

Here at Wayside you often hear that God's kingdom is upside-down from the world (Acts 17:6<sup>i</sup>). The first shall be last and the last first (Mark 10:31<sup>ii</sup>). The one who exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 18:14<sup>iii</sup>). The meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5<sup>iv</sup>). Lose your life to find it (Matthew 10:39<sup>v</sup>). God's ways are so much higher than ours and often are contrary to the way natural man thinks and expects (Isaiah 55:8,9<sup>vi</sup>).

A major factor in our spiritual growth is renewing our mind with the Word of God so that we see life the way God does (Romans 12:2<sup>vii</sup>). Having the mind of Christ means rejecting much of what our culture teaches and expects of us. Most of Jesus' teachings are correcting our worldly mindset. We see that in the parables, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, the good Samaritan, the wheat and tares growing together, and on and on. Then consider the many times He healed on the Sabbath, talked with the woman at the well (John 4:7-9<sup>viii</sup>), and forgave the adulterous woman (John 8:11<sup>ix</sup>). Each was so contrary to the world's thinking. His very mission to die on a Roman cross was so unexpected and unlike anything the people of that day expected. We need His mindset if we are to be effective for the kingdom of God (Philippians 2:5<sup>x</sup>).

The accounts from Luke today address two very different situations, but both address misconceptions that fallen humans tend to have. The first one addresses the religious pride of the Pharisees. The movement developed in the inter-testament period just after captivity. They saw that God judged their nation because of disobedience. They wanted to live in complete obedience to God's laws so they could receive the blessings promised to the nation. So far so good.

But the next steps took them down a wrong path. They were worried about defilement from others. In one sense that is legitimate. We don't want others to influence us to sin or for their compromises to find a place in our lives. The Pharisees set themselves apart with the way they dressed so others would not come too close to them. They practiced social distancing but not for the same reasons we are. What that conveyed in their day was what we call a "holier than thou" attitude. In other words, I'm better than you so don't get too close. Jesus' parable explains the problem.

*<sup>9</sup> He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:* Luke 18:9 Like the previous parable, we are told upfront what the parable is about, but in this case the theme comes at the end. The real problem with the Pharisees' religiosity was that their trust was in their ability to keep the Law rather than trusting in God. If I can be righteous in my own power, I don't really need God. And if I can do it, what is your problem that you don't do it? That made them think more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Romans 12:3<sup>xi</sup>). Even though they were scholars and knew God's Word, they forgot the passage that tells us that there is none righteous, no not one (Psalm 14:3<sup>xii</sup>)! They forgot that it is the Lord who sanctifies us (Leviticus 20:8<sup>xiii</sup>). They forgot the reaction of the prophet Isaiah when he saw the holiness of the Lord and realized by contrast how unholy he was (Isaiah 6:5<sup>xiv</sup>).

The people of that day revered Pharisees. It was such a difficult task to keep the 613 laws and the oral traditions that only those with resources could attempt to live as a Pharisee. The public thought the faithfulness of these men might usher in the Messiah. They never expected that they would instead play a role in murdering the Messiah. That

is the upside-down world of God's kingdom. It is a warning to us to have the mind of Christ so that we can see what is really taking place.

<sup>10</sup> *“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”* Luke 18:10 There couldn't be a greater contrast than the lives of these two roles. The Pharisee was considered to be the perfect Jew. The tax collector was viewed to be a traitor to the nation and God. They worked for the occupying force and became wealthy doing so. They sold their souls for financial gain. When Jesus uttered this first line of the parable, the listeners would be shocked to hear the tax collector was in the temple. They would think that he shouldn't be allowed to be there, for his very presence was defiling that holy place. Put yourself in that culture and realize how radical Jesus' teaching was to them. What follows is the opposite of what they would have expected.

