October 26th

THE NEW SHOFAR

If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting "Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?" then I know nothing of Calvary love. Amy Carmichael.

Summary: There are 39 parables in the synoptic Gospels, comprising approximately 1/3 of the teachings of Jesus. The parable in **Luke 18:9-14** follows a familiar pattern of contrasting opposites creatively to make a profound spiritual point. In this parable, Jesus contrasts a righteous pharisee with a despised tax collector—his teaching surprised many and is instructive for the church today.

Following different paths to God

This parable centres on two men who entered the Temple. We can presume that both were on a quest to draw close to God and return home justified. Justification in the Bible is a process where God transforms a sinner into a righteous person. This is done through the collaboration of the sinner with divine grace.

Only one man was aware of his true spiritual state and prayed to be in right standing before God. In the parable, the Lord noted the proud Pharisee stood (not a posture of humility) and prayed—not thanking God for anything He had done. What he was talking about was his own standing in the eyes of others and the way he thought God should be looking at him and judging him.

The repentant tax collector thanked God for the promises of mercy in His Word. Jesus emphasized how the tax collector beats his breast (an expression of remorse) while pleading for God to be merciful. Though a sinner, his expressions of faith were well-received, resulting in an outpouring of God's grace.

Why Did Jesus Christ Tell This Parable?

Jesus told this parable to help three distinct groups to help them better understand God's grace and what it was God wanted for His people.

The Pharisees: First-century Pharisees were a leading religious body in Judea known for their pride and arrogance. They had an external appearance of being men close to God and thought it their right and duty to impose burdens on others, insisting their way was the only way to God. They used their position to condemn many in the community as sinners because they were unable to meet all the customs and laws the Pharisees said come from God. They would typically not interact with those they deemed to be sinners and would approach God feeling superior to those who were not in their small circle of the righteous. They were known for seeking the attention of others and often went to the Temple to pray at times when others could notice them. To the pious Pharisees, Jesus shared the parable to help them understand that

God was more concerned with the condition of the human heart, their feelings, ambitions, hopes and goals. He reminds them that God is not impressed by status or by the eloquence of their prayers. In this parable Jesus calls for a personal commitment to repentance, a turning around of their lives so that their ways more closely followed the ways of God, ways revealed to them by Jesus.

The Disciples: Jesus told this parable to the disciples to help them better understand how to live under divine rule. He is giving them a gentle reminder that His Father sees all that we do and say and is aware of our true spiritual state. We can fool others by our actions, but God sees into our hearts. This parable highlights the true nature of righteous behaviour, stressing that justification is something God gives, not something we achieve by our actions. The disciples and others would have been shocked by the way Jesus was talking about the Pharisees. They come out of it self-righteous hypocrites, men who were far from God. Even more shocking was the way Jesus spoke of the despised tax collector. These men were not generally permitted to enter the Temple precincts; such was their sinfulness. Surprisingly, it was this man who returned to his house justified. For the disciples, the story emphasized how it was true sorrow and the humble searching for God that the Lord wants…*what I want is love, not sacrifice* (**Hosea 6:6**). The prophet told the Hebrew people that genuine love, mercy, and a relationship with God are more important than religious rituals or sacrifices. In this parable, Jesus emphasizes how God appreciates humble, child-like faith and the contrite sinner who believes God's grace is greater than his sin. Jesus Christ shared this parable to illustrate that pleasing God, finding God, and being in right standing with God is not about being outwardly or even overtly pious. Discipleship is about worshipping God in truth and love. It means we believe in the promises revealed to us in the Son and obeying as best we can God's holy law. We are people who listen to God, not the world, not our preferences and not Satan. Redemption for sinners is possible even for the wicked people who are *like this tax collector.* They acknowledge their sins and accept their need for God's grace in every part of their lives. They can return home justified, not by their own actions or their own sense of spiritual wellbeing, but by God's mercy and through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ…*let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (**Hebrews 4:12**).

To Believers who struggle with pride and 'works.' We should not think that we are nothing like the Pharisees, that our spiritual lives are all that God demands of us. We too can fool ourselves into believing that our religious deeds are enough to make God happy, that there is not much more we need to be doing. The only thing that makes us righteous before God is his Son Jesus Christ. Not what we do. This is what Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension achieve for us. He draws us into the love of His Father, overcoming the limitations of sin and rebellion. This is why the parable says that God "despises the proud" but "lifts the humble." Self-righteous people may know how to pray eloquently and appear righteous, but God is aware of our motives and judges the condition of our hearts. When we live and approach God in humility and live our lives as Jesus lived his, only then will we be judged to be a good person because it is the Jesus within us that the world truly encounters.