

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 4:1-15

### *Cain and Abel*

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”<sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.<sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?<sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.<sup>11</sup> Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.<sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.<sup>14</sup> Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”<sup>15</sup> But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

**4:1** *With the help of the LORD.*† Eve acknowledged that God is the ultimate source of life (see Ac 17:25). According to Luther’s translation (“I have the man, the Lord”) Eve believed that her son was the fulfillment of the promise in 3:15. (CSB)

Adam and Eve were the first sinners, but also the first believers, the beginning of the Church of God on earth. We walk in the footsteps of Eve’s faith. (Kretzmann)

BROUGHT FORTH A MAN - Hebrew phrase (qanithi) is wordplay on the name Cain (qayin). With the help of. Unusual grammar. Some interpreters, including Luther (AE 1:242), understand Hebrew to mean that Eve though Cain was the Lord incarnate, the fulfillment of the promise of the seed in 3:15. Eve’s statement more likely recognizes that the fulfillment of her role as mother is a gift from God and that God has seen her through the pain of childbirth (3:16). (TLSB)

CAIN – In the order of natural procreation, according to the blessing which the Lord had pronounced upon the man and his wife, Eve gave birth to a son, whom she named Cain (possession). (Kretzmann)

**4:2** *Abel*. The name means “breath” or “temporary” or “meaningless” (the translation of the same basic Hebrew word that is in Ecc 1:2; 12:8) and hints at the shortness of Abel’s life. (CSB)

This was her second child, her second son, whose name Abel (vanity) indicates that she was feeling the vanity of this earthly life and hoped all the more eagerly for salvation. (Kretzmann)

ABEL KEPT FLOCKS - Abel tended their flocks, which is probably implied in the distinction between “beasts of the earth” and “livestock” mentioned in the creation account (1:24-25), but this is the first time domestication is specifically mentioned in the Bible. (TLSB)

CAIN WORKED THE SOIL - Cain tended the soil that God had given his father. (TLSB)

**4:3–4** *Cain brought some of the fruits ... But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock*. The contrast is not between an offering of plant life and an offering of animal life, but between a careless, thoughtless offering and a choice, generous offering (cf. Lev 3:16). Motivation and heart attitude are all-important, and God looked with favor on Abel and his offering because of Abel’s faith (Heb 11:4). (CSB)

In the very mention of the gift there is an indication of the difference in the attitude of the hearts; for whereas it is said of Cain only in general that he brought of the fruit of the soil, it is stated concerning Abel that he brought of the first-born of his flock, such as were in the best of condition, rich in fat. The gifts thus expressed the difference between Abel’s free and joyful faith and Cain’s legal, reluctant state of heart, Heb. 11, 4; 1 John 3, 12. (Kretzmann)

**4:3** IN THE COURSE OF TIME - Literally, “end of days,” implying the end of the growing season. Cain’s offering is apparently intended as a thanksgiving offering for the harvest. The text does not record God commanding offerings of any kind, so we must assume that this is either a spontaneous offering of thanks or that God’s command was not recorded. (TLSB)

**4:4** *firstborn*. Indicative of the recognition that all the productivity of the flock is from the Lord and all of it belongs to him. (CSB)

Like Cain’s gift, Abel’s gift was a thank offering, in this case for the fruitfulness of his flock. (TLSB)

LORD LOOKED WITH FAVOR – ESV has “had regard. Hebrew “look at,” “gaze upon,” “pay attention to.” God favored Abel’s sacrifice. (TLSB)

The Lord searches the reins and the heart. He noted the humble faith of Abel, whose one thought was to give the Lord a proof of the sincere gratitude for all the goodness and mercy which had been vouchsafed him. But God saw also the hypocrisy of Cain's heart, the fact that he was not interested in the worship which his hands were performing. He therefore indicated His pleasure in the one case and His displeasure in the other, either by some outward sign visible in the smoke of the offering, or by a subsequent rich blessing in the case of Abel, or through the mouth of Adam, as the priest of the family congregation. It is not the outward size of our gifts and offerings which makes them acceptable in the sight of the Lord, but the attitude of our hearts and minds toward God. He wants pure love flowing out of sound faith. (Kretzmann)

**4:5 NOT LOOK WITH FAVOR** - ESV has "had no regard." God did not pay attention to Cain's offering. Abel's offering was not inherently superior to Cain's offering. Both were proper thank offerings. Throughout the OT, God looks with favor on offerings of grain and other produce, just as He does on offering of animals. God regarded Abel's offering because it was given in true faith (Heb. 11:4). Although the text does not say so directly, the language implies that the offerings were accompanied by prayer request, and that Abel received that for which he prayed but Cain did not. (TLSB)

*angry.* God did not look with favor on Cain and his offering, and Cain (whose motivation and attitude were bad from the outset) reacted predictably. (CSB)

This paragraph shows the progress of actual sin, from the evil desire of the heart to the sinful act. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel because of the latter's humble faith and his consequent acceptance by God. He was angry exceedingly, he was filled with bitter wrath, which was reflected in his face, in the expression of his eyes, in his distended nostrils. He fell to dark brooding and evil plotting. (Kretzmann)

**4:6 WHY ARE YOU ANGRY** – The Lord's warning at this time had reference both to the cause and to the possible consequences of Cain's wrath. He implies, first of all, that the brooding posture assumed by Cain, was unreasonable, foolish, in the circumstances. (Kretzmann)

Cain made the common mistake of thinking that God can be influenced by means of our offerings. God repeatedly reminds His people that He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious and will show mercy upon whom He will show mercy (Ex. 33:19). Irenaeus of Lyons: "God is not appeased by sacrifice...He who thus cherishes secret sin does not receive God by that sacrifice which is offered correctly as to outward appearance" ANF 1:485). (TLSB)

**4:7 DO WHAT IS RIGHT** – The fault lay altogether with Cain himself; for if he had done well, if he had had faith and shown this faith in truly good works, in acceptable offerings, then he would have experienced the appreciation for which he seemed anxious, and could have lifted his countenance in token of a good conscience. (Kretzmann)

Several aspects of this verse are difficult. “Will you not be accepted?” Suggests that doing good should be its own satisfaction. ESV note says “Hebrew ‘will there not be a lifting up (of your face)?’” (TLSB)

The meaning of the whole statement, then is this: As long as you do right you are acceptable to God, not in the sense of meriting such acceptance, but rather in the sense, warranted by the connection of a warning and a searching question: Have you forfeited your acceptability by doing ill? (Leupold)

*sin is crouching at your door.* The Hebrew word for “crouching” is the same as an ancient Babylonian word referring to an evil demon crouching at the door of a building to threaten the people inside. Sin may thus be pictured here as just such a demon, waiting to pounce on Cain—it desires to have him. He may already have been plotting his brother’s murder. (CSB)

Cain should resist the attempt of sin to rule him. The dominating power of sin does not come from God. (TLSB)

If, on the other hand, his sacrifice was not brought in true faith and he was now angry over his rejection, then sin, like a wild, predatory beast, would crouch at the door of his heart, eager for even the slightest opportunity to enter and to work its will. (Kretzmann)

6/18/11 – Gen. 4:7, “Sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you, but you must master it.” This is the same as the devil ever lurking like pictured in 1 Peter 5:8. God never leaves us with a temptation that is too much for us to handle. (1 Cor. 10:13). God always offers us His Spirit as our helper. We never have to face the devil alone.

