

Sermon: The Devout Pharisee and the Traitorous, Greedy, Cowardly Tax Collector

Series: Offensive Grace

Bible Passage: Luke 18: 9-14

My name is Enoch and I'm one of the staff ministers and pastors, focusing on this English-speaking congregation here in Chinatown. We're beginning our Lenten series, regarding the season of Easter. Next week is Palm Sunday and the week after is Easter Sunday. A lot of us, whether because we have a tradition where there is ash on our foreheads involved, or because we see people walking around with ash on their foreheads, or something like that, we realize we have been in the Easter season for some weeks. As far as our worship service goes, we're starting a series called Offensive Grace.

I pick that title because a lot of times, Christians especially, when people hear the word grace, we think it's so positive and so wonderful and precious. In fact, we name our children Grace and I've had a crush on girls named Grace a few times in my lifetime. We think grace is so positive. We say grace all the time. To really understand grace, to understand that grace is undeserved favor, unmerited kindness, is to understand that it could cause great offense.

We're going to see a story here later where someone committed a crime, perhaps committed a murder, and Jesus forgives this person. That sounds wonderful to us, but it also sounds ridiculous. What if that person who was killed, raped, or harmed was your loved one? Later, we're going to see Jesus forgive a guy named Zekius, which sounds wonderful. Wow, a tax collector who extorted money from people and abused his power. That's great; Jesus is full of grace. However, what if you lost your home or business because of someone else's criminal activity?

Today, we're going to take a look at the parable, known as the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. We might think this is such a great story, the wretched tax collector, no offense to people who work in the IRS or for the revenue department, is forgiven and loved by Jesus. Again, if you don't realize that that is kind of offensive and if you've forgotten that that might make someone angry, then you and I might have forgotten how radical Jesus' grace is.

This morning we're going to start our first sermon, which I've titled so descriptively: The Devout Pharisee and the Traitorous, Greedy, Cowardly Tax Collector. It's a modern day story. Please

turn your attention to Luke 18: 9-14. I'm going to read this for us and then pray for us. This is the Word of the Lord:

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ 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. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ 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!' ¹⁴ 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."

Let's invite the Holy Spirit in prayer to teach us.

Heavenly Father, You say through Your son that man doesn't live through bread alone, but through every word that comes out of Your mouth. Lord, teach us but we also ask that You would feed us, nourish us from your Word; nourish us with your truth this morning. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

This past Monday and Tuesday, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my brother Steve and I went on a continuing education course because we are going, God willing, to the Philippines to partner with one of our missionaries Sharon and her husband, Pastor Manny.

One of the things that we'll be doing on this missions trip is, during the day time, we'll be at different sites and I will be doing this 8-hour training session using this curriculum that Sharon uses to train all of her tribal church planters. These are the people from the Muslim tribes from different islands of the Philippines. Sharon and the other missionaries are training them in leadership; Christian ministry, theology, and teaching; and livelihood and sustainable living practices so they can go back to their villages and feed their people both physically and spiritually. That is what I'll be doing for eight hours a day. Additionally, Sharon wants Steve to teach the tribal leaders songs for eight hours a day – we'll see how that goes. At night, we're going to be going some training on how we, here at BCEC, run trainings and conferences. It's kind of a new concept from one of the ministries over there and many of the youth there are poor and have never gone away for retreats or conferences. In all, we'll be spending eight hours during the day teaching them about leadership and the Bible and then four hours at night teaching them about how to run conferences. We're only going to be there for five or six days.

I bring this up to you partially to share and invite you to pray for our ministry. The other part is because this year is different. Sharon said to us, “We’d love for you to come back and to teach these things, but you can’t stay in the center. We have other plans for you. Because of the other training you’re going to do, we want you to stay in this apartment complex. It’s about thirty minutes by vehicle away. It would be really helpful if you could drive yourself on Filipino roads.” The funny thing is, last year when Steve and I were visiting some of these tribal churches deep in these mountains, we would have to get onto a motorcycle driven by another pastor with four people on one motorcycle. We rode with no helmet up and down gullies and across rivers. I remember thinking and talking to Steve, “If you and I ever come back, we should learn how to drive motorcycles, for the sake of Jesus, so that we don’t have to trouble these local pastors to take us.”

