

Sermon for August 15, 2021

Not long before his death, Martin Luther uttered these words, “We are all beggars before God.” What does this mean? “We are all beggars before God.” Sometimes we hear words that are so clear in meaning that no discussion is needed. What does this mean, “We are all beggars before God?” That is exactly what it means. We are all beggars before God. God owes us nothing. None of us! What He gives us, He gives us out of His grace. We beg for forgiveness. God gives forgiveness by grace through faith.

Luke 18:

¹⁰ *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

¹¹ *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*

¹² *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’*

¹³ *And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’*

So, there it is, this is a simple teaching. Two men went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was religious, self righteous, even self religious. He claimed to be one who kept the law, the ten commandments. He also claimed to keep the other 613 man made commandments of the Pharisees and Scribes. He claimed to be righteous. Thus, this Pharisee prayed with himself - hear that - he prayed with himself, he was praying to himself and with himself. The Pharisee depended on himself to keep the law. And he depended on himself as being enough to hear his prayers and forgive himself.

In his prayers, this Pharisee did not consider himself to be a sinner like

other men that he knew. He did not consider himself to be an extortioner who extorted money and property from others. He did not consider himself to be unjust before God or to be unjust to other men. He did not consider himself to be like adulterers, people who were known publicly and outwardly to be crass sinners. No, according to the Pharisee, he was above all that. He considered himself to be righteous and just before God by his own works and merits. He certainly did not consider himself to be like this other man who was here at the temple to pray, this tax collector who was known to cheat and manipulate people to collect more taxes from people than were actually due. This tax collector wailed publicly for God to forgive him.

The Pharisee considered that his twice weekly fasts and his tithes were outward works that merited salvation. How could God ignore all of that? But the Pharisee ignored the very thing that God examines in each of us. The Pharisee ignored the condition of his heart. And the condition of his heart was that his heart was hard. The Pharisee ignored his pride, and his arrogance. He ignored his need of repentance. He thought his works would save him. He considered that he wasn't like all these sinners who begged for God's mercy. No, the Pharisee was prideful and arrogant. But the tax collector was different -

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

The tax collector knew he was guilty before God. He was humble and would not raise his eyes to heaven. He beat his breast in agony. He hurt in his heart. His soul felt the pain of his convicted heart of his sins and his

iniquity – that is - his guilt. The tax collector said as his prayer 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' <PAUSE>

Jesus told you of a man who was a tax collector – it is a true story. And so I tell you of a man named Jim Ivy – it is a true story. He was an older man – probably not – at the time I knew him - then as old as I now am. He had been all over the world. He had lived a rough life. He had been a sailor in the Merchant Marine. He had lived in New Orleans as a cook and day worker for many years. He had done a lot of things he was not proud of. He knew he was a sinner. After knowing him for a short while, Jim decided to go through catechism and be baptized. During one of our Catechetical sessions, I asked Jim if he wanted to be judged on his good works or be given undeserved pardon thru God's grace in Christ. With no hesitation and in a very soft voice, he said that he wanted God's grace and that he wanted to be a Lutheran.

Then shortly afterwards, realizing that Jim only had a few days to live because of terminal cancer, we moved his date of baptism up. In spite of the devil's efforts to stop Jim's baptism, Jim was baptized, and became one of God's children. A few days later he died. But his words and claim on God's grace through faith in Christ will always be real and vivid in my mind. Thank God for Jim Ivy. He was a sinner who asked God to be merciful to him, a sinner. And thanks be to God for the tax collector. Jesus came to save sinners like the tax collector, like Jim Ivy, like you, and like me. Thanks be to God. We are all beggars before God. We are saved by God's mercy, grace, and will through faith in Christ. Amen.