



Made Right with God-Part 1

Seeing Our Need

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A few years back there was an armed robber who was arrested. True story by the way. And when they were arresting him the cops had him there against the car they emptied out his pockets as they always do. And in his wallet they found a piece of paper that was folded up that had a set of rules on that piece of paper. Strangely enough these rules were all related to his life of crime. He'd written down a code of ethics for himself and here were a few on his list.

"I will only rob people seven months out of the year." Those year-round crooks are such irritating people.

"I will only rob people at night." I really hate getting robbed in the morning. It's much, much better at night. That's very kind of him.

"I will not kill anyone." Well, that sounds good. "Unless I have to." Oh! Well, you know, sometimes those obstinate victims they... I understand if you have to kill them. And it goes on and on and there's one I should explain to you. I should explain that I don't understand it. He says, "I will not rob 7-Elevens." I'm not sure what that's about. Slurpee fan perhaps.

Well, this crook certainly had a code to live by. And in his mind I'm sure that code kept him from being the kind of person that he despised. In other words, he felt like he was not all that bad of a criminal because, after all, I mean, he's not robbing people 12 months out of the year. He doesn't pull out those afternoon heists like those other criminals. I mean, he doesn't set out to kill people, you know, frivolously, only when he has to. This is a criminal who certainly feels better than the next guy. You know when the cops found this piece of paper, unfolded and read it, they didn't stand back and say, "Oh wow, sir, this is, I mean, thank you so much for being such a good example to all the criminals in our city. You may go." No. He's a crook, he's a criminal, he holds people up, he shoves a gun in their face and he takes their money. He's a crook and they send him to jail and for us that all makes perfect sense. You know why that makes perfect sense that the authorities would send this crook to jail? It makes sense because you and I sit here today as being people who don't hold people up for money, I trust. We're not armed robbers. So that makes perfect sense. Send them off to jail. We don't care about their distinctions among one another and we don't care if the criminals, you know, one does it this way, one does it that way. We think that everyone who steals from us, puts a gun in our face, they ought to go to jail. Crooks belong there. Send them off.

But when we ponder the ultimate authority, the ultimate authority in the universe, sentencing sinners to a place of punishment, ahh, that's where we start raising objections. Yeah, that doesn't make as much sense. We don't much care for that. There are lots of objections. Even Jesus said, there will be objections from those who he's sentencing on that day and they're going to say, from Matthew Chapter 7, "Hey wait a minute, did we not do this, this, this, and this?" And he will say, "Depart from me you workers of lawlessness." You break the rules. You are sinners. "Yeah, but we're not sinners like those guys. I mean, we did do these good things and, I mean, I'm not as bad as I could be" and he'll say, "Depart from me. All you practice lawlessness."

Holding sinners accountable for sin does not make as much sense to us because we are all sinners. And we have a certain empathy for sinners because we know that sinners, being sinners, there are sinners who are really bad sinners and then there are sinners who are not as bad sinners and then they're sinners like us who hardly feel like we deserve the title at all. We're just, you know, good

sinner.

And if we are better sinners than the other guys who we think of when we think of sinners, you might think that God will say one day, "Oh wow, sir, I'm looking at your resume here. Thank you. Thank you so much for setting such a good example for all those other sinners down there in Orange County when you were living on earth. Come on in. Come on, you're free." No. That won't happen and it won't happen because this issue of perspective and perspective is everything when it comes to us understanding the gift of salvation. That perspective is granted to us very clearly in Luke Chapter 18 as we continue now our study of the Gospel of Luke. So take your Bibles and turn, if you would, for a brief look at Luke Chapter 18 verses 9 through 14. If you've got to worship packet and you want to follow along there, you have the text printed there on the right side of that page, verses 9 through 14, when Jesus tells a story, a parable. A parable that he tells us right out of the gate what it's for, in verse 9. Take a look at it with me. I'll read it for you, verses 9 through 14. "He," that is Christ, "also told this parable..." Who's he telling it to? "To some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Now that's an interesting statement because the Bible has said over and over and over again there are none righteous, no not one.

