

## His Mercy Is More

### Luke 18:9-17

Once upon a time, long ago our four-year-old son lied to us. By this time in his young life, Jackson often heard me explain that lies severely damage one's soul and that Satan is the Father of Lies. So he knew that lying was a BIG DEAL to God and to his parents. He had heard me share that God gave him a mommy and daddy to help him fight against soul-destroying sins and that our help often would include discipline. So when we caught him in a lie, he knew what to expect from us . . . he knew that painful correction was coming toward him. And he began to tremble at the thought of it. **He began to weep over the approaching accountability that he would soon experience.** Even at this tender age, he knew that trying to deny his lie, to explain his lie, to justify his lie or to minimize his life was not going to change his destiny with his dad's decision to bring the weight of the paddle to his hinder parts.

But somewhere in Jackson's little mind and heart, he remembered the Gospel stories. And in a flourish of sorrow, my little boy fell upon his knees in front of me. His hands folded together in earnest plea, his eyes wet with tears of contrition and he cried out with a bowed head and loud voice, **"Mercy, daddy! Mercy!"**

His cry did not feel to me like an emotional manipulation, but it had the tones of a truly humble and desperate plea. At that time and to this day, I believe the LORD had **done His Gospel work in Jackson's heart.** The rod of instruction fell from my hands and my arms opened with a warm embrace . . . and tears now moistened both our faces. **Mercy humbly requested; mercy willingly granted.**

Over 20 years later, my reflection upon this event still moves my heart. It reminds me of my need for mercy from the LORD. It reminds me of the Gospel of grace that God announces to every person who has disobeyed His perfect Law. **No truth is more life-giving than the good news that God provides a way for guilty souls to receive His mercy.**

Jesus is a master teacher. He knows how to capture our attention and to drive truth into our hearts. Here in Luke 18, Jesus uses a parable to show us the path that leads to His mercy. A parable is a small earthly story with a big heavenly meaning. Jesus tells us His main idea behind this story in verse 14.

This morning as we turn to Luke 18, we hear Jesus teach us a parable about a grown man who felt like my four-year-old did on the day he was caught in a sin.

Jesus tells this story so that we would know the answer to one of life's most important questions.

**Key Life Question: "What is required for me to be forgiven by God and to be welcomed into His family?"** Or to put the question negatively, "What must I do to avoid God's righteous punishment for my sin?"

**Main idea: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:14 [ESV](#))**

Before Luke records this parable in his gospel, Luke tells us the context in which Jesus told it.

*"He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt." (Luke 18:9 [ESV](#))*

Jesus sees a big problem among the churched people of His day. He sees that they are "trusting in themselves". Trusting in themselves for what? Some were trusting that they good enough to be accepted by God. They were believing that they were living a good enough life to receive God's welcome into His kingdom. Jesus sees this misplaced trust as a severe problem. Jesus knows that no does enough good to cancel out the wrongs that they have committed against the LORD. Jesus had read His Bible and He knew what the Father said about every person born into this world.

*"God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one." (Psalm 53:2-3 [ESV](#))*

And so helps us to understand that we are must NOT trust in our own righteousness and that we all need the mercy of the LORD if we are to be in right relationship with the LORD.

**In this story Jesus reveals God's mercy in three ways.** Jesus teaches us about a place where mercy is found, a posture that invites God's mercy and a plea that pours God's mercy over our lives.

**A Place to Find Mercy.**

Where can I go to find mercy from the LORD? If you were a Jew living in Jesus day, you would have been taught the answer to that question from the time you were a toddler.

*“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” (Luke 18:10 ESV)*

These two men, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, could not have been more different socially, ethically and spiritually. Yet here they are at the same place at the same time. **Their lives converge at the Temple.** Now the Temple in Jesus' day is different from a church or a synagogue in our own. It was more than a place of worship and instruction. **The Temple was also the place of sacrifice for sin. The Temple is the place where God provides the ground for mercy to be granted to guilty people.**

The Temple in Jerusalem was established by God in Solomon's day. But its shadow reaches back to the tabernacle in Moses day. **At the Temple, God gave Israel a place where they could meet him and experience His localized presence.**

Central to the Temple is a room in the middle of the Temple called the Holy of Holies. This room housed the Ark of the Covenant which was a wooden box about four feet long and covered in gold. **Inside the Ark were the stone tablets engraved with the 10 Commandments. On top of the Ark was a gold lid that was called The Mercy Seat.** The Mercy Seat had two golden angels whose wings stretched forward almost touching each other at the center. **At the Mercy Seat, God's personal presence is said to dwell.**

**What does God see from the Mercy Seat?** He sees His Holy Law and he sees the people who have broken the Law. God is the Righteous Judge who will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. **The LORD knows that every person deserves judgment, yet the Mercy Seat is called the Mercy seat for a reason.**

Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest sprinkled the blood of a goat over the top of the Mercy Seat. That goat was killed as a substitute for the people. **The people deserved to die because they disobeyed the LORD, but God made a way for the people to receive His mercy . . . that way was an atoning sacrifice for sin.** The innocent animal received the punishment for sin that the people deserved to have placed upon them.

