

Worthy?
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Luke 18:9-17

You don't want to be "that guy!" That expression has become common in our culture. What does it mean? The Urban Dictionary defines it: *"That Guy -The person everyone loves to hate and never wants to become. You're driving and get stuck in the middle of the intersection just as the light turns red. Now, because of you no one can get by. You have now become 'That Guy'."*⁹

Inc.com identifies 17 different versions of "That Guy" in the workplace including the jerk, the negative person, the martyr, the gossip, and the person who cooks fish in the office microwave. You don't want to be "that guy."

A colleague of mine years ago commented on how sometimes a person in the workplace can shift from "this guy" to "that guy" in the eyes of management. They start off in a positive light: *"This guy is great!"* Then you know the honeymoon is over when management shifts to referring to them derisively as *"that guy!"* It's good to be "this guy" but really bad if you become "THAT guy!"

Today's parable in Luke 18 describes the contrast between two men praying in a church service. One of them is convinced he is "THIS guy" (someone to be admired even by God.) The other is equally convinced that he is "THAT guy" (someone worthy of shame and in desperate need of help.) Ironically, we'll see that Jesus will flip things around by the end of the parable. In Jesus' eyes, "THIS guy" turns into "THAT guy", and "THAT guy" went home "justified."

Let's read our text and see what it says, what it means, and how it should change us this week.

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” ¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

- This parable is unique to the gospel of Luke; we only find it here.
- Your first reaction may be, *“Great! Another lesson on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees – I got that message!”* Hold on a minute. Yes, that theme is also in this passage but the real point is something different.
- We will see how a “trained theologian” got redemption wrong while a common man got it right.
- In the humble prayer of a sinner we’ll see important theological concepts like justification, atonement, and imputation. Let’s unpack these verses.
- In verse nine, Luke makes the target of Jesus’ parable clear: *“Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else.”ⁱⁱ*
- In this tale of two prayers the contrast couldn’t be any greater.
- John MacArthur writes, *“The Pharisee thought he could please God on his own; the tax collector knew he couldn’t. The tax collector was truly repentant; the Pharisee seemed not to sense any need for repentance. That same distinction divides everyone on the planet into two clear categories.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- Let’s look at the placement, posture, and prayer of the Pharisee.
- *“Stood by himself...”* meant he found a spot to be seen and heard.
- Jesus said in Matthew 6:5 (ESV) *...when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the*

synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

[That applied to this Pharisee]

- When I say look at his posture, it's not that standing to pray was wrong. This was common in that day. I'm referring to his "prideful posture."
- To see that pride, just count the "I's" in his prayer; five in two sentences. Contrast that with the one lonely "me" in the tax collector's prayer.
- His prayer began correctly: *"I thank you God..."* then he took a hard turn in the other direction. Instead of praise for God it was praise for himself.
- He used the classic approach of all hypocrites comparing himself to the most "low down" person he could find. *"I'm glad I'm not like... THAT guy!"*
- As he described his own accomplishments it's almost as if he is saying to God (and those listening,) *"Aren't YOU thankful for ME, God?"*
- Quoting MacArthur again, *"In effect, he was praying to himself, to stroke his own ego, rather than truly speaking to God...he thanks God that he is better than others, [but] gives God no actual praise. He asks nothing from God—no mercy, no grace, no forgiveness, no help. He seems to refer to God only because that's the way prayers are supposed to begin..."*
- We see the pride and hypocrisy, but I want us to see the erroneous theology of this "trained theologian." The Pharisee bought into the flaw of every false religion: Believing that God's favor is earned by good works.
- False religion is about "human achievement" true gospel is about "divine accomplishment."^{iv} If I can earn my way to Heaven I don't need Jesus.
- The Pharisee (though trained) got it wrong. The "despised" tax collector intuitively got the theology of salvation RIGHT. Look at his prayer.
- He stood at a distance too ashamed to be in a prominent place.
- He felt so guilty he wouldn't even look up to Heaven as he prayed.
- His conviction of sin was so strong he "beat his breast" in sorrow.

