

The Two Praying Men

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Date: 30 June 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, so Marianne's going to get baptized in a little while she's hanging on in there and she's doing fine and So I'm just gonna ask a question before that before explaining a little bit about what this passage I hope is about what What what does it mean?

To have the service and what particular is he mean for Marianne to get baptized? I will say a little bit more just before she gets baptized, but essentially Marianne has come to recognize like all of us who are Christians here today that Jesus is not just make-believe Okay that he really did break into history and that his claims to be more than just a good person more than just a Decent individual but who claimed to be God in the flesh does stand up to scrutiny that his death on the cross and His resurrection three days later, which we sung about there Means that he's more powerful than than death and is in fact the author of life is what he claims to be and She and all of us who put our trust in Jesus are those who have found our identity in him forgiveness amazing love grace Strength for every day and hope for the future so that's really where we are in our lives in our Christian faith

And Jesus Christ speaks into the what is often the mess of our lives the guilt that meant Often we feel the fear that paralyzes us And he speaks into our questions and our desire for answers into the the big questions about who we are why we're here and What do we make of the creativity of this beautiful world as well as the chaos?

There's that series on on TV on BBC one. I don't know if any of you watch it Called who do you think you are? Where famous people Find out about their genealogy about where they come from or you know the you know 500 years ago There are great great great great great great great grandfather was Norman the conqueror or something like that And they find out all sorts of things about their past because people look for and are interested in roots and identity and Ancestry and belongings And that's what we find all in ultimate terms in relationship with Jesus Christ We find out all about these big questions and about the world we live in about our own hearts and about Who he is and who he claims to be and why this world exists that's really why we make such a big deal about Jesus Christ in our lives and in our worship and That's why as Christians we gather every Sunday to worship him and we read from the Bible and I preach and speak and teach from the Bible because we believe

It's a living and a significant and important Message that the Bible teaches to us. So the parables which we read one of today Jesus Told these parables really to make us think a little bit more about our own hearts about our own motives for living about our relationship with God or not If you know we don't have a relationship with God and they're there for that Jesus has given them to help us dig a little bit below the surface and see Whether we can understand more about God and are interested in learning more about God and this is a story a Parable that he told about two guys who went up to pray and it would have been a shocking story To his original audience a really shocking story Because of the way he presented the story and the characters that he spoke about in the story And so I hope that we can be a little bit shocked as well and be challenged by what Jesus has to say

[3 : 58] For us because there's two main characters in the story. There's this guy called a Pharisee and there's a guy called a tax collector So the Pharisee would be a really respectable person in the society in which he lived. He was a religious leader He kind of had a job a bit like me, but I really hope I'm not like him Okay, but he was one of the guys that in the day and generation which he lived was very moral very upright a Ritualistic in his religious observance and but also someone who really thought he was much better than other people and he looked down on other People and he believed absolutely. He was good enough for God God would accept him and God would hear his prayers More than that really that God owed him a favor And so he prayed in that way, you know, and we read about that prayer and look at it briefly again In a moment, but that that was the kind of guy he was and so the people who a lot of people who were listening to Jesus

Would all have gone yep thumbs up for this guy. He's really good guy He's the best guy and he's a religious one and he's the one that God will love and will accept and take to heaven And then we've got a tax collector and the tax collector was regarded as scum okay everybody in the society hated the tax collectors, okay, because Israel at that time was occupied by the Roman Empire tremendously powerful nation You know gladiator and all these kind of films that speak about the Roman Empire of the time and the tax collectors were Jewish guys who who had worked for the Roman authorities, okay, they They as tax collectors and they charged more than they should have so they really Ripped off their own people and they became very wealthy But also very despised because they were seen not only as greedy, but as traitors and cheats and you know that the the cultural

Strength of the people of Israel was really strong and to deny that or to betray that was seen as the ultimate Insult and so here was the tax collector Definitely too bad for God God could never love a tax collector and never accept him he would get the thumbs down You remember in the big Roman arena It was if the if it was to the death they would put the thumbs down and if it was to live they would put the thumbs up Well for him it was it was absolutely he would be reject God wouldn't have any interest in this lying cheating corrupt selfish wealthy greedy manipulative individual But yet when they prayed It seems the tables were completely turned absolutely turned in terms of What God thought of them the Pharisee who was The good guy is rejected by God

He didn't go home justified before God right in God's eyes Whereas the tax collector was accepted All he prayed from a distance. He didn't even go near to the place where the others were praying from a distance He said just Lord God have mercy on me Please have mercy on me sinner And Jesus says that this guy is the one who went home right with God justified before God now that That story was that would have been hugely thought-provoking and Challenging by Jesus. It was something that was turning convention completely upside down and he was wanting to challenge people to think about Their relationship with God and and how they judged that and what Jesus was saying into that and what he was coming to do To put our relationship with God right so just for a few moments. We'll one or two things in applying this