<sup>11</sup> *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.’* Luke 18:11 There are several possible translations for the first line. He is standing by himself as he doesn't want to be defiled by passersby (ESV). But the Greek wording of verse 11 is that the Pharisee stood and "to" or "unto" himself (*pros*) prayed. NIV translates it, “and prayed about himself.” Notice that the personal pronoun "I" comes up five times in this short prayer of two verses. Jesus condemned Pharisees for making long-winded prayers in the marketplace just to be seen by others (Luke 20:47<sup>xv</sup>).

The prayers of Pharisees were considered by Jews to be models to learn from. Everyone who listened could sympathize with the Pharisee's prayer. Jewish males prayed each day a prayer of gratitude that they were not born a Gentile or a woman. This tells us the “holier than thou” attitude was not just a problem with the Pharisees, but of the entire nation. This Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other men. Really? Are you telling me he never looked with lust on a woman (Matthew 5:28<sup>xvi</sup>)? Do you think he had never been greedy for gain? Was his thought life holy? If the answer is no, then he is no different from all those to whom he compared himself in prayer.

Hear what the Apostle Paul tells us about comparing ourselves to others. <sup>12</sup> *Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.* 2 Corinthians 10:12 This Pharisee and all who compare themselves with others to gauge their spiritual condition are without understanding. In interviews with the public, I often hear people say that they think they will get into heaven because they are better than most people. They don't do this or that which they consider serious sins. They are without understanding.

Brothers and sisters, there is only One to whom we should compare ourselves. He is Jesus. He is God's standard. How do you measure up? Now you're beginning to have understanding. None of us comes anywhere near His life of righteousness. There is a problem with trying to be righteous through the Law. Break one commandment and you are just as guilty as if you'd broken them all (Galatians 3:10<sup>xvii</sup>). Try as they may, the Pharisees were only fooling themselves and some of the public. But they never fooled God. Nor can we. We need the righteousness of Jesus freely given to us in exchange for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>xviii</sup>).

The Pharisee went on to tout his good works. <sup>13</sup> *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’* Luke 18:12 Pharisees denied themselves to try to please God. They fasted more than 99.9% of today's Christians, but for the wrong reasons. They would even

count the leaves on their herbs and give a tenth to God (Matthew 23:23<sup>xi</sup>). This was extreme dedication, but what was their motivation? Jesus said that everything they do is done to be seen by others (Matthew 23:5<sup>xx</sup>). They reveled in what others thought of them. It was an ego trip. In the previous chapter we read that that which is highly esteemed in the sight of men is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 17:15<sup>xxi</sup>). How contrary to the ways of man! How we need heaven's perspective!

*<sup>13</sup> 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 First, note that he is also far away from others but for a very different reason. He wants to be alone with God. He is ashamed of his sinful condition. The Pharisee doesn't want to be defiled but the tax collector doesn't want to defile others. His posture is very different. While Pharisees lifted their eyes upward and extended their arms, this man is bowed low and beating his chest in remorse. He recognized what the Pharisee could not. He knew he was a sinner in need of God's mercy. Again, the Greek helps us for he did not call himself "a sinner" but rather "the sinner."

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin (John 16:8<sup>xxii</sup>). He convicted the Pharisee and the tax collector but only one of them would receive it. When the Pharisee was convicted, he justified it by pointing to his good works and comparing himself to other fallen people. You can always find someone worse than you, or at least who you think is worse. The Holy Spirit convicts me of sin. He convicts you of sin. How do we respond?

Up to this point in the parable the listeners would have thought the Pharisee was praying a nice prayer of gratitude. They would be somewhat glad to hear the tax collector repented. They would have thought, "He should. He's an evil man. The Pharisee should give thanks, for God has helped him to live a holy life." But then Jesus concluded in a way that would have stunned them.

Let me put it in terms we might relate to today. A missionary and a pedophile went to a church to pray. The missionary went to the pulpit and prayed a long flowery prayer of how blessed he was to serve on a foreign field and sacrifice so much by the grace of God. He thanks God that he does not have a secular job and live for money but is instead in fulltime service to God. He goes on to pray that he is so grateful that he never got caught up in sin like the pedophile who was kneeling in the back pew. But in the background you can hear the pedophile on his knees sobbing and the word mercy over and over again. Now hear how Jesus' conclusion would have shocked the listeners.

