

## God's Justice

Luke 18:9-17

The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, October 23, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

What is so wrong with not cheating someone? What is so wrong with being righteous? What is so wrong with avoiding adultery? What is so wrong with not stealing from others to line your own pockets?

After all, the world would be a better place with fewer cheaters in it. The world would be a better place with more righteous people in it and fewer wicked people in it. The world would be a better place if no one committed adultery or fornication or any other sexual sin. The world would be a better place if there were no thieves.

Imagine if you will a government without corruption. Imagine how much more efficiently such a government would run! Imagine how peaceful and prosperous the citizens of such a government would be? I could do with a world with fewer cheaters and thieves in it.

Imagine if you will a world where no one commits adultery. Imagine a world where everyone is faithful to their spouses and demonstrates sexual fidelity toward them. Imagine the families that would still be whole. Imagine the children who would not be traumatized by the break-up of their parents over an adulterous affair. Imagine a world without adultery of the heart. Imagine a world without pornography. Imagine the joy and contentment of husbands and wives if they avoided adultery. Imagine the contentment and joy of their children having parents who are faithful to one another. Think of it! I could do with a little less adultery in the world.

Imagine a world with more righteous people in it. Imagine a world where everyone was devoted to obeying God's laws. Imagine a world where everyone obeyed God's laws. Imagine the peace and prosperity of such a place.

What is so wrong with fasting? Does not our Lord tell us how to fast? What is so wrong with tithing? Does our Lord not tell the Pharisees that they should have paid attention to the weightier portions of the Law without neglecting this one?

Imagine a world where people devoted themselves to fasting! Imagine a world filled with people who were capable of self denial. Imagine a world where people tithed to the church. Imagine the good the church could do for the world if only she had the resources for doing so.

What is so wrong with these things? And if nothing is wrong with these things, then what is so wrong with the Pharisee in our Lord's parable with thanking God that he is not those things?

The Lord says that the Pharisee who had avoided all of these sins and committed himself to fasting and praying did not go to his home justified.

Understand what that means. The Pharisee went home unjustified before God. That means that the Pharisee went home and was not right in the eyes of God. The Pharisee went home damned, condemned to a lifetime in hell for the things that he had said at the temple.

What is so good about the tax collector?

By way of reminder the tax collectors at the time of our Lord were Jews whom the Romans had hired to collect Roman taxes from the Jews. Rome instructed the tax collectors to collect certain amounts of taxes from the people. The tax collectors knew that the people did not know how much they were instructed to collect so the tax collectors collected more than they were instructed to collect. They forwarded the amount that Rome wanted to Rome and kept the remainder for themselves. They kept this money in addition to the salary that Rome paid them for tax collecting.

Now there are people in our society who do the same thing. They use governmental authority to tax you and they line their pockets with your money. You cannot do anything about it because these people have duped their own constituencies into voting them into office each term. You cannot get the votes together necessary to get them out of office nor are there enough honest politicians to do something about the corrupt ones and so other people are getting rich off of you while they raise your taxes and you pay them to be rich. I bet if I gave you enough time you could think of people like this. Have you got them in your mind? Now imagine if this person were also working for a foreign government while they did this. It is bad enough that our own government does this to us. Think if they were also collaborators with a foreign government. Come to think of it some of them probably are! This is the kind of person that the tax collector in our Lord's parable is. He is a thief. He is corrupt. He is extorts people. He probably extorts poor widows. He is a cheat. And with his luxurious lifestyle the man is probably an adulterer and fornicator to boot. After all, he has the money.

This man stands in the back of the temple, beats his breast and begs for mercy and goes home justified. Understand what that means. He goes home justified in the eyes of God. That means he goes home saved. He is not damned. The Lord receives him unto Himself.

And where is the justice in that?

The justice in that is in the blood that was shed.

Unfortunately most English translations do not capture this. Most of them simply say that the Lord had the tax collector in His parable say, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." While the tax collector does call himself a sinner, when he prays, "Have mercy on me," the word that he uses is a word which refers to the blood that the high priest sprinkled in the Holy of Holies before the presence of God Himself in order to atone for the sins of Israel.

