

GRACE>MERIT
Judging Jesus, Pt. 1
(Launch Sunday!)

LUKE 18:9-14

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I. PRAYER

- i. Jesus, I pray that through the preaching of your Word, that you would reveal yourself to every person in this room. For those who still question if you are real, would you transform that doubt into belief. And for those who do believe in you, would you give them sweet assurance of your love.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. Imagine with me a world where...

- i. All of our relationships are based on grace rather than merit.
 - Grace meaning that I am receiving something that I have not earned.
 1. So, I am receiving the favor of someone even though I have not done anything to earn it.
 - Merit being that you have to earn the favor of that particular person.
- ii. **Imagine a place where all of your relationships were based on grace.**
 - I think the majority of the relationships that we experience in this life are based on merit.
 1. We have to earn people's favor.
- iii. **All of us have felt the pain of rejection because we have not measured up.**
 - I can remember in elementary school (HERE!) not being good enough in basketball to play with the other kids during recess.



- I can remember my girlfriend in the 7th grade breaking up with me because I wouldn't kiss her at the ice skating rink!
 - I can remember fights that my wife and I would get into...where all I was doing was pointing out all of the things that she had done wrong...and all she was doing was pointing out all of the things that I have done wrong.
 1. Rejecting each other for not measuring up.
 - We have all felt the pain of rejection for not measuring up.
 - And we have all rejected others for not measuring up.
- iv. **So, imagine with me a place where all of our relationships were based on grace.**
- Where in our marriages, we don't have to measure up to our spouses expectations just to have peace...and where they don't have to measure up to our expectations.
 - Where parents love, cherish, and protect their children despite their behavior and messing up.
 - Where our friendships aren't one politically incorrect comment away from being ruined.
 - Where those in the church talk more about people's value than people's behavior.
- v. **Imagine a place where our performance was not a factor in our acceptance.**
- Don't you long for that place?



b. And for many people, when they think about God or Jesus Christ...whether they believe in Him or not...

- i. ...they think about something that is based in merit...and not based in grace.
 - They think that if they want to believe in God, or follow Jesus Christ, or be considered a Christian...that they have to measure up.
 1. That there is this list of things that thou shalt not do or be and if you shalt do or be any of them...then you'll be rejected by God and ridiculed in the church.
 - They think of a religion where your performance is absolutely a factor in your acceptance.

III. JUDGING JESUS

a. And that's one of the reasons we wanted to begin with this sermon series called Judging Jesus.

- i. Because, regardless of who you are, you have to make a judgement about Jesus.
 - And I believe that there are many people who are rejecting Jesus because they think to actually believe in Jesus means you have to measure up.
 - And I believe that there are many people who have accepted Jesus because they believe that they actually do measure up and they have earned their favor with God.



b. So, over the next four weeks, I want to give us four things that we have to know about Jesus before we make a judgement about Jesus.

- i. Whether we accept him or reject him.
- ii. If you're going to make a judgement about Jesus, let's make sure that we are accepting or rejecting the God of the Bible and not a misconstrued version of God.
 - So, this series is both for Christians and non-Christians. It is for those who have their minds made up and those still searching.

c. But here is my request of you...

- i. Stick with us for four weeks.
 - Come back. Come and hear all four things that we believe you need to know before you make a judgement about Jesus.
 - Engage with us as a church.
 - Not only should you not make a judgement about Jesus based on one sermon or experience, neither should you judge a church based on one experience.
 - So, I'm asking you to stick with us for four weeks as we work through this series together.

d. And this morning, my goal is for all of us to understand that Jesus deals with us on the basis of grace and not merit.

- And to show you that, I want to look at a passage of Scripture from the book of Luke.



IV. LUKE 18:9-14

a. Luke is the third book in the New Testament.

- i. If you're not as familiar with the Bible...
 - Divided into two major sections - Old and New Testaments.
 - These major sections are divided into books...so today we'll be in the book of Luke from the New Testament.
 - The big numbers on the page are chapters and the small numbers are verses.
- ii. **So, we are going to read in the book of Luke. Chapter 18. Verses 9-14.**
 - So, if you have a Bible you can turn to Luke 18.
 1. If you don't own a Bible, we have Bibles at our Connect Table in the lobby for you.
 2. If you don't own one...just take one of those and keep it.
 3. You can also download a Bible app on your Smart Phone as well.
 4. We'll also display the verses on the screens.

b. Read Luke 18:9-14

- i. **Parable: a fictional story meant to make a point.**
- ii. **Audience.**
 - Maybe this is your perception of church: a bunch of people who think they're righteous and they look at others with contempt.
 - Well, that's who Jesus is speaking to here.



c. So, in this parable, we have two people: A Pharisee and a Tax Collector. Let me tell you a little about both.

