

SERMON NOTES
Luke 18:9-14
“Justified By Humility”

Intro:

- “Today is a historic and wonderful day for those who believe in fairness, equality and human rights for all. I join other Unitarian Universalists across the nation who celebrate the decision by the Iowa Supreme Court that the ban on gay marriage violates the Iowa Constitution.

Some wish to insert into this debate about fairness a religious component. Often cited are the Christian and Jewish scriptures which in four or five verses speak obscurely about sexuality. There are many prohibitions from the Bible that are deemed irrelevant. Those four or five verses should be deemed irrelevant as well.

I say thank you to the Supreme Court for recognizing that civil marriage is a civil right. And I say thank to all of those who have fought hard for equality on this front. Today is a great and historic day. Fairness has triumphed over prejudice.”

(Rev. Roger Butts, Davenport Unitarian Church)

- *Many Americans – including a majority of young adults – believe that denying a marriage license to a couple solely because they are of the same gender constitutes discrimination*
- Same-sex marriage is viewed by many as an extension of a basic civil right that should be available to homosexuals as well as heterosexuals
- Many people assume that the only people who oppose same-sex marriage are religious bigots (i.e. conservative Christians) who base their objections on questionable interpretations of a few obscure verses of the Bible – *and their prejudiced religious beliefs should be dismissed as irrelevant since this is a civil rights issue, and religious people have no right to impose their religious beliefs and moral values on the rest of society*
- But if this is strictly a civil rights issue, then why did 70% of African-American Obama supporters in California vote for Proposition 8, which eliminated same-sex couples’ right to marry in California?
- **Perhaps African-Americans do not know the meaning of discrimination and civil rights as well as white liberals do**

- And if conservative Christians are the only people who believe that only a marriage between a man and a woman is valid, then why do the following countries with virtually no Christian influence out-law same-sex marriage?
- *(Vietnam, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China, North Korea, India, Turkey – in fact, most of the rest of the world)*
- (same-sex marriage has been recently legalized in only a handful of countries)
- The marriage union of a man and a woman is the family structure that best serves the well-being of children – *that is why virtually every society at all times and all places – with a few recent exceptions – has defined and sanctioned marriage as the union of a man and a woman*
- **We are not advocating for traditional marriage just because the Bible says so or Christianity says so – we are advocating for traditional marriage because *Christians and non-Christians alike benefit from families headed by a mother and a father who love each other and are married to each other***
- *When dealing with secularists in a pluralistic democracy, we need to present non-religious arguments for traditional marriage*
- We have to win the debates about what is best for the common good by convincing our fellow citizens that traditional marriage is in the best interests of children, families and our society as a whole
- *But within the Christian church, we need to clearly teach the relevant Scriptures on the subject of sexuality and marriage – and there is much work to be done within the body of Christ*
- *For Christians don't even agree among themselves what the Bible actually teaches on the subject of sexuality and marriage*
- But, hey – Who needs the Bible when we can let Hollywood shape our thinking and values for us?
- But for Christ-followers who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, the teachings of Jesus are relevant – and authoritative – on every subject
- *What did he teach about marriage?*

Matthew 19:4 - 6 (NIV) ⁴“Haven’t you read,” Jesus replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

- **Keep showing slide**
- Is there anything obscure or unclear or ambiguous about these words of Jesus?
- *Could these words of Jesus possibly be construed to mean that marriage between two males or two females is morally equivalent in God's plan to the union of a man and his wife?*
- **Why does Jesus teach that marriage is the union of a man and woman? *Because the Creator made humans Male and Female, and marriage is God's plan for bringing about the one-flesh union of a male and a female as only a male and female are physically designed to experience***
- *This is not religious dogma – this is a biological reality that is recognized in all cultures of the world*
- **Male and female were designed by God to become one flesh – and that sexual union is God's plan for procreating children and raising them in a family headed by a married man and his wife**
- **Stop showing Scripture slide now**
- *Thank God that Cornerstone boldly and clearly teaches the truth of God's Word on the vital issues of our day as well as concerning salvation through Christ alone*
- Thank God that we stand tall for biblical truth and moral absolutes and the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of human life
- *Thank God that homosexuality and adultery and premarital sex and pornography and cohabitation and divorce and abortion are unheard of among our members*
- *Thank God that we clearly teach about being born-again through personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior*
- Thank God that we are not like many liberal churches that don't preach the Gospel and most of the church members don't even know what it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- Thank God that we teach the Bible and stand up for the conservative religious and moral values that our country was founded upon
- *Thank God that we speak out against homosexuality and abortion and tax-and-spend liberals and anti-Christian public school educators and Obama socialism and illegal immigration and all the other evils of our society*
- If only there were more people like us – this would be a much more blessed and righteous nation to live in, wouldn't it?