Honestly, you have to know, all our missionaries labor with faith. This morning I received a letter by another missionary who got in an accident in east Asia. Everything is a work of faith there. When you go on missions, it’s all about faith. I said to Steve last year, “If God wants us to ride motorcycles, he will provide a way.” I kind of didn’t think about that until a couple months ago when I was sitting in Starbucks with Sharon and she said, “It would be really nice if you could drive yourself. We have a missionary car, but it would be really helpful if you could drive a motorcycle.” I said, “For Jesus, sure.”

You have to understand, this is not some youthful, ignorant, dangerous thing. I’m almost forty years old, so this is more of a mid-life crisis kind of thing. The point is: we took this class and spent six to seven hours in this class watching videos and taking quizzes. We spent about nine hours on the range on a motorcycle, practicing driving, stopping, merging, weaving, jumping over things, and all this great stuff. One thing I was convinced of after this training, I told my wife Karen, is that, if possible, I should not drive a motorcycle, especially in the Philippines.

At the motorcycle driving training, they talk about trust. How much do you actually trust your skills and your experience? Pray for us. Pray for our spiritual impact. Pray for our physical safety. Pray for the fact that we’re discerning about missions. I bring all that up here because of this issue of trust.

How much do we actually trust ourselves to perform certain things? How much do we actually trust in our abilities to get us to where we need to go? This passage, this very famous parable that is told to children around the world, is a profoundly challenging parable. This is really about

how much we should trust our selves. This morning, as we consider this parable, I'd like us to see three things about trust:

1. What does it mean to really trust?

Biblically, when the Bible says, "Who do you really trust?" What does it mean to trust? In this case, do you trust in yourself or God? This passage is going to talk about what it means to trust in yourself or in God and you might be surprised by what it says.

2. How do you cultivate trust in yourself or in God?

What are the behaviors we do or the practices we do that, even if we don't realize it, in which we're cultivating trust in God or in ourselves?

3. What are the results of trust?

If we trust in ourselves, what is God's response? If we trust in God, what does He do?

1. What does it mean to really trust?

Let's consider the first point. What does it mean to trust in yourself? Let me just say, I think it might be surprising. When you and I think of trust, we think of generically taking someone for their word. "I will do this for you" "Oh, I trust you." Or "I will bring this back and return this to you." "Oh, I trust you." It's a generic, do I trust this person? However, in this context, and in many places in the Bible, there is a very significant, theological narrowing. It's not just generic trust. It's very specific; it is: trust in are you good enough to stand before God? What does it mean to trust? It means: do you trust yourself? Are we right enough? Are we pure enough? Are we loving enough to stand before God?

Let's take a look at this first verse, verse 9, where Jesus hasn't even begun the parable but the writer Luke says this,

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt

Jesus is talking about the people who trust themselves. Now, what does that mean? It doesn't mean that you trust yourself to drive a motorcycle safely. It doesn't mean that you trust yourself to perform well at work or get good grades at school or resist temptation. It means that you trust yourself that you are right. Trust yourself in that you are righteous. What does that mean Pastor

Enoch? That's such a lofty term. Here is what it means: are we right enough? Are we loving enough? Are we good enough people to stand before God? If you're wondering what it means to be righteous, this very theologically rich term, it has more nuances, but in a sort of rough-and-ready definition, it means: can you stand before God unashamed? Can you stand before God and look him in the eye and be okay with how you've lived your life – the words you said, how you've spent your time and money, the words you haven't said but should have said? That's what it means. How much do we trust ourselves? And if you take a look at this passage here, notice what the definition is.

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt

This is inescapable. The more you trust in your own abilities to get you where you need to go, the more you have to look down on other people. The more you believe “it is by my own hard work, my smarts, the breaks I have gotten myself, the long hours I put in, the creativity and ingenuity that I put in...” it is inevitable that you will look down on others.

To put it in an example, and this may be stepping on some toes, take how many of us are transitional or homeless. It is so easy to pick up that homeless people, in fact we have several homeless people who come worship with us regularly and some of you yourselves are in transition, are homeless because they are lazy. When I was growing up, I heard this message as a kid, especially as a child of immigrants. “Mommy, why are people on the street and why do they smell like that?” The easy answer is, “Well, it's because they're lazy or maybe they went to war somewhere and got a disability. They have some problem.”