d. The Pharisee

- i. If you've studied the Bible before, you know that Jesus was often at odds with the Pharisees.
 - Pharisees were very conservative and strict Jews.
 1. As far as their observance of the Law and their religious practice, they were pristine.
 2. It is sometimes easy for us to have this negative view of the Pharisees, but we have to understand that they were highly respected.
 - So, this Pharisee would have been highly educated in the Scriptures and would have been morally impeccable.

e. The Tax Collector

- i. A tax collector in Palestine would have been a Jew but employed by the Roman Empire.
 - And the job of the tax collector would have been to collect taxes from the people in Palestine to deliver to the Roman government.
 - However, tax collectors were known to be extortionists who would charge sky high tax rates, give Rome their portion, and pocket the rest.

f. So, in this parable, Jesus says that the Pharisee and the Tax Collector go to the temple to pray.



i. Obviously, it was not common for tax collectors to go to the temple to pray and it was a daily practice for the Pharisees.

- So, Jesus is concocting an interesting scenario here.
 1. You had one who clearly measured up with another who clearly did not.

g. Now, earlier I asked you to imagine a world where our relationships were not based on merit but were rather based on grace...

- i. And in this parable, Jesus is demonstrating to us that the Pharisee, the impeccable religious person, is actually interacting with God on the basis of merit.
- If you look at the text, specifically v.11-12, we see that the Pharisee is not interested at all in what God is or has done...he is only interested in what HE has done.
 1. Read v.11-12
 2. His prayer is oozing with pride, self-righteousness, and contempt for other people.
 3. He is not in love with God or interested in the glory of God...he is in love with himself and interested in his own glory.
 - But, here is what we need to see. The Pharisee believes that he can approach the throne of God because he not only keeps the law but he goes above and beyond the law.
 1. The Jews were not required to fast twice a week. But this guy does.



2. They were not required to tithe a tenth of EVERYTHING they get. But this guy does.
- See, in the mind of this Pharisee God was OBLIGATED to be pleased him because of his performance.
 1. This Pharisee thought he had merited his standing before God.
 2. He thought he was accepted because of his performance.
 - But it gets worst, not only does this Pharisee put God in his own debt because of how awesome he is, his heart is cold towards others.
 1. As he looks upon this tax collector who is bent over in guilt over his sin, the Pharisee can only scoff at him and see him as the scum of the earth.
 2. Because when we view the world on the basis of merit, there are people who measure up and there are people who don't measure up.
 3. And if you are one of the ones who measures up, then you have special permission to impose your superiority over the ones who don't measure up.
 4. Doesn't that explain a lot of the conflict and pain that we have felt and dealt out in our relationships?
 5. How many times have you been rejected because you don't measure up?
 6. How many times have you held the mistakes of others over their heads.
 7. That's life in a world that is obsessed with merit.



- ii. But see, the Tax Collector in this parable – the one whom we assume would be the villain of the story – is an example for us on what it looks like to interact with God on the basis of grace.
- This guy was clearly a sinner. He was guilty of stealing, cheating, lying, and probably a whole bunch of other things.
 1. And this tax collector is aware of his guilt because of his posture as he goes to pray in the temple.
 2. He was bent over. Couldn't even look up towards God. He was beating his chest.
 3. And the only words that he could get out was a plea for mercy.
 4. This guy knew he did not measure up. You didn't have to convince him of that.
 - And this is one of those places where the Bible is packed with treasure. Remember, this is Jesus telling a parable...a fictional story to make a point.
 1. So, Jesus is sending a message through the way that he tells this parable.
 2. The book of Luke is written in Greek. The typical word for mercy in greek is **eleōo**. (screen).
 3. But, the tax collector, as told by Jesus, doesn't use that word in his plea for mercy. He uses the much more complex word – **hilaskomai**. (screen)
 4. This word is only used one other time in the New Testament and is the word associated specifically with the Day of Atonement.



- See, in the Old Testament, God gave us the law because we are sinful people who have rejected God and his ways.
 1. Now, God knew that we would not be able to follow this law and because of that he made a way for our transgressions against this law to be atoned for, to be forgiven.
 2. In the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement was a part of that system.
 3. This was a time once a year where the High Priest would go into the temple, into the holiest chamber where the presence of God dwelled, and he would bring with him a goat.
 4. He would place his hand on the head of the goat and confess the sins of the people. He would then kill the goat and spill its blood.
 5. The priest placing his hand on the goat's head signified the transfer of the sins and guilt of the people onto the goat.
 6. And the spilled blood of the goat signified that God had carried out the death sentence against sin upon this goat instead of the people.
 7. The goat stood in the people's place.
 8. The goat was a substitute.
 9. So, the people could be forgiven of their sin.
- Okay, this tax collector asks for this!
 1. He asks that God's wrath towards his sin would be turned away through a blood sacrifice.
- So remember this is Jesus telling a parable! Jesus is sending a message.