There are some people who think they are righteous. And when they think they're righteous they're going to look at other people they think are not righteous and they're going to hold those people in derision in their mind. They're going to treat them with contempt. Well, that's who he's telling it to and I suppose there are many of us who have thought this way, perhaps we're sitting here today thinking this way. You watch Dateline, you go read a crime novel, you think, "I'm glad I'm not like those people. Yeah, I mean, I know I don't always tell the truth and, sure, I have these problems in my thought life and yeah, there are issues in terms of my ethics in the past and I've cut corners but, come on, those are the really bad guys who we'll see on the news at 11:00 tonight."

Jesus says, here's a story for you. "Two men went up to the temple to pray. One, a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other men,'" you know, those men who are "extortioners, the unjust people, adulterers," who are cheating on their spouses, "or even like this tax collector," over here who was at the bottom of the food chain in the first century Greco-Roman world. If you're a Jewish person at a Jewish Temple Mount at a Jewish worship center and you're looking at a Jewish man who's collecting taxes for the Romans who have your religion really encapsulated in a stranglehold, you know, they're not only taxing you in terms of the civic things going on in your country. The king, if you will, Herod, had poured all this money into the temple and others. Temple taxes being paid and they're being paid out to Roman officials. You've got a guy who's a turncoat. He's not faithful to the Jewish people. Look at him. He's gotten a job, a lucrative job at that, as a tax collector for the enemy.

"I'm glad I'm not like him. I mean that guy seems to love money more than anything else. No, I'm not like that. I'm willing to give up things for the Lord. As a matter of fact, I give up food twice a week. I fast twice a week. When it comes to giving, look at me. I tithe all that I get. I'm not like that tax collector in it for money."

That's the picture of the first man. Here's the picture of the second man, verse 13. "But the tax collector, standing far off..." Oh, he's near there, that Temple Mount, and he's on the Temple Mount but he's within eye shot of that Pharisee who's standing on the Temple Mount, but he's not going to draw close. Matter of fact, he wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven. I mean, so much of that structure is going to point your vision northward, you're going to look up but he's not going to look up, not thinking of those columns, not thinking of those carved golden and gilded structures and the

pomegranates and the leaves and all that Herod had put around this amazing edifice called the Temple. He's not going to look at all that. Instead, he's going to beat his breast. And he's going to say this, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." There's a sinner calling himself a sinner. We had a man in the beginning of this story who, according to the rest of the Bible, clearly is a sinner because there are none righteous, no not one, but he thinks he's righteous and so we've got a sinner who doesn't seem to be as bad as the sinner who is within eye shot of him but, he didn't see himself as a sinner.

Well the man who saw himself as a sinner, Jesus is going to make a commentary in verse 14 to wrap up this short little parable by saying, "I tell you, this man," this tax collector, this tax collector who saw that he was a sinner, this tax collector who felt so bad he was beating his own chest saying, "Oh God, please fix my problem, I'm a sinner." "This man went down to his house..." Now here's a key word, it ought to be boxed off, highlighted and underscored, "justified." That's a big Bible word and it is so important. God changed his status in Heaven at that moment. He went home that day before God, justified. God then accounted, attributed to him that he is now acceptable to his Creator, rather than the other. "Are you telling me this guy who can compare resumes and feel so much better, he's fasting, he's giving up things for God, he's tithing. That guy is not going home justified? You're saying to me he is not acceptable to God?"

Yeah. Why? Because the principle that Jesus keeps on reiterating, "Everyone who exalts himself is going to be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus quoted that axiom so many times in his ministry and applied it in all kinds of different ways. When it comes to this text, he's saying when it comes to your salvation, that's how it starts.

If you're exalting yourself, praying to God, wanting more of his blessing, wanting him to cherish you as a righteous person, you will go away humbled, though you might not even feel it. Because God will not embrace you. But if you're willing to humble yourself, a man who wouldn't even look up, he's going to beat his own breast saying, "I am a sinner," you'll go home exalted. You may not even feel the extent to which you are exalted but in God's eyes now you have been placed in Christ, to put it from New Testament terms, and you are now accepted in Jesus Christ. That's a huge turnaround. Talk about the first last and the last first.

