

February 8th, 2009 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 33”

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Luke 18:9-14

9 Also [Jesus] 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, [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the [Pharisee]; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Our text for today gives us the intellectual basis for Christianity and for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fact about ourselves about which we are probably in the most denial is that we are sinners. Not accidental sinners, not people that are forced to sin because of circumstance, but rank sinners that willfully disobey God because we disagree with Him and have decided to do that which we want to do. We are all willfully disobedient, and we need to acknowledge that fact, because if we do not, we will find ourselves in the situation of the Pharisee in this parable.

For the last two weeks, I have talked about the twin attributes of marriage, those being, love and submission. However, for the most part, male/female relationships in our society are not based upon those two ideas. The paradigm for male/female relationships in our generation is not the Bible, but rather, a Shakespearian play, Romeo and Juliet.

Let me give you a brief synopsis of the play. The play is set in a time in which parents generally control the choice of their children’s spouses. Romeo and Juliet are members of feuding families, but they develop an attraction for one another, and marry one other secretly. Both families object strenuously to their union after their marriage, and duels are fought between the supporters of the couple and the ones that object to the marriage. After a great deal of killing over their marriage, the story ends when the war between the families leads Romeo and then

Juliet to kill themselves, after which the feud ends, as their families reconcile because of their mutual grief.

The point that the play makes is to say that when young people have a romantic feeling and want to establish a relationship with someone, their feelings should be respected, however inappropriate the older, wiser adults in their families consider the relationship to be. In other words, Shakespeare makes the point that in matters of the heart, emotions should trump logic and intelligence, regardless of the potential inappropriateness of the choices that our emotions lead us to make. “But I love him (or her)” becomes the strongest logic, and any other consideration becomes secondary. This has become the paradigm for our thinking about male/female relationships.

This thinking is much like that in the garden. In **Genesis 2:16-17**:

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

The woman was aware of the command of God, but she lacked a perspective on death. She had had no contact with death; no one she knew had ever died, and the concept of the temporary nature of life was just not part of her experience. What the woman had was an instruction from God, who, as the Creator, certainly knew more about life and death than she did, and so, it was her responsibility to trust the truth of that which God had to say. But unfortunately, she received another perspective. In **Genesis 3:4-5**:

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The serpent did not stimulate the woman’s intelligence; rather, the serpent stimulated the woman’s emotions. The phrase, “**you will be like God**” does not carry intellectual proof with it, but is one with which we can all identify. God is the one who can give and who can deny us things, and who makes decisions about our lives. If we could be like God, we could make these decisions ourselves. How would you like to be like God and hold your own life in your own hands?

Romeo and Juliet knew that their decision to disobey their parents and marry was going to cause conflict in their families, but they did not realize how much trouble that their decision was going to cause. When the woman decided to disobey God and eat of the fruit, she did not realize how much trouble her decision was going to cause. Want for things causes us to deny the potential evil of that which we want and to be deluded into thinking that that which we want is good for us. **Genesis 3:6** says:

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

The man and woman in the garden were deluded because they wanted the fruit. As I have often said during my many expositions of this passage of Scripture, poisoned fruit is not good for food, nor will it make you wise. It might look good, but any wise person will tell you that everything that looks good to you is not good for you.

Adam hid when God came into the garden, and God inquired why Adam would do so. Adam told God that he was afraid because he was naked, so he hid.

Hiding is our first response to our sinfulness. Lying about our sin is a form of hiding, as we are trying to keep our sin from becoming known. Denial is another form of hiding, as we try to hide our sin by redefining it as righteousness.

Is shoplifting really stealing if you pay for the items once you get caught?

Is fornication really a sin if you are “in love” with the person with whom you are fornicating?

Is divorce really so bad if your spouse does not make you happy?

Aren't there really some situations in which adultery is justified?

Is church on Sunday really so important? After all, can't we talk to God anytime?

These questions, and others like them, that seek to deny the truth of the Word of God and justify our lack of morality have all been asked before. More importantly, they have all been answered before. One of the arrogances of young people is that they think that because they just thought of a question or just had an idea, that their thinking is original. But this is not true.

According to God, there are no new ideas. Nothing is new; things are just new to us. The Roman poet Ovid wrote a story with most of the characteristics of Romeo and Juliet called Pyramus and Thisbe about fifteen hundred years prior to Shakespeare's publication of his work. Solomon tells us, in **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10**:

9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us.

The tragedy of Solomon's statement comes in verse **11** of the same passage, which says:

11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.

In high school, a history teacher told our class, “He that does not know his history is doomed to repeat it.” That cliché has application, not only in history class, but in our lives as well. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and the tragedy of our lives is the same as the tragedy in the garden; God has given us His Word to inform us as to how we should behave, and the devil is tempting us to disobey God, just as he tempted them in the Garden. We often fall, as did Adam and Eve, when we decide to act on our desire for things that God tells us are not good for us.

