

↳ As is true of most of the Lord's parables, this one is counterintuitive. This is in fact more than counterintuitive, it was outrageous, scandalous, even shameful by the religious standards of the day. The idea presented here had no place in the theology of that day.

1. This completely overturned their thinking.

- ✓ A self-confessed (society agreed) wicked man left the temple justified and self-confessed (society agreed) righteous man did not. Jesus commends the worst guy in this story, this would have gotten everyone's attention. Why is He telling this parable? He's been speaking of His second coming and this is part of that discussion. Who will be in His kingdom and who will be rejected? This is the answer to that. The answer to that question is a stunner! "It's not the man who thinks he is good, and society says is good who is justified, but the man who knows he is not good that is justified." The Jews knew God to be righteous, they knew He demanded perfection "Be holy as I am holy". "All our righteousness is as filthy rags" to God. They knew very well what the Psalmist reiterated in Psalm 143:2. How can this be accomplished? How can a person be justified? They should have known what got their original ancestor in Genesis 15:6. They should have known the promise of Isaiah 53:11. They knew they needed to be right with God, but by the time Jesus walks the earth, they had forgotten what their Bibles taught them. They had missed it all together, they didn't even understand that the Messiah must suffer and die! They had lost complete sight of the meaning of the sacrificial system, of Passover, of Isaiah 53. They had decided what the rest of world had decided; that you get to God by being good.

2. "What must I do to be right with God and have Him let me into His eternal Kingdom?"

- ✓ Jesus answers this question with an incredibly simple story. You would think that this question would lead to some convoluted, complex massive discussion of theology and religion, as it often does. But with profundity, clarity and simplicity, Jesus answers this question with this little story. Every religion whether it has a huge following or is some kind of self-styled religion that a person has concocted of their smorgasbord of beliefs, can be boiled down by a simple question: "what is required for a person to go to heaven?" "they have to be good." Turns out its not complicated or convoluted or complex: it is just simply either you can make yourself right with God or you can't; either you can achieve a righteousness that satisfies God or you can't. Either you can make yourself acceptable or it has to be done for you. Either you get to God by being good or you have to have it done for you. Either you are convinced that you are good or at least better than most and are really too good for God to send to hell, or you know for certain that you're more than qualified for hell and throw yourself on God's mercy. This is the simple division of every religion on the planet. Every religion whether it has a huge following or is some kind of self-styled religion that a person has concocted of their smorgasbord of beliefs, can be boiled down by a simple question: "what is required for a person to go to heaven?" the classic wrong answer is: "they have to be good." This religious train jumped the track way back at the gates of the Garden of Eden: two brothers brought different things to God for different reasons.
 - 1) Abel brought a sacrifice of blood, but it is not for the sake of blood as much as it is for sake of him doing what he was told, that he was accepted. "By faith Abel offered a better sacrifice" "faith comes by hearing" Is he the only one who heard? God told Cain, "If you do what is right, you will be accepted."
 - 2) Cain brought of the fruit of the ground. Again, not for the sake of the type of sacrifice as much as it was him not doing what he was told. He wanted his idea to be accepted instead of doing what God told him. He became the first to bring to God his deal, his plan of salvation instead of submitting to God's plan. Two ways divided in these two boys. One, the Religion of Personal accomplishment, of human achievement, of self-righteousness, seeks no mercy, no grace, no forgiveness, no sympathy. Or two, the Religion of Divine Accomplishment, where God provides your righteous, where you seek His grace, mercy, forgiveness.

3. We have the same division in this story.

- ✓ The Pharisee, self-righteous, seeks no mercy, no forgiveness or grace, thinks he needs no sympathy and no help, self-exalted, he goes away unjustified. The Tax Collector, the sinful outcast, standing as far away as he can, but wanting mercy and grace, distraught that he is not righteous, he goes home justified. Two men, two postures, two prayers, two results!

Those headed to hell seek God's commendation, those headed to Heaven seek His forgiveness.