*<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*" Luke 18:14 The tax collector – that traitor to his people, greedy selfish man that he had been for so long, went home just as if he'd never sinned. The Pharisee's sins remained as barrier between him and God, awaiting the day of judgment. One received mercy because he received the conviction of the Holy Spirit and repented. He turned his life in the opposite direction and committed himself to change with God's help. He recognized how far he was from God and how great was his need for God's mercy.

The other trusted in himself and his own ability to be good enough for a holy and righteous God. He ignored the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Unless he humbles himself and repents, he will perish (Luke 13:3<sup>xxiii</sup>).

Jesus' maxim should be sealed on our hearts: *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."* Receiving the conviction

of the Holy Spirit is humbling. Recognizing how often we fail to live up to God's standard is painful and challenges us to allow God to reign in those areas of our lives. True repentance means to turn and go in another direction. The upside-down world of God's kingdom says to face your sins, ask for mercy, and be changed, and only then will you truly be exalted. Dig your heels in and try to exalt yourself and God will humble you!

*Two men went to pray; or rather say, One went to brag, the other to pray;  
One stands up close, and treads on high, Where th' other dare not send his eye.  
One nearer to the altar trod, The other to the altar's God.<sup>xxiv</sup>*

The story Luke follows this with seems very different at first glance, but like many of Luke's pairings, there is the similar theme of humility. <sup>15</sup> *Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.* Luke 18:15 Jesus cared deeply for children. There are several accounts of Him healing children (John 4:53<sup>xxv</sup>; Mark 5:41<sup>xxvi</sup>; 9:25-27<sup>xxvii</sup>). He warned of the harsh penalty for those who cause a little one who believes in Him to sin (Matthew 18:6<sup>xxviii</sup>). He declared that if we welcome a little one in His name, we are welcoming Him (Luke 9:48<sup>xxix</sup>).

In Jesus' day the synagogue rabbi would have the boys from five to twelve-years-old during the day to teach them to read and memorize the Torah. Children were certainly loved in Jewish culture (Psalm 127:3<sup>xxx</sup>), but they were to be cared for by their mothers and not to bother men, especially men who were studying the Scriptures. It seems that the disciples saw this request of mothers to bless their children as a distraction and forbade them to approach Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> *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. <sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* Luke 18:16,17 Jesus saw this and called out that they should let the children come. The parents wanted Jesus to put His hands on them and pronounce a blessing over their lives just as Jacob had done over Joseph's sons (Genesis 48:14,15<sup>xxxi</sup>). Jesus was glad to oblige. The disciples were to stop hindering them from coming. I picture Him taking a little time with each one, asking their age, and something about their life, and then praying a prayer unique to each one. The children weren't a distraction, but rather they were examples of those to whom the kingdom of belongs. He went on to explain that the kingdom belongs to such as these, and unless we receive the kingdom of God like a little child, we can't enter it.

What does that mean? The description of these children in verse 15 was "infants". Infants are helpless. They completely trust their parents to provide their needs and expect them to be met. A baby cries knowing a parent will bring relief to whatever the need is. Babies and children in their first three years would never survive without someone caring for them. They are like sheep that need a shepherd to guide and care for them. But unlike sheep they have nothing to give their parents in return for the care and provision. They have no achievements to boast about or any wisdom to lean on. They only receive, but they do give a great deal of joy. The ones who realize that this is our standing before God are the people to whom the kingdom belongs.

I think "jaded" is a good word to describe the opposite of this childlike faith. People become jaded toward the Gospel when they grow up with bad examples. They

hear the words and see the actions and conclude there is no value in it. They become cynical when they see people who call themselves Christians do hurtful or immoral things. How many people became jaded years ago when a series of televangelists were exposed as hypocrites or priests were convicted of molesting children? But a similar attitude develops in those who think they are the spiritual elites, better than everyone else, having it all figured out.