Now the problem with this man in the first four verses here, verses 9 through 12, I mean here's a man who, it is said for us clearly in verse 9, thinks he's righteous, treats others with contempt. Why? Because he's up on a temple mount praying and he's looking at his life and comparing with other people's lives. That's what I call "lateral comparisons" and I'm always talking about the fact of what a danger that is, particularly when it comes to your salvation. You cannot make lateral comparisons. If you're taking notes that would be worth jotting down. Number one. "No Lateral Comparisons." Just get that out of your thinking, don't ever be tempted to do it and every time we live in this world and see a sinner who is worse than us you are going to be tempted to make lateral comparisons, "I am better than he is." And you know what? You're right. You are. No, really, you are.

I understand, if you only rob people just seven hours a day and someone else is robbing people 24 hours a day, that guy's a worse criminal than you. If you really go out and say, "I'm not going to kill these people, I mean, unless I have to," that's better than the guy who goes, "I'm going to take their money, take their gold chains, take their wallet, then I'm gonna shoot them in the head." That's a worse criminal than you. I mean that's true. I mean these are things I understand. I mean you say, "There's only one part of the day I'm going to rob people. It's only at night. I recognize it's not good to rob people in the morning or at noon," I don't know why, "or the afternoon, I'm going to rob people at night and I'm just going to keep my robberies to this little area. I'll just put my sin right



here in this little package. I won't let it be here, here or here. At work, I'm not going to do it and..." Yeah, that's better than the sinners who say, "I don't care. I'll do it anywhere. I don't care who I hurt." You're right, you may be better than other people. If you are comparing sinners you may be a better sinner than the worst of sinners who you know, certainly that you watch on the shows. But that lateral comparison, unfortunately, here is what it tempts you to do. It tempts you to think that you are, this is key, categorically different than them. There's the key. Your lateral comparisons will tempt you to believe that you are categorically different than them and, you know what the Bible says, you're not categorically different. You're different within the spectrum but you're in the same category. And what's the category? Jot it down. Romans Chapter 3.

Romans Chapter 3 says, "There are none righteous, no not one." I mean the passage is filled with this. All of us have turned away from God, all of us have tongues that deceive. Is anyone here going to tell me they have not had a deceptive tongue? And if you raise your hand and say, "That's me," then you're lying right now, we all know it and your proving of deceptive tone. How about mouths that are full of bitterness? How about the fact that there's a way of peace but you haven't always chosen it? You don't know walking consistently on that path of peace. The fear of God is not what it ought to be.

He's quoting all these Old Testament verses in Romans Chapter 3 to come to the place when he says this, that if you really thought about it, it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter if your church goer or some pagan, it doesn't matter if you are an accountant or whether you are an armed robber. You're categorically in the same category because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That's what Romans 3 is all about, which means that, yeah, there are distinctions between us.

Go ask police officers who arrest criminals. There are some criminals who are worse than others but all of them get hauled to the booking desk. They all get arraigned. They all go before a judge and they get sentenced. Why? Because they're all criminals. And the Bible says as you sit around here at the booking desk of life and you look at other people who you're sitting next to as you sit there with a handcuff to the wall, yeah, there are other people in that line who are worse than you but you're all in the same category. That is so important for us to get. Lateral comparisons, if you keep making those, you'll think you're not categorically the same but the Bible says that you are. It always has said that.

Now this may be too fundamental of a sermon for some of you because you're Sunday school grads and you understand salvation by faith and you're sitting here thinking, "I don't think my salvation is a reward. I don't think like this Pharisee who thinks, "Oh yeah, God loves me. His refrigerator has my picture on it. He just adores me, I'm so righteous." Listen, you may not think that way.

You may be like a kid at Christmas who has a really bad brother and you think, "I know my dad would never give my terrible brother a present at Christmas because he does not deserve it. And I know that gifts are gifts, I don't really earn it either, but I get that gift from God and I take that gift from God and I'm glad I get that gift from God and I celebrate the graciousness of my dad giving me that gift, but I understand that my brother does not deserve it. But you know what, I reach out and grab this gift and I grab it without any reference to my sin." And whenever salvation is grabbed without any reference to sin, you know this, they're not grabbing salvation, they're grasping at an illusion. They think they're somehow getting right with God and they go home from their worship time and they are not justified because there is no justification without a recognition of the problem, and sin is the problem and salvation is the gift, it's the answer.