The acts that we perform based upon our conclusions that God's declarations don't match our desires are called sins. The Apostle Paul specifies the universal nature of sin by quoting the Psalmist as he writes, in **Romans 3:10-18**:

10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”

13 “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps is under their lips”;

14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

**16 Destruction and misery are in their ways;
17 And the way of peace they have not known.”
18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”**

Romans 3:23 reminds us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Yes, I hear your question. “Even me? Even me, Lord? Did you even mean me?”

In the first part of our text, **Luke 18:9-12**, the Bible tells us this:

9 Also [Jesus] 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.’**

“Not me” said the Pharisee. “I’m not a sinner, I despise sinners, including this tax collector, but I’m a righteous Pharisee. I’m not a sinner, I’m a pillar of the community!”

You notice, however, that the text tells us that the Pharisee is praying with himself. His prayer does not move God, and I can tell you that he is not really interesting in praying to God, because God does not share the Pharisee’s exalted has opinion of himself. Do you remember that which the Pharisees did when God in the flesh came into the world? They rejected His testimony and crucified Him, because He told them that they were sinners rather than the righteous men that they wanted to think that they were. But Jesus condemnation of them was true, as God inspired the Solomon to say, in **Proverbs 20:9**:

9 Who can say, “I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin”?

And again, in **Ecclesiastes 7:20**:

20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

The Pharisee is praying with himself because he has an interesting characteristic, shared by much of the human race. He thinks that he has purified his heart. He thinks that he does good and not sin. In other words, the Pharisee thinks that he is right.

Folks, that’s a bad position to hold. None of us are correct about that which we think unless we receive an accurate interpretation of the Scripture from the Holy Spirit Himself. Jesus tells us, in **John 14:16-17, 16:13**:

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

We are never as wrong as when we think that we are right. One of my favorite movies is entitled “A Few Good Men”. In this movie, Tom Cruise plays a Navy lawyer who is appointed to defend two marines that inadvertently killed a fellow soldier named Willie. Willie had an undiagnosed heart condition, which made it impossible for him to successfully participate in the physical rigors of being a marine. However, the base doctor failed to detect Willie’s condition,

and the doctor's lack of a diagnosis made the base commander and the platoon leader in Willie's unit think that Willie was malingering. The base commander ordered the platoon leader to have some of Willie's fellow soldiers beat him up to whip him into shape, like a fraternity hazing, which was an old practice on the base but one that had been officially outlawed by the Marine Corps. While the guys from the unit were beating Willie up, Willie's heart failed and he died. The officers decided to frame the soldiers that beat Willie up on a premeditated murder charge to keep themselves out of trouble, rather than admit that the soldiers were beating Willie up on their orders.

Tom Cruise offered the defense that there had been no murder; the soldiers that killed Willie did not intend to kill him and had no personal grudge against him. The responsible parties, according to Tom, were actually the doctor that missed the diagnosis about Willie's heart condition and the officers that ordered Willie to be beaten up. At the climax of the movie, Tom Cruise was able to provoke Jack Nicholson, who was playing the base commander, so effectively on the witness stand that Jack defiantly declared that he gave the illegal order to have the guy beaten up.

In the next scene, the judge read the verdict on the two soldiers on trial. He said, "On the charge of murder, the [court] members find the accused not guilty. On the charge of conspiracy to commit murder, the members find the accused not guilty. On the charge of conduct unbecoming a United States Marine, the members find the accused guilty as charged. The accused are hereby sentenced to time already served, and you are ordered to be dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps."

The soldiers that were on trial were stunned, because they thought that they were right. Beating Willie up was supposed to make him a better marine, not kill him. A lot of guys got punished by other guys in their unit when they didn't shape up. How could they be guilty of dishonorable conduct? They were just doing that which their superior officers told them to do. How could they be wrong?

Suddenly, the soldier that was the most adamant about his innocence understood the verdict. "Yes, we did do something wrong", he said to his co-defendant. "We were supposed to fight for people who couldn't fight for themselves. We were supposed to fight for Willie."

Before this revelation, the soldier thought that he was right, because he did not really understand the purpose of his position in the Marine Corps. The marine, like the Pharisee in our text, thought that his job was to follow orders. The marine knew that he was not guilty of murder, because he didn't kill Willie intentionally, and he knew that he was not guilty of conspiracy, because he did not kill Willie on his own, but accidentally in the execution of an order from his superior officer. But he initially thought the fact that he was following orders made his actions correct. The verdict of the court made it clear to him that simply following orders does not mean that you are conducting yourself in a manner becoming to a United States Marine.

The Pharisee in our text thought in the same way as did the soldier before the verdict was handed down. He thought that his obligation to God was to follow instructions; to do the things specified in the Law of Moses, that he had fast and tithe, while refusing to extort, commit adultery, or be an unjust judge. But Jesus says, in **Matthew 23:23**:

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and

cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

God has not designed us to follow instructions like computers, but He has designed us to think and to communicate with the Holy Spirit. Following the rules is necessary, but following the rules is not sufficient. We need to understand the weightier matters of the law; that which it means to truly be a Christian, and how we need to both give and receive justice, mercy and faith.