James 4:7, too, urges a resisting action. Both the James and Peter texts point to the power of the Word. Eph 6:17 reminds that “sword of the Spirit” is the Word and an offensive weapon. Matt 6:33 reminds us that as we spend time in the Word God helps us. As we are in God’s Word we are in God’s presence and we have God in our midst. Fellow Christians are also a gift from God to help fight the devil.

Lord help me to search for ways to spend time in the Bible with family and friends.

*it desires to have you.* In Hebrew, the same expression as that for “Your desire will be for [your husband]” in 3:16 (see also SS 7:10). (CSB)

God warns Cain to resist the temptation to take out his anger and disappointment on his brother. Cf. 3:16 on the issues of “desire and rule” that confronted Eve. Melancthon: “(God statement) teaches the difference between inward righteousness and external sacrifices...There is (also) a warning concerning the coming judgment” (Chem, LTh 1:311). (TLSB)

That is as it should be in the heart of the child of God. Although the desire of sin is always directed against man with the intention of gaining control over him, yet the

believer will keep the upper hand, will hold the wrath of the heart back with the firmness of the sanctified mind. (Kretzmann)

**4:8** Cain did not heed God's warning. He gave in to the domination of sin and exercised his angry desire by killing his brother. (TLSB)

CAIN SAID TO HIS BROTHER – The warning of the Lord was disregarded, deliberately set aside, as he started a quarrel with his brother. (Kretzmann)

The substance of Cain's conversation with Abel may have been accidentally omitted from the Masoretic Hbr text used as the basis of most modern translations. (TLSB)

*attacked his brother ... and killed him.* The first murder was especially monstrous because it was committed with deliberate deceit ("Let's go out to the field"), against a brother (see vv. 9–11; 1Jn 3:12) and against a good man (Mt 23:35; Heb 11:4)—a striking illustration of the awful consequences of the fall. (CSB)

Cain did not try to keep the sinful desire of his heart in subjection, and so the end of the quarrel was murder. Note that the words "his brother" are repeated again and again, in order to emphasize the heinousness of the first murder. In our hearts also evil thoughts are found: murders, with all the jealousy, envy, bitterness, hatred, and anger that this climax of wickedness presupposes, and our constant endeavor must be to conquer the inclination toward all these sins and to keep the example of pious Abel before our eyes. (Kretzmann)

**4:9** *Where ... ?* A rhetorical question (see 3:9). (CSB)

God asked the question to give Cain the opportunity to confess his sin (cf. 3:11). (TLSB)

The arraignment of God in this case is like that against Adam and Eve after their transgression. The Lord confronts the murderer with a direct question regarding the whereabouts of his brother Abel, with the intention of working repentance in his heart. (Kretzmann)

*I don't know.* An outright lie. (CSB)

*Am I my brother's keeper?* A statement of callous indifference—all too common through the whole course of human history. (CSB)

That is the attitude of the hardened sinner, to deny all responsibility, to challenge the Lord with a bold lie: I don't know; am I supposed to be my brother's special keeper and guardian? Sin, willfully committed, always hardens the heart, until all hope of repentance, of a godly sorrow, is futile. (Kretzmann)

**4:10** *Your brother's blood cries out.* Abel, in one sense a prophet (Lk 11:50–51), "still speaks, even though he is dead" (Heb 11:4), for his spilled blood continues to cry out to

God against all those who do violence to their human brothers. But the blood of Christ “speaks a better word” (Heb 12:24). (CSB)

The great Judge now flatly confronts the murderer with the evidence of his crime: The voice of the blood of thy brother, every single drop of it, is crying to Me from the earth. Blood that is shed in malicious murder may not cry with a voice audible to men, but it cries to God, as the Avenger of all crimes, nevertheless; for murder belongs to the deeds that cry to heaven, a fact which lived in the consciousness of even the heathen nations. (Kretzmann)

**4:11** *curse*. The ground had been cursed because of human sin (3:17), and now Cain himself is cursed. Formerly he had worked the ground, and it had produced life for him (vv. 2–3). Now the ground, soaked with his brother’s blood, would symbolize death and would no longer yield for him its produce (v. 12). (CSB)

Adam was driven from the garden for his sin, was forced to toil to get the earth to produce fruit. Now Cain, as a result of his further sin, will be driven off the soil entirely. It will produce no fruit for him (v. 12). (TLSB)

The curse of God rested upon Cain in such a way that it denied him a form of sustenance by way of tilling the ground, the work with which he had till now gained his livelihood. Because the earth had been obliged to open her mouth wide, in the act of swallowing the innocent blood of Abel, therefore the soil now rebelled against the murderer, refusing to serve him as heretofore. (Kretzmann)

OPENED ITS MOUTH - Grave in which Cain buried Abel is pictured as the mouth of the land, which has opened to swallow the dead from the killer’s hand. (TLSB)

**4:12** *wanderer*. Estranged from his fellowman and finding even the ground inhospitable, he became a wanderer in the land of wandering (see NIV text note on v. 16). (CSB)

As Cain will not be able to earn his living by tending the soil, he will have to search for sustenance. (TLSB)

The irrational creature suffers and groans on account of the sin of man. The earth refuses to yield a crop to the murderer, no matter how hard he should attempt to coax it by the most careful tilling. A feeling of inward quaking, of trembling, of restlessness, would result in Cain’s outward fleeing, in a roving without home and without definite relationships. To this day this is the mark of the murderer, for his conscience will give him no rest, but drives him from one city to another, from one country to the next. (Kretzmann)

**4:13** *My punishment is more than I can bear*. Confronted with his crime and its resulting curse, Cain responded not with remorse but with self-pity. His sin was virtually uninterrupted: impiety (v. 3), anger (v. 5), jealousy, deception and murder (v. 8),

falsehood (v. 9) and self-seeking (v. 13). The final result was alienation from God himself (vv. 14, 16). (CSB)

Cain's punishment is twofold: expulsion from the land, so that he must wander the earth (v. 12) and separation from God (v. 14). His selfish response shows a lack of true repentance. Cain demonstrates no guilt or remorse over his sin; rather, he complains about the harshness of his punishment. (TLSB)

Instead of turning to the Lord in true repentance, Cain gives himself up to utter despair, declaring that the guilt of his sin is too great for him to endure, that the punishment meted out to him is too heavy for him to bear. His words imply an accusation against the Judge, who has laid upon him such an unendurable burden. (Kretzmann)

**4:14–15** *whoever ... anyone ... no one*. These words seem to imply the presence of substantial numbers of people outside Cain's immediate family, but perhaps they only anticipate the future rapid growth of the race. (CSB)

**4:14** HIDDEN FROM YOUR PRESENCE - Just as Adam was expelled from God's presence when he was forced out of the Garden of Eden, so Cain interprets his being forced off the land as an expulsion from God's presence. Separation from God is the most severe aspect of divine judgment. (TLSB)

