

October 27, 2019  
Divine Mercy



Adult Resource  
Sheet 1

## Focus on Luke 18:9–14

*Semicontinuous Joel*  
2:23–32  
*Ps. 65*  
*Complementary Sir.*  
35:12–17 *Ps. 84:1–*  
*7*  
*2 Tim. 4:6–8, 16–18*  
**Luke 18:9–14**

**WHAT is important to know?** —From *“Exegetical Perspective”* by E. Elizabeth Johnson On the one hand, the two prayers highlight God’s preference for humility over arrogance. “All who exalt

themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” (v. 14) revises and recasts Jesus’ saying that “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (13:30). On the other hand, though, the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector also draw a strong connection between piety and ethics, a theme that also runs throughout Luke–Acts.

**WHERE is God in these words?** —From *“Theological Perspective”* by Robert Leach One of the key words in the passage is “justified.” After the tax collector humbly prayed for God’s mercy, the text says “this man went down to his home justified rather than the other” (v. 14). The doctrine of justification asks the question of how we reach a status of righteousness in God’s eyes. The Pharisee trusted in himself for his own righteousness, and the tax collector trusted in God for righteousness. He did nothing to earn or deserve God’s mercy. God’s mercy was freely given to him. Paul says that “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

**SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?** —From *“Pastoral Perspective”* by Laura S. Sugg Jesus challenges believers to avoid trusting in our own efforts at fulfilling the law and, rather, to humble ourselves before a merciful and loving God. Trust is called for, but not trust in ourselves or in our ability to keep God’s law. What is called for here is trust in God’s mercy. In a culture that values individual achievement so highly, this can be a tall order, but even as we are cautioned not to trust in our ability to fulfill the law, nowhere does Jesus say that we may ignore the law. Discipleship is a balancing act. We humble ourselves before a merciful God yet are confident in the Lord’s promises. Whether Pharisee or tax collector by nature, all find welcome in God’s temple.

**NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?**

—From *“Homiletical Perspective”* by  
Marjorie Procter-Smith

By looking at the tax collector’s prayer as a model of prayer, we are drawn to consider the great mercy of God. The sins of the tax collector were undoubtedly real and serious. Tax collectors commonly stole from those they taxed and pocketed the money for themselves; they collaborated with the oppressors of their own people; they accepted bribes as a matter of routine. In other stories we see repentant tax collectors engaging in restitution, but not here. This parable is interested only in his trust in God’s mercy. If a tax collector can find mercy before God, who is excluded?

## The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Jesus sets the scene in verse 10. “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” This sets the two men both together and apart. They are both Jews (they go to the temple). They are both pious (they go to pray). The one, however, is a Pharisee, someone noted for extraordinary piety. It is curious that he goes to the temple at all, since the Pharisees are the first to promote “the priesthood of all believers,” and the locus of their religious lives is the home rather than the temple altar. This one prays in the temple, though. The other is a tax collector. He cannot be a Pharisee, since the Pharisees are particularly contemptuous of tax collectors, who consort with Romans, handle their money, and extort from the populace.

Although the Pharisee properly acknowledges God as the source of his righteousness, he goes on to remind God how fortunate God is to have such a wonderful worshiper. The man obeys the commandments: he does not steal or covet (what the NRSV translates as “thieves” is better rendered “greedy ones”), he is not unjust (what the NRSV calls “rogues”), nor does he commit adultery. He fasts not only on the holy days for which fasting is prescribed, but twice a week. He tithes.

Ancient Palestinian tax collectors, of course, are not like contemporary Internal Revenue agents paid to enforce the law. They are franchisees of a corrupt and byzantine system that gouges the poor and enriches the wealthy. The tax collector, by definition a wealthy man, pays the empire a set amount for the privilege of gathering whatever he can squeeze from his neighbors. Although he is personally responsible for the money owed by his district, he is free to collect that money any way he wants, and anything he collects above what he owes is his profit.

Tax collectors are frequently foreigners, and they often farm out their own responsibilities to others, creating a perfect pyramid scheme of graft. It is no wonder they are roundly despised. This tax collector, however, acknowledges God’s judgment of him and throws himself on God’s mercy.



Excerpted from E. Elizabeth Johnson, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 215, 217.