After the blood of the goat was poured on the Mercy Seat **God looked down from heaven and instead of seeing the Law broken by the people, the LORD saw the blood that covered the sins of the people.** God's justice is

satisfied. **Sin has been punished and now He offers mercy to all who come to the Mercy Seat in faith.**

The problem with the blood of goats is that an animal could never take away the sin of man. **The animal sacrifices were only meant to be a picture . . . a pointer to another sacrifice that would be sufficient to remove the guilt of sin from man forever.** God's plan to offer mercy to us centered on His sending of His Son Jesus to be our Sacrifice for sin. As man, Jesus in His flesh could represent us. As God, Jesus in His sinlessness and infinite power, was the only man qualified to bear the punishment for all mankind's sin.

*"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, . . . and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:19–22 ESV)*

*"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24 ESV)*

*"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God," (1 Peter 3:18 ESV)*

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly . . . but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8 ESV)*

Both men in Jesus' story knew WHERE to go in order to find mercy from God. They needed to get to the Mercy Seat. If you feel the weight of your sins and know that you stand before God guilty, do you know where to find mercy?

**Truth: There is only one place to go if you wish to find mercy from God. That place is a Person . . . Jesus the Messiah.** He alone suffered the punishment that our sin deserves. If you want God's mercy, you must come to Christ. The cross of Jesus is where God's righteousness is satisfied and where mercy flows to us.

*I love Chris Tomlin's worship song "Love Ran Red"*

*There's a place where mercy reigns and never dies  
There's a place where streams of grace flow deep and wide  
Where all the love I've ever found  
Comes like a flood*

*Comes flowing down*

*At the cross*

*At the cross*

*I surrender my life*

*I'm in awe of You*

*I'm in awe of You*

*Where Your love ran red*

*And my sin washed white*

*I owe all to You*

*I owe all to You Jesus*

### **A Posture to Obtain Mercy**

*“The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:11-13 [ESV](#))*

One of these men illustrates that kind of heart posture that pushes God’s mercy away and the other man illustrates the kind of heart posture that pulls God’s mercy toward.

The posture of the Pharisee is one of good works . . . a posture of self-righteousness. No one who comes before a holy God dressed in his own righteousness will receive mercy. Mercy is for the sinner . . . the desperate . . . the guilty.

**Truth: Mercy is not for the deserving, but for the undeserving. By definition, mercy means that we do not receive the punishment that our sins deserve.**

**The Pharisee decided to stand before the LORD on the Merit Plan instead of the Mercy Plan.**

Having confidence in his own righteousness, the Pharisee recites his credentials to God. He says, **“God, here is what I don’t do. And here is what I do. I avoid the sins many commit and I do the works many neglect. I think you will be pleased”** He is a bit like **little Jack Horner** who sat in a corner eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, **“My, what a good boy am I!!!”**

This man is not interested in whether anyone else has pie or not. He is simply proud that he has one all to himself and **that he should be praised for pulling some fruit out of it.**

**The problem is not that this man is glad that he avoided soul damning sins or that he lived a life of moral righteousness. The problem is that he took credit for the evil that he avoided and the good that he did.**

Notice that he uses prayer as a means to communicate his own goodness, rather than to ask mercy from the LORD. Five times in this short prayer, the Pharisee uses the personal pronoun "I". **(Walk through the prayer again.) This man has an "I" problem.** He needs a spiritual optometrist to help with his "I"s.

**Truth: Confidence in one's own righteousness is the anti-posture for obtaining mercy.** When we think our good works outweigh our bad deeds, we are not in the line that leads to mercy from God.

**By nature, many of us are very much like this Pharisee. We consider ourselves good people and so we think God thinks us good too.** Not long ago, I read of a guy who said that his greatest fear is that he would be standing in line at the Pearly Gates behind Mother Teresa, and hear Saint Peter say to her, "Sorry, you don't quite measure up." **But the fact is, no one makes it in to heaven based on their good works. No one.**

In contrast to the Pharisee is a tax collector whom EVERYONE KNOWS IS A TERRIBLE SINNER. The question people are asking on this Sabbath day is, "What is a guy like THAT doing in the Temple?"