I WILL BE A RESTLESS WANDERER – In bitter resentment the words pour forth from the mouth of Cain, accusing God of denying him as much as a single spot on the face of the earth where his foot might find rest. Moreover, whereas God had formerly revealed Himself also to him in the worship of the family, Cain now was condemned to be hidden from the face of God, in constant danger of the avenger of blood who might arise from among his brothers and sisters. The complaint of Cain was at the same time a plea for some sort of assurance on the part of God respecting his own safety. (Kretzmann)

WHOEVER FINDS ME - Cain expects to encounter his other siblings in his wanderings. They are not mentioned in this account because they are not important to the story of Cain killing his brother. The Bible does not attempt to give us a complete, detailed history of everything, but focuses on events most important to its theological purpose. (TLSB)

KILL ME - Following the biblical principle that the punishment should fit the crime, Cain expects that God's judgment against him for killing his brother will eventually lead to his own death. (TLSB)

**4:15** *sevenfold*. This "sevenfold" apparently means "seven times as heavy a punishment as Cain merited (Delitzsch). The statement as such give assurance to Cain. (Leupold)

*mark*. A warning sign to protect him from an avenger. For the time being, the life of the murderer is spared (but see 6:7; 9:6). For a possible parallel see Eze 9:4. (CSB)

Never described and important. What is important is the God continued to care for Cain even after pronouncing judgment on him, just as He provide clothes for Adam and Eve to show His ongoing care for them after the fall (3:21). Chemnitz: “God...clearly prohibits private revenge” (LTh 2:353). (TLSB)

To assure Cain that no revenge would be taken on him, the faith Lord gave Cain a sign. Some have understood this to be a visible mark of identification on his body. The Hebrew seems to suggest it was a miraculous sign God gave to Cain, similar to the signs to God gave to Moses (Exodus 4:8-9), to Gideon (Judges 6:17-22), or Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:5-8). In either case, the sign was a miraculous reassurance to Cain that his life would be spared. (PBC)

Again we hear in the narrative the voice of both law and grace. Sin cannot be ignored or justified. Cain must pay a penalty for his actions. But the God who pronounces the sentence also makes available to the criminal his protection and concern that he too not become a victim of violence. Cain is banned and blessed. He is marked man, in a positive sense. He leaves God’s presence but not God’s protection. (Hamilton)

That was God’s answer to Cain’s plea, a decree which delivered him to the pains of an evil conscience, after which he may later have welcomed death as a relief. A sevenfold vengeance the Lord threatened to every one who would slay Cain. At the same time the Lord transmitted to Cain some sign, or token, which secured immunity for him against any avenger of blood. Cut off from the companionship of decent human beings, therefore, ostracized so far as the children of God were concerned, Cain became a fugitive and a vagabond, a warning example to all men that would hear of his case that God will not be mocked. Thus the Lord always takes care of His saints, and will avenge their blood upon their enemies. They that trust in Him shall not be ashamed. (Kretzmann)

#### EPISTLE – 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

**<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**

**4:6** *drink offering*. The offering of wine poured around the base of the altar (see Nu 15:1–12; 28:7, 24). Paul views his approaching death as the pouring out of his life as an offering to Christ (see Php 2:17).

An allusion to the OT sacrificial system (cf Ex 29:38–41). Paul regards his eventual death (i.e., the pouring out of his blood) as an offering to Christ. (TLSB)

*my departure*. His impending death (cf. Php 1:23). (CSB)

A reference to Paul's death, which he believes to be near. (TLSB)

In this paragraph the apostle gives the reason for making his admonitions to Timothy so comprehensive and explicit. He himself was about to withdraw from the field, and so his successors in the work of the Gospel-ministry should always keep his example in mind: For I am about to be poured out as a drink-offering, and the time of my dissolution is at hand. As in Phil. 2, 17, the apostle here uses the term for making a drink-offering to designate his approaching death. He knows that he must soon die, that he must seal the testimony of the truth as preached by him with his blood. And still he speaks of his impending martyrdom with all the quiet confidence in God which knows no fear of death. His dissolution, his departure from this world, is at hand; his soul was destined soon to leave the body which had suffered so much in the interest of the Gospel. Death has not even a remnant of horror for him that trusts in Christ's death and resurrection. (Kretzmann)

**4:7** In this verse Paul looks back over 30 years of labor as an apostle (c. A.D. 36–66). Like an athlete who had engaged successfully in a contest (“fought the good fight”), he had “finished the race” and had “kept the faith,” i.e., had carefully observed the rules (the teachings) of the Christian faith (see 2:5). Or, in view of the Pastorals' emphasis on sound doctrine, perhaps “the faith” refers to the deposit of Christian truth. Paul has kept (guarded) it. (CSB)

Could refer to remaining personally in the faith that God has given and/or guarding Christian doctrine against false teaching and error. (TLSB)

A true believer may rather call out with the apostle: The good fight I have fought, my course I have run, faith have I kept. The great warfare for Christ against sin and unbelief had engaged the apostle ever since his conversion. It was a continual, hard, and fierce battle, but he had persevered to the end, he had not given way one inch, he could claim the honor of the victor. The course, furthermore, which had stretched out before him through the long years, like the track before a runner, he had finished; he had reached the end of his life of faith. No matter whether he had often stumbled by the way, no matter whether he had often been on the brink of losing courage, the Lord had enabled him to endure to the end. He had kept the faith; he had not only been faithful in the work of his ministry, but, through the grace of God, he had held his faith in his Redeemer secure against all attacks, in all persecutions. (Kretzmann)

**4:8** *crown of righteousness*. † Continuing with the same figure of speech, Paul uses the metaphor of the wreath given to the winner of a race (1Co 9:25). The crown of righteousness means the crown of glory which Paul expected to receive on the last day because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. (CSB)

Eternal life. Cf Rv 2:10. “The justified are due the crown because of the promise. Saints should know this promise, not that they may labor for their own profit, for they ought to labor for God's

glory. But saints should know it so they may not despair in troubles. They should know God's will: He desires to aid, to deliver, and to protect them" (Ap V 242–43). (TLSB)

*that day*. The day of Christ's second coming ("appearing"). (CSB)

Judgment Day described in Mt 25:31–46. *loved*. A reference to those who lived by faith. (TLSB)

With this blessed assurance in his heart the apostle was able to look forward beyond death and grave into the glorious future of eternity: Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord will deliver to me on that day, the righteous Judge, but not only to me, rather to all whose love was firmly placed in His manifestation. The apostle speaks so confidently, so cheerfully, as though he had death behind him and were even now about to receive the reward which had been promised to him. It is a characteristic of every Christian's faith that it trusts absolutely and implicitly in the promises of God, that the believer is altogether sure of his salvation. Of course, if the redemption of a man's soul depended upon his own works and merit, even in the most infinitesimal degree, this joyful confidence would be out of the question. But the true believer places himself altogether into the hands of the heavenly Father, knowing that no enemy can pluck us out of His hand. The prize and reward of grace is the crown of righteousness, the final declaration of righteousness by God, the final imputation of the righteousness of Jesus, by which we are free from all guilt and condemnation. This assurance is given to us before the throne of God, as the wreath was placed upon the head of the victor in the games of the Greeks. Christ, who will Himself be the Judge on the last day, will be acting in His capacity as just Judge in awarding this prize, not to works, but to faith. Since we shall appear before the judgment-throne of God with a firm reliance upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, it will be a merciful and yet a just judgment which will award to us the crown of righteousness. This is by no means a special privilege of the apostle, but, as he assures us, will be the happy experience of all those that have looked forward to the final revelation of the Lord, to His second advent, with the love that grows out of faith. All true Christians long for the redemption of their body, for the coming of their Lord to take them home. The words of the apostle therefore contain an earnest admonition to the believers of all times to be faithful and patient to the end, since the goal toward which they are striving will repay them a thousand fold for all the misery and tribulation of this short earthly life. (Kretzmann)

