

- Two stories illustrating kingdom qualities

1. First - humility

- The man who was not accepted by God did some correct things

- But he was not accepted by God because he was trying to stand before God in his own righteousness

- Self-righteous people are actually self-centred

- Self-righteous people have a critical spirit

- Self-righteous people are not accepted by God

- The man who was accepted by God was ashamed of his sins and asked for mercy

- Jesus says this man was 'justified'

- He received God-given covering righteousness

In the two stories here^{☐1} we are presented with two qualities that are necessary if we are to be acceptable to God and experience His kingdom.

1. **The first is humility.** The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is still continuing the theme of prayer and explains how we can be accepted by God. The worse thing to do is to try to stand before God in your own righteousness^{☐1}. We are to be persistent and daring in our prayers^{☐2} but we cannot stand before God in any way except through His mercy.

Consider **the man who was not accepted by God.** (i) He tried to pray. There is nothing wrong with that! It is good to seek to pray. (ii) He honoured God's temple. (iii) He lived a moral life. (iv) He lived a disciplined life; he fasted. (v) He lived a generous life; he tithed. So far, so good. We cannot criticise any of these things. Yet he was not accepted by God! He was such a 'good' man, and yet God would not accept him. He was making one supreme mistake: **he was trying to stand before God in his own righteousness.** God hates self-righteousness. No 'good works' of our own entitle us to stand before God. Our good works are not good enough. The standard God sets is for us to be as pure as Jesus Himself. Our repentance is never sufficiently pure to entitle us to stand before God.

Self-righteous people are actually self-centred. Look at how much the Pharisee talked about 'himself'. 'I thank you that I am not like other people ... I fast ... I give tithes...'.

Self-righteous people have a critical spirit. They despise others. Only before we have come to realise our own sinfulness can we talk about how righteous we are, and this leads us to feel that others are inferior. A critical spirit is a sign of self-righteousness.

Self-righteous people are not accepted by God. The man in the story was never accepted by God. He was only praying 'with himself'^{☐1}.

Consider **the man who was accepted by God.** (i) He was ashamed of himself. He stood a long way back from the temple gates. He was too ashamed to look up to God. (ii) He said nothing at all about his good works. (iii) He was distressed about his sins. No one repents perfectly – but this man was truly sorry for the way in which he had lived. (iv) He had faith. He was coming to God. He was praying. He did have hope of mercy. If he had not had faith, he would never have been received by God at all. (v) He asked for mercy – and he received it.

Jesus says this man was 'justified'. This is the favourite term of the apostle Paul, but we find it here in the words of Jesus. Perhaps Paul thought of talking about being 'justified' because he knew this story. To be 'justified' means to be 'declared righteous'. When the sinner comes in faith to God through Jesus, he is 'declared righteous' before God. It is not his own righteousness. It is a God-given righteousness. It is not **in** him; it is **covering** him. New birth and God's work of sanctification work righteousness **in** us. Justification is a covering righteousness which enables us to stand before God. Righteousness **in** us is always

☐1 18:9-14,
15-17

☐1 18:9
☐2 18:1-8

☐1 18:11

2. Second – persistence in child-like faith

• Children do not represent innocence, they represent powerlessness

• Trusting – like children – believing God without getting too complicated

• Child-like faith enables us to draw near with confidence and be bold in prayer – rather than stand far off!

imperfect; Christ’s righteousness **covering** us is perfect.

2. **The second is persistence in childlike faith.** Our first faith is needed if we are ever to be accepted by God at all. But something else is needed. If we are to fully enter into all that God has for us we must regularly and persistently have childlike faith. What are children like? It is a mistake to think they represent innocence. People who think that have presumably not known many children! But children do represent powerlessness; and they do represent trust. It is the latter that is relevant here. People were bringing young children to Jesus, believing that if Jesus touched them they would somehow be blessed^{□1}. The disciples did not want Jesus to be bothered in this way^{□2} but Jesus wanted to see them. He liked to be directly in touch with people, including the children^{□3}. At the same time Jesus took the opportunity to teach something. He was concerned for people to experience the kingdom of God. ‘Entering the kingdom’ means experiencing God in His royal power. To know God’s kingdom-blessing requires **receiving** what Jesus has to give in simple faith. In practice it simply means believing and trusting what He says to us. Children are trusting. They generally believe what you say without getting too complicated. Christians are to be the same: believing what God says without getting too complicated.

Actually in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the tax collector could have done with more of this simple childlike faith. Jesus tells the story to show that even someone in distress and grief over his sins can find peace with God. Yet actually the tax collector did not need to stand far off! He could have drawn near through bold and confident faith. His sins did not have to keep him ‘standing some distance away’. ‘Draw near with confidence,’ says the letter to the Hebrews^{□1}. This is why persistent childlike faith has to become the characteristic of our life. It will first give us boldness in prayer. It will sustain us amidst trouble and bring us to steadfastness in times of testing. It will bring us to love amidst criticism and calmness when things are moving slowly for us and for God’s kingdom. We shall enter the kingdom of God.

□1 18:5
□2 18:15b
□3 18:16

□1 4:16

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