Parable this story to ourselves and what it means for today and what it means for our lives and what Jesus Keeps on saying to us When he speaks in the Bible and when he speaks to us through our conscience and through his spirit the first thing I think is that What the parable reminds us is that God's opinion about us matters It talks here about One or the other being justified or being made right with God or not right with God and Jesus saying that is a really important Distinction and what God thinks of us is really significant Jesus really wants to make that clear. He's saying that God matters. It's it because we live as people who are Accountable to God because he made us he's our Creator and he's our Lord. I Know even if we don't believe that if we please I don't believe that for a moment We do recognize within ourselves even if we don't believe God or don't believe in spiritual truth We do have a sense all the time don't we of accountability to someone

[9 : 22] Even if it's just ourselves We do have a sense of what is Right and wrong at least by our own standards We do feel guilty or we feel innocent and hard done by so there's this great sense of accountability That that is part of our very DNA part of our existence part of our lives and that comes We believe as the Bible teaches from God because we are made in his image and we are made to worship him to love him and We're accountable to him. So he says to you and to me. He says actually your life really does matter your life is very significant and What you do with your life matters what you think matters if you dismiss God it does matter He's the most important being if God is God isn't it?

He is the most important being in the universe If he's not God if he's just make believe then we can all just give up and go home today But if he is God and if he is the Creator and if he is who he claims to be the infinite eternal one Who made you who knows you who loves you then his opinion of us is significant And Jesus was really wanting to ram that home lovingly to the Pharisees Of his day and also the tax collectors of his day who felt rejected and felt unloved and hopeless Just as much as the Pharisees felt proud and independent and self-reliant So God's opinion matters. That's for sure. The second thing is that he is a different standard of I guess what's the word a different standard of judgment?

Well, what's the word a different standard of judgment? Than we do See what the Pharisee made a big deal of was just comparing himself with other people Well, I'm better than that guy much better. I'm glad in fact so much so that he thanked God It's it's a it's quite a humorous prayer in some ways. He just he thanks God He thinks God will be delighted with him because he thanks God that he's just not like other people And he judges himself by other people particularly by how he acts outwardly You know the fact that he's a religious person the fact that he goes to church the fact that he reads his bible all these things outward things Are what he is judging himself on?

But Jesus God never compares us to other people. He never says well that guy is better than that guy Or worse than that guy because he doesn't just judge on what we're like on the outside On the outside is God as God sees our hearts and he sees what we're like on the inside He knows and understands both our thoughts and our the intentions That we have our motives our insecurities our anger our loneliness our pride our selfishness our longings Our good thoughts are bad all the things that make up the maelstrom of who we are inside and sometimes it spills out into who we are On the outside as well. He knows and but he is and but he's a different standard of judgment And he says and this is a tough bit really is that our very best efforts our very best efforts outwardly or inwardly Can't make us right He says

Every single person who is ever born whoever lived needs to be made righteous made right with him and nobody can do it on their own No tax collectors no Pharisees nobody Because he sees our hearts he sees our attitudes to him and he sees our attitudes and what we do with others We can't love him perfectly. We can't love others perfectly and that's the standard And you know what it's like, don't you? You know what it's like when you have a major fallout with someone Something major goes wrong You can't be right with that person until you deal with it And then you can say are we good? Are we good now?

[13 : 29] Because you've dealt with it But until you've dealt with it you can't say are we we can't just forget and just say are we good? I think well, no, there's this huge big barrier and gulf between us and God is saying that that's what it's like between ourselves and God and we can't just say Are we good now with you because we've done this or that or the next thing we can't deal with it And we can't deal with it on our own. There's something major wrong So that we are separated from the living God and It its consequence is ultimately death rebellion Chaos around us chaos in our hearts death all of it is like a megaphone And often we just put the mufflers on I'd rather not deal with it. I'd rather not think about it. I'd rather just ignore it and move on But God sees he's a different standard From us and we see that With the two guys don't we the Pharisee? What was the problem with the Pharisee? Well, he was he was proud really proud he didn't need God really

He didn't need forgiveness Basically, he was going into God's presence and saying look God you should be grateful for me. I am just The best You should be grateful for me for the life. I'm looting you owe me a favor You owe me a place of blessing now and a place in heaven because I am one of the good guys. I'm definitely better than other people And Yet he's rejected and the interesting thing is For all his claims to knowing God All his claims to understanding who God was He didn't Know God. He maybe knew about God He didn't know God. I've used this illustration here a lot. So forgive me But it's the difference say Uh, and I'm gonna show my age here as well. Say David Beckham walked into the here. Okay, David Beckham hero footballer What no not worship?

