

## **“The Power of Honesty”**

### **Luke 18:9-14**

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus told a parable to some people who had no regrets. They “trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt” (18:9). If they were alive today, these folks would have “No Regrets” tattooed on their arms.

“Two men went up to the temple to pray,” said Jesus, “one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector” (v. 10). The people listening to Jesus understood immediately that the Pharisee was a devout person, and the tax collector was a sinner.

The Pharisee stood by himself, because Pharisees stood apart from the crowd to preserve their purity before God. And then he began to pray, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income” (vv. 11-12). He was a man who practiced the disciplines of refraining from eating along with making generous donations to the temple.

The guy had no regrets.

“But the tax collector,” said Jesus, “standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (v. 13). In contrast to the Pharisee, the tax collector was full of regrets.

Then Jesus concluded the parable by saying: “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” (v. 14). The tax collector went home justified, which means that he was restored to a right relationship with God. The Pharisee, on the other hand, was not justified,

which means that he remained out of whack with God. The Pharisee exalted himself, putting his faith in himself instead of in God. And the result was that he was humbled.

This parable is a perfect illustration of the power of honesty. The tax collector was justified because he put his faith completely in God, asking God to be merciful to him. He took an honest look at his past, regretted many of his actions, and asked for God to forgive him. Regret “reveals what makes life worth living,” says Daniel Pink in his book called “The Power of Regret”. “There are some things in life that we really, really care deeply about.”

The tax collector cared deeply about being right with God, so he confessed his sins and asked for God’s mercy. He was humble enough to know that he needed help, and his request was granted because he made it with honesty and humility.

The good news is that most people want to do the right thing, and God is willing to help us turn our lives around and head in a new direction. Pink interviewed a woman who broke down and cried about her deepest moral regret: “She bullied a kid on a school bus when she was eight or nine years old.” Because she was humble and honest about this, she could use this regret as a spur to treat people more kindly in the future.

God really wants to forgive people who are willing to say, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Regrets can even help us turn into more effective leaders. Pink says that leaders in business should reveal their regrets to their teams and say, “Let me tell you about this regret that I have, this decision that I made that bugs me. And here’s what I did about it.”

That’s a winning leadership strategy, no doubt about it. Much better than if a leader stands up and proudly proclaims, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people!”

Honesty and humility. These are the qualities that can help make us right with God and with the people around us.

An anonymous author wrote this story about true honesty . . . A successful businessman was growing old and knew it was time to choose a successor to take over the business. Instead of choosing one of his Directors or his children, he decided to do something different. He called all the young executives in his company together.

He said, "It is time for me to step down and choose the next CEO. I have decided to choose one of you." The young executives were shocked, but the boss continued. "I am going to give each one of you a SEED today - one very special SEED. I want you to plant the seed, water it, and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from the seed I have given you. I will then judge the plants that you bring, and the one I choose will be the next CEO."

One man, named Jim, was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly, told his wife the story. She helped him get a pot, soil, and compost and he planted the seed.

Every day, he would water it and watch to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other executives began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Jim kept checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks went by, still nothing. By now, others were talking about their plants, but Jim didn't have a plant and he felt like a failure.

Six months went by still nothing in Jim's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed.

Everyone else had trees and tall plants, but he had nothing. Jim didn't say anything to his colleagues; however, he just kept watering and fertilizing the soil. He so wanted the seed to grow. A year finally went by, and all the young executives of the company brought their plants to the CEO for inspection.

Jim told his wife that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she asked him to be honest about what happened. Jim felt sick to his stomach, it was going to be the most embarrassing moment of his life, but he knew his wife was right. He took his empty pot to the board room.

When Jim arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the other executives. They were beautiful - in all shapes and sizes. Jim put his empty pot on the floor and many of his colleagues laughed, a few felt sorry for him! When the CEO arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted his young executives.

Jim just tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the CEO. "Today one of you will be appointed the next CEO!"

All of a sudden, the CEO spotted Jim at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered the Financial Director to bring him to the front. Jim was terrified. He thought, "The CEO knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me fired!"

When Jim got to the front, the CEO asked him what had happened to his seed, Jim told him the story.

The CEO asked everyone to sit down except Jim. He looked at Jim, and then announced to the young executives, "Behold your next Chief Executive Officer! His name is Jim! Jim couldn't believe it. Jim couldn't even grow his seed. "How could he be the new CEO?" the others said.

Then the CEO said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone in this room a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds; they were dead, so it was not possible for them to grow.

All of you, except Jim, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Jim was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new Chief Executive Officer!"

- If you plant honesty, you will reap trust
- If you plant goodness, you will reap friends
- If you plant humility, you will reap greatness
- If you plant perseverance, you will reap contentment
- If you plant consideration, you will reap perspective
- If you plant hard work, you will reap success
- If you plant forgiveness, you reap reconciliation

Be careful what you plant now; it will determine what you will reap later.

The first step is to see ourselves honestly, as the tax collector did, as the businessman did, and be honest about our failures.

After seeing ourselves clearly, we need to show some true humility. In this, we should listen to the words of the apostle Paul, who urged the Philippians to do nothing “from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Our role model for this is Jesus, who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross” (vv. 7-8).

Humble. Self-emptying. Obedient, Honest. These are the qualities of Jesus Christ and his true followers, qualities that led to Christ’s exaltation. Remember, said Jesus, “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). The path to God’s future includes serving others sacrificially, as we follow a Lord who “came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28).

Let us experience the power of honesty as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

May the peace of God . . .

#603 – God, When Human Bonds are Broken