The thing is, if we really believe that the difference between people like and a homeless person is that we worked harder and we are smarter, then how can we not look with contempt on them. However, if we realize that there are many factors that are beyond our control, like who our parents are, the families we are born into, the socioeconomic situations we were born into, the educational opportunities we were born into, the loving supporting networks we were born into, and if we understand that we didn't earn or deserve any of that stuff, then I think we would at other people in different situations, like homeless folks, with the mentality like, “Man, that could be me! I am no better. As a Christian, I am called to love and bless others.”

I think it's practical. I remember really wrestling with that. Well how can we not look down on people? Let's translate that spiritually. There is a doctrine called predestination, or election, that some people think is so elitist. You can't escape from because the word is in the Bible and here at

this church, myself and some of the other pastors, believe that God chooses people to be saved. Now, you may think that sounds so elitist, but here is the thing: if God didn't choose people, who would get to be saved and who would get to go to heaven? Well, the people who are holier. Who gets to go to heaven? The people who lived moral and upright lives. That sounds fair. Who gets higher grades in school? The people who did better work. Who gets higher pay at work? Theoretically, the people who did better work. Who gets the public recognition and praise? Hopefully and theoretically, the people deserve it. Therefore, who gets a better afterlife? The people who are moral.

Now, think with me and think with the Bible, if a person believes the reason why I am a Christian and the reason why I am going to heaven is because I live a more holy and moral life than another person, than how can you not look down on other people spiritually? How can you not? The flip side is true. The thing is: you don't even have to be a Christian to fall into this trap of thinking. Let me try it on the other side. If we believe the people that get into heaven are the better, more moral people, you're not a believer, and you come to service like this, there are two common reactions: "Tch, what a bunch of elitist, hypocritical Christians who believe they are better than other people. If I feel, as a person who isn't in this group, that these people are holier because of their superior righteousness, I will feel like they are being condescending towards me. I will feel like they're judging me. How could I not if I hear that they are Christian because they're better?" The other response is: "If I believe that the people that go to church are the holy, moral people, I may come to church and feel unworthy." I was so surprised how many people leave our church, and other churches, and say, "I just don't feel worthy enough to be in the group. Everyone seems so nice and I just don't feel like I'm there." All I can think is, "Wow, that is so far from what the Gospel says." If you have ever felt that way, it's because deep down you and I have not dealt with this idea, which Jesus calls a lie, that you are somehow better and that's why you'll go to heaven.

Jesus taught this parable to show that it isn't about trusting in yourself. Therefore, no one is ready to be baptized, no one is worthy to come before the Lord, no one is worthy to do any of those things because the Bible says that you must not trust in yourself. You must trust in God.

2. How do you cultivate trust in God?

What does it look like? What does it mean? This point is going to be a little longer because we'll be looking at the actual parable now. There will be three subpoints and we will end with Jesus' comments. Point two with three subpoints – this could be a sermon in itself.

Friends, this is important. You cannot not cultivate trust. You cannot not condition yourself through these patterns to either trust God more or trust yourself more. What I am saying is this, every time you pray, no matter who you are and no matter how long you've been a Christian, you are reinforcing one of these modes of the heart of either trusting in God more or trusting in yourself more. In fact, you could even say this, "I don't even pray so it doesn't count." No no no, every time you pray, even the absence of it, you are definitely reinforcing one of these modes of trusting in yourself or trusting in God.

The three things I believe Jesus teaches us in this parable about how to cultivate trust.

The first way we cultivate trust is how we view our worthiness before God. We cultivate this by thinking about how we view our worthiness or approach, or to use a physical term, our position and posture before God.

When we contrast the Pharisee and the tax collector, we have to understand: the Pharisee was part of a religious sect that was very pious and adhered very closely to the Old Testament law as well as numerous other laws. They were considered the scholars, the professors, and the rock stars of their day. The Pharisees really were impressive. Then, you have the tax collectors, who were considered greedy. The Jewish tax collectors collected tax for the Roman Empire. To collect taxes from my neighbors would mean that I would take your money, probably take more money than you actually owe, and then give it to our oppressive, military-occupying power called Rome.

We read the Bible and read that Jesus loves tax collectors and prostitutes and He hangs out with them. We also think the Pharisees are legalistic. You have to understand: to the hearers of Jesus, they think the Pharisees are awesome. They would even be surprised that a tax collector was praying in the temple. We have to get that because the punch line is much later. For us, we think Pharisee, tax collector, got it. They don't know that yet.

Let's begin to contrast them in three ways.