1. The Old Testament Law and sacrificial system was not God's ultimate plan for dealing with our sin!
2. The Law is a merit based system that we would never measure up to!
3. Jesus is signaling to us here that God's ultimate plan when it comes to dealing with our sin is Himself...it is Jesus Christ.
4. See, that only other time that that word hilaskomai is used in the New Testament is in Hebrews 2:17, which says: "[Jesus] had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement (hilaskomai) for the sins of the people."

iii. **Joe read Ephesians 2 for us earlier.**

- Here's what it said in v.4-5 - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."
- The truth is friends that all of us do not measure up when it comes to God. We have all sinned against God. We have rejected him as our Creator. And the Bible says that we stand before Him condemned and awaiting our punishment...which is death.
- But God is rich in mercy and God desires to relate to us not based on merit but based on grace.
- So, Jesus came and he became our High Priest and he atoned for our sins.



1. Jesus Christ lived the righteous life that we could not live and he died the death on the cross that we deserved to die by being nailed to a cross.
 2. Our sins and our guilt was transferred to Jesus and his blood was spilled signifying that the death penalty that we deserved was carried out upon Jesus.
 3. Jesus stood in our place.
 4. Jesus was our substitute.
- And if we are willing to relate with God on the basis of grace by humbling ourselves, confessing that we have sinned and we deserve God's wrath and his punishment, and trust in God's grace...
 1. ...then God says that our sins will be forgiven on the basis of the atonement provided by Jesus Christ.
 - But when we relate with God on the basis of merit, where we believe that we somehow have lived righteous enough to earn God's favor...then we've missed it entirely.
 1. We still stand condemned before God.
 2. And in v.14 of our text this morning, we see that it was the tax collector who walked home right with God and not the Pharisee.

V. QUESTION

- a. **So, this is the question that I have to ask this morning.**



- i. If you've made a judgement about Jesus, whether you have accepted Him or rejected Him, are you making your judgement based off of the god of the Pharisee or the god of the Tax Collector?
- Are you judging the god of the Bible which relates to us based on grace or are you judging a false god that relates to us based on merit.
- ii. Because I believe that there are many people who have decided to reject Jesus and His church because they were told that god is a god that relates with us based on merit.
- That you have to measure up.
 - You've encountered those people who think they're righteous and look at others with contempt.
 1. And there are plenty within the church.
 - And if you rejected that god than you made the right decision!
 - But that god that you rejected is not the true Jesus Christ!
 1. For someone to see themselves as righteous and to look at others with contempt is about as unchristian as one can get!
- iii. And if you have accepted Jesus and consider yourself a follower of Jesus...
- Do you worship and serve the god of the Pharisee or the god of the Tax Collector?
 - As followers of Christ, it is so easy to begin our Christian life trusting in the grace of God and then slip into interacting with God on the basis of merit.



1. Have you ever said to yourself: “Man, I am just not close with God right now.”
 2. Have you ever gone to pray to God and felt guilty because of ways in which you’ve messed up and felt that God was annoyed with your prayer?
 3. That way of thinking is evidence of us moving from relating to God through grace and beginning to relate with god through merit.
 4. Because the work of Christ on the cross is total and complete, it is impossible for you as a Christian to be far from God!
 5. You’re told boldly to approach the throne of grace.
 6. Yes, confess you sin. Yes, seek to live a life obedient to god. Yes, ask God for forgiveness.
 7. But, as Tim Keller puts it, it’s not that we obey therefore we’re accepted. It’s I am accepted by God through Christ therefore I obey.
- It’s possible that the god you decided to accept is not the actual god of the Bible but is this false god of the Pharisee.

VI. CONCLUSION

a. For too long, people have represented Jesus Christ and Christianity as being all about measuring up to a moral standard.

- i. I believe the reason why our society is getting more and more post-Christian is because we have more and more people **RIGHTFULLY** rejecting the god of the Pharisee!



- But the god of the Bible is the god of the Tax Collector. The god of grace and mercy through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- ii. **The Christian life is not about measuring up so we can earn the favor of God!**
- The Christian life is the recognition that we do not measure up!
 1. That we need help!
 2. We need rescue.
 3. We need a Savior!
- b. So, let me ask you. Have you accepted, have you trusted upon the true saving grace of Jesus Christ?**
- i. Have you made that decision? Have you made that commitment? Have you had that moment where you confessed to God that you do not measure up and that you have no hope other than mercy?
- Have you cried out to God for mercy?
- ii. **Because the God of the Bible is not interested in you cleaning yourself up for him.**
- He wants you as you are...today.
 - He wants to extend you mercy and grace...today
 - He wants to begin to transform your life and make you more like Christ....today.
- iii. **Will you do that this morning?**



- Because all that you have to do to come under the grace of God is confess your sin and trust that Jesus Christ has atoned for your sin through his life, death, and resurrection.
- I am going to pray for us. And if you're in that place right now where you want to cry out to God for mercy and you want to begin your new life with Jesus as your Lord and Savior...Why don't you pray along with me in the quiet of your heart? Let's cry out to God for mercy.

VII. PRAY

