

October 26th, 2025

Luke 18:9-14 “Put Away Your Judgy Bits”

Long before sanctuaries, steeples and capital campaigns – back when Christians secretly met in houses to avoid Roman persecution, the church has struggled with what it means to be a disciple. That’s why I’ve been doing this series about how we’re supposed to live as disciples. We need to be reminded that discipleship isn’t easy. In fact, following Jesus *asks* something of us. In the early days of the church, Christians risked everything. In Luke 9:23, Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Matthew and Mark record this teaching also, but I like Luke’s version best, because he reminds us that following Jesus is a *daily* commitment.

Then in Luke 13:24 Jesus tells his disciples, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.” Matthew’s gospel elaborates on this a bit by adding, “For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction -- but the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.” Following Jesus isn’t for the faint of heart. If you want easy, then by all means, take the easy road. But it will only lead to destruction. Jesus was somewhere between 30-33 years old when he said this. His life was cut short because he didn’t choose the easy way. But thirty years after his crucifixion the church was already saying, “But is that what Jesus *really* meant? I mean, come on – In Matthew’s gospel, chapter 11, verse 28-30 to be specific, Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ I mean, come on Jesus saying discipleship easy or hard?” Well, that depends on who you’re talking about. These two passages aren’t contradictory at all. The easy yoke was for the ones who were weary and already carrying heavy burdens. The

narrow difficult road is for disciples who are more privileged and *aren't* carrying heavy burdens.

Cut to twenty-first century Western Christianity where we've tried hard to throw both of these teachings in the trash bin. Or at least we try to hide them in the church basement. I mean for goodness' sake, we want people to join the church! Don't tell folks how hard it is to be a Christian. Tell them about all the perks! Or better yet, let's gaslight people into believing that things that are easy are difficult and things that are difficult are easy! Let's convince people that caring for the poor or showing mercy or compassion or showing *any* kind of empathy is the easy way. "Oh, empathy and mercy is *too* easy! The hard way is showing people tough love, otherwise they'll never get better!" Oh yeah, it's *so* hard to tell people they're not welcome in church because they're poor or black or queer or different in any way. We want to convince folks that the difficult path is to stand up, draw the line, and say, "You shall not pass!" Come on. Let's be real. Is it *really* easier to do that? Or is it easier to convince ourselves and others that Jesus doesn't like the same people we don't like? Hey, I'll be honest -- it's *much* more difficult for me to show empathy, mercy and compassion for people *I* don't like! It's much easier to say I'm the one being persecuted when what I really want is to persecute people who don't believe the way I do. And yet here we are.

So how about we take a look at the scripture Gary read. That's what we're supposed to be doing, right? Stay with the plan pastor. Okay. To give you some context, this passage is part of a series of parables that Jesus told to a group of Pharisees who were questioning his teachings. The parable on the table this morning is known as, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector." In the King James version it's called, "The Pharisee and the Publican" which isn't what you might think -- "Publican" is an Old English term for "tax collector." Saint Augustine called this, "The Parable of the Humble and the Proud" which I like because it focuses on the contrast of *attitudes* rather than social roles.

So, what's going on here? Well, Jesus is calling out two characteristics of toxic faith that true disciples need to avoid. The first is self-righteousness. Jesus is addressing, "those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt." The Pharisee in this story clearly felt superior to other people, especially the "sinners" who he mentioned – robbers, adulterers, and tax collectors." When he went to the temple he said, "God, I thank you that I am not like these other people." His prayer reeked of arrogance and self-righteousness. Unfortunately, arrogant and self-righteous religion is *still* alive and well and has been for over 2,000 years. A lot of religious people in today's world believe that they and they alone practice "pure" religion which makes them feel superior to others. But this text, Jesus warns his followers to *resist* that kind of arrogance.

The second toxic characteristic we see here is a judgmental spirit. In the opening words of our text, Luke was talking about those who "regarded others with contempt." The Pharisee in this story exhibited severe judgement over others. Or as folks say these days, his "judgy bits" were showing. The problem is, he was showing contempt to his fellow worshippers in the temple! Why? Because the target of the Pharisee's spiritual assault was a "tax collector!" And worse, this tax collector was being humble and praying for God's mercy in a place where *it's entirely appropriate to do so!* Folks, we have *got* to be careful about this. When we judge others or show contempt for others in a place of worship, that's just *wrong*. And you'd think that at some level, people would *know* how wrong it is and catch themselves before their judgy-bits start showing! But alas, the church still struggles with judgy attitudes that condemn others without even knowing the story of the person they're condemning. And what's even sadder is that this judgmental attitude is one of the main reasons unchurched people say they *avoid* church.

So, the lesson here from Luke's gospel is that *authentic* disciples avoid self-righteous judging of others. *We* are not the judges. That's God's job. But humans have this thing about telling God, "Oh you don't have to worry about that. I'm *great* at judging others. No, really, I promise."

Another thing we like to do is try to correct Jesus, especially when what he requires of us is difficult. We'll say, "Oh, Jesus didn't mean that. *Here's* what Jesus *really* meant." We'll say, "Well sure Jesus says care for the poor, the widows and the orphans, but he only meant the ones we like – you know, the nice ones – the *deserving* ones." We think we're so good at human-splaining what Jesus may or may not have meant when he said, "Don't judge others." Take Mathew 7:1-5 for example – and yes, I know we're supposed to stay in Luke's gospel, but I like this because Jesus uses humor to make his point. He says –

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Instead of practicing arrogant self-righteous judgment like the Pharisee in this parable, Jesus calls us to exhibit humility, like the tax collector. In the parable, the tax collector beat his chest in repentance and prayed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" In the end Jesus said the tax collector "went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." Yeah, but pastor, we *have to* judge. It's necessary when we make day-to-day decisions. True. I was at a clergy meeting the other day where someone closed a prayer with, "May our judgment reflect God's wisdom." Wow. That in itself sounds like God's wisdom.

Listen, the world doesn't need more Christians who are *right* — it needs more Christians who are *real*. It doesn't need more temples filled with judgment — it needs people who pray, "God, be merciful to me." The call of Jesus is still the same: deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me. The narrow way isn't about exclusion — it's about

humility. So may we walk this way. May we open our hearts wider than our mouths. And may the world know we are disciples — not because we judge well, but because we love well.