*His appearing*. Probably a reference to the Christian's longing for the Last Day; might also refer to Christ's incarnation. (TLSB)

**4:1–8** Faced with the thought of his imminent death, Paul impresses upon Timothy the importance of carrying on where Paul will leave off, preaching the Word faithfully. We should not judge our pastors' preaching on whether they say the things we personally like to hear. We should judge preaching instead on God's Word. God's Word sometimes cuts like a knife when it exposes our sin. But after the Law comes the Gospel of peace, binding up the wounds inflicted by the Law with the sweet Gospel, which proclaims Christ's forgiveness for all our sins. • Make me an ever-ready hearer of Your Word, O Lord. Do not let me seek preaching that satisfies my

sinful desires, but give me preaching that will continually return me to the forgiveness You have given me through Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)

**<sup>16</sup> At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

**4:16** *my first defense.* The first court hearing of Paul's present case, not his defense on the occasion of his first imprisonment (Ac 28). (CSB)

The legal proceeding that led to Paul's present imprisonment. (TLSB)

Here was another cause for deep sorrow which Paul felt constrained to register here: At my first defense no man stood by me, but all deserted me; may it not be charged to their account! It appears from these words that Paul had had a hearing, he had had one opportunity to refute the charges made against him. It was upon this occasion that he had a bitter experience, one which might have discouraged a Christian with less character. According to Roman law he was entitled to a certain number of witnesses or patrons, whose business it was to assist him. If any one might have expected loyalty from his friends, surely the great apostle was entitled to this consideration. But the opposite was the case. All the men upon whom he had thought he could depend absolutely had scented danger for their own persons in the proceedings and had deliberately deserted him. They were not strong enough in faith to be equal to the situation. But here also Paul suppresses all resentful and vindictive feelings, rather making intercession for the weakness of those whom he still believed to be Christians at heart, asking that this defection might not be charged to their account. (Kretzmann)

**4:17** *so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed.* Even in these dire circumstances Paul used the occasion to testify about Jesus Christ in the imperial court. (CSB)

Even when all others abandoned him, Paul remained confident in Christ's abiding presence. (TLSB)

*message.* Gk *kerygma*, "preaching" or proclamation of the word in v 15. (TLSB)

*I was delivered from the lion's mouth.* Since, as a Roman citizen, Paul could not be thrown to the lions in the amphitheater, this must be a figurative way of saying that his first hearing did not result in an immediate guilty verdict. (CSB)

Could symbolize deadly peril or describe an accuser at Paul's trial. Because of his Roman citizenship, it is not likely that Paul would have been put to death by lions in the amphitheater. Probably Paul was not declared guilty at his first defense. (TLSB)

As for Paul, he had a better advocate than any friend could have furnished him: But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, that through me the preaching might be fulfilled and all the heathen might hear; and I was delivered from the mouth of the lion. When he was forsaken by men, the Lord Himself was his Patron, whose support was worth more than all the assistance of men. He it was also, Christ the Lord, that granted to His servant strength in richest measure, thus enabling him to bear also this affliction with fortitude. And what is more, He gave him the courage to proclaim the Gospel-message in the very midst of his enemies. His defense of his cause, at the first hearing, had at least this effect, that he was given some respite, thus being enabled to gain time for a very necessary piece of work, namely, that of completing arrangements to have the Gospel sent out into all the countries of the known world. The mission of Crescens in Galatia or Gaul and that of Titus in Dalmatia were but a beginning for the carrying out of plans by which all nations should hear the glorious news of their salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus Paul can joyfully record that he had been torn out of the lion's mouth, that he had escaped, for the time being, from all the perils with which his enemies planned to overwhelm him. It does not seem, from the entire context, that Paul had actually been condemned to be thrown to the lions, and this would not seem very probable. (Kretzmann)

**4:18** *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack.* Since Paul fully expected to die soon (v. 6), the rescue he speaks of here is spiritual, not physical. (CSB)

Once more the apostle voices his firm trust in the power of his Lord: The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. This is putting the Seventh Petition into the form of a definite statement, which shows the nature of faith. From every evil work, from all the cunning, trickery, and power of Satan, from all the wickedness and persecution of the children of the world, out of all these evils the Lord will deliver and rescue His servant, so that, in the end, his enemies will be put to shame. Where the faith of Christ's servants is rooted and grounded in the Word of God, in the power of the Lord, there all the attempts of their enemies to harm them must come to naught. And if temporal death seems to have gained the victory and separates the soul from the body, the believers again are the gainers, for their inheritance in heaven is thereby given to them, they are kept by the power of Jesus Christ, their Lord, unto salvation. And therefore they gladly join in the doxology of St. Paul and give all honor and glory to Christ, who is God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, world without end. As often as a Christian thinks of the immeasurable blessings which have been imparted to him in Christ, he cannot refrain from voicing his thoughts in joyful thanksgiving to his Lord. (Kretzmann)

*heavenly kingdom.* Heaven itself. (CSB)

Eternal life beyond earthly death. (TLSB)

*glory.* Whether in life or in death, Paul continues to praise God's name. (TLSB)

**4:9–18** Paul requests that Timothy visit him at Rome, confident that his fellow Christian will prove faithful. We should not hesitate to ask others for their help, particularly when our need is great. Probably they are more than ready to give us aid and require only to know our need. The self-sacrificing generosity that Christians show toward one another comes from only one place: the self-sacrificing love of Christ Jesus, who gave Himself fully for our salvation. • Thank You, Jesus, that You have given all things for me. Give me Your Holy Spirit, that I may be bold, both to serve others with self-sacrificing love and to ask for such love from others when I am in need. Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Luke 18:9-17

### *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*

<sup>9</sup> **To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:** <sup>10</sup> **“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about<sup>a</sup> himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ <sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

**18:9** TO SOME – καί (also)—This parable is connected to the preceding discourse. Jesus *also* told this parable. (CC p. 677)

CONFIDENT OF THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS – As in 18:1, Luke begins with a very direct introduction that reveals the point of the parable. The parable itself is directed against those who fit Jesus’ assessment of Pharisaic attitudes: “to some who were trusting in themselves that they were righteous and who were despising others” (18:9). The most recent reference to the Pharisees as part of Jesus’ audience occurred at the beginning of his eschatological discourse (17:20). Those who trust in themselves (πεπποιθότας ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῖς) include the Pharisees, as the Pharisee in the parable holds up his own deeds before God. (CC pp. 679-680)