*"But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13 ESV)*

**If you are taking notes this morning, we notice that Jesus uses this ungodly tax collector to teach us the posture that leads us to the mercy of God.** The tax collector is standing in the Mercy Line. He is looking to the LORD for spiritual deliverance from the guilt of his sin. Mercy is the reason he is at the Temple.

**The tax collector gets it. In the NASB translation of the the NT, the tax collector cries out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (NASB).** I am not sure why other

translations do not translate this the way, but the Greek NT has the article “the” in front of the word “sinner”. The tax collector is not merely saying, “I am a sinner like many other people.” **He is saying, “I am THE sinner.”**

This guy knows what other people are saying about him. They have called him a liar, a cheat, a traitor, an extortioner, a louse, a scoundrel, a crook. He is broken before God as he confesses, **“I am what people say about me. I am even worse than what they say.”** Notice that he does not make excuses for his sin. **He does not say, “Well, I have a family to feed.” Or “Hey, you do not know how bad I had it as a child.”** He does not put someone in front of him and say, **“Well, maybe I have made some mistakes, but look at this guy.”**

**He takes the full measure of guilt for his sin upon his own shoulders. “God, be merciful to me. I am the sinner!”**

How different is the posture of the souls of these two men! The Pharisee approaches God on the basis of his own merits, while the tax collector approaches God on the basis of God’s own mercy. They stand before the Lord on totally different ground: one on the ground of his own righteousness, the other on the ground of God’s mercy.

**Truth: The posture to obtain mercy is one of conviction about the depth and desperate nature of our sins. No one gets into the Mercy Line without a consciousness of the weight of his/her own sin.**

### **A Plea to Receive Mercy**

*“but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13 [ESV](#))*

The posture of conviction gets us in the right line to receive God’s mercy, but we **MUST ASK GOD** for mercy to receive it. It is not enough for us to **FEEL** guilty about our sin. We must go to the **PLACE** of mercy . . . Jesus our Sacrifice . . . and ask in faith for mercy. We do not ask God for mercy because we have done something to deserve it. We ask God for mercy in spite of the fact that we have done nothing to deserve it.

**PROTEST: But it seems presumptuous for this man to have lived the life he did and then ask God to clean the slate of his offenses through mercy.** Where did he get the idea that God was merciful to sinners like Him? **Answer:** From the meaning that God places upon the Temple.

I love this little plea. “Have mercy on me”. The cry, “Have mercy on me.” is the verb form of the word “Mercy Seat” . . . remember that the Mercy Seat is the place in the Temple where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled to make a covering for sin. The sense of this request could be understood as **“Lord, sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon me so that I will be free of the guilt of my sins.”**

**In other words, this is not merely a plea for mercy . . . but it is a plea for mercy based on the blood sacrifice that God provided for him.**

Here is Jesus’ summary statement after He tells this story:

*“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. (Luke 18:14a [ESV](#))*

**“Justified”. What a word!**

**Definition: To be justified is to be declared righteous by God and to be accepted by Him as one who has not sinned.**

The tax collector is a sinner. God knows it. He knows it. Yet he leaves the Temple that day with God speaking a word over his life. God says over him, *“You are declared righteous in my sight. I will not deal with you according to your sins. My sacrifice has cleansed you. From this day forward, you are forever accepted as a righteous son in my family.”*

*“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:16 [ESV](#))*

**God’s declaration is not based on the man’s obedience, but upon the obedience of Jesus in giving His life as an atoning sacrifice for sin on the cross. The man’s sins were many, but God’s mercy is more! What joy!**

The tax collector saw the wretchedness of his sin and on the basis of God’s sacrifice plead with God for mercy. God did for him what he promises to do for anyone who comes to Him in like faith.



This is a parable . . . a story that has deep meaning but did not really happen. Later in Jesus' life there is a historical story that closely matches this one.

*"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.""* (Luke 23:39-43 [ESV](#))

Here was a man who had no time to amend his ways. By his own confession, he lived a miserable life of disobedience to God. Yet in faith, he asks Jesus to have mercy upon him and remember him. And the mercy of Jesus flows from the cross!

Question: Have you fallen upon your knees and asked God for mercy on the basis of His Son's sacrifice on the cross?