A. We cultivate trust in ourselves or God based on our posture and sense of worthiness before God.

Take a look at verse 10. These two men went up to a temple to pray. One man was a Pharisee, which was totally normal, and the other was a tax collector which, some commentators would say, was shocking; they wouldn't even expect a tax collector to be in the temple praying.

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men... ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast

The posture is: when you pray, do you come to stand close to God or do you begin by standing far off? You have to understand the layout of the temple. The ancient Israelites have this notion that the temple is the dwelling place of God. The closer you got to the center of the temple, the holier and more set apart one needed to be. In fact, in the center of the temple, the holiest of holy, only the high priest could enter and only on certain days of the year. The parable, evidently, says the Pharisee went right up and stood there and prayed. In contrast, the tax collector stood far off and prayed. Commentators say he's probably standing at the edge of the court of the Gentiles, which is probably several courts on the outside, whereas the Pharisee probably got as close to the holiest of holies, as close as he could.

Here we already have the prayer because no words were spoken yet. No words were uttered in their minds or on their lips. You don't even have to say a word, but the very way we start and approach prayer, Jesus says, shows the state of our heart.

I believe the Bible says you can pray anywhere. You can pray lying down, you can pray in the car, you can pray on the T, etc. You don't need to be legalistic. However, at the same time, I believe there is something to be said about praying on your knees. For example, in our household, when we pray, especially when we have our morning and evening prayer, we pray on our knees. That was easier when my children were smaller and carried less weight, but, as they get bigger and older, praying on their knees is a pain and they'll literally say, “Baba, do we have to? It's uncomfortable.” A part of me wants to say, “It's not supposed to be comfortable!”

Why do people kneel? Why do you put your face down before the Lord? Because it's uncomfortable. It's a sign of humility. I'm not trying to be legalistic and I'm not saying that every time you pray you have to have your knees so high, your neck needs to be angled so high, etc. Here is the thing: where in your posture do we cultivate a sense that God is holy, that we are unworthy to come before God and be in His presence, apart from His grace? Or do we just casually pray to God like we're texting our best friend or like we're on the phone and we say,

“hey” because God is our Abba Father. Totally true. We can jump on our Father’s lap. Totally true. But He is the mighty, great, omnipotent, Creator, King, and Judge as well.

If you say, “Well, I don’t even pray Enoch,” then that’s the ultimate posture. The ultimate posture is walking in to the holiest of holies and not even talking to God. People, in the ancient Jewish world, wanted to go to the temple to talk to God. We’ll see a little bit. The Pharisee’s prayer was probably more about him than about God. But imagine, going to the holiest of holies, desecrating the most sacred of Jewish spaces, and not even talking to God, perhaps instead playing Solitaire. That’s what it’s like if you don’t pray to God. If you don’t pray to God at all, you have the ultimate trust in yourself because you don’t even have to acknowledge God and you’re okay. Maybe you don’t even believe in God and that’s a different issue. If there is God and you just don’t pray, I think there is an implication that you think there is no worry to stand before God, your judge.

This is the first thing – the posturing. Before we even utter a word, Jesus says, “I can tell your heart and look into your heart by the way you even approach prayer.” Again, sure, you can call God, “Papa”, “Abba”, or “Daddy” and just shoot Him up a prayer like you send a text message or email to a friend, that’s fine. There’s a place for that because He is your endearing, tender father, but he is also the holy God. If we just walk right up like the Pharisee, we might get a different cultivated heart than if we humbly realize, “I don’t dare come close to God apart from His work in my life.” That’s how we cultivate, every time we pray.

You might ask, “Well Pastor Enoch, should we kneel half the time and the other half of the time do other things?” I don’t know what the ratios are. I do know that as physical human beings, our physical positions do convey this. I’m not trying to be mystical. I’m not telling you to open your hand a certain way. I’m just saying that the Bible is Jesus saying that where you even stand shows us where our hearts are before the Lord, so we can cultivate a posture of trust by looking at the tax collector and realizing that we don’t deserve to stand close. Let’s take a look at the second way we cultivate this trust either in ourselves and in God.

If the first way is how we posture, how we stand close or far from God in terms of our worthiness, the second point is this:

B. We cultivate trust in ourselves or God based on whom we compare ourselves with – to whom we are comparing ourselves to.

