



STORIES OF LIFE!

The Gospel of Luke

A Story of Comparisons!

Luke 18:9-17

Message #53 of 60 – S841

Sermon given on March 31, 2019



Sunday Morning Service

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A Story of Comparisons!

Luke 18:9-17

Opening Comments

- Turn to **Luke 18**
- We continue a study through the Gospel of Luke – **The Stories of Life**
- One of the dangers of social media is something termed ‘compare and despair’
- This happens when someone compares the reality of their life with the highlight reel that people post on social media
- All they see is other people’s children smiling and loving each other, while their children are running around trying to set each other’s hair on fire
- Or they are seeing images of husbands or wives doing something incredibly thoughtful - while their spouse totally blew off date night to do something with their friends
- On social media, we typically only see the best part of people’s lives
- This is not a message about social media
- It is about comparing ourselves to others
- It is dangerous to our mental health and says a lot about our faith
- Let’s pray and then get into the text for today
- **Pray**

Teaching

- **A Story of Comparisons!**
- The beginning of Luke 18 had the parable of the persistent widow
- Taught us to pray in faith believing God will answer, and to keep praying until He does
- This next parable includes the backdrop of prayer also
- **Luke 18:9-10**
- In this parable, Jesus is going to contrast two men
- These men were on opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum
- The Pharisees were considered the holiest men in Israel - And if you weren’t aware of that, they would make sure to let you know

- ‘trusted in themselves that they were righteous’
- They were comparing themselves against themselves – Looking in the mirror - I make this look good!
- The tax collectors (some translations - publican) were hated by everyone except other tax collectors
- They were exceptionally corrupt and notoriously wicked
- A modern equivalent might be a drug dealer or pimp
- Jesus’ audience would have a positive image of the Pharisee and a negative image of the tax collector
- That would have been reinforced by what Jesus says next
- **Luke 18:11-12**
- The Pharisee in this parable is comparing himself to truly wicked people
- People still do this today – if you try to talk to them about their sin, they quickly tell you that they have never murdered anyone – Oh good! That’s a relief!
- He then describes his righteousness – fast/give tithes
- These things somehow make him someone God should respond to
- Unfortunately, there is a problem **Isaiah 64:6**
But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
- Our very best acts of righteousness are still tainted with the sin that dwells within each of us
- God expects us to act in righteousness – that means being, thinking, and doing those things that are right and good, but our righteousness doesn’t give us any rights with God
- The Pharisee acted as if God owed him something based on his self-righteous view of himself
- God is gracious beyond our finite comprehension and He has given us everything we need **2 Peter 1:3**
...as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...
- The warning of the Pharisee is, don’t compare your righteousness to that of others – and be careful about self-evaluating your righteousness
- The apostle Paul made a self-evaluation **Romans 7:18**

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells...

- Paul is being brutally honest about his true nature
- Even though he lived his life as righteously as he was able to – he knew his righteousness was still ‘filthy rags’
- At this point Jesus’ audience still has a positive image of the Pharisee
- Next comes the negative image
- **Luke 18:13**
- Notice the tax collector doesn’t try to compare himself to anyone else, either better or worse
- He knew what he was, and he owned it ‘me a sinner’
- In the NASB = ‘the sinner’ –
- As far as this sinful tax collector was concerned – this transaction was between him and God alone
- Jesus’ audience would still have the negative image of the tax collector
- Many of them would even suggest that God wasn’t listening to him
- What Jesus says next would have shocked them
- **Luke 18:14**
- The tax collector was justified = made right with God – the Pharisee wasn’t – that means his sin remained upon him
- He exalted himself – the tax collector humbled himself
- Let’s go back to verse 13 and see just what he did
- ‘standing afar off’ – honest with God and the world – didn’t fake it
- ‘would not so much as raise his eyes’ – shame for his sins
- ‘beat his breast’ – true brokenness – he knew his sin broke God’s heart and so he was heartbroken
- ‘be merciful to me a sinner’ – this is the cry of repentance – he knew his sins deserved God’s wrath – knows nothing he can do to appease God – only God’s mercy can save him
- The Pharisee and the tax collector are the two extremes of a spectrum
- Where would we fall on that spectrum? Are you more like the self-righteous Pharisee or more like the humble tax collector?
- As this parable was set in the context of prayer – it is important we answer this question, or our prayers may not be as effective as we might wish

- As Jesus is talking a large crowd is milling around
- Jesus notices something and responds and gives us another comparison
- **Luke 18:15-17**
- This was a very common practice – parents bringing children to have a blessing spoken over them
- This is one of the reasons we do Child Dedications
- It is a testimony to their faith that they were bringing their babies to Jesus – Saw Him as able to bless
- It is unclear why the disciples rebuked them
- Maybe they felt Jesus was too busy – maybe too important
- Jesus tells them that they are mistaken – let the babies come
- Jesus knows something about babies that they don't
- Science tells us that new stars are being born all the time
- One source said as many as 275 million stars are born every day
- And once born, they say they will last for millions of years
- Our own star, the sun, is expected to keep burning for another 5 billion years
- As remarkable as the birth of a star is – the birth of a baby is even more amazing
- At conception, every baby is endowed with an eternal soul
- When our sun burns out in 5 billion years, that baby's soul will continue to live for countless billions more
- And as glorious as a star is – every baby is wondrously more beautiful because they bear the image of God
- 'of such is the kingdom of God' – every baby is created to be a part of God's kingdom
- Every human that God creates is important to Him and therefore all human life from conception on should be important to us
- What does Jesus mean by verse 17?
- This is another call for self-examination
- Jesus challenged the religious leader Nicodemus with this same concept **John 3:3**

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- What is it about little children that makes them something we should use to evaluate our faith?
- Four things that reflect the child-like faith that Jesus calls us to
- First – **Trust**
- An infant is utterly dependent upon others survive because they are absolutely helpless
- The Pharisee trusted in himself – the tax collector knew he could do nothing to save himself **Psalm 37:3-4**

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

- The less you trust in yourself and put your trust in God, the more ready you are for heaven
- Second – **Humility**
- A little child is humble because they have no knowledge or achievements to be prideful about
- All your adult knowledge and achievements get in the way of humbling yourself like a child before God
- The Pharisee reminded God of all he had done for God
- The tax collector begged God to do for him what he couldn't do for himself **1 Peter 5:6-7**

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

- Third – **Reception**
- Little children receive gifts without hesitation or question
- They don't question whether they deserve them or not, and they don't concern themselves with why the gift is given – strings attached?
- God would call us to receive everything as from His hand in the same way a small child receives gifts **James 1:17**

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- When God tries to give you something – take it!
- Fourth and final trait of child-like faith – **Love**
- Children just love – unabashedly, unashamedly, unrestrained
- As we grow up – we learn how not to love
- Child-like faith loves **1 Corinthians 13:13**

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

- Three pictures of comparison – the Pharisee, the tax collector, and the little child
- The little child is the ideal – the Pharisee is the one to avoid – the tax collector is what we should be when we blow it
- Let's stop comparing ourselves to others and simply receive the kingdom from God with child-like faith
- Trust Him, humble yourself before Him, receive from Him whatever He gives you, and then love Him with all of yourself.
- The story God is trying to write in your life is a good story – it is the story of Jesus – and one of the characteristics of that story is child-like faith
- **Pray!**