

**Preaching Christ....  
...by the power of the Holy Spirit  
...and the authority of the Word of God**

**Date:** 3 April 2022  
**Services:** Grenfell  
**Series:** Parables of grace  
**Passage:** Luke 18:8-14  
**Title:** God, have mercy on me  
**Outline:**

1. The Pharisee
2. The tax collector
3. The shock

**READING - Luke 18:8-14**

<sup>9</sup>To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup>"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

<sup>13</sup>"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

<sup>14</sup>"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

- I want you to cast your mind back a few weeks...
- The last time I shared with you from God's word, we were looking at the **two** lost sons... do you remember?
- Do you remember the **issue**?
- The sinners and tax collectors were gathering around to listen to Jesus – they **loved** his teaching...
- But the **religious leaders** – they looked at these sinners – and Jesus **hanging** with them – even **EATING** with them – and they were – well they were **disgusted** really... and **muttering** about Jesus – **shaking** their **heads** – **pointing** the **finger** at how **terrible** it was that Jesus was breaking all their **religious traditions**... many of them of course – **man made**!
- And you'll **remember** that in that **moving** story Jesus told of the two lost sons...
- ... the **younger son** represented the **sinners and the tax collectors** – **they** were the ones who had come to their senses having formerly pushed God out – and had turned their lives around... now hanging on **Jesus'** every **word**...
- And just like when the son returned home to the father, the sinners and tax collectors had found **welcome** and **compassion** and **embrace** and **forgiveness** when they **returned** to **God**... //
- However – do you recall the reaction of the **older son** when the **younger** son came home?
- He had **no** joy that this wayward brother was **safe** and had come **home**... he has just **angry** that his brother was given a **party** – when he had spent **all HIS** life – in his words – "**slaving** away for his

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**father”.**

- And of course – Jesus would have hoped that the **Pharisees** and **other** religious leaders could see **themselves** in the **older grumpy resentful son...** because that is **precisely** how **they** behaved towards the **sinner and tax collectors...** //
- Well in the intervening chapters in Luke’s gospel Jesus has been dealing other matters... some of you will have seen the video sermons over the last couple of weeks on the **shrewd manager** – dealing with generosity and the **persistent widow** dealing with prayer,
- ...but here in Luke 18:9-14, Jesus returns to this pressing issue... //
- Have a look with me at v9 – *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.*
- **There** was the issue.
- This was the **Pharisees** to a tee – this was the **older brother** exactly...
- “We are just so **good...** we follow the **rules, the traditions, the rituals...** we work **hard** for **God...** and really – he should be **very pleased** with us **thank you very much!!**
- “As for all those others – the **sinner and tax collectors...** that younger brother – goodness me – they are just a **disgrace** frankly... they should be **ashamed** of themselves... what are they **thinking...!?” //**
- **Those** types of people are the **targeted audience.**
- ...confident of their **own righteousness.**
- ...looking **down** on everyone **else. ///**
  
- So let’s unpack this parable this way today
  1. The **pharisee**
  2. The **tax collector**
  3. The **shock**
- First then,
  1. **THE PHARISEE**
    - The first target of the story
    - **Like** the tax collector, he went up to the temple to pray.
    - And although Jesus said in v11 that the Pharisee stood by himself and **prayed...//** ...his prayer is not **really** a **prayer** is it? //
    - Let’s have a look at what he said: ‘*God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.*’
    - That’s it... prayer time **done.**
    - All he is doing is telling God how **great** he is.
    - I’m not like all these other **really bad people...**
    - ...and then just to make sure God understands his point he gives **four** examples...
    - I’m not like **robbers**
    - I’m not like **evildoers**