Romans 3 continues. That's a great passage to study before you go to your small groups this week. If you're going to look at Romans Chapter 3, every element of what I'm trying to say here and what Jesus was teaching in Luke 18 is right there. God has to gift you something, not so that you can have a better life, not so that you can advance in this world, not so that you can get your ticket to the spiritual Disneyland in the sky when you die. You get a gift because you are in dire perilous need and unless you have Christ step in and solve your problem, you're going to be sent off to the federal prison. Let's put it that way. We're all at the booking desk. We're all in handcuffs. We are all there. We have to think of salvation as redemption. We have to get out of this mess. Yeah, there are other criminals sitting here at the booking desk, at the sheriff's office and they are all getting booked just like you and, you know what, yeah, their punishment may be worse than yours, they may have solitary confinement in the penitentiary and you may have something else but when it comes down to it, you're all criminals and you're all going to get on that bus and you're all going to head to the eternal prison.

Time for us to say, "The gift I need is to get out of here. I need redemption. I need salvation." And you cannot have those things without an awareness of sin. That is the whole point.

We're all sitting in custody. The gift is to fix our problem. And Christ can get us out. I really challenge you, for the sake of time, we don't have time to look at it, but Romans Chapter 3 is a beautiful expression of what Jesus is trying to say here and says so well in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

What about this tax collector? Verse 13 says he's standing far off. I think that's helpful. Read this slowly. He's standing far off. Far off from what? From all the activity. Where? Verse 10, he went up to the temple. Now even this last week in our Old Testament survey we're looking at the tabernacle, which has the rudimentary elements of the coming temple that Solomon built, which was amazing. And it was destroyed and then Zerubbabel built the second one and it was kind of paltry compared to Solomon's, which was so great. But then Herod dumped all this money into it, which all the Jews had to pay for through their taxes. But here he built this amazing edifice and it was marvelous. The disciples even walked by it and said to Jesus, "Look at our temple, isn't it crazy, it's amazing?" And it was. And here was a man in this image, in this story, in this parable who you're supposed to envision standing far off. Standing far off from what? From all that activity. What kind of activity? There are animals being sacrificed, which means there's a huge hibachi in the middle of the courtyard. And when you went to church you didn't smell sugar from donuts, you smelled, man, barbecue, you carnivores. It smelt so good going to church back then, right? This was great. And pillars of smoke. And not only that, it was mixed with the incense that was burning in the holy place, and that incense went up. It was like you walk toward this, you know, huge beautiful smelling facility, not to mention, as I said, it's gilded in its columns and the colonnades and the surrounding stables and the platform and the jewels and the gold and it sparkling. And then the trumpet players would come out with their brass trumpets and they would play the trumpets, then the crashing of cymbals and the singers and the Levites, who were dressed there preparing everything for worship and they had all their vestments on, all their regalia on. They had their jewels in their breastplate that the high priest wore, and you had all these fancy clothes and all that was going on as you heard and smelled and experienced all these pictures. The curtains, the curtains that veiled the holy place.

You had beyond that, Levites. You can't get in there but they can get in there, the priest could step through there. You have the court, the inner court, for the Jewish men and then the Jewish women and then you had the Gentiles and you stood far off and you're dressed like a tax collector. And everyone knows you are the pariah of the culture. And as you stand there for what? Because I guess

you want God. You can't even get close. Alfred Jeremias says the ancient Eastern practice and posture for prayer for men in the first century was to cross their hands over their chests and to bow their head and to pray. And I can picture that, the two fists of this tax collector with his head bowed. But in this text it says his hands could not stay immobile. He starts beating his chest. Everything is pointing upward and all the sounds and the sights and all that's going on is in a distance. He just beats his chest. Reminiscent of those words in Matthew 15 when Jesus said, you know, the real problem is in our heart, isn't it? Out of the heart come evil thoughts: adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witnesses, slander, covetousness. All of that inside your heart and he just beats his chest. And then he says this, "Have mercy on me, a sinner."