Believing their lives were acceptable to God. (TLSB)

EVERYBODY ELSE – The Pharisees are also among those who are despising “others” (τοὺς λοιπούς), for the Pharisee in the parable shows how he despises others when he thanks God that he is not like “the rest” (οἱ λοιποὶ) of men (18:11). “The rest” are probably other Jews, the common people, or *‘am—ha’arets* (“people of the land”), and not Gentiles, since Gentiles would not even figure in the Pharisee’s worldview. (CC p. 680)

In the Lukan context, Jesus has set up two challenging thoughts before the Pharisees. In 17:21, Jesus responds to a question concerning the coming of the kingdom by

saying, “The kingdom of God is among you” (17:20–21). Then Jesus answers the question of whether the Son of Man will find the faith on the earth (18:8) with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in 18:9–14. The kingdom is present in the ministry of Jesus, particularly in the ministry of Jesus at table with tax collectors and sinners. The Son of Man will find faith on the earth in those who accept God’s plan (βουλή; 7:30) as it manifests itself among sinners (such as the tax collector in this parable) who repent and join the table fellowship of Jesus. The immediate context and Luke’s introductory verse have set the stage for the parable itself. (CC p. 680)

**TOLD THIS PARABLE – καί**—This parable is connected to the preceding discourse. Jesus *also* told this parable. (CC)

**18:10 WENT UP THE TEMPLE** – For public prayers. (TLSB)

ἀνέβησαν—One “goes up” to Jerusalem since the city and the temple were built on mountains, with the temple hill being the highest point in the city. At the end of the parable, the tax collector “goes down” (κατέβη) to his home justified. (CC p. 677)

The structure of the parable is very simple. Jesus provides us with a frame that contains a circular movement of two men going up to the temple to pray (A—18:10) and returning from the temple to their homes (A’—18:14a). In between, we observe the actions of these two men, first the Pharisee (B—18:11–12) and then the tax collector (B’—18:13). In view of their actions while praying in the temple, Jesus makes a judgment about the two men (18:14a), out of which flows his concluding restatement of the principle of the Great Reversal, which he previously announced in 14:11. (CC pp. 680-681)

The first part of the frame identifies the place—the temple—and the persons—a Pharisee and a tax collector. They are going up to the temple (τὸ ἱερόν) for the purpose of public prayer (A—18:10). The temple plays a significant role at the beginning of Luke’s gospel

One of the major themes in the infancy narrative is the shift in the locale of God’s presence from the temple in Jerusalem to the flesh of the infant Jesus. See comments at 1:5–25; 1:26–38; 1:39–45; also 2:21–40; 2:42–52. The infancy narrative is framed by references to the temple, for the last two scenes are in the temple when Jesus goes to the temple for the presentation of his mother (2:21–40) and at twelve years old (2:42–52). ναός (“sanctuary”) occurs at 1:9, 21, 22, again in 23:45, and twice in Acts (17:24; 19:24). ἱερόν (“temple precincts”) is used at Lk 2:27, 37, 46 in the infancy narrative and frequently at the beginning of Acts (2:46; 3:1, 2, 3, 8, 10; 4:1; 5:20). (CC p. 681)

and at the end of Jesus’ ministry.

At the very end of his ministry, Jesus enters the temple and cleanses it so that it may serve as a locale for his final teaching (19:45, 47; 20:1; 21:5, 37, 38). Jesus remarks at his arrest that he has been available to his opponents in the temple

ever since he entered the temple on Palm Sunday (22:53). At the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain in the temple (23:45; ναός) tears in two. As many have observed, Luke frames his gospel with the temple, for in the very last verse of his record of Jesus' life, the Eleven and the other disciples return to the temple to bless God (24:53). (CC p. 681)

Between the infancy narrative and Jesus' Jerusalem ministry there are only two references to the temple: at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, where the devil begs him to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (4:9), and the reference here in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Is not the inclusion of this parable, set in the temple, at this point in the Lukan narrative significant? We are on the threshold of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, signaled as imminent since 13:31–35. Naming the temple as a scene for a parable reminds the hearer of the significance of the temple in the gospel and that Jesus will soon enter the temple, cleanse it, and teach in it until his crucifixion renders it obsolete (cf. 23:45). But it is still the locale of God's presence, and the hearer asks, "Do both the Pharisee and tax collector enter into this holy place with reverence for the presence that is located there, a presence that brings salvation?" (CC p. 681))

*to pray.* Periods for prayer were scheduled daily in connection with the morning and evening sacrifices. People could also go to the temple at any time for private prayer. (CSB)

προσεύξασθαι—An infinitive of purpose. (CC p. 677)

Implicit in the account is also a possible time framework, since Jesus tells us that the purpose of their going up was for prayer. Public prayer was permitted in the temple in the morning and the evening during the atonement sacrifice, which was made at 9 a.m. and again at 3 p.m. Private prayer could occur at any time. It is possible that the two men came to the temple at one of the two times set aside for corporate prayer, during which time it was customary for people to offer their own private prayers, specifically at the offering of incense after the morning or evening atonement sacrifices. (CC pp. 681-682)

Cf. K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 144–47. He notes this about the public hour of prayer:

Anyone on any unspecified day on his way to corporate prayers in the temple would naturally be assumed to be on his way to the atonement sacrifice. This service was the sacrifice of a lamb (for the sins of the people) at dawn. A second similar sacrifice was held at three in the afternoon [cf. A. Edersheim, *The Temple* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.) 152–73]. ... The time of incense was especially appropriate as a time of personal prayer because by this time in the service the sacrifice of the lamb had covered the sins of Israel and thus the way to God was open. The faithful could *now* approach Him (Edersheim, *Temple*, 157). The incense arose before God's face and the faithful offered their separate

petitions to Him. This background appropriately combines for us the idea of private prayers (which the two actors in this drama do indeed offer) in the context of corporate worship (in that the atonement sacrifice is mentioned in the parable) in a place of public worship like the temple (which is specified as the scene of the action) (pp. 146–47; emphasis Bailey). (CC p. 682)

Thus, these two figures may have come to the temple, the locale of God’s presence, precisely at the time of the atonement sacrifice, and atonement was the reason for the temple’s existence. This context would point to the promise of the sacrifice of *the lamb*, who would take away the sins of the people *once and for all*. (CC pp. 6810682)

**18:11 PHARISEE STOOD UP** – σταθείς—There is nothing unusual about the Pharisee standing up for prayer. This is the normal posture for prayer in the temple. “Having taken his stand” suggests that the Pharisee made himself visible to all. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 875–76, captures the sense of this verb when he says: “The verb probably implies a standing posture, but usually it indicates arrival at an intended destination and taking up a position there for whatever is to follow.” In contrast, the publican, stood “at a distance,” behind the Pharisee and the other worshipers. (CC p. 677))

The elements of the narrative are remarkably balanced with parallels between the Pharisee and the tax collector. They are introduced by a ὁ (“the”)/ὁ δὲ (“but the”) construction: ὁ Φαρισαῖος (“the Pharisee”; 18:11). ... ὁ δὲ τελώνης (“but the tax collector”; 18:13). And the prayer of each begins with the same greeting, “O God” (18:11, 13). The Pharisee, first, is presented with the worst of the traits a Pharisee might have. He stands by himself (πρὸς ἑαυτόν)