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- I'm not like **adulterers**...
- ...and then – having a look around the temple – Oh – and I'm not like this **tax collector**....
- Now – this is a story Jesus is telling to make a point – but it certainly **does** that **doesn't it??!** //
- And there's a little bit of this in **all** of us...
- Well – I've never **murdered** anyone... I don't **steal**... I've never slapped someone on stage at the **Oscars** – I've not invaded a neighbouring nation without justification and killed thousands of **innocent people**... //
- We all know people in the **world** – or in our **lives** – with whom we can compare ourselves – and we come up looking **pretty good**...!!
- **Pride** kicks in. **Self-congratulation**. //
- To **some** who were confident of their own **righteousness**... //
- But **this** man is not done **yet!**
- Pointing out who is **NOT** like is just one **aspect**
- Now he wants to tell the Lord that not only is he **not** like these **bad people**.../ ...he's actually **better** than most **good people**!! //
- Because – v12 – he fasts **twice** a week – more than what was **mandated** – and he gives a **tenth** of all he **gets** – more than what was **required**... there was only certain **categories** of things of which you had to give 10% //
- Again.... There's a little bit of this in **all** of us....
- That is, we think – not only am I **NOT** like those **bad people** – I'm also better than most **GOOD people**... better than many others at **church**....
- ...because I **go** more, **give** more, **pray** more, **serve** more... /////  
//
- Can you see yourself in this man...? A **little bit**?
- "I'm up at that **church all the time**... did you see me at the **book fair** or the **fete**... the money I've helped **raise** – I **tell you!** – and in my **younger** days – well – there was the **choir**, the **Sunday school**, **scripture** in the **school**, **parish council**, even **treasurer** for a time... I **rang** the **bell**, gave out the **books**, read the **lessons**, went to the **old people's home**....
- "I'd just like to point out Lord... how **well** I'm **really doing**.
- "I've written my **own annual report** on **myself** – and frankly – its **looking pretty good!**" //
- I can see **myself** there... I **recognise** it...
- Is it true in any way – a **tiny** way – of **YOU?** //
- **Tragic** isn't it?
- **Pathetic**.
- And yet – I **get it**. //
- People can get the impression from church over the years... that being **acceptable** to God means **not** being like **THOSE** people – and then being **better** than certain **others!**
- The church has not **communicated** its message **clearly!** //

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- Well – let’s leave **Pharisee** there for a moment and see the **tax collector**

## 2. TAX COLLECTOR

- So remember the tax collectors were considered kind of **scum** – (a) because they collected money on behalf of the **occupying** forces – the **Romans**... // Think – a **Russian** in **Ukraine** collecting **taxes** for **Russia**...
- ...and (b) because the way they **made money** was to **increase** what they were **required** to collect so they could **pocket** the **difference**. //
- So what is this guy going to say...? well not **much** as it turns out
- Have a look in v13 – *he would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’.*
- Like the younger son in that **other** story, this guy has come to his **senses**.
- He’s realised that not all has been well between him and God...
- ...and the only thing he can do is ask for God’s **mercy**...
- “I’ve **mucked** things up **Lord**
- “I have nothing to **bring**
- “I’m totally **dependent** on your **mercy** – your **grace**...” //
- That’s it... that’s all he **said**.
- So – what happens next? What follows these **two completely contrasting prayers**? //

## 3. THE SHOCK

- Well the **shock** comes in v14 – have a look with me - *“I tell you that this man, - let’s be clear – he means the tax collector - rather than the other, the pharisee - went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*
- Two men went to the temple to **pray**
- **Both** men received what they **asked for**
- The pharisee asked for **nothing** in the end... and received precisely that – **nothing**. //
- The tax collector asked for **mercy** and received – **mercy**. //
- And Jesus said that **tax collector** went home right with God – and the **pharisee / didn’t** ////
- Wait a minute – the **bad** guy goes home **right** with **God**
- The **good** guy – with all those **credits** he’s **listed, doesn’t**? //
- **Yes**.
- **There’s** the **shock**. // Are you **shocked**?
- If you **ARE** shocked, I want to say as gently as I can, that you’ve actually **never understood** the **Christian message**. ///
- And I don’t **blame** you for that.
- We’ve done a bad job of **communicating** it
- At Noosa I had the joy of marrying heaps of people who had gone to Anglican schools right through

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high school

- I always asked them whether they were sure they had eternal life
- They always answered – that they **hoped** so because they lived **good lives** and had never done anything **major wrong**
- Sound **familiar??** – I’m not one of the **bad guys** – and I’m **better** than you’ve average **good person**.
- That’s what they’d picked up from **6 years at an Anglican school**.
- I’ve asked heaps of **elderly** people **facing** death – are you **sure** you have eternal life??
- They give the same answer – I certainly **hope** so – I’ve been in church all my **life**... I follow the **10 commandments** – and I’ve not done anything **wrong**
- **Confident** of **their righteousness**.
- They’ve been in church their entire lives and the best they can say about eternal life is “*I hope so!*”
- That’s not the **gospel**...that’s not the **good** news!
- so – how come? //
- How come the tax collector goes home **OK** with **God**??
- Because what God wants from us is not a **proud list** of our **achievements** and an argument about how happy **God** should be that we’ve done **so well**...
- But a **humble**, frank **acknowledgement** of our **failures**... our **shortcomings**...
- As our Lenten study speaker said in her talk this week on forgiveness.... “Our problem is that we compare ourselves to **others**... and that’s a pretty low **bar**... when all the time – we should be comparing ourselves to **Jesus**... and when we do **that**... we soon see that compared to Jesus who was totally without **sin**, we fall **very far short**...!” //
- **God, have mercy on me a sinner**.
- That’s where we **start** with God
- *I’m no longer **worthy** to be called your **son**...* the younger **son** said.
- And when we start **THERE**...
- ...God comes **running**... to **welcome**, to **forgive**, to **embrace**... //
- all the Lord wants to hear from us is – **God, have mercy on me, a sinner**... For there is a principle here that Jesus explains.
- Everyone who exalts **THEMSELVES** will be **humbled**... Everyone who like the Pharisee is proud of their own goodness... one day they’ll come crashing **down**... before God’s **judgement**... //
- But on the other hand.... Everyone who humbles himself // will be exalted...
- Everyone who is prepared to admit they’ve **mucked it up**... who has come in **humility**, in **sorrow**, **throwing themselves on God’s mercy**... God will lift them **up!**
- ...he will lift them **out** of their **failure**... out of their **sorrow**...
- And he’ll freely **forgive** them; make them his **children**; and **give** them **eternal life**... !!
- **A staggering and wonderful reality**. ///
- **THAT** is the good news – **really good news!**

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- I saw a brilliant example of this principle a couple of years back on our televisions... the example that everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled... but whoever humbles themselves will be exalted...
- It was plain for all to see on the Bachelor in 2019... //
- I'll cut a long story short... but on the final night of the Bachelor... it is revealed which girl the Bachelor has finally chosen... only two from the original 28 remain.
- The two finalists this year were Abby and Chelsie.
- It was a very dramatic build up to the final revelation... and the audience was left guessing as to which one he'd choose... though social media had revealed which was the viewers' favourite.... //
- But there was a marked difference in the attitude between the two girls... Abby backed herself... she couldn't believe the Bachelor would choose anyone other than her!
- Meanwhile Chelsie spent the morning crying... because she was convinced that she had blown it and that there was no way he would choose her!
- Finally – the Bachelor told Abby, that his love lay with another...
- ...and then told Chelsie – that he loved her.
- Abbie couldn't believe it WOULDN'T be her!
- Chelsie couldn't believe it WOULD be her!
- ...Abby had exalted herself... and was sadly humbled...
- Chelsie... having approached the final with humility – was exalted... ///
- If you approach God – with **self-confident righteousness**, listing your great **achievements** before him – believing there's **NO** way you're **not** OK with him... / you will be **humbled**...
- But if you come before God – knowing you're **undeserving**... aware of your **failings**... with an attitude that says – I am longer worthy to be called your child... you will be **exalted**....! /////
- What if I asked you today – are you sure you have eternal life...
- How would you answer?
- If you answer like the Pharisee – I'm not as bad as these **bad guys**... AND I'm **better** than most **good people** – than – you've **misunderstood** – I'm afraid you may not be **right** with God and one day you'll be in for a **shock**!
- Are you **confident** of your **own righteousness**, looking **down** on everyone **else**?? This **story** is for you... **STOP!** ///// it won't end **well**!! ///
- ... but if in **humility and sorrow**, trusting in **God's mercy**, with a **realistic view of yourself**, you've said – *God, have mercy on me, a sinner* // - then like the **tax collector** – you're going home today – **right** with **God**.... ///
- That's the **glory** of Easter – that's the **impact** of Easter – the message of Easter...
- That on the **cross**, Jesus took your **guilt**... he **dealt** with your **sin** – he set you **free** and gave you the **free gift** of **eternal life**... //
- **Revel** again in that news this **Easter**
- And go home **knowing** that in the **grace** of **Jesus** – through his **death and resurrection** – you have been made **right** with **God**!