



Bloomington Campus Sermon Study - 8.2.2026

Leader's Corner

The Parable of the
Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18:9-14

Main Passage: Luke 18:9–14

Main Idea: Salvation has never been about proving our righteousness before God—it has always been about humbly receiving His mercy through faith.

Main Practice: Come before God with honesty instead of performance, trusting completely in His grace rather than your own goodness.

Leader Summary: Every religion asks, “What must I do?” The gospel asks a different question: “Who am I trusting?” In one of Jesus’ shortest parables, two men approach God with entirely different hearts. One confidently presents his resume; the other simply asks for mercy. Surprisingly, the respected religious leader leaves unchanged while the despised tax collector leaves justified. Jesus reminds us that the doorway into God’s kingdom is not achievement but humility. We cannot save ourselves; we can only receive the salvation God freely gives.

Prayer and Praise

Opening Prayer:

Merciful Father,

We confess that we often want to earn what You have already offered as a gift. We compare ourselves with others, defend ourselves, and sometimes even try to impress You with our goodness.

Today we lay all of that down.

Teach us to come before You with humble hearts, trusting not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ alone. Thank You that because of His life, death, and resurrection, sinners can be declared righteous through Your amazing grace.

Keep us humble, grateful, and dependent upon You every day.

Through Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Praise & Worship Suggestions:

- * Come Thou Fount
- * His Mercy Is More
- * Nothing But the Blood
- * Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me

Group Discussion

1. Our culture encourages us to build a résumé, reputation, and accomplishments. Where do you think people most commonly look for confidence or identity today?

2. Read Luke 18:9–14 aloud. Compare the Pharisee and the tax collector. What differences do you notice in:

- * their posture?
- * their prayers?
- * their focus?
- * their expectations?

3. If someone asked, “How can a person be made right with God?” how do you think most people would answer? How does Jesus’ parable challenge those assumptions?

4. The Pharisee thanks God—but his prayer quickly becomes centered on himself. What signs of pride or self-righteousness do you notice? How can religious activity become a substitute for genuine dependence on God?

5. Why do you think Jesus highlights such a short prayer? “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” What does this prayer reveal about:

- * repentance?
- * faith?
- * humility?
- * trust?

When have you experienced the freedom of simply coming honestly before God?

6. Jesus says the tax collector “went home justified.”

Read:

- * Romans 5:1
- * Romans 3:21–26
- * Titus 3:4–7

What does justification mean? Why is it one of the most important truths in the Christian faith?

7. David’s outline asks: Why is humility so important to our salvation? Why can’t pride coexist with saving faith? How does humility prepare our hearts to receive God’s grace?

Read:

- * James 4:6
- * 1 Peter 5:5–6

8. Where are you tempted to “present your résumé” before God? How would your prayer life change if you truly believed God’s acceptance rests completely on Christ?

9. Self-righteousness often creates comparison, judgment, and division. How does remembering that every believer stands solely by grace shape the way we treat:

- * family?
- * coworkers?
- * neighbors?
- * people far from God?

10. This week, intentionally begin each day with this prayer: “Lord, today I depend completely on Your mercy, not my merit.” What difference do you think that daily reminder could make?

Practice

Group Practice:

Provide everyone with an index card. On one side, ask them to quietly write down the things they are tempted to trust for their identity or righteousness:

- * accomplishments
- * morality
- * ministry
- * success
- * reputation
- * comparison
- * knowledge
- * family
- * generosity

After a few minutes, read Philippians 3:7–9 together. Then invite everyone to turn the card over and write:

“Christ alone is my righteousness.”

Close by praying together, thanking God that salvation is received—not achieved.

Individual Practice:

Throughout this week, each evening, ask yourself three questions:

1. Where did pride quietly show up today?
2. Where did I experience God’s grace today?
3. How can I approach tomorrow with greater humility and dependence on Jesus?

Finish by praying Luke 18:13 before bed.

Further Study

Supporting Scriptures:

Justification

- * Romans 3:21–31
- * Romans 5:1–11
- * Galatians 2:15–21
- * Philippians 3:7–11
- * Titus 3:3–7

Pride & Humility

- * Proverbs 16:18
- * Isaiah 57:15
- * Isaiah 66:2
- * James 4:6–10
- * 1 Peter 5:5–7
- * Micah 6:8

Salvation by Grace

- * Ephesians 2:1–10
- * John 3:16–18
- * Luke 15
- * Luke 19:1–10

Theological Reflection:

“Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” — Augustus Toplady, Rock of Ages

“The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.” — Tim Keller

Justification is the heart of the gospel. God does not ignore our sin; He deals with it completely through Jesus Christ. Because Christ bore our guilt on the cross and rose again, those who trust Him are declared righteous—not because they have earned it, but because His righteousness is credited to them by grace through faith. Humility is essential because it is the posture that receives a gift. Pride insists on earning what can only be received.