

## Sermon for 3-25-2020 7:00 PM

### Hope, Wake Forest, NC

Luke 18:9-14 "Confession"

18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 18:10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 18:11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 18:12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 18:14 I tell you, this man 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."

#### I. Introduction

- a. Am I a sinner? Are you a sinner?
- b. Of course we are – how does that make you feel?
- c. We regularly go through the motions of confessing our sin, but are we truly contrite?
- d. In his explanation to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther said "we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment".
- e. Do we really believe that?

#### II. The issue of degrees of sin

- a. Is there such a thing as good sinners and bad sinners?
- b. I am a sinner, but I'm not nearly as bad as some of the other sinners out there.
- c. We would not put ourselves into the same class as Adolph Hitler, Jeffrey Damer or other mass murders
- d. We are more like the little boy: Because the younger children at our parochial school often forgot their sins when they entered my confessional, I suggested that teachers have the students make lists. The next week when one child came to confession, I could hear him unfolding paper. The youngster began, "I lied to my parents. I disobeyed my mom. I fought with my brothers and..."

There was a long pause. Then a small angry voice said, "Hey, this isn't my list!"

- e. We like to think of ourselves as basically good, but are we?
- f. I'm a sinner, but...
  - i. Excuses
  - ii. Contemporize
  - iii. Rationalize
  - iv. Pass the buck

- v. Even deny it's sin
- III. The reality of sin
  - a. Original sin
    - i. Enemies of God
    - ii. The problem of "ego"
  - b. Anything not done out of faith is sin
  - c. Sins of commission
    - i. Deeds
    - ii. Words
    - iii. Thoughts
  - d. Sins of omission
- IV. The results of sin
  - a. Sin's effect on us - A lady in the north of England said that every time she got down before God to pray, five bottles of wine came up before her mind. She had taken them wrongfully one time when she was a housekeeper, and had not been able to pray since. She was advised to make restitution.
 

"But the person is dead," she said.

"Are not some of the heirs living?"

"Yes, a son."

"Then go to that son and pay him back."

"Well," she said, "I want to see the face of God, but I could not think of doing a thing like that. My reputation is at stake."

She went away, and came back the next day to ask if it would not do just as well to put that money in the treasury of the Lord.

"No," she was told, "God doesn't want any stolen money. The only thing is to make restitution."

She carried that burden for several days, but finally went into the country, saw that son, made a full confession and offered him a five-pound note. He said he didn't want the money, but she finally persuaded him to take it, and came back with a joy and peace that made her face radiant. She became a magnificent worker for souls, and led many into the light.
  - b. Sin's effect on others – relationships
  - c. Sin's effects on our relation with God
  - d. The wages of sin is death
- V. Conclusion
  - a. The Pharisee and the Publican
  - b. Which am I? Which are you?
  - c. Is our confession words which we say by rote, or does our confession begin with true contrition – Lord be merciful to me, a sinner?

## Luke 18:9-14 "Confession"

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We begin with a question - Am I a sinner? Are you a sinner? Why would I ask that question? We confess our sins on a regular basis. We say of course we are sinner, but how does that make you feel? Are we really sorry for our sins? We regularly go through the motions of confessing our sin, but are we truly contrite?

In his explanation to the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Luther said "we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment". Do we really believe that? Do we believe that we sin every day? Do we believe that we deserve nothing but punishment? If we believe that, why do we often ask, "why is this trouble happening to me? Why me, Lord? Why do we ask, "why do bad things happen to good people if we really believe that we daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment?

I think part of the problem is that just as we often think of degrees of glory and degrees of damnation, we also think there are degrees of sin. We think there are some sins that are worse than others. But is there such a thing as good sinners and bad sinners? We think, "I am a sinner, but I'm not nearly as bad as some of the other sinners out there." We would not put ourselves into the same class as Adolph Hitler, Jeffrey Dahmer or other mass murderers. Thinking this way deflects some of the blame from us and we don't feel so bad about our sins.

We are more like the little boy who went to a catholic school. Because the younger children at his parochial school often forgot their sins when they entered the confessional, the priest suggested that teachers have the students make lists. The next week when one child came to confession, the priest could hear him unfolding paper. The youngster began, "I lied to my parents. I disobeyed my mom. I fought with my brothers and..." There was a long pause. Then a small angry voice said, "Hey, this isn't my list!"