Luke 18:9-14 ⁹Then Jesus told this story to some who boasted of their virtue and scorned everyone else:

¹⁰**“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, and the other a cheating tax collector. ¹¹The proud Pharisee ‘prayed’ this prayer: ‘Thank God, I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don’t commit adultery, ¹²I go without food twice a week, and I give to God a tenth of everything I earn.’**

¹³**“But the corrupt tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed, but beat upon his chest in sorrow, exclaiming, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home forgiven! For the proud shall be humbled, but the humble shall be honored.”**

- *Ouch!*
- This parable of Jesus exposes the spiritual peril of being proud of our commitment to truth and moral righteousness while looking down on those with wrong beliefs and ungodly values and immoral behaviors
- It is a parable of highest import because it is the only parable in which Jesus uses the term “*justified*” – the same word used by Paul so many times in Romans and Galatians
- ***To be justified is to be accepted by God as righteous in His sight***
- In this parable, one man went home justified – and the other man went home unjustified
- ***Much to the surprise of those who heard Jesus’ story then – and those who read it today – it was the unrighteous sinner who left the Temple changed, forgiven and accepted by God – and it was the righteous religious man who left the Temple unchanged, unforgiven and rejected by God***
- **At stake here is nothing less than eternal life or death**
- The Bible is clear that every human being faces two totally opposite eternal destinies: *those who are saved – a destiny of eternal happiness in the presence of God // those who are unsaved – a destiny of eternal misery separated from God and His love*
- **Therefore, there is no more important question in life than: *What must I do to be saved?***
- **The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world**

- *That is the objective truth of biblical salvation – **Salvation is through Christ alone – through what He accomplished in His Incarnation, death and resurrection***
- But then there is the subjective side of salvation: *What must I do to be saved?*
- *How do I personally experience this salvation of Jesus Christ?*
- **The NT teaches that we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ – but what does this mean? What constitutes saving faith?**
- *Is saving faith a matter of head knowledge only – or is the heart also involved?*

Matthew 22:36 - 40 (NIV) ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** ³⁸**This is the first and greatest commandment.** ³⁹**And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

- *If the most important thing in life is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind – then doesn’t it make sense that saving faith would involve our heart and soul and mind – and not just our intellectual beliefs?*
- In fact, one could make a case from biblical teaching that the heart is the source of love for God – and soul, mind and strength are the spheres in which this love is demonstrated
- *If so, what is the required condition of the heart to receive the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ?*
- Where do we turn for answers to these questions? -- *What must I do to receive eternal life? What must I do to be saved? What is saving faith?*
- **Our ultimate authority on questions of salvation and eternal life is the risen Savior Himself – the Lord Jesus Christ – The Word made flesh -- the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life**
- *And this parable in Luke 18 sets forth Jesus’ teaching on how to be justified before God*

I. A TALE OF TWO PRAY-ERS

- You will notice some parallels between this parable and the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15

Luke 15:1 - 3 (NIV) ¹Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³Then Jesus told them this parable:

Luke 18:9 (NIV) ⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

- *The audience is the same for both stories – namely, Jesus’ critics – the guardians of doctrinal purity and moral righteousness of Jesus’ day – the Pharisees*
- The Pharisees were the Bible-believing religious conservatives of Jesus’ day
- **They took pride in their correct biblical beliefs and in their devotion to keeping the biblical commandments**
- *They kept themselves separate from Gentiles and the common, ordinary, Jewish sinners of the day*
- They were highly critical of Jesus and his lax law-keeping and his scandalous association with sinners
- *The Pharisees were more scrupulous about keeping the religious traditions and customs of Jewish law than Jesus was – and the Pharisees were more careful to avoid defiling contact with ungodly sinners than Jesus was*
- **In short, the Pharisees regarded themselves as better Jews than Jesus was**
- The Pharisees were the most righteous people of the day – *and the tax collectors were the most despised sinners of the day – traitors to the Jewish people who enriched themselves by fleecing their own people by collecting taxes for the occupying Romans – and then keeping for themselves whatever they could collect in excess of what Rome required*
- If Jesus were telling the story today, whom might he choose as the two pray-ers?
- *Many people in our society would associate the self-righteous, judgmental Pharisees with Baptists or conservative evangelical Christians*
- And filling the role of the tax collector today might be a sex offender or illegal immigrant or gay activist or a drug dealer or the CEO of AIG or the first lesbian to get married in the state of Iowa

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: **“Two people went up to the temple to pray, one a Baptist and the other a lesbian.**

--The Baptist stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—adulterers, tax cheats, secular humanist liberals—or especially like this lesbian.

'I attend church twice a week, read my Bible daily, vote pro-life and support traditional family values, and give a tenth of all my income to the Lord's work.'

--"But the lesbian stood at a distance. She would not even look up to heaven, but beat her breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

--"***I tell you that this woman, rather than the Baptist, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and she who humbles herself will be exalted.***"

- Are you starting to get a feel for how his target audience might have responded to this story?

II. THE VITAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO PRAYERS

- *The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself*
- The Pharisee basically misses the whole point of prayer, since his heart and mind were focused on himself, rather than on God

- *I thank you, God"*
- That's better – maybe now he is going to turn his attention toward God and His goodness and faithfulness and His blessings
- No, afraid not

- *God, I thank you that I ... I ... I ... I*
- The Pharisee is self-absorbed with himself and his goodness in comparison with sinners who are well beneath him on the ladder of righteousness
- *The Pharisee is grateful, alright --* The Pharisee is grateful for himself and his religious accomplishments and moral superiority

- *God – aren't you grateful to have someone like me on your side?*
- I'm not like all the others – liars, cheats, dishonest, greedy, totally lacking in integrity
- *I'm not like all the sexually immoral people of our day – people who sleep together and live together before marriage // people who have affairs // people who engage in homosexual relationships*

- *God – aren't you grateful for all that I have done for you?*
- I go way beyond the call of duty and abstain from food twice a week – and I scrupulously give 10% of all my income to Your work – and I attend all the worship and Bible study and prayer services every week
- *Whatever would you do without faithful, devout, upright people like me, Lord?*

- *In contrast, the tax collector approached God with a sense of humility and unworthiness – not lifting his hands or his eyes toward heaven as was customary in Jewish prayer*
- *Instead, he beat his breast in sorrow for his sinfulness*
- *His prayer included no self-congratulation // no rehearsal of his moral virtue and good deeds*
- *The tax collector came to God empty-handed – with no merit of his own*
- *The tax collector came to God with one great need – his need for God’s mercy and forgiveness*
- ***“God, have mercy on me, a sinner”***
- *That was it – the whole prayer*
- *But that’s all it takes – and God heard and answered the sinner’s prayer*
- *Does God hear us because of our righteousness? Or because of our humility?*
- *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”*

III. THE SURPRISING CONCLUSION

- *Jesus’ audience would have been shocked by the way he ended the story*

Luke 18:14 (NIV) ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- *Two men went up to the Temple to pray – but only one of them went home justified before God*
- *Which one went home justified before God – the righteous man or the sinner -- and why?*
- *This is one of the most important verses in the Bible because it is the only one where Jesus uses the word “to justify” in the same sense that Paul uses it: namely, forgiven and accepted as righteous by God*
- *The common wisdom of this world says that heaven is for good people and hell is for bad people*
- *Jesus turns that worldly wisdom upside down in this story*
- ***Entering the kingdom of heaven is not about being religious or irreligious // moral or immoral // conservative or liberal // church member or unchurched***

- *It's not a matter of the good people are in and the bad people are out*
- **Instead, Jesus teaches: *The humble are in – and the proud are out***
- *God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud*
- ***Those who are humble enough to admit their need of mercy and accept God's grace in Jesus Christ – are in – and those who think they are so good that they don't need God's mercy or refuse God's grace in Jesus Christ – are out***

- **Those who come to the Cross of Jesus Christ and say: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner – are in***
- Those who are confident of their own goodness and righteousness and look down on sinners – *are out*

- Two men went up to the Temple to pray – but only one of them went home justified before God
- *The proud, self-righteous Pharisee went home still in his sins and alienated from God*
- **The humble, mercy-seeking sinner went home forgiven and accepted as righteous by God**

- ***We are justified by humbling ourselves and admitting our sinfulness and asking for God's mercy in Jesus' name***
- *The humble enter the kingdom of heaven – and the proud are excluded*

- Why doesn't Jesus say that we are justified by faith – as Paul does?
- *Are Jesus and Paul teaching different ways of being saved?*

Ephesians 2:8 - 9 (NIV) ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

- *Saved through faith, not by works – so that no one can boast*

Romans 3: 23-28 ²³For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. ²⁵For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. ²⁶And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

²⁷Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds. It is based on our faith. ²⁸So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

- *We are made right with God by putting our faith in what Jesus did for us on the Cross, and not by obeying the law – so that no one can boast that they have done anything to be accepted by God*
- **Paul regarded faith as an expression of humility and reliance upon what Jesus Christ has done for us to make us right with God**
- Let's look at this from another angle: *What is the opposite of saving faith?*
- Lack of biblical knowledge? Immoral lifestyle? Lack of attendance at religious services? Incorrect doctrine? Lack of external righteousness?
- **None of the above – according to Jesus – and Paul -- the opposite of saving faith is self-righteousness – trusting in yourself that you are righteous enough to be accepted by God – congratulating yourself on being one of “Us” – the righteous -- rather than one of “Them” – the sinners**
- **Ironically, being confident that you are righteous enough for heaven is precisely what will disqualify you from heaven, according to Jesus – and Paul**
- *What is the heart of saving faith?*
- Passing a doctrinal exam? Belonging to a Bible-believing church? Living a moral lifestyle? Understanding the doctrine of justification by faith?
- **None of the above – according to Jesus – the heart of saving faith is poverty of spirit – Blessed are the poor in spirit – Blessed are those who acknowledge their desperate need of God's grace – the heart of saving faith is a humble, broken and repentant heart that cries out: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner***
- *This is consistent with Paul's contrast between faith in Jesus Christ and boasting in our own good deeds and moral virtues*
- *The prayer of a sinner seeking mercy is a prayer that God will never refuse – anyone – anywhere in the world – from any religious background – living any kind of lifestyle – carrying any kind of burden of sin and shame – who cries out to God from a humble and repentant heart: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner – God will count that heart-cry as saving faith and will credit righteousness to that person on the basis of the merits and finished work of Jesus Christ**

- **Salvation is through Christ alone – and the saving grace and saving work of Jesus Christ are received by faith – defined here by Jesus as humility of spirit expressed in the heart-cry: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner***
- Jesus says: *That man – the man who is humble in spirit and cries out to God for mercy – will go home justified before God – accepted by God as righteous*
- You see, the Pharisees had faith in the sense of correct beliefs about God and the teachings of the Bible and the Jewish faith
- *Their minds were committed to biblical truth and biblical moral values – but their hearts were proud and far from God*
- **Saving faith is not just a matter of having right beliefs – saving faith is a matter of humility of heart – poverty of spirit – despairing of our own righteousness, and crying out to God for mercy**