This could be translated in four different ways: he prayed to himself silently; about himself rather than God; to himself rather than to God; or by himself apart from others. The last alternative seems the most natural. Clearly, he prayed about himself, as his prayer indicates. It seems too much to suggest that he prayed to himself rather than to God. See L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 271, on the first three possibilities and K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 147–49, on the fourth. (CC p. 682)

apart from the other worshipers, but in a central location where everyone may see him. Even in private prayer, Jews usually do not pray silently, so this Pharisee probably prayed so that others would hear him. This is the point of his prayer! The picture here, then, is of a man who is arrogant and elitist. He sets himself apart from the rest of the worshipers but within earshot so that they can observe his piety and hear his prayer. He wants to impress those around him. The Pharisee uses the first person singular five times in two verses: “*I* thank you ... *I* am not like the rest of men. ... *I* fast ... *I* pay tithes on everything *I* obtain” (18:11–12). The Pharisee’s prayer is *eucharistic* and not *petitionary*, but he gives thanks to God *for himself* and not for the gifts God has given him. He petitions God for nothing since he needs nothing. He believes he is already perfect. (CC p. 682)

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 171, says: “The Pharisee’s posture is unmasked as idolatry. He was usurping the prerogatives of God, which is how the devil acts. To judge is God’s prerogative (cf. 1 Cor 4:5), not ours.” (CC p. 682)

PRAYED ABOUT HIMSELF – πρὸς ἑαυτόν—Of course, the prayer is *directed to* God. The phrase could mean “to himself” (silently, “in his heart,” W. Arndt, *Luke*, 378), but it is better to read it as “with reference to himself” (cf. BAGD πρὸς, III 5 a, and Mk 12:12; Lk 20:19) or “by himself” (= παρά τινι or παρά τινα; cf. BDF § 239 [1], [2]). The word order of the Byzantine uncials suggests “took a stand by himself,” while that of P<sup>75</sup> et al. suggests “prayed with respect to himself.” (CC p. 677)

I AM NOT LIKE – Arrogant pride. Aug: “He had no mind to pray to God, but to laud himself” (*NPNF* 1 6:455). (TLSB)

His prayer is specific in that he thanks God that he is not like all the rest (οἱ λοιποὶ)—something that Luke already hinted at when he said this parable was spoken to those who despised others (18:9; τοὺς λοιπούς). He distinguishes himself from three types of people: seizing, unrighteous, and adulterers. The seizing (ἄρπαγες; RSV “extortioners”) are greedy, grasping, rapacious. The Pharisees accuse others of what they themselves are most guilty, for Jesus uses a word from the same family to describe them as “full of rapaciousness and wickedness” (11:39; ἀρπαγῆς καὶ πονηρίας). It is even more ironic that this Pharisee claims not to be like the “unrighteous” (ἄδικοι), for the parable will conclude with the tax collector being “justified” or “declared righteous” (δεδικαιωμένος, from the same word family; 18:14), instead of the Pharisee. As Luke said in the introduction (18:9), some people are convinced that they are righteous, but they do not understand what that means. There is no evidence in the gospel that Pharisees are guilty of adultery, but in view of the OT use of adultery as a metaphor for apostasy from the true God and idolatry, the Pharisees are adulterers. (CC p. 683)

Finally the Pharisee thanks God that he is not like this tax collector, who is placed in the same category as extortioners, unrighteous, and adulterers. The Pharisee looks across the temple to see a well-known tax collector and uses him as the opposite extreme of piety. But the Pharisee is not through. He gives evidence for his piety: he fasts twice a week and pays tithes not only on his income but also on what he buys with that income. In first-century Israel, these clearly are works above and beyond what was expected of the pious faithful. (CC p. 683)

R. Stein, *Luke*, 450, n. 281, points out that this prayer is not a caricature of the Pharisees, since a strikingly similar kind of prayer occurs in the prayer of a Pharisee in the Talmud, *Berakot* 28b:

I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash ... and ... not ... with those who sit in [street] corners.” Also in *Sukka* 45b one rabbi boasted: “I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now, and were Eliezer, my son, to be

with me [we could exempt it] from the day of creation of the world to the present time, and were Jotham the son of Uzziah with us, [we could exempt it] from the creation of the world to its final end.” The same rabbi went on to boast: “I have seen the sons of heaven and they are but few. If there be a thousand, I and my son are among them; if a hundred, I and my son are among them; and if only two, they are I and my son.” (CC p. 683)

There should be no doubt to the hearers that this Pharisee has chosen an alternative means of salvation based on works—a way that is diametrically opposed to the kingdom that Jesus preaches and brings in his own person. (CC p. 683)

**LIKE THIS TAX COLLECTOR** – Expresses disdain. The tax collector is placed in the same category as the other sinners in the verse because of his hated occupation. “He who prays for grace in this way does not rely upon God’s mercy and treats Christ with disrespect” (Ap V 211). (TLSB)

**18:12** *fast twice a week.* Fasting was not commanded in the Mosaic law except for the fast on the Day of Atonement. However, the Pharisees also fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (see 5:33; Mt 6:16; 9:14; Mk 2:18; Ac 27:9). (CSB)

Not demanded by the OT. (TLSB)

νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου— Jews fasted on Monday and Thursday. According to Didache 8:1, Christians were to fast on Wednesday and “the day of preparation”—Friday—to distinguish themselves from the “hypocrites.” They may have chosen Wednesday because in Holy Week this was the day the plot against Jesus was hatched (Spy Wednesday), and of course Friday was the day he was betrayed and crucified. (CC pp. 677-678)

*a tenth of all I get.* As a typical first-century Pharisee, he tithed all that he acquired, not merely what he earned. (CSB)

In first-century Israel, these clearly are works above and beyond what was expected of the pious faithful. (R. Stein, *Luke*, 450, n. 281, points out that this prayer is not a caricature of the Pharisees, since a strikingly similar kind of prayer occurs in the prayer of a Pharisee in the Talmud, *Berakot* 28b: I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash ... and ... not ... with those who sit in [street] corners.” Also in *Sukka* 45b one rabbi boasted: “I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now, and were Eliezer, my son, to be with me [we could exempt it] from the day of creation of the world to the present time, and were Jotham the son of Uzziah with us, [we could exempt it] from the creation of the world to its final end.” The same rabbi went on to boast: “I have seen the sons of heaven and they are but few. If there be a thousand, I and my son are among them; if a hundred, I and my son are among them; and if only two, they are I and my son.”) There should be no doubt to the hearers that this Pharisee has

chosen an alternative means of salvation based on works—a way that is diametrically opposed to the kingdom that Jesus preaches and brings in his own person. (CC)

**18:13 THE TAX COLLECTOR – ὁ δὲ τελώνης—** (CC P. 678)

**WOULD NOT EVEN LOOK UP –** He does not even raise his eyes to the heavens (which is typical of Jews at prayer. (CC)

Knowing his inadequacy before God, he seeks a God who saves rather than condemns. (TLSB)