We're going to see this here. Take a look at the Pharisee. This guy is praying out loud. Now, don't get upset by the fact that the Pharisee is praying out loud. It was normal to pray out loud; in that day, praying out loud was not a weird thing. What is unusual and what Jesus is highlighting is what the Pharisee says and whom he compares himself to. Let's take a look starting in verse 11:

¹¹ 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.

Let's see who the tax collector compares himself to, in verse 13.

¹³ 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!'

Here's the thing: a lot of times in life, especially in the church world, there is this popular wisdom, which is mostly true. It goes like this: don't compare yourself to other people; if you start looking at their salary, their family, and their kids, there is no good that is going to come from that. I think there is a lot to be said about that advice because God did make us differently. Some of us are faster, some of us are slower, some of us are more bookish, some of us are more athletic, some of us, like me, are neither. However, if you really examine this, it's really not Biblical to say, "don't ever compare yourself." It is who you compare yourself with.

Notice who the Pharisee compares himself with. He says, "God, I thank you that I am not like a robber extortionist, I'm not a cheat crook or an unjust person, and I'm not someone who cheats on their spouse. I'm better than them." On the one hand, you might think, "Wow, that guy is pretty arrogant minded" and on the other hand, you're thinking, "He probably picked three of the most despicable traits in the ancient Jewish culture to compare himself to." That's like saying, "God, I thank you that I am not as dumb as Styrofoam. I thank you that I'm not as mean as jalapeño peppers. I thank you that I'm not as..." It's just such an absurd comparison. What the Bible is saying is this: the Pharisee makes himself feel good by pointing out others who are below him.

This is why the comparison thing is important: you will always find someone who has worse sins than you. If you and I make ourselves feel better by saying, "Well I'm not as bad of a husband because look at that guy", "Well I'm not as bad of a father because look at that family", "I'm not as bad of a brother or sister because look at them", "I'm not as bad of a child because look at the kids in that family", "My youth group really isn't that bad because look at that church; it's really messed up", whatever it is, that is dangerous. If we compare ourselves to other people and pick their worst sins, their greatest weaknesses, then of course we're going to feel better about

ourselves and not about God. We will also look down on those people. When I feel better about myself, the price is looking down on you. If you just scan this room, you could think, “Tch, I’m better than that person. I go to church more than that person. That person is late to church again?”

You might say that the tax collector isn’t comparing himself to anybody. I disagree. What does the tax collector say?

¹³ 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!’

Why would he not dare to look up at the dwelling place of God? Why would he beat his breast, which in that culture, was a sign of repentance? Why would he say, “Be merciful to me”? Because he is comparing himself to the only one who matters: God.

I remember one of Pastor Jack’s most thrilling sermons, for me. He was on a roll. He was making this point, “You want to compare yourself to someone? Don’t compare yourself to someone who isn’t as good as you, smart as you, or rich as you. Compare yourself to God.” I yelled, “Yeah, Jack!” but no one else did that and so I sat down... That is really where the humility comes from. If you want to feel good about yourself by comparing yourself to that other person, you can always find someone else worse off to feel better from, but at the expense of having a condescending attitude towards others and at the expense of training your heart to trust in yourself. If every time you look at God and approach God and you’re mindset is about focusing on God and who He is, then I think you will always have this humility.

That is what is so ironic about this Pharisee. Who is the subject of his prayers? The Pharisee begins with his prayer with “God”, but the rest of his prayer has the word “I”. Look at his sentence. It’s almost comical.

¹¹ ...God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.

He is basically praying, “Dear God, I thank you that I’m not like other men. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I have. I’m glad I’m not like him. I’m praying about me to you. God, I thank you that I’m so awesome.”

Again, if we don’t consciously cultivate a sense of, “I might be doing a little better. I might be farther along in my spiritual life than someone else. God might have done a little more work in my heart and dealt with a little more selfishness and a little more of my pride, but I am still so

far apart from God's standard and I don't dare approach him or even look at His home apart from His grace in my life. That is the second way.