Just liked him as a footballer. Okay, and he would come in and I go There's David Beckham and I could tell you all about him and I could tell you about his footballing career and the goals He scored and his wife and his kids and all that know all about him But he would look at me and say I don't know who he is Who's this guy the front? I don't know Derek Because I know about David Beckham, but I don't know him. I've never had a Conversation with him never gone out for a drink with him. I never never met him So there is that difference a human level between knowing about people and knowing them personally And it was like that with a Pharisee. He knew lots of things about God, but he didn't know him He didn't know what God demanded. He didn't know what God offered He didn't know who God was He was proud and didn't really need to bother finding out The tax collector, however was humble You know, we find that don't we that in his prayer? He just was humble and he said, you know Father forgive me have mercy on me a sinner

He recognized in other words it really his life was in a mess outwardly He some ways he was doing great money was his God But it left him empty and absolutely alone separated from God separated from others his heart was a mess and he knew it And he was humble enough to admit it. He was a rebel against God and others. He'd been greedy. He'd made an idol of money. He needed mercy And he wanted forgiveness and a new heart And you know the great thing is He did know God See the difference wasn't just he knew about God. He went Humbly but confidently Into the presence of the one who he knew would show mercy to him Who would forgive him who would accept him?

He was really confident in that and that's a huge difference between the two And that's really the lesson I'm just going to end with today Is that the key to this parable?

[17 : 36] Is actually the mercy of God It's all about knowing God and knowing his mercy and his forgiveness and his grace He loves us even against the odds of who we are And he acts himself to put things right on our behalf. No, okay. I'm sorry. I'm really bad at new illustrations And he's I'm really old. He's another really old illustration I used it already this week at boot camps if there's been anyone here from boot camp then they'll know that I already Apologize because it's the only one I ever use but it's a great illustration about mercy And it's about a guy who was in the Napoleonic wars fighting for Napoleon who a young guy who Ran away from the army who absconded. What's the proper word for that?

Deserted correct he deserted couldn't remember it on Wednesday either. He deserted. Okay. Now that was punishable by death So he was caught he was brought into Napoleon's presence and the boy's mother was there as well And as the sentence of death was being meted out the the mother fell in her knees before Napoleon and begged for mercy for her son And Napoleon said my dear woman He doesn't deserve mercy And she replied If he deserved it it wouldn't be mercy And that's the key to our understanding of the gospel Is that we depend on God's mercy not because we deserve it like the Pharisee thought he did But because we need him And that's the great news of the gospel is that Jesus came to pay For the consequences of the badness he sees in our hearts He pays the spiritual cost of us rejecting the author and the giver of life

God could justly punish us against our pride our selfish and sinful choices And you know you may bristle at that You bristle at a god who would Who would do that but but justice in this universe matters doesn't it?

It really matters And we recognize that he is the one who is the standard But we also recognize that even though we can't put it right he took the sentence Of death it was due to us our estrangement from God the father our sinful hearts And he died in our place. That's why we sing about the death of Jesus That's why you might think it's weird that Christians You know have a cross as the symbol of of their faith and why we focus so much at Easter on the death But also the resurrection of Jesus. It's because it's central It's because Jesus isn't for us just a kind of fluffy Toy Nice guy Sort of with pretty thoughts That he's he's God who came and who died in our place on the cross It's God saying to us in all the mystery and complexity of that I know your heart is much worse than you ever imagined it to be But I love you more than you could ever dream of being loved

And I take your badness And I pay for it myself On the cross and that opens a way back for you to me To a living relationship with God to a new life to belong to forgiveness and to hope forever And all we're asked to do is accept that gift So In many ways every time we come together and every time we preach and think about it I have we have to think there's really no more terrible news But there's also no more fantastic news as well Um, it's like being told in one moment. You've got an incurable disease But there's an anti antidote But you can't meet the cost But someone's gifting you at free And that's the reality of Of the gospel and the gift of grace that Jesus Christ, you know, is there anybody else That you could ever meet who loves you That much and is willing to be so honest with you

[21 : 47] And with me about our hearts even at the risk of being rejected by you because many people do In order to offer you a better way And life eternal That's really why we worship him That's why Marianne's getting baptized today That's why we trust him And we live in a spiritual relationship with him because he is Worth it. He's worth it And we I would and we would we would love you to consider if you're not a Christian his claims On your life because it does really matter and as Christians we always need to reassert our Commitment and our love to him for who he is So that's really the basis of why we get together and why we Are doing this baptism and why we worship so let's pray briefly together before moving on to the baptism today Lord we thank you for your word we thank you that it remains really relevant

And challenging to us and It does challenge us to to go deep down into Our own thoughts and our own heart and our own existence And our own reason for existence and why we're here and who he is and what he claims to be And how so many people's lives have been transformed by Jesus not just in the past but in the present And in many parts of the world today in huge numbers So lord help us to worship you and take your word today and we do ask that you would Uh imprint it on our minds and our hearts that you would bless this next part of the service today with the baptism And that in all that we do we would do it to the glory of god we ask it all in jesus name. Amen