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Ask the bigger questions

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Humble dependence

A cost benefit analysis of following Jesus:

What does Jesus require of me? Is it worth it?

- Session 7

The words of Jesus

Luke 18:9-17

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Jesus tells this parable with great brevity but it packs a punch – it would have shocked Jesus' original audience. That is because in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were a reform movement, very devout in following the requirements of the law, and considered the good, moral, upright people in society – the pillars of the community. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors because they were Jewish but collaborated with the Romans in collecting taxes for the Empire. To the audience in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were the ones whom everyone thought were acceptable to God. However that is not the conclusion Jesus draws.

It might be helpful to know that the law required fasting once a year (on the Day of Atonement). The practice of the Pharisees was to fast once a month. The tithing of products such as oil, seed and wine was expected.

Q1. What do we learn about the Pharisee in the parable? (verse 11)

Note that when the tax collector asks for “mercy”, he’s not using the word generally used for showing kindness. He’s using a word used to describe the “mercy seat” in the tabernacle in the Old Testament. The “mercy seat” was where the blood of the animal sacrifices was splattered, in order to provide “atonement” for sins. “Atonement” is the restoration of relationship between God and his people when God’s anger at human sin is satisfied as the punishment for sin is poured out on a substitutionary sacrifice.

Q2. What do we learn about the tax collector in the parable? (verse 13)

The words “justified” or “righteous” come from the same root word, which means to be declared right according to the demands of God’s law – to be legally acceptable or approved.

**Q3. The twist...what is Jesus saying about who is acceptable before God?
(verses 13-14)**

Q4. Why is Jesus telling this parable?

Q5. Are there parallels between the Pharisee and the tax collector and the disciples and babies? (verses 15-17)

Q6. If it's all about asking God for mercy doesn't that sound a bit too easy?

Words about Jesus

Luke 2:11 (Angels speaking to the shepherds about the birth of Jesus)

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

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