**Friends, this story of the tax collector and the Pharisee is a common one that happens every Sunday in America: Two people go to the same church on the same day to the same service. They hear the same sermon and sing the same songs. One goes home justified . . . transformed; the other goes home unchanged. What makes the difference?**

One in pride and self-sufficiency places faith in himself. The other in brokenness and humility places faith in Christ. How will you leave our worship service this morning?

*"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."* (Romans 3:28 [ESV](#))

*"And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,"* (Romans 4:5 [ESV](#))

*"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 5:1 [ESV](#))

The wrong way to approach God is through our own merit. The right way to approach God is through a desperate plea for Christ's merit to be applied to us! **When sinners approach God for mercy, He instantly justifies them.**

**Friend, have you prayed for God to be merciful to you, the sinner? Our salvation begins with a prayer for God’s mercy. Our Christian life is sustained by prayers for God’s mercy.**

At the end, Jesus delivers His main point:

*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14b [ESV](#))*

If we think we are good enough for God’s smile, we will discover heaven pushing us down to the reality of our unworthiness. If we acknowledge our lowliness before the LORD, He will take our hand and lift us up to the heights of heaven itself.

The Latin word for humble is “humilis” which means low or slight. This Latin term comes from the Latin word “humi” which means “on the ground”.

Do you remember what Luke told us about this story before he recorded it?

*“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” (Luke 18:9 [ESV](#))*

Our pride first has a vertical impact upon our posture . . . we stand up in the presence of God thinking that we have earned a place of honor in His presence. BUT there is a horizontal impact of our pride too. Pride causes us to treat certain people with “contempt”. The treat others with contempt means that we see others as lower on the ladder of personal goodness than we are. We find ourselves repulsed by others . . . not by their sins, but by them. With a sneer we think, “They are the problem with this world!”

**Do you find yourself treating any other people with “contempt”?** Our world is full of contempt. Pride bends us toward thinking less of people who engage in certain sins that are repulsive to us. Pride bends us toward rejecting people who have certain political views that are wrong. Pride bends us toward thinking ourselves as above people who have theological views that do not conform to what we see in the Bible.

Please know that God is the Judge of all the earth. He judges sin and unbelief and doctrines that damage people’s souls. Humility does not mean that the standards of truth or holiness are discarded.

**Truth: Humility simply means that we see ourselves as standing on the lowest rung in a crowded room.** God above us. No one below us. Regardless what others have done, our sin views our own sin as the biggest problem in our little world.

Here the tax collector realizes that he is “on the ground” socially and spiritually. He does not know one person in the Temple who is below him because he is HUMBLE . . . “on the ground”. Not all tax collectors are humble. The tax collector could have come to the Temple looking down at the Pharisee with contempt thinking, “*Well, at least I am not an arrogant hypocrite like that guy. He thinks he is so much more righteous than everyone else. The worst thing in all the world is an arrogant moralist!*” But the tax collector does not see the sin of the others. He only sees his own sin.

You see, people who are humble or “**on the ground**” do not consider ANYONE as below them in rank with God or in higher stature with others. A humble person simply sees that his/her own sin places them **on the lowest rung of the ladder**.

**Truth: Pride is part of all our lives and pride will keep us from being accepted by God. The only remedy for pride is humbling ourselves before the LORD in search of His mercy.**

**Main idea: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”” (Luke 18:14 [ESV](#))**

What exactly does it mean to be humble myself before the LORD?

Jesus knows that we will have a hard time understanding how to do that so He gives us an example.

*“Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”” (Luke 18:15-17 [ESV](#))*

As a grandpa, I have the privilege of spending a lot of time with a set of 2-4. Now I see sin in their hearts. Lots of sin. But I also see that they do not try to live life in proud independence. They do not mind asking for help or for gifts that they

cannot obtain for themselves. They are humble in that they do not see themselves as sufficient.

Jesus says, "If you do not become as helpless as a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Conclusion:

Mercy is simply, "Not receiving the punishment that we deserve to receive."

**Application: When we stand before God, we want to be on the "Mercy" plan and not on the "Merit" plan.** If we are on the merit plan, we will receive what we deserve and it will be terrible. If we are on the mercy plan, we will not receive what we deserve and it will be wonderful.

My son KNEW he had sinned. He KNEW that he could not conceal his sin any longer. He KNEW that he could not justify his sin. He KNEW that he deserved the consequences of his sin. He KNEW that he had to stand before one who would hold him accountable. He knew that there was a thing called mercy. He knew that he needed mercy. He knew that his whole hope of rested not on his own good works, but upon the mercy of another. He simply cried out in faith, "Mercy, Daddy! Mercy!"

A Place to Find Mercy.

A Posture to Obtain Mercy

A Plea to Receive Mercy