Talk about being painfully honest about why you do not belong to be with God. I mean this is the ultimate picture of that. I can't even get near those people. I have no right to be here. I certainly don't have any authority or righteousness to enter into this worship, even. I just got to stand way over here in the shadows and just pray. And I'm not praying in some peaceful serenity, I'm beating my chest knowing how unworthy I am to be here. Number two on your outline, "We Need To Get Honest, like he was, About Falling Short." I said, "All fall short of the glory of God." You know that passage, Romans Chapter 3 verse 23. But whether you fall short in a way that you think is a whole lot more than everyone else or whether you fall short in a way that you think is a whole lot less than everyone else, the point is, categorically, you fall short and if you fall short, what you need before you ever find the solution, before you ever can grab the gift of salvation where God says, "I'll clear your account, I'll make you righteous, I'll make you acceptable to your creator," is for you to get honest, painfully honest, about how you fall short.

Here was a man, unworthy. He knows he's unworthy. But he longs to be in fellowship with God.

That earthly temple certainly had many symbols that would help this man feel that. Oh, the Pharisee, he was so used to Herod's temple, there was nothing there, I suppose, the sights, the smells, the sounds, the worship, the trumpets, the choirs, the cymbals being crashed. To him, "Yeah, I've seen it many, many times."

You know who else had seen that many times in Solomon's Temple? A godly man who I'm sure if this Pharisee could spend an afternoon with him, he'd say, "Oh man, talk about righteous, this guy's righteous." His name was Isaiah and, man, he was righteous. A good man in a day of darkening morals in his culture, he stood head and shoulders above the rest. He loved God, willing to stand up for God, willing to be persecuted for God. And one day God put him in an experience to have a thing called a vision and he said, "Listen, I know you've seen Solomon's Temple many times but let me take you up here and let me show you the heavenly temple. You want to talk about posts? Here are some posts for you. You want to talk about smoke? Here's smoke filling the temple. You want to talk about incense and tongs and burning coals, we're going to have it all there. And speaking of burning coal, we're going to have the highest ranking angels, they're called "burning ones" that's the Hebrew word, "seraph", "im" means plural. The "seraphim" were flying around. And guess what, they are a whole lot more righteous and holy than you, and every tax collector and every Pharisee and every prophet. And in their perfection, never knowing what it is ever to sin, to have a lustful thought, to deceive, to slander, to be covetous, to be idolaters, those seraphs could not lift up their eyes to behold the Lord seated on the throne with his glory filling that temple. Do you remember the seraphs in that passage were described as covering their eyes? I mean, it is a lot like the Pharisee [tax collector] covering his chest and then beating on his chest and the Bible says that they covered their eyes and then they cried out to the one on the throne and they said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts."



So here's the problem, if you never really ever had a painfully honest moment about your sin, perhaps your problem is lateral comparisons. But if you say, "Well, I don't really do a lot of that," then here's your problem: you don't have an elevated view of God. You don't understand the God of the Bible. I love a lot of these testimonies we've heard this weekend, last night and this morning already, some of them come back to the reality of, "Listen, I thought I knew God but I never read the Bible. I had my 15 or 5 or 7 favorite verses and those just inform me about the God of my own creation. But when I started getting into the Bible, I saw he was something completely different than I thought he was and that started to put me in a category of falling short. And then God allowed me to have my eyes opened to see how unworthy I was to have any fellowship with this God." Get honest about falling short. Isaiah felt it and when he did and heard those angels, his first reaction in verse 5 of Isaiah 6 is, "Woe to me! For I am lost; because I am a man of unclean lips." That may sound like a small thing compared to the adulterers, the extortionist and the tax collectors. But it was enough sin to put him in the same category. When he felt categorically as a sinner before a holy, holy, holy God, he said, "I'm undone. Woe to me." How did he have such sensitivity to his painful shortcomings? Well, his eyes saw the king, the Lord of hosts.

See, you may be the most righteous person in this room in terms of your behavior. "Yeah, you're better than me, you're better than the next guy, look down your aisle, I'm better than all those guys." You might be. Just like you might be the best dressed person in the room. I may feel like, you know, "I got the decent shoes, I didn't come in shorts to church today. I may even feel so superior if I start hanging out at the gym in these clothes or maybe I go to the beach this afternoon and walk around in these clothes. Hey, I'm feeling pretty good." But you extract me and you put me in Westminster Abbey and there happens to be some big wedding of a prince and a princess this afternoon, I'm going to feel woefully ill prepared. I'm going to, as Isaiah 64 says, I'm going to feel like all my garments that I think are so righteous, my righteousness, I'll feel like they're filthy rags, polluted garments. And I'll be like a leaf, the rest of that verse says, I'm just shriveled up and I'm just blown away. I'm nothing.