- I think of Paul's words in Romans 7:24: *"Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from "this life that is dominated by sin and death?"*^v
- Again, compare five "I's" to one lonely "me." The Pharisee bragged, *"I did this and I did that."* The tax collector begged, *"Have mercy ON me."*
- Let's talk about that word for "mercy." It's **"hilaskomai; to be propitious, make propitiation for."**^{vi}
- What is propitiation? John used that word in 1 John 2:1-2 (ESV) *"...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*^{vii}
- The word "propitiation" is a **means of forgiveness**, an atoning sacrifice^{viii}
- The very plea for mercy by this guilt-ridden sinner recognizes the need for an atoning sacrifice. Now, Jesus hadn't yet been crucified and raised, but this man new from Old Testament teaching there had to be a sacrifice!
- In Leviticus 17:11 (ESV) Moses quoted God, ¹¹ *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*
- *"Have mercy on me a sinner,"* meant, "cover me" with an atoning sacrifice.
- We know what that man didn't: Jesus died as the perfect atoning sacrifice.
- His prayer triggered perhaps the most important theological truth of all.
- In verse fourteen Jesus shifted the tax collector from "that guy" to "this guy." "[T]his man went down to his house justified, rather than the other."^{ix}
- This is the foundational concept of JUSTIFICATION -...the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law,^x
- JUSTIFICATION comes by faith alone. We don't earn it we trust in Christ to receive it. This flawed and sinful man understood that his only hope was to place his faith in God to make him right in God's eyes.

- That points to IMPUTATION. “[T]he righteousness of Christ is imputed to them that believe in him, or so attributed to them as to be considered their own; and our sins are imputed to Christ.”^{xi} (Romans 4:9-11)
- So, we see that this despised and sinful tax collector in his humility checked all the crucial boxes of turning to God in faith for salvation.
- To illustrate how the tax collector got it right I’m going to risk offending someone by quoting a country song (it’s been a while so I’m due!)
- In this case, it’s the lyrics of Kris Kristofferson’s *“Why Me Lord.”*
- I’m not making a statement about the writer’s spiritual condition but simply comparing the chorus of that 1972 song with the tax collector’s prayer.

*Lord help me Jesus, I've wasted it so
 Help me Jesus I know what I am
 Now that I know that I've need you so
 Help me Jesus, my soul's in your hand.*^{xii}

- *“Lord help me, Jesus...”* We see recognition of the need for help that only comes from Jesus. *“There is no other name under heaven...”* (Acts 4:12)
- *“I've wasted it so, Help me Jesus I know what I am...”* We see conviction, sorrow for sin and recognition of the need for mercy. The tax collector beat his breast and wouldn’t even look up to heaven, he knew who he was.
- The words, *“I know what I am”* is more than we can say of the Pharisee!
- *“...[N]ow that I know that I've needed you so, Help me...”* This mirrors the repentance that is implied when the tax collector pleads for mercy.
- *“Jesus, my soul's in your hand...”* reflects the recognition that salvation only comes through Jesus. He said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)^{xiii}
- Again, I’m not commending the author to you, but the lyrics are consistent with the way the tax collector came humbly to God.

Speaking of humility, Jesus spoke to that with these words and a real live illustration:

¹⁴ ...For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” ¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

So, What's the Takeaway?

- May we all be able to pray, *“God, I thank you I’m not like THAT GUY!”*
- In this case, THAT GUY was the Pharisee.
- Darrell Bock writes, *“The real danger of pride is that it blinds us to how we really stand before God. On the other hand, humility takes a sober look at where we stand, never forgetting that the standard of comparison is the character of God himself. We should never lower that bar so that we can easily jump over it. The credit of the tax collector is that he knew where he stood as he approached God. He was not a product of his own achievement, but a result of God’s kindness in extending mercy.”^{xiv}*
- The fact that the simple, humble, sorrowful prayer of the tax collector touches all the theological bases of salvation speaks to the reality that the message of the gospel isn’t complicated. It’s simply about recognizing our sinful condition and realizing that only Jesus can solve that problem.
- No sinner is so bad that they can’t reach for Jesus’ hand of mercy.
- Those of us who (like the tax collector) have prayed to ask for God’s mercy can rejoice that our sins have been covered and we now wear a “robe” of the righteousness of Christ.
- As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”^{xv}* To that we can say, “thank you Jesus,” and go home justified!

ⁱ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=That%20Guy>

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- ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Lk 18:9). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur, John F.. *Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed Through the Stories Jesus Told* (p. 116). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition. f
- ^{iv} *ibid* (p. 108).
- ^v Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Ro 7:24). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^{vi} Thomas, R. L. (1998). [*New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*](#). Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.
- ^{vii} [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Jn 2:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^{viii} Swanson, J. (1997). [*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)*](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- ^{ix} [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Lk 18:14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^x Easton, M. G. (1893). In [*Easton's Bible dictionary*](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.
- ^{xi} *ibid*
- ^{xii} <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/kriskristofferson/whyme.html>
- ^{xiii} [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Jn 14:6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- ^{xiv} Bock, Darrell L.. *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (p. 463). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
- ^{xv} [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ro 5:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.