

## ***“Propitiated and Justified”***

Where do you stand with God? Is everything alright between you two? That’s the bottom line in our text for today – and the bottom line for every day of your life.

In God’s Word to us today we have comparisons. We have the Pharisee and the tax collector – those who exalt themselves and those who humble themselves – the infants and the disciples of Jesus. And all of this is in the context of prayer.

Last week Jesus asked – “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” – or as I mentioned in the sermon, will He find you praying – like the pesky widow in the parable who kept badgering the judge for justice.

So, when Jesus comes again “to judge both the living and the dead” – what will be His judgment? In other words, what will be your standing with God? To answer that, let’s look at our prayers once again.

Jesus tells parables in order to teach us how it IS in the kingdom of God – not how we think it is with God and His kingdom. And so that we might understand, He tells us that this parable is spoken “to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” – and, “treated others with contempt.”

Parables are by nature comparisons – and in this one we are introduced to “two men” who “went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”

Now, on the surface, we get the point of the parable. The Pharisee is full of himself. He brags to God about himself. He thinks God should be impressed and pat him on the back – that God should agree with him, that he is righteous. The Pharisee thinks he is in a right standing with God.

This Pharisee who exalts himself before God – also treats others with contempt. “Extortioners, unjust, adulterers” – he even throws the tax collector under the bus – lumping him together with “those people.”

But there's more. In bragging about himself, he also derides others – “you don't fast like I do” – “you don't give anywhere near what I give” – as if he is a super-pious Christian. Again, He thinks God should be elated with him – and he uses sinners, “those people,” to prove it.

On the other hand there is this tax collector – as humble as humble can be. His humility comes from comparing himself to God and His will. The tax collector knows his state – that he is unrighteous – that he is not just A sinner, but THE sinner.

So he stands “far off” – afraid to draw near into the presence of the holy God. His eyes are cast to the ground (like a little child who knows he's done wrong). He beats his chest, treating himself with contempt. But he too prays – “God, be merciful to me, THE sinner.”

Two men – two prayers – and the contrast between their standing before God is without comparison. One exalts himself – the other humbles himself. One believes he is righteous before God – the other knows he is unrighteous. One, in his prayer, says to God – “I need you.” The other prays as if he has no need for God.

There is more – something we don't often hear. The tax collector is not just begging for God's mercy – more specifically, he prays for God's PROPITIATION. Propitiation means that God's holy wrath at sin is turned away – that God no longer counts sin against the sinner – and He reconciles the sinner to Himself.

We are told that these two men went up to the temple to pray – and most likely, this was at the time for the morning or evening sacrifice – the two most common times for prayer at the temple – a time of both corporate prayer, and individual prayer.

The prayers of God's people ascend before Him as a sweet-smelling sacrifice – like the incense offered at the time of prayer. God truly delights to hear our prayers. But there is something else going on – the morning and evening sacrifices of a lamb, whose blood is shed, and by which God promised to atone for their sin.

The Pharisee's prayer shows what he believes – that he is righteous in himself – “I don't need your stinking lamb and your atonement God!” The tax collector, on the other hand, begs for propitiation – he believes that he cannot live without the blood of the lamb – that he has no standing with God, without the shedding of blood.

When the children of God came into His presence at the temple to pray – they were to do so with faith in God's promise – that this lamb was sacrificed “for me.” The sinner would press his hands on the lamb, signifying the transfer of sin. He might even thrust the knife to sacrifice the lamb. Imagine what that was like for the sinner – the sounds, the sights, the smells!! “What have I done? My sin has brought death !!”

Our sin brings death to God's own Son, to Jesus, the Lamb of God who is sacrificed to take away the sin of the world. Our sin brings death to our neighbor. As a husband and father, I have brought death to my family – I have harmed them by what I have done. As a pastor – I have brought death to you by what I have failed to do.

Such is the prayer, the confession, the belief of those who humble themselves before God.

God's kingdom belongs to the little children – the needy ones, who cannot do anything for themselves – but who gladly receive what is given. It is “those people” – the sinners (you and I) – who stand far off from God, averting our eyes, beating our chests, and crying out – “God, propitiate me, THE sinner.”

“I tell you,” Jesus says, “this man went down to his house justified. Through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who sheds His blood – the wrath of God at your sin has been turned away – God no longer counts your sin against you – and you are reconciled to God, and to your fellow man. The Lamb of God who gives His blood “for you” today.

You are propitiated – washed in the blood of the Lamb. By daily contrition and repentance your boasting, self-exalting and self-justifying is put to death – and by His forgiveness, the new man is raised to life (the man of faith) – to live before God as one who is justified.

Where do you stand with God? All has been made right – through the blood of the Lamb. That is how it IS in God's kingdom. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.