If you think Christianity is some kind of spiritualized Tony Robbins seminar by the airport, you don't understand what the Bible has to say. You're not trying to get self-improvement. It's not about I want to feel better, it's not reaching out for the blessings of God because I want to have some more blessings. It's about you seeing your painfully perilous dangerous state before a Holy God. And you can sit here and listen to me and one day you'll stand before God and you will be there conscious as sure as you're sitting in this room today and you will stand before that God and that God is going to say, "Hey, I want to remind you, you're categorically a sinner. I don't care how much better you were than everyone else." Did you ever get to the place of recognizing that you were a sinner? And then how did you respond to that? With excuses, rationalization, "Everybody else does it." Or did you say, "Woe to me. I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I'm undone." Or as this man said, "Be merciful to me."

Jesus said this man who said, "Be merciful to me," he gave this comment in verse 14, "I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." The man who got honest about falling short. So this man, because he said and certainly expressed honestly and sincerely that he was a sinner and cried out with this word, "Be merciful to me," he says, "Yeah, now he's justified. I've made him right with me. I've credited to him all that he needs to be acceptable before a Holy God. He can now walk up to the throne room, he can enter boldly before the throne of God. God is no longer his judge and executioner. Now he is his redeemer and his friend. Because he humbled himself."

Some of you have not humble yourself before God - ever. You sit here today thinking, "Yeah God, I'm kind of into that" or "I believe that" or "I know those things." "Yeah, I guess God's got



blessings, I want some of those. And isn't it great he generous? I'm going to get his gifts this Christmas. When I die I'll get a kingdom invite. I'm sure I'm going."

Here is a statement about being humble before that God in recognizing those great benefits of being exalted that all of us hope to have at the end of our lives, that come to those who've been humbled. He'd like to give you that but you've got to have, really, what's going on in verses 13 and 14 here. Justification because of the reality of your own sin.

Let's put it down this way and then briefly wrap this up. You need to be amazed at justification. That's what this is about, justification. I know we're often talking about being amazed at Grace and I'm all about that. You should be amazed at Grace, you should write some hymns about it. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." That is awesome because Grace is the motivation. This is not about the motivation. This is about the execution of the salvation. This is about the mechanism of the salvation. This is about the act of salvation. Now, notice the difference here and then I hate to do this to you but unfortunately sometimes, because the Bible is written, the New Testament, in Konia Greek, I've got to get under the English here and show you a distinction. Here is one of them and, unfortunately in this text because it's been traditionally translated this way, we miss the concept of what's being said in verse 13. And I've already read it three, four or five times in the service but I need to go back, put a star by that word and help you understand what's being said here, and that is in verse 13. If I'm going to understand verse 14 and being justified, I got to understand the cry of verse 13 when he says, "Be merciful." Put a star by the word "merciful." "Be merciful to me, a sinner." And then looked down in the passage when the blind beggar in verse 38 cries out to Jesus, take a look at this, he says, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Now you'd think, because our English text has "mercy" and "mercy", "have mercy on me", "have mercy on me", that's the exact same phrase. If you thought that, unfortunately you'd be wrong. That's why it's good for us to understand the languages in which the Bible was written and you'll start to see, well these are really different words.

Eleeo is the regular Greek word for mercy. Eleeo is the word that first year Greek students get a vocabulary word about mercy, that's the word you're going to see. Eleeo And you're going to learn it, you're going to know it and every time you see it in the text you're probably going to translate it mercy. Merciful. Now in our passage we don't see Eleeo. That's not the word here. In this text, when it says in verse 13, "God be merciful to me," this is the word, "hilaskomai." That word is a word used only twice in the New Testament and it needs to be in the margin of your Bible or in your notes that the only other time it's used is in Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 17 and it carries a completely different flavor and feel than "Hey, I need you to have a disposition of kindness, of mercy, of compassion, of grace toward me." It's not that request at all.

Hilaskomai in Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 12 [17] is translated this way. It says, "He's a merciful and faithful High Priest," that's the regular word for mercy, "in the service of God, in order to make a," here's the word, "propitiation for the sins of the people." That's a mouthful right there. You might as well think we're reading Greek there to read the word propitiation because you didn't use that this week in any casual conversation at lunch. Right? Propitiation, what are you talking about?