Firstly, we talked about how we cultivate grace is our posture, our approach, our sense of worthiness before God. Do we just go up to God, which is Biblical, but do we also practice a sense of approaching God humbly, like Moses taking off his sandals because God is holy. Secondly, we talked about whom we're comparing ourselves to. It's easy to feel good about ourselves when we are comparing ourselves to people who are cruel or mean, basically the people that everyone else dislikes, but that isn't the point. Let's compare ourselves to God and see how we measure up then. Thirdly and lastly, as we think about what it means to cultivate trust is this:

C. We cultivate trust in ourselves or God based on how we view our works.

Let me put it this way: How do you view the things you are most proud of in your life? I don't mean like, "I built this model and I'm pretty proud of this model." That's pretty cool. I mean like, "I'm proud that I gave money to that needy cause" or "I'm proud that I helped this person". How you view your greatest acts of selflessness will tell us whether we have our trust in ourselves or him. Take a look at what the Pharisee says in verse 12. He picks two exercises that are good exercises, but let's see how he views his works:

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

We must not mistake this. Fasting, which is the idea of abstaining from food to pray more, is not bad. Also, giving your tithe, which is the idea of giving a certain percentage of your income, is not bad. In fact, Jesus even says in the Sermon on the Mount, "when you fast, do it like this..." and "when you tithe, do it like this...", so he's not down on tithing or fasting. What he is saying is fasting for the sake of appearance or tithing for the sake of self-righteousness, in a way that says, "I feel good about myself because I did..." It is that sort of self-righteousness, look at one's own works, that Jesus is warning us from, whereas, with the tax collector, he has nothing to boast about. The tax collector says, "I don't even want to say anything. I have mercy, is that okay? Can I beg for your mercy?" while the Pharisee says, "Well I fast twice a week and I tithe."

In fact, in chapter nine of this gospel, the Pharisees even tithe their herbs. They were so exacting. Here is where you can see what you are cultivating and here is why I think the Pharisee is a challenging example. We can tell if we are proud of our works if we ever feel like God owes us better. Have you ever wondered, "God, I don't think I deserve this. I think I deserve something

better.”, “God, I think you’re holding out on me. I think you’re selling me short. I don’t deserve this.”, or “God, I really wanted to marry that person and buy this home.” If you and I have ever thought, “But God, look at what I did over here!” and felt like we could give God a snide remark, then we might be of the same mind as the Pharisee.

My wife, Karen, and I participated in Restaurant Week a few weeks ago. You can eat a five-star restaurant for the price of a super nice, fancy, Chinese banquet. We’ve been to a couple things of these in the past. In my world, fancy restaurant means the bigger the price, the smaller the amount of food. I’m not a huge fan of these types of things because, in my mind, I’m paying \$20, give me bigger steak or something! We went to this restaurant and the portions were big and generous. In fact, because the portions were so big, I actually felt bad, like there is no way this restaurant is making money off of this. In fact, some people, when they order food, they order on the greatest profit margin – the dish that will cost the restaurant the most money, the harder it is to cook, and how much it costs to make. When we were leaving a tip, Karen and I were thinking that we should probably not tip on the restaurant week price, and so we tip them better. Part of it, I realize, is because they are doing us a favor by giving us such a great deal, and I believe the same applies to God.

If you’re looking at God and saying, “Come on God, this is all I get? Don’t you know how many hours I go to church and how much time I put into that ministry team? Do you know how much I sacrificed for you?” and then Jesus says, “That’s your reward. Well you feel pretty good about yourself. There is your reward.” But God says: the more we realize that our greatest works are filthy rags before a holy God, that again, apart from something called radical, offensive grace, we dare not come close to God, the more you and I are able to cultivate our proper spirit.

Let’s think about this as we consider Easter and the cross on Friday and the tomb where our Lord laid dead and then the resurrection Sunday. What does it mean to trust in ourselves in this narrow way? Jesus says it means: do you trust yourself to stand before God? Do you trust in your good works, your good life, your good deeds, or your good character? Do you trust in yourself? In fact, every time you do a prayer, even if you don’t say the prayer, you and I are cultivating a mode of that trust by the posture by which we approach Him, how we compare ourselves to others, and how we view the things we are most proud of. Jesus says: if you bank your righteousness on those things and you think those things will get you before God, let’s see what the result is.

3. What are the results of trust?

This is Jesus' commentary. The first point was Luke setting up to talk about what is the nature of trust. The second point was about the three ways we can cultivate trust. The third point is about Jesus' comments and closing remarks on this. Let's take a look at verse 14:

¹⁴ 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."