Jesus Christ understood justice, mercy and faith. He understood justice, because He knew that there was no just way for any of us to enter heaven, because we are all sinners, and the wages of sin is the second death in the lake of fire. **Revelation 21:8** tells us:

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

But Jesus Christ was not a sinner; He had lived a perfect and sinless life, and His sinless life gave Him the currency to spend to redeem us from our sins, by giving Himself as a sacrifice and taking our punishment. Jesus Christ understood that He was the only one that could keep all of us out of Hell, and He decided to have mercy on us and bear our punishment in our place. He understood mercy, and He said, in **Hebrews 8:10-12**

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”

St. John testified that Jesus Christ understood faithfulness, as he says, in **1John 1:9**
9 If we confess our sins, [Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches me that I need justice and mercy and faith in order to have eternal life, but I am not sinless as is Jesus Christ. God has blessed me with this realization, even as He did the tax collector in our text, **Luke 18:13**:

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!’

The marine in “A Few Good Men” was blessed to have Tom Cruise as his defense attorney, but we, as Christians, are even more blessed to have Jesus Christ as our Savior. Tom was good enough to keep the marine from being convicted of murder in a court of law, but he was not good enough to keep the marine from receiving a dishonorable discharge in the same court. But my Savior Jesus Christ is able to not only keep me from being convicted of my sins and sent to the Lake of Fire, but is also able to make sure that there is no dishonorable discharge in my future.

How do I know? The record is that Jesus Christ hung of the Cross between two thieves, who argued over their interaction with Him. **Luke 23:39-42** records:

39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed [Jesus], saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”

40 But the other, answering, rebuked [the first criminal], saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?”

41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”

42 Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

Jesus’ answer to the thief is my assurance that I am secure with Jesus Christ. **Luke 23:43** records:

43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Jesus promised a home in Paradise for a condemned criminal that had acted so evilly that he was sentenced to be executed. Jesus promised this while the criminal’s sentence was being carried out, simply because the criminal acknowledged his own sinfulness and confessed his faith in Jesus Christ.

As we go down from this place today, we need to rethink our lives. We, as Christians, have access to the greatest gift ever given in the history of creation, that being the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. But our access to the gift is in potential danger, because we may decide that we do not want it. As I have been preaching for the last two weeks, our marital relationship is possibly the most important human relationship that we have, and the Word of God makes it clear as to how we are to treat to one another as husbands and wives. Wives are to submit to their husbands, not frustrate them, as **1Peter 3:1-6** instructs:

1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,

2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.

3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—

4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,

6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Husbands are to love and honor their wives, not treat them with disrespect, as **1 Peter 3:7** instructs:

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

But we are all sinners, none of us is perfect, and we have all transgressed the commandments to submit to and/or love and care for our spouse at some time during our marriage. We have two choices as to that which we can do about our situation. We can do like the Pharisee in our text, and live in denial about our sin. We can decide that our partner’s disobedience justifies our sin, denying God’s call for justice, mercy and faith. Rather than confessing our sin, we can decide to focus on times that we follow the minutiae of the law, ignoring that which John says in **1John 1:8**:

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Our other option is to live like the tax collector, who understands that he is in a constant battle against the devil, a battle that he will lose unless he humbles himself and calls upon help from the Lord. The tax collector is not praying with himself, but is calling on God for help and mercy, as he recognizes his own sinfulness and uses his prayer life, not as a means to brag and boast, but as a way to confess his sins and contact God for strength, as John tells us in **1John 1:9**:

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Wives, if you are not always submissive to your husband, you have a matter for prayer. It is intuitively obvious that you will not always desire to submit to your husband; for if you did, there would be no need for the commandment. The commandment exists as both a reminder that to submit is your responsibility, and as a focus for your confession and repentance when you recognize your sinfulness in willfully refusing to do so.

Husbands, if you do not always love your wife and give yourself for her, you have a matter for prayer. It is intuitively obvious that you will not always desire to give yourself for your wife; for if you did, there would be no need for the commandment. The commandment exists as both a reminder that to love and give yourself is your responsibility, and as a focus for your confession and repentance when you recognize your sinfulness in willfully refusing to do so.

At the end of our text for today, Jesus says, in **Luke 18:14**

14 I tell you, [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the [Pharisee]; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

What does it mean to be exalted like the tax collector? **Revelation 7:9-17** tells us:

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.

16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;

17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

There is a benefit for wives that make their husbands happy as they submit to them and for husbands that love and give themselves for their wives. The reward for marital devotion is great. Every tear that you have cried while keeping your commitment to our spouse will be

wiped away by God Himself. But, to be exalted by God, you must humble yourself here, as **Philippians 2:5-16** teaches:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Jesus ran a good race for us to show us the way. He humbled His Divine Self before God and man in the way that He is asking us to humble ourselves before our spouses. So, as we go down from this place, let us resolve to not be competitive with our spouses, the ones that we have promised to love, honor and cherish, but to submit to our husbands and love and give ourselves for our wives, even as Christ gave Himself for us.

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