Although it's there in the text because this word, propitiation, is an important word, and it's the word that we often associate with the fact that there is a problem that needs to be fixed and if the problem ultimately is God's frustration, his anger, his measured righteous judgment on sinners, I need that somehow to be averted. I need his wrath to be assuaged. I need somehow for the problem I've created sitting at the booking desk with my handcuffs on and I'm about to now face the judge when I've been arraigned, I need that judge to somehow take his anger about my crimes, his just



response, and I need that somehow taken off my account. That's what he's asking for here. "God, solve the problem. Make satisfaction for my sins. Settle my account, provide a payment. Turn away your anger against me, divert your righteous judgment from me." That's what he's calling for. He's not saying, "Would you feel something in your heart toward me that would make you go light on me." Not like a criminal saying, "Have mercy on me judge." This is, "Judge, I need you to have another way to deal with this. Let this cup pass from me." There's a good parallel for it. "I need somehow a different way for you to solve this problem than you casting me out of your presence."

Now the word, justification, that makes perfect sense. I'm going to, I'm going to declare you righteous because you've asked for propitiation. Now, think about that. The context is he's walking to the edge of the Temple Mount where at the central feature of the courtyard of the temple is sacrifice. People bringing their animals, you're hearing animals outside, you got people selling animals, they're exchanging their money for animals as small as pigeons, bringing them in and sacrificing them as food for the priest and as worship to God and all this bloodshed and all this smoke and all this barbecue smell that you're smelling every time you go to the Temple Mount, here is a man with his arms across his chest beating his chest saying, "God, can you somehow provide a way to turn your anger away from my sin. I know I'm a sinner. Have mercy on me."

And God says, "Yeah. I'm going to justify you. I will append to you," in the words of Psalm 32 and Romans 4 as he quotes Psalm 32, "I'm going to make you a delightfully happy person. I'm going to justify you." How? "I'm going to credit to you righteousness. I'm going to take all your sin and I'm going to credit it somewhere else." In Psalm 32, we don't know where, in Romans 4 he makes it clear. He's going to credit all of that sin to Christ and when he cries out, "Let this cup pass from me," the father going to say, "No, you're going to drink that cup of God's wrath mixed full strength. You're going to drink it down to the dregs," to use the Old Testament phrase, "but you're going to do that so that I can have you conquer death for all of them so that they won't have to drink that cup." Remember Good Friday this last year? He can drink one of the two cups. Right? He could have drunk the cup of blessing, but he drank the cup of wrath. So that you can stand here deserving to drink the cup of wrath and provide for you the cup of blessing. I want God to bless me, have mercy on me, provide the solution. That will make you a Christian who is amazed at justification. I don't have time for this passage either, but Ephesians Chapter 2 is a good passage for you to study before your small groups, at least verses 3 or 9, which reminds us that it is mercy that motivates this transaction but then the transaction comes. By Christ's death he's going to pay for your penalty so that your sins can be appended to his cross and his righteousness can be credited to you, not by works, which is exactly what we see. This tax collector did nothing to get right with God other than seeing his need, humbling himself and crying out for some kind of diversion of God's anger. And God said, "OK, I'm going to do that." While all these lambs are being sacrificed around you, there is a lamb, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And he's going to come within a short period of time from the writing of this text and he's going to climb up on a cross and he's going to die so that you don't have to encounter the wrath of God. Many of you in this room, I can only guess given the size of this room, will suffer for your own sins eternally. That'll be your lot. And you'll think back to this day when I sat here and preached to you and you'll say, "I was warned. I knew it. I heard it. I didn't believe it because I didn't think I was that bad because the very things he said, 'Don't compare yourself with others. Stop with the lateral, you know, comparison,' I continued to do that." And then maybe there are some of you who are headed for that dreadful day, when he would otherwise say, "Depart from me, I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness." And you'll say, "It wasn't that bad." Instead he'll say, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Perhaps you'll hear that because today you're willing to say, "OK, I am a sinner. God I need you to have that propitiatory mercy toward me. I need you to divert your anger toward me. Not because I want a blessing in my life. But because I need that blessing in my



life." Two men, two prayers, two eternal destinies. Two men, just like we might have in this room, two kinds of people, they're praying two prayers. They both might call them the sinner's prayer. One wants blessing because he wants to go to heaven, one wants blessing he wants God's favor. The other one doesn't do it cause he wants it, he prays it because he needs it. He desperately feels his need for salvation and he says I need your forgiveness. On a radically different responses, this one is justified prepared for heaven, this one is not because he thinks he's justified already.

