

Luke 18:9–14 (NKJV) — 9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: **10** “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ **13** And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

YOU LOOK DOWN

What did God mean when He spoke through the prophet Isaiah, **Isaiah 40:4 – Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; ?** Jesus reiterated this, “**Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low, and all flesh shall see the salvation of our God**” (Luke 3:5).

The coming of Christ and the revelation of salvation that He would bring is accompanied by “every valley” being “exalted” and “every mountain” being “brought low.” We read in verse 14 of our text, **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**”

You look down. Depending on how we say this, it could different things. “You look down on other people” and “You look down on yourself” convey two completely different ideas. Well, what is our perspective today? What was our perspective yesterday, ... or any day? You look down.

1. On others when we exalt ourselves.

– on others when we exalt ourselves. **9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.** The English word “despise”

actually comes from the Latin, “*de*” meaning down, and “*spise*” meaning look at. To despise someone, really has to do with us “looking down” on another person.

The only way we can “look down” on another person is by finding a higher elevation. Isaiah speaks of the day of the LORD coming upon everything proud and lofty, everything lifted up shall be brought low, upon all the high mountains, and the hills that are lifted up, ... the loftiness of man shall be bowed down.

How often do we lift ourself up to a higher elevation so as to look down on the way other people are living, the things other people are doing, the choices other people are making?

The contrast is then presented in our parable between, v.9, those who thought they were righteous and, v.13, the tax collector who considered himself a sinner. We find them both enter the Temple into the Court of the Israelites, but they conduct their worship in very different ways. The Pharisee stands facing the Holy of Holies. Yet the tax collector cannot bear to look up. The Pharisee prays “with himself.” and notice the content, he thanks God for his own personal accomplishments and merit – nothing of what God has done for him. On the other hand the tax collector has nothing of his own merit to offer God but only a pleading heart seeking forgiveness.

The Pharisees had so named their sect because “Pharisee” means “separated ones.” They viewed themselves as “separated” from other men, other Jews even, on the basis of their strict observation of Jewish Law. The tax collector was one from which they considered themselves “separated.” The tax collector was viewed as a traitor to the nation of Israel, because they were working for the Romans. And often they were dishonest and sought personal gain at the expense of taxing the people. So we see the Pharisee grouping this tax collect in v.11 with extortioners, unjust, and adulterers. **11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—**

Do we ever find ourselves being soap box Christians? – setting our self up above other sinners? One way I know this temptation

can creep into our midst is because of the orthodox confession that we hold to in the CLC. It is so easy to slip into thinking because we avoid fellowship with false teaching churches and because God has preserved the truth of His word among us, that we are better than those “other men”. It is easy to think this separation is based on something we have done, our proper understanding of the Bible. We are separate only because of what Christ has done, only because of the precious truth of the gospel, only because of God’s Word. When we see another person slipping into error, or living a lifestyle contrary to God’s word, it is so easy to feel elevated – to stand and pray – “I thank God that I am not like other men” ...

The Pharisee had kept a very good record of the things he had done for God to set himself apart from other men. **12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.**’ The Law of Moses only required fasting once per month and tithes were only to be given on certain portions of your income. The Pharisees were known for going was above and beyond what was required and then “looking down” on those who didn’t do the same.

Let’s say we have everyone post a record of the things we consider good works on our lives. We will place this on the front wall of church. In fact let’s include those in the community around us. If I was higher up on the list would I be able to resist looking down on these other people? – or looking right to the bottom of the list, to see who I’m above? Are there times when I make such a list in my head anyway? Just like the Pharisee, without even knowing it, we too count, quantify, and categorize our works – things are going good, it feels like we are doing enough for God, we have met our criteria. **9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.** God shows us how far short we have fallen. God shows us how true righteousness is not about man’s exaltation of himself. Literally the preposition in verse nine says they put their trust upon themselves. The coming of Christ into our hearts is to knock this this selfish pride out from under us, to cause us to fall flat, to put an end to “comparison righteousness” and reveal the true foundation upon which to place our trust. **Psalm 40:4 – Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his**

trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

2. On yourself when we are humbled.

You look down. Have you ever felt so crushed, so depressed, so down on yourself, that people around you couldn’t help noticing? Have you ever had a time in your life when you have committed a sin that you just don’t know how God could ever forgive you? Have you ever felt like there is some certain weakness in your life that you can never live up to the expectations that God has for His people? You look down.

Who knows what the past life of this tax collector would reveal? Maybe we would think it was horribly sinful, or maybe we wouldn’t even think it was that bad. This parable is not so much about that. Jesus wants us to get away from that comparison righteousness. The only comparison we are to do is with God’s Law. The Law is a mirror. It shows only our failures. It requires perfect love in all that we do, perfect devotion, and shows how we have never lived up to it. The mirror only shows me. I do not see anyone else standing next to me, I do not even see Christ.

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ This is what the mirror of the Law when it is looked at honestly, reveals – “a sinner.” In fact the tax collector actually said, “God be merciful to me *“the* sinner.” In the original we find the article attached “the” ; meaning “the one and only” or “the greatest sinner.” He didn’t see anyone else’s sins but his own. This is how we properly confess our sins – just between me and God.

You look down.

3. So look up because you are justified.

– So look up! because you are justified. **14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who**

humbles himself will be exalted.” The word justified is a court room term. It shows us how despite all our sins, God has, on account of Christ, set us free. In this one word we see how God has set right what was so wrong. We see how God has not ignored sin, but paid for it. We see how there is no more payment remains, how the sentence has changed from guilty to righteous. Look up because you are justified.

Romans 3:24–26 – being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, ... to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

That we are justified means that we have been “declared righteous” and “set free” in God’s eyes. The tax collector prays, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” It is as if the Holy Spirit is responding to this plea in Romans ch. 3 when He says, “we are justified (declared righteous) freely, through Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation (a satisfactory payment, a place of atonement where man can go time and time again to find forgiveness) by His blood. This is the see-saw effect, where though you were once down, Christ has come aboard and by lowering Himself, you are lifted up.

So look up – go home today just as the tax collector did. In fact, boast! Yes brag about it! What did the pastor just say? I thought he just got done telling us to be humble? **Psalm 34:2 – My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.** There is something we do not need to be humble or lowly about – that is the exaltation of our Lord. We don’t lift ourselves up to look down on others, God lifts us up. Then we can boast. We can tell others of the great victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can tell Satan of how he can no longer speak to us of our former ways, for we have been justified! We boast in the Lord and in Him alone.

This is what true humility is all about having our boast not in ourselves, but in our Lord. For this is the attitude the Lord loves.

Isaiah 57:15 – For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

The High and Lofty One, who dwells in a high and holy place, has made his home with the lowliest of sinners. And what a wonder, that this Lofty One is descending to you in just a few minutes in the Lord’s Supper, to be united with these earthly elements, to give you the forgiveness of sins and salvation, to assure you that you are justified. You look down, Look up! Amen.