

SERMON

Luke 18:9-14

Go Home Justified

Nunawading and Waverley, 23-10-22

Why do people sit at the back of the church? At the pastors' conference in Tanunda, I sat near the back but the leaders were at the front. Yes, we would rather not be conspicuous. We are not in charge; therefore, we don't have to be seen. There is a sort of humility in that, like **the tax collector who stood at a distance**, at the back of the temple court. In Jesus' parable, there were two people who came into the temple grounds seeking the presence of the Lord but only one **went down from Mount Zion to his home justified** and that was the person standing at the back. Today, let us come in humility and go home justified.

Justifying ourselves and blaming others is a very old game and we all do it. The driver in front stopped suddenly and I hit the rear of her vehicle. She did not give me any warning. I was in the right and she was in the wrong. But I was travelling too close and that's the truth. You see, we know how justification works, don't we? In relationships one says, "You yell, you attack me, you put me down and insult me." The other replies, "Oh, you are just too sensitive." Blame-shifting can stop now because today, our Lord Jesus will put us in the right with our Father. Today, the Holy Spirit, here in the temple of his saintly people, will ensure we leave this place, justified. Justified means, to be put in the right with God.

Jesus began by speaking about believing in oneself: **He told this parable to those who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and were despising others.** When we come here, there may have been a time when we were trusting in ourselves. It is easy to our default setting of self-justification, excuse-making, thinking we are doing better than others, and blaming. Listen people of God, our Lord is saying something truly good today: "Return to your homes justified." We come here trusting ourselves and climbing higher by putting others lower but we leave, we go home today with the words ringing in our ears, "I have justified you."

Isn't the Lord also telling us that when we enter his house and eat at his table that this is the time we let go of our defences? Isn't this where we are going to be real with God, telling our Father what is really going on? Perhaps you come here and nothing registers. Ok, then ask the people close to you: "Have I offended you? Do I validate your feelings? Are the jobs being done? Do I let you down? Do I point you to the comfort of the

Holy Spirit? Am I encouraging you to have hope in our Saviour?" Usually, others see us better than we see ourselves and the Lord, who searches hearts and minds, knows everything. As we confess and ask ourselves what is going on in our lives, the Lord will send us home justified.

When we come before the Lord in his home as a beggar, then, we leave fully in the right, the greatest Christian in the world; no more than that, as good as Jesus Christ himself! We occasionally see a beggar in the inner-city streets of Melbourne. I hope we feel great compassion for such people but the point of using that example is to say that we come today on a spiritual level in rags, unwashed and with wild hair. Only beggars go home justified, like the tax collector who said: **God, be merciful to me a sinner.** He had good reason to say that. He had betrayed his people, worked for the enemy and extorted money. Yet, being a beggar before the Lord, he went home justified. Let us come as beggars, then.

I was visiting an elderly member, not in this congregation, who told me that when she was 18, she had an affair with an married man. She wanted to put this right but couldn't. What an incredible thing to be able to announce God's forgiveness and that Jesus went to the cross to make things right for her and for the married couple she had sinned against. In the world of smart phone cameras and social media, no one is safe from being outed. Talk about the all-seeing eye of God! Politicians and fraudsters and sporting people are exposed and condemned. How terrible is the justice of the mob who are like a million Pharisees **despising others** and saying how good they are. We live in a culture of shame. Once justified, we can't raise a shout in condemnation for long. When someone is caught out, we should feel pity and if it is someone close to us, be ready to tell them that our Lord Jesus can put things right and put us in the right through his mercy.

Every Sunday we pray the sinner's prayer, **Lord have mercy.** It could be a theft or a lie, then you had to tell another lie to cover the first lie. Perhaps we are angry with God. Whatever, let's pray, Lord have mercy and be assured he has shown us mercy before we uttered our first word.

Let's finish by re-writing the parable. The Pharisee who was so religious and disciplined, giving to the church and to the poor, so regular in worship, completely devoted to his Lord remembered passing the tax-collector as he went to the front. He began to ask himself why people should make way for him. So, he gave up his place and went to the back wall of courtyard and stood with the man who had brought shame on God's covenant. After a while he spoke up: "May I confess before you and my

Lord that I have been proud, I have looked down on others, I haven't encouraged and supported people in their faith, especially those hated and rejected by others. I trusted myself too much and failed to trust in the goodness of the Lord. He is compassionate, willing to forgive even when we do not deserve it. I need to trust him for my justification as much as you or even more than you."