We like to think of ourselves as basically good, but are we? We are willing to confess that we are sinners. We do this regularly in our liturgy, but do we really mean what we say? We often make excuses for our failures. We temporize and rationalize our sins. That's the way things are. Everyone else is doing it, so I can't be so bad. We even pass the buck, like Adam and Eve, blaming others for the things we do that are wrong. We are even guilty at times of denying that what we are doing is sinful. Sin is real. We see evidence of it everywhere, not only in creation

where there is sickness and disease, natural disasters and crazy weather. But we see it in human relations. The daily news is filled with shootings, robberies, assaults and many other crimes. Why is this?

The origin of sin goes back to the Garden of Eden when our first parents rebelled against God, disobeying His one command. As a result the human race has been tainted with sin – a sin we call “original sin”. This means that we are unable to obey God, we are unable to please Him. We have lost the image of God and as a result we are enemies of God. We resent God’s commands and His “interference” in our lives. Perhaps original sin is most evident in our ego – we are self-focused and selfish.

The Apostle Paul said it well, when he wrote, “anything not done out of faith is sin.” How often do we seek to please God by what we do? We have to admit that the majority of our thoughts, words, actions and decisions are made or done with no thought to how we can please God. **It’s all about us.**

Sin has many faces. There are the sins of commission. God gave us the Ten Commandments for our good. They are to protect us from doing the things that would harm us and others, but in truth we have broken every one of them. If we doubt this, we need only read through Luther’s explanations to the Ten Commandments in his small catechism. If we doubt that we need to read Jesus words in His Sermon on the Mount, where He intensifies the commandments. He says that even calling our brother names is equivalent to murder, or lust is the same as adultery.

We are guilty of sins of commission by means of the things that we do by which we break the commandments. But we also sin by words that we speak and how many careless words do we speak each day, sometimes, or perhaps even, not realizing the harm that we are doing with things spoken thoughtlessly. It is not only the deeds and the words that are sinful, we are even guilty of sinning with our thoughts. **How many of us would care to have our thoughts made public to others?**

In addition to sins of commission – the things that we do, we are guilty of sins of omission – not doing those things that we are commanded to do. We are often blind to the needs of others – whether they are physical needs or emotional or spiritual. How many people do we know who do not have a relationship with Jesus and we are content to let them live without the assurance of salvation. How many times do we fail to assure others of forgiveness when they profess sorrow over something they have said or done? We are all guilty.

We cannot avoid the fact that we are sinners, but do we consider the results of sin? Sin can have a powerful effect on us. I am reminded of a lady in the north of England who said that every time she got down before God to pray, five bottles of wine came up before her mind. She had taken them wrongfully one time when she was a housekeeper, and had not been able to pray since. She was advised to make restitution.

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Sin also has an effect on others. Not only do we hurt others with our sins, but sin impacts our relationships with others. It destroys marriages, drives away family members, results in anger and hostility and is evident in jealousy and other negative emotions.

Sin affects our relationship with God. Actually sin breaks our relationship with God. We find it difficult to worship or pray. We feel God no longer cares about us or even that God is our enemy. Sin is used by Satan to cause us to doubt God.

Ultimately the wages of sin is death. We know that Jesus came into this world to suffer and die for our sins, but unrepentant sin can cause us to reject what Jesus has done to save us. Before Adam and Eve sinned there was no death – imagine that!

We have heard again this evening the reading about the Pharisee and the Publican. We know who the good guy was and who the bad guy was. One was a “good sinner” and one was a “bad sinner”. It did not depend on the sins they committed – they were both sinner. Jesus died for both, but one confessed his sins, the other did not.

Which am I? Which are you?

Is our confession words which we say by rote, or does our confession begin with true contrition – Lord be merciful to me, a sinner? We’ve spent a lot of time speaking of sin because sin is real; it’s serious, but we cannot end here. The reason we must address sin is that sin kills – it kills eternally, but God is not willing to let that be the last word. He has the last word by sending Jesus into our world; into our history. That is what Lent is all about. Jesus came to fulfill God’s righteous Law for us. He was obedient unto death. Jesus suffered the punishment for my sins and for your sins. Jesus took our punishment because He loves us and wants us to be with Him eternally. Jesus died for you because you are a sinner. Don’t compare yourself to other sinners – you have enough sins of your own, as do I. Confess your sins, knowing God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus.