

## Sermon for August 31, 2025

Not long before his death, Martin Luther uttered these words, “We are all beggars before God.” Well, what does this mean, “We are all beggars before God.” Sometimes we hear words that are so clear in meaning that – really – no discussion is needed. “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 us forgiveness by grace through faith.

Luke 18: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ <sup>13</sup> 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, like being beggars before God, 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, the Scriptures say this Pharisee prayed with himself - hear that - he prayed with himself, he was praying to himself and with himself. He had no need for God. God did not hear his prayer. The Pharisee depended on himself as being adequate enough to hear his prayers and forgive his sins.

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 – 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 due. The Pharisee had no sin needing forgiveness. But, this tax collector wailed publicly for God to forgive his many sins.

The Pharisee considered that his twice weekly fasts and his tithes were outward works that merited salvation. I mean, 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. The Pharisee ignored his pride, and his arrogance. And the condition of his heart was that his heart was hard. 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 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 – a heart that weighed heavy - his guilt before God. 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. I give you a shortened version of the story. Jim was an older man – probably in his sixties. He had been all over the world. He had lived a rough life. He had been in the Merchant Marine. He had worked 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 underserved 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. Thanks be to 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 and grace through faith in Christ. Amen.

Note: All Scriptures below are from the New King James Version.

Note: All of the notes below are from the Lutheran Study Bible.

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-10

### *The Risen Christ, Faith's Reality*

**15** Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

**15:1** *remind*. Lit, “make known.” He is “recalling it into memory” (Chrys, *NPNF* 1 12:226) because they had learned it before. See p 1965. *gospel*. See p 1902. *received*. Paul first preached the Gospel in Corinth c AD 50 (Ac 18:1–18a). *stand*. Just as they are saved by the Gospel, they stand firm and live by the Gospel.

<sup>2</sup>by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

**15:2** *being saved*. Though saved now through faith, the fullness of salvation is still to come in eternity. *the word I preached*. The Gospel. *believed in vain*. The Corinthians stand by the Gospel, though it is also possible to fall away from it.

<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

**15:3** *delivered*. See p 1902. *first importance*. Though Paul had much to teach the Corinthians, nothing was more important than the Gospel. This is always true. The Gospel predominates in Christian teaching. *received*. Cf Ac 9:4–5, 15–19. *that Christ died ... with the Scriptures*. These words form the heart of the Apostles' Creed, which summarized the Gospel for the early Christians. See p 1975. “He suffered, died, and was buried so that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe” (LC II 31).

<sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

<sup>5</sup>and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

<sup>6</sup>After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

<sup>7</sup>After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

**15:5–7** *Cephas*. See note, 1:12. *twelve*. Lit, only 11 disciples at the time of the resurrection. However, “twelve” meant “the company of the apostles” for early Christians. *more than five hundred*. Scripture records numerous appearances of Jesus over the 40 days after the resurrection. Paul recounts six examples here. Apostles were not always alone when Jesus visited them (cf Lk 24:33; Ac 1:14–15; 13:31). Paul does not specifically appeal to the women who first saw Jesus after the resurrection. This may be because in Roman culture the testimony of women was not regarded as fully reliable. *fallen asleep*. Physical death. *James ... apostles*. James, Jesus' half brother, is singled out because he came to lead the Jerusalem churches.

<sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

**15:8** *untimely born*. Medical term for a premature birth, including stillbirth, miscarriage, and abortion. Possibly this insult was used by Paul's opponents to tear down his authority. Earlier, Paul asserted his authority; now he purposely humbles himself to emphasize God's grace (cf v 10).

<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

**15:9** *persecuted*. See note, Ac 8:1.

<sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.

**15:10** *grace*. See p 1902. *worked harder*. See note, 2Co 11:23–27.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

**15:11** *so we preach*. Paul now ranks himself with the other apostles, demonstrating unity with them despite conflicts about his apostleship.

**15:1–11** Because of zeal for more knowledge, the Corinthians have neglected what has first importance: the simple truths and application of the Gospel. How great is the temptation for us to overlook the Gospel today! A multitude of contemporary issues can crowd out the Gospel of life and forgiveness in Jesus until it grows unclear in our minds. Praise God for the wonderful creeds that our forebears have handed down across the centuries, which take up Paul's very words, summarize the Holy Gospel, and etch it into our memories. • Holy Jesus, You died to take away my sins and rose to fulfill all the Father's promises in Scripture. Send now Your Holy Spirit so that by Your grace I may stand in this faith always. Amen.

## Luke 18:9-14

### *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*

<sup>9</sup> Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

**18:9** *trusted in themselves*. Believing their lives were acceptable to God. On true righteousness, see p 1904.

<sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

**18:10** *into the temple to pray*. For public prayers. See note, 24:53. *Pharisee*. See note, Mk 2:18. *tax collector*. See note, Mt 5:46.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

**18:11** Satirical. See p 1335. *not like other men*. Arrogant pride. Aug: “He had no mind to pray to God, but to laud himself” (NPNF 1 6:455). *like this tax collector*. Expresses disdain. The tax collector is placed in the same category as the other sinners in the verse because of his hated occupation. “He who prays for grace in this way does not rely upon God's mercy and treats Christ with disrespect” (Ap V 211).

<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

**18:12** *fast twice a week*. Not demanded by the OT. *tithes*. See note, 11:42.

<sup>13</sup> 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!’

**18:13** Knowing his inadequacy before God, he seeks a God who saves rather than condemns.

<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

**18:14** *justified*. To be declared righteous and therefore acceptable to God. See p 1903. *who humbles himself ... exalted*. Only the humble would pray for and receive God's forgiveness (Pr 15:33; 16:18).

**18:9–14** The Pharisee excludes himself from God's gift of righteousness, while the penitent tax collector embraces it. Today, beware of the complacency of measuring your goodness against others. Measure yourself against God's standards—then repent. God is ready to justify the worst of sinners by His generous grace in Christ. • God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.