What is he saying here? He's saying that there is a reversal, a reversal of what God honors. If we're pretty big on ourselves, He gives us what we need – we need a little humility. However, if we are down, if we are far from God, God says: I want to remind you that I did something, so that you can boldly approach the throne of grace, you can boldly come to the Lord of the Universe, which is a picture of Isaiah coming to the throne where the angels put a burning coal on his tongue to symbolize the cleansing of his soul, so you can boldly serve the world, like in the Old Testament when Zachariah felt like he was dirty and God symbolically give him clean white robes to symbolize that God makes him clean and worthy by forgiveness of sins to stand in His presence.

The result is this: if we stand on our righteousness and think, "Well, I'm pretty good. I don't need this grace" then we will stand on our righteousness. We will stand before God, but our lives are not holy enough. I think deep down, we know that. The Bible here says that only one man was justified. Some of us have been in the church for awhile and know that the word "justified" is a kind of theological terms. I don't think it means forensic justification in the fullest sense here. I think, in this context, it means that the prayer was acceptable for God. This is Jesus talking, not Paul, and there is not a lot of other theological stuff going on here. I think when the passage says "one man was justified", it means God heard his prayer.

Did you know that God doesn't hear every prayer? It is totally Biblical. Look at all the prophets of the New Testament. God basically says, "I don't hear your prayer. I don't hear you. You are abusing the poor. I don't hear you. You are ignoring the widows and orphans. Your offerings are not a fragrant aroma; they are a stench." God repeatedly says, "I don't hear you" because you're praying with pride.

There is an often quoted verse in Jeremiah that says, "God is going to bless your life. I know the plans He has for you." I guess in general, Romans 8 says that has a good plan for people, but that good isn't necessarily good ease and comfort. In the same book of Jeremiah, the Bible says, "Don't pray to me. Don't pray for them because I'm not going to hear them." Biblically, God does not hear the prayers of the proud. God does not hear the prayers of those who think they deserve

God to do what they ask. God does not hear the prayers who think they stand before God. Just like in the Old Testament, the foreigner, the immigrant, the widow, the orphan, the weak, the marginalized in society, the outsiders at church, the people who cry and weep in their beds at night because they know they're so broken, those are the people God hears and those people God will lift up. I know of no greater encouragement when I am so depressed or discouraged and I feel so worthless than to think, "I must be worthy enough, in the image of God, that He would send His son down to die for me. I just not be so worthless that God would actually fill me with His spirit." That is true for any person who receives Christ as his or her savior.

I suppose the worst, most tragic response would be, "Gee Pastor Enoch, thanks. I'm so glad we aren't like that Pharisee." That would be terribly ironic. That's not the point. The point is to recognize that it is folly to trust in yourself and it is foolish to stand before God on your own. You cannot do it. You are not going to be able to do it.

When I was a kid, my friends and I would play basketball on our street. I was standing there on the porch with a glass lamp. My friend passed me a bounce pass and I, being a chicken little kid who didn't really know how to catch a bounce pass, dodged the ball. The ball bounced off a post, went past my body, and hit the glass lamp behind me. Now I'm scared, so I run home. I tell my parents about the incident and my dad tells me, "You need to go tell this person, say sorry, and offer to pay." I go up the street, ring the doorbell, and explain. The homeowner says, "That's okay, but someone is going to have to pay for it." I'm thinking, "Oh, great", but then I hear "Oh that's okay. We'll pay for it." I turn around to see that my dad was standing there with me. I realized that if my parents had told me "We'll stand by you and take on the consequences and pay for it" I think I would have had a very different attitude.

What the Bible says is this: we're all going to die one day, unless the Lord returns sooner, and we're all going to face the accounting for our lives. That sounds like old school preaching, but I think, at the heart of human being, there must be a reckoning for the way we lived our lives, the way we've spent our time and money, for every word, deed, and thought we've ever said, had, or done.

The Bible also says this: you want to stand on your own? Then you will fall on your own, but it doesn't have to be that way. You can stand in Christ, in His righteousness, in the fact that He died on the cross and He paid the penalty that you and I could have never paid ourselves – which is why hell and punishment is forever. It takes the infinite sacrifice of our omnipotent deity, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross to pay for my sins and the sins of everyone here. We can

choose to trust ourselves and stand on our own, or choose to stand there knowing that we are going to face judgment, but both God, the Father, and God, the Son, is our advocate who takes our place.

That is what Easter is about. That is why this grace is so offensive. It is because people get offended when someone who should be punished gets off for free. We think it's not right. Yes, it's not exactly just, but the Bible says that mercy can triumph over judgment.