Jesus made a great statement, it's so helpful, in John 9, when he said, you know, here's why I came into the world. It's "For judgment that I came into the world." Judgment for what? "So that those who do not see can see." I'm blind. I would like sight. I want to see. This is not a physical description even though it comes on the heels of a physical healing of a blind man. But listen to this, "And that those who see..." And you can put that in quotes, they think they see, that's the context of the Pharisees going, "Wait a minute, we're not sinners." That was the previous two verses, "We're not sinners." So that those who see, you think you're not sinful? "You can become blind." Why does he want to be blind? So, if you're blind you can be painfully aware of your loss and you can reach out for the gift of salvation and then you'll see.

I wonder where you are on that scale right there. You come into here thinking, "I see. I know I'm good with God. I'm right with God." But you can't look at a time when you recognize that there's no possible way I deserve to be right with God. I am unworthy, I do not deserve it. I didn't walk an aisle, pray a prayer, slip up my hand, sign a Bible, sign a track, repeat some kind of mantra, throw a pine cone in the fire, get baptized, whatever it is that you did, I didn't do that just so I can have some kind of security, some kind of insurance policy. I did it because I realize I'm desperately in need of a fix for my problem. My sins are going to send me into outer darkness.

But God says here, "How happy is the man," that's the Hebrew word "asher." We translate it blessed, but it's a better word, asher. "How happy is the man the Lord does not count iniquity." This is a great passage. Listen to this. "How happy is the man whose transgression is forgiven, how happy is the man whose sin is covered, how happy is the man against whom the Lord does not count iniquity," and here's the real key, "and in whose spirit there is no deceit." He's not deceiving himself. He's honest about his need. I pray that will be you, that you will recognize where you stand with God. Because if you want to be right with God it starts with seeing your need and that's where this first parable goes.

Stay tuned. Next week, another parable about children and what the attitude of our faith ought to be. Not ignorant faith, but simple, childlike faith. We'll look at that next time we're together.

Let's pray. God help us please take seriously our responsibility to see our need for what it is. We are sinners and we need desperately the salvation that we find in Jesus Christ. And while many people have looked around and say, "Well, I got a lot of bad siblings in this world and I know they're not getting any good gifts from God. But I want a gift from God, I want my life to go better, I want to go to Disneyland after I die." And we reach out for that gift of salvation but we have no idea that this is about a solution to sin. And if we would be asked in the middle of that time of reaching out for salvation that we think we're grabbing, if someone said, "Well, let's talk about your sin." We say, "Well, I'm not really a sinner."

How many people think they're right with God and yet they had no reference at all to their sin and their unworthiness when they came to Christ? How many tracks can we find that talk about God promising you a great life and improving your life and increasing your life and giving you heaven and they never mention sin or repentance or contrition? What kind of gospel do we have that's



guttled of its main thrust? When we tell each other, "Hey, you want a better life? Try God. Try Christ." When really what we need is to get honest, like this personage in this parable who couldn't even look up to pray because he realized his sin. And he beat his chest and said, "God, divert your anger toward me because I know it's just and it's right, I deserve it." So help us God in this regard to be much more like him and then walk away as we're going to see in the parables that are yet to come and the stories that are yet to come of how that changes how we live. That tax collector in that story, if it were a real historical situation, would never be the same after that situation on the Temple Mount realizing his sin and being justified by Christ. So help us to learn the totality of this in this seven part series that we're jumping into and I pray it will be very helpful and enlightening for us and a motivating force. And there are some here this morning who have yet to see their sin and put their trust in Christ and reach out for this gift of salvation as they should. I pray that today would be the day. There are no aisles to walk, no hands to raise, no cards to fill out, but just do business with you even right now as they hear my voice. Please God, convict hearts, lead them to you and change their lives. Once they are, I know there will be no mistaking that. They will be different because you've changed who they are from the inside out. Grants us new life in our church I pray today.

In Jesus name. Amen