Jews came with all kinds of false conceptions of what the Messiah would be like and what He would do. It was a selfish mindset of Jews being better than the rest of the world. When they saw Jesus give signs that He is the Messiah, they wanted to see the signs they expected. They thought he didn't measure up to their standards. Their mindset kept them from running to Jesus for the blessing of entering the kingdom of God. They could not express child-like faith and receive what Jesus offers us.

In the previous passage the tax collector recognized he was totally dependent on God's mercy. He was helpless to do anything about his sins, except to plead for mercy, as helpless as these infants. The following passage is about the rich young ruler. He wants to know what HE can do to inherit eternal life. The point of that account is that he can't be good enough for God unless he puts his total trust in God instead of his money. He must recognize he is helpless, humble himself, and have faith and trust like that of a child to follow Jesus.

Little children are models for us as they have total trust in their parents for everything. They have not yet experienced the abuse of trust which causes us to be skeptical. They have no expectations other than being loved and their needs being met. They are ready to return love for love received. Their hugs are always sincere. They don't compare themselves to others to see if they are more worthy of a parent's care, at least until they are a bit older. They don't struggle with self-righteousness or pride in how much they know. That comes in the teen years.

Of course, all those things begin to change as the child becomes a little older. Then expectations, pride, manipulation, comparisons, and deceit all begin to manifest. That's because we are born with Adam's fallen nature. And these are the issues that keep us from receiving the kingdom. Think about the teenager that doesn't get the game system he pleaded for at Christmas. No matter how much love went into the gift he or she did receive, it is not what was expected or desired. His or her disapproval is obvious. It's an illustration of how we adults can act when God, our heavenly Father, does not answer prayer in the way we expected. No wonder Jesus described salvation as being born-again (John 3:3). <sup>3</sup> *... "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 18:3

Was the Pharisee in the previous parable childlike? The tax collector was! He received the conviction, was broken over it, and cried out for undeserved mercy, just like a three-year-old would when caught and disciplined for disobedience. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in His time. Be like babies desiring the sincere milk of God's Word so that you can grow and discern between the world's ways and heaven's upside-down reality (1 Peter 2:2<sup>xxxiii</sup>). Enter the kingdom like a little child, completely trusting in the love and provision of our heavenly Father.

## Questions

1 What did the listeners think about the two main characters?

- 2 What might they have thought of their prayers?
- 3 Why is Jesus' conclusion so shocking?
- 4 What had the Pharisee rejected?
- 5 What does the parable promise?
- 6 What did that culture and ours think of children?
- 7 Why did the disciples stop them?
- 8 Why did Jesus welcome them?
- 9 In what ways are we to be like little children?
- 10 What is the connection between these two accounts?
- 11 How should we see our world?

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<sup>i</sup> **Acts 17:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,

<sup>ii</sup> **Mark 10:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

<sup>iii</sup> **Luke 18:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

<sup>iv</sup> **Matthew 5:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>v</sup> **Matthew 10:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

<sup>vi</sup> **Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>vii</sup> **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>viii</sup> **John 4:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup> (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

<sup>ix</sup> **John 8:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."]]

<sup>x</sup> **Philippians 2:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

<sup>xi</sup> **Romans 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

<sup>xii</sup> **Psalms 14:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Leviticus 20:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 20:47 (ESV)**

<sup>47</sup> who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

<sup>xvi</sup> **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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<sup>xvii</sup> **Galatians 3:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

<sup>xviii</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>xix</sup> **Matthew 23:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

<sup>xx</sup> **Matthew 23:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

<sup>xxi</sup> **Luke 16:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

<sup>xxii</sup> **John 16:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Luke 13:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

<sup>xxiv</sup> - Preaching the Word, Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth

<sup>xxv</sup> **John 4:53 (ESV)**

<sup>53</sup> The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Mark 5:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Mark 9:25-27 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” <sup>26</sup> And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Matthew 18:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Luke 9:48 (ESV)**

<sup>48</sup> and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

<sup>xxx</sup> **Psalms 127:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Genesis 48:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). <sup>15</sup> And he blessed Joseph and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,

<sup>xxxii</sup> **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—