The tax collector does not appeal to the daily offerings of the priests, nor does he bring an offering himself for his sins. He knows that what he has done will not be covered by those things. He goes for the big sacrifice, the annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. He picks the highest and holiest of Israel's sacred rites and appeals to it for his mercy. He knows it will take blood to get Him justified in the eyes of God.

Such blood of the Day of Atonement is in the end only a shadow of the blood that was shed by our Lord, Jesus Christ. So ultimately when the tax collector appeals to the blood that was shed for mercy, He is appealing to the blood of Jesus Himself for mercy.

The justice of God is in His mercy. His mercy is in the blood that was shed. When you cry out to God for justice against your adversary you are crying out for mercy for yourself. That is what the tax collector did and he went home justified. In spite of his evil he went home justified. The Pharisee who thanked God that he was better than the other people went home condemned.

And so the one who exalts himself will be humbled and one who humbles himself will be exalted. God will do the humbling. God will do the exalting.

The same with children.

We have trouble understanding what our Lord means when He says, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child shall not enter it." For some reason we have developed an idealistic sense of the innocence of children. In spite of the fact that most of us here have raised children and know that they are not innocent, when we read this passage we tend to think of the children about whom our Lord is speaking as innocent. We also tend to think of them as simple. In other words they have the pure

simple faith of children uncomplicated by the concerns and attitudes of adults. When we read the account of our Lord blessing the children in this way none of the rest of the Scripture makes any sense. I have heard people use this account as an excuse to be ignorant of what the Scriptures say. And if the truth be told people use this account of Jesus blessing the children as an excuse to ignore the parts of the Scripture that they don't like. Whenever a passage of the Scripture comes up that such a person does not like what it says, they will trot out the account of the Jesus blessing the children and say something to the effect of, "Well, I just have the faith of a child." What I think that such people are implying is that their faith is too simple and pure and innocent to handle the complicated or difficult passages of the Scripture, when in reality there are plenty of complicated Scriptures that these people can and will handle it is just that the passage under consideration is one that they don't want to listen to and so they pretend that it is too complicated for their simple, innocent child-like faith, and they can pretend to ignore that passage of the Bible and not be condemned by God. Their condemnation will be justified.

The real attitude toward children both ancient and contemporary is that they are a pain. We like them in theory, but practice is far different. The ancients were honest about it. They considered children to be an inconvenience until they got old enough to think and talk. They thought that children should not do or say anything in public because it would be useless. They were like Carol Burnett in her soap opera sketches that when presented with a child, she would take the child over to the trash can or the umbrella stand and dump the child in there in mockery of soap operas where children are born, but never seen or heard on camera until they are old enough to contribute to the plot, but any of you who are parents know the hours that are spent doing mundane things with your children that accomplish nothing more than having the floor picked up until the next time he or she appears.

This is the kind of people for whom the Kingdom of God is. They are for the helpless and the useless. They are for the unintelligent and inexperienced. They are for the people with whom you invest all kinds of time and sometimes get no result from it. It is possible to do everything right by your children and have them still turn out to be useless and profligates. It is for these kinds of people that the Kingdom of God is.

The Kingdom of God is therefore not for contributing members of society. It is not for people who are intelligent or wise. It is not for the strong and the just.

The reason that we cannot see this is because we are convinced that we are saved by our works and that if Jesus blessed the children that somehow they are more innocent and righteous than we are. That was not His point at all, but because we think that is what the Lord's point is, we have improved our attitude toward children over the past two millennia.

The Kingdom of God is for the useless and the users. It is for the tax collectors and the children. It is for the humble, not the ones who pretend to be humble, but inside their hearts thank God that they are not like other people.

So when you pray, beware. When you thank God for your blessings, be careful. When you thank God for your blessing and you find yourself thanking God that you are not like other people and you have a list of people that you are thanking God that you are not like, then repent. Repent and beat your breast. Do not dare to lift your sinful eyes to heaven. You are no better than a Pharisee! Repent and understand your place in your life. If you need help doing this consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife or worker? Have you been disobedient unfaithful or lazy? Have you been hot tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? And then you will be ready to go home justified before God.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.