C.S. Lewis: *When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less.*

- How about you? Are you getting better – or getting worse?
- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*
- ***For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted***
- *God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud*
- ***We are justified and saved by a humble acknowledgement of our sinfulness and a humble plea for mercy and a humble reliance upon Christ's death on the Cross to make us right with God***

Suggested life response:

- **Some of you here identify more closely with the sinner in Jesus' story – whether a first-century tax collector or a 21st-century lesbian or adulterer or alcoholic or divorcee or a person who has declared bankruptcy or a person who has had an abortion or a person who has slept around too much**
- ***You need to know that Jesus loves you and gave his life for you and that his shed blood is sufficient to cleanse you of all your sins and present you clean and righteous before God***

- **And you need to know that our church welcomes sinners of all stripes and varieties**
- *Indeed, every one of us has sinned and desperately needs God's mercy as poured out at the Cross of Christ*
- **But many of us Baptists – if we're honest with ourselves – can identify with the Pharisee in Jesus' story**
- *We pride ourselves on standing tall for biblical truth and moral righteousness in our depraved society*
- **Many of us listen to Christian radio and conservative talk radio where we are repeatedly reminded that we are the good guys – the defenders of the true faith and biblical moral values – while looking down on the bad guys – the sinners – the liberals // the socialists // the Democratic Congress // the media // the gay activists // the illegal aliens // the pro-choice feminists // the same-sex couples seeking marriage licenses // the activist judges overruling the will of the majority // the radical public school educators imposing their godless worldview on our vulnerable children // Hollywood celebrities corrupting our youth with their immoral lifestyles, TV shows and movies**
- **Hour by hour as we listen, we grow more confident that we are the righteous ones and those who disagree with us are the sinners and the reprobates**
- *Insidiously – without our awareness – as we congratulate ourselves for being on the right side of truth and righteousness – our hearts become more and more vulnerable to the deadly sin of spiritual pride and moral superiority*
- *Our souls are in danger of approaching God with the heart attitude of the Pharisee rather than with the humility of the sinful tax collector*
- **So what are we to do?**
- *Give up the battle for truth and righteousness and biblical moral values?*
- *Let Hollywood's values shape our convictions about sexuality and marriage?*
- **Of course not**
- *It is not commitment to truth and righteousness that imperils our soul*
- **It is pride in our right beliefs and right values and right lifestyles that imperils our soul**
- **Most of you have some understanding of what it means to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”**
- **Recognize lies and ungodly thoughts and false ideas // reject those lies and unclean thoughts and false ideas // and replace them with truth**

- *But some thoughts may be right or correct or true – but the spirit or attitude or mindset behind that thought or idea may be unChristlike – proud // judgmental // self-righteous // grumbling // complaining // overly-critical*

Philippians 4:8 (NIV) ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

- *Can we put into practice that verse while listening to someone on the radio rail against our President for 45 minutes?*
- *It's not enough merely to ask: Is what I am listening to truthful or correct or the right perspective?*
- **We also need to ask: What effect is what I am listening to having on my heart attitude? Is it leading to thoughts and attitudes that are Christ-like?**
- *Am I cultivating humility of spirit by what I am filling my mind with – or am I sowing seeds of spiritual pride that are detrimental to my spiritual health?*
- **We need to guard our hearts and minds from prideful, self-righteous, judgmental thoughts and ideas just as much as from unclean or untrue thoughts and ideas**
- **We live in a day and age when some people are hostile to Christian truth claims and will persecute us for standing up for moral righteousness**
- *But what is objectionable to many more people is not our beliefs or values or positions on social & moral issues as much as our self-righteous pride*
- **Many people who would respectfully listen to our truth claims if we lived and presented our beliefs in a spirit of humility – and if we put into practice the teachings of Christ with compassionate deeds of love and mercy – and if our attitudes toward other sinners accurately reflected the truth of the Gospel that the ground is level at the foot of the Cross**
- Two men went up to the Temple to pray – but only one of them went home justified before God
- *How about you?*
- How will you be going home from church today? Forgiven and Justified before God – or not – or not sure?
- *You can make sure right now*
- Salvation Prayer
- “Amazing Love”