**BEAT ON HIS BREAST –** ἔτυπεν τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ—The durative imperfect, “he kept beating his chest,” suggests the continuous state of repentance of the tax collector. (CC p. 678)

*have mercy on me.* The verb used here means “to be propitiated” (see note on 1Jn 2:2). The tax collector does not plead his good works but the mercy of God in forgiving his sin. (CSB)

ἰλάσθητι—This is an example of a permissive passive and suggests the translation “let yourself be disposed to grace.” (CC p. 678)

The contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector is marked. The Pharisee presented himself in a position to be seen by everyone; the tax collector stands at a distance to be seen by no one because he is conscious of his sin. His recognition of his sin creates two actions of humility: he does not even raise his eyes to the heavens (which is typical of Jews at prayer), and he beats his chest as a sign of his unworthiness. The only other occurrence of this expression in the gospels and in all of Greek literature occurs in Luke’s gospel at the cross: the multitudes returned home after Jesus’ death “beating their chests” (23:48), an act of contrition because they knew they had conspired to kill God’s suffering, righteous Messiah. The tax collector’s conscience, his self-knowledge, allows him to say only one thing: “O God, be propitiated [ἰλάσθητι] toward me, the sinner” (18:13). The normal Greek expression for “be merciful to me” (RSV) is not used here, though it is used later on in this chapter when the blind man begs Jesus for mercy (18:38–39; ἐλέησόν με). The verb ἰλάσκομαι is used in the NT only at Heb 2:17 (“to expiate” sins) and here: “be propitiated,” passive with God as the subject. (CC pp. 684-685)

Cf. BAGD, 1–2; BDF, § 101. K. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 154, notes that the noun is used in Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10, where “it clearly refers to the atonement sacrifice. Expiation and propitiation as English words must be combined with cleansing and reconciliation to give the meaning of the Hebrew *kaffar*, which lies behind the Greek *hilaskomai*. The tax collector is not offering a generalized prayer for God’s mercy. He specifically yearns for the benefits of an atonement” (that God be propitiated by the sacrifice). (CC p. 684)

In view of the probable context of this prayer (the time of the atonement sacrifice), it makes sense to see this tax collector reflecting the faith of the remnant and yearning for the Messiah to come to his temple to make the final atoning sacrifice for the people's sins. And so he comes before God's presence during the incense offering and begs God to "be propitiated toward me, *the sinner*." He sees himself not just as a sinner among many, but as *the guilty one*, the embodiment of the classification. In comparing himself to others, he does not claim to be better; rather he knows and confesses that he is worst of all (as does St. Paul in 1 Tim 1:15–16). (CC pp. 683-684)

**18:14** *justified before God*. God reckoned him to be righteous, i.e., his sins were forgiven and he was credited with righteousness—not his own (v. 9) but that which comes from God. (CSB)

To be declared righteous and therefore acceptable to God. (TLSB)

δεδικαιωμένος—This perfect passive is theological: "this man went down to his home having been declared righteous" *by God*. (CC p. 678)

The frame of the parable is sealed when the tax collector, who has come up to the temple in order to pray (A—18:10), returns to his home "having been declared righteous" (δεδικαιωμένος). Jesus used this word to describe how the people and the tax collectors "acknowledged God as just" by submitting to John's baptism (7:29), but here it has its more common sense in which God declares someone righteous. This forensic sense is common in St. Paul's epistles. When considered in combination with ἰλάσθητι, "be propitiated," these words suggest that the sacrifice (atonement) is the basis for the declaration of the status of righteousness before God (justification).

R. Stein, *Luke*, 451, says: "Thus justification must involve a standing before God, for it is instantaneous. Like the Pauline teaching, it involves forgiveness (cf. 8:13 and Rom 4:6–8); but it also bestows a standing, i.e., a declared righteousness. This parable reveals that the Pauline teaching on justification is not an anomaly but is also found in Luke and is ultimately rooted in Jesus' teaching." (CC p. 684)

The irony here, of course, is that the one who goes down to his home "justified" is the tax collector and not the Pharisee. Again, it boils down to a simple matter of whom one trusts for salvation: either in oneself, as does the Pharisee, who exalts himself as the means of his own redemption because he trusts in himself that he is righteous (18:9; τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι), or in God and the atoning sacrifice he has provided (as does the tax collector). (CC p. 684)

EXALTS...HUMBLES – Only the humble would pray for and receive God's forgiveness (Pr 15:33; 16:18). (TLSB)

ταπεινωθήσεται ... ὑψωθήσεται—They are both theological passives: "will be humbled" *by God* and "will be exalted" *by God*. This saying occurs also at 14:11 in almost identical form. (CC p. 678)

The *prayers* of the Pharisee and the tax collector reflect the spiritual condition of each: pride versus humility. The principle of radical reversal, which Jesus has already enunciated at 14:11, applies: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (18:14).

C. Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 170–71, notes this about the reversal theme in Luke:

The story fits into the general theme of status reversal in the third gospel. The New Age will overturn the values and structures of the present evil age. We meet this theme in the birth narratives (1:51–53) and the Sermon on the Plain (6:20–26). In the travel narrative (9:51–19:44) Jesus’ teaching anticipates this eschatological reversal even now in overturning the estimate of what is virtue and what is vice. Consider 10:29–37 (good Samaritan/bad priest and levite); 10:38–42 (good inactive Mary/bad active Martha); 11:37–41 (good unclean/bad clean); 12:13–34 (good poor/bad rich); 14:7–11 (good humble/bad exalted); 15:11–32 (good prodigal/bad elder brother); 16:19–31 (good Lazarus/bad rich man); 18:18–30 (good poor/bad rich). Into this thematic context 18:9–14 fits (good tax collector/bad Pharisee) as another example of Jesus’ reversal of values. (CC p. 685)

The ultimate Great Reversal, as every catechumen knows, happens with Jesus himself, who humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:8) and was therefore highly exalted. As Jesus will say in Jerusalem in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (his final parable to the people): “The stone that the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner” (Lk 20:17). (CC p. 685)

**18:9–14** The Pharisee excludes himself from God’s gift of righteousness, while the penitent tax collector embraces it. Today, beware of the complacency of measuring your goodness against others. Measure yourself against God’s standards—then repent. God is ready to justify the worst of sinners by His generous grace in Christ. • God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Little Children and Jesus*

**<sup>15</sup> People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

The movement from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to this pericope about children and entering the kingdom is natural; they both have the same theme. The tax collector is a true disciple of Jesus in his humility and acknowledgement that God makes atonement for sin. Before God, he is as helpless as an infant. Precisely “infants and little children” have access through Jesus to the kingdom of God. “When the Son of Man comes, will he even find the faith on the earth?” (18:8). Yes! He will find the faith, but in the most unlikely places: in tax collectors and infants! (CC p. 687)

**18:15 BABIES** – Very youngest children, unable to make independent decisions. (TLSB)

**TOUCH** – For blessing. “We bring the child in the conviction and hope that it believes, and we pray that God may grant it faith [Luke 17:2; Ephesians 2:8]. But we do not baptize it for that reason, but solely because of God’s command. Why? Because we know that God does not lie [Titus 1:2]. I and my neighbor and, in short, all people, may err and deceive. But God’s Word cannot err” (LC IV 57). (TLSB)

**THEY BROUGHT...REBUKED** – Likely, they regarded babies as unworthy of the Lord’s attention. (TLSB)

προσφέρον ... ἐπετίμων—It is unlikely that these two imperfects describe a customary or repeated scene, as the disciples would have learned soon enough the Lord’s wishes. προσφέρον, rather, is conative (“they tried to”), and ἐπετίμων is most likely progressive: “kept rebuking”—until Jesus stopped them. (CC p. 686)

As Jesus draws closer and closer to Jerusalem, some persons (presumably the parents) try to bring little children to Jesus.

J. Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, trans. D. Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 49, suggests that the practice of bringing little children to rabbis or scribes for a blessing took place on the annual Day of Atonement during the evening before the sacrifice was made and the blood poured on the altar in the Holy of Holies and on the people. This observation may not be definitive for dating this passage on the 10th of Tishri, but it does suggest important theological ramifications for the infants being brought to Jesus as he approaches Jerusalem. It would also provide a connection to the previous passage, which has the Pharisee and the tax collector offering prayer in the temple, perhaps during the atonement sacrifice. Jesus alone is able to accomplish what the atonement sacrifices anticipated: release from bondage and the blessing of God. (CC pp. 687-688)

Luke emphasizes in 18:15 that these are infants or babies, who would not be able to choose or decide to believe in Jesus’ miracles and teaching. They must be *brought* into his presence. The desire to have Jesus touch them reflects the conviction that his fleshly presence conveys gifts of grace—blessings. The disciples view this as an infringement or as inappropriate. By rebuking those trying to bring the infants (as Jesus rebuked demons and fevers and winds), the disciples act as if they know what they are doing in responding to hostile intrusions upon Jesus’ ministry (see textual note on “rebuke” in 18:15). But in fact they show once again, by their rebuke, that they completely misunderstand the nature of the kingdom. (CC pp. 687-688)

This is not the first time the disciples have been instructed about the place of children in the kingdom. Following Jesus’ second passion prediction at the very end of his Galilean ministry (9:43b–45), a discussion arose among the disciples as to who was the greatest.

Jesus' responded to them by using a child as an illustration of who is great: "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me; for the one being least among all you, this one is great" (9:46–48). To be least in the kingdom is to be great—another logion from Jesus' teaching on reversal. But the parallel continues, for immediately following this illustration of children, the disciples undertook to *prevent* someone from casting out demons in the name of Jesus, and Jesus cautioned them that "whoever is not against you is for you" (9:50). The words of Luke 9 echo in Luke 18. At the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the disciples have not progressed beyond their confusion at the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry. (CC p. 688)

ALSO – καί—"Even" emphasizes that *even infants* are brought to Jesus. (CC p. 686)

BABIES – τὰ βρέφη—This word occurs six times in Luke-Acts and only twice in the rest of the NT. It means "baby, infant," either in the womb or after birth. Unborn babies, therefore, are deemed to be fully human persons. (CC p. 686)

TOUCH THEM – ἅπτηται—The crowds seek to touch Jesus in Lk 6:19. A hemorrhaging woman touches the tassel of Jesus' garment and is healed in 8:44–47. Jesus uses touch to heal a leper in 5:13, to raise the widow's son at Nain in 7:14, and to heal the ear of the high priest's servant in 22:51. Clearly for Luke, to touch Jesus or be touched by him brings one into contact with God's power to restore and bring the new creation. (CC p. 686)

REBUKED THEM – ἐπετίμων—This a rare occurrence of the disciples rebuking someone. The hearer knows that Jesus shows his power to release creation from its bondage by rebuking demons (4:35, 41; 9:42), fevers (4:39), and the wind in a storm on the Sea of Galilee (8:24). He has also rebuked his disciples so they would not speak about the messianic passion secret (9:21) and for wanting to cast fire on a Samaritan village for rejecting Jesus (9:55). Jesus does command his disciples to rebuke those who sin against them, and if they repent, to forgive them (17:3). That kind of rebuke is Law in the service of the Gospel. But here the disciples are using the Law to exclude people from the blessings of the Gospel—a misuse of the keys of the kingdom. In the next verse (18:16) Jesus will instruct them in the proper use of the keys. (The other two occurrences of the verb in Luke are in 19:39 and 23:40.) (CC p. 686)

**18:16** THEM – αὐτά—The antecedent for the first αὐτά is the infants (τὰ βρέφη). (CC p. 686)

LET – ἄφειτε—This aorist imperative, "release," shows that it is part of Jesus' program to release those in bondage. Elsewhere the verb often means "to forgive," e.g., twice in 11:4. The sense of "allow, let, permit" for ἀφήμι (BAGD, 4) surely grows out of "let go" (BAGD, 1). The "infinitive as complement of a verb" with meanings such as "allow, permit, hinder," etc. "borders closely on the infinitive of purpose and result" (BDF § 392). (CC pp. 686-687)

The disciples attempt to prevent those who would bring infants, but the disciples fail. Jesus overcomes their ignorance with his simple summons (προσεκαλέσατο) for the infants. He speaks a command that serves as an absolution: “Release [ἄφετε] the little children to come to me” (18:16). He tells the disciples to release the children so that they may share in the kingdom and the new creation that come through his flesh—his flesh that he will give for the life of the world (cf. Jn 6:51). He is the baby conceived and born as the King of the kingdom (Lk 1:32–33), and to physically touch him or be touched by him is to partake of the blessings of that kingdom. (See the textual note on “touch” in Lk 18:15.) The disciples have yet to comprehend just how the kingdom comes through Jesus’ flesh and how all are welcome to come to Jesus. (CC p. 686)

**LITTLE CHILDREN** – τὰ παιδία—Jesus switches to “little children” from “infants” (τὰ βρέφη) in 18:15 (cf. Mt 19:14; Mk 10:13). The word here can mean “very young child, infant” or “child.” Little children” includes both infants and children. (CC p. 687)

**DO NOT HINDER** – ἢ κωλύετε αὐτά—“Stop preventing them” accents Jesus’ command of release that reverses their behavior of rebuking those who bring the infants. The present imperative with μή “forbids the continuance of the action, most frequently when it is already in progress; in this case a demand to desist from the action.” The disciples had tried to prevent someone from casting out demons in Jesus’ name (Lk 9:49), but Jesus told them not to prevent such people, for they may be fellow disciples (9:50). The harshest words Jesus has for the lawyers is the accusation that they took away the key of knowledge, not entering the kingdom themselves and preventing others from entering (11:52). Positively, this word is used in connection with entering the kingdom through Baptism in Acts in these rhetorical questions: “What prevents me from being baptized?” (8:36) and “Is anyone able to prevent water from [being used] to baptize these people?” (10:47). (CC p. 687)

**KINGDOM OF GOD** – The kingdom of God comes to all who humbly trust the Lord, no matter what their age or status (1Co 1:27–29). *belongs*. Just as an infant may inherit the parents’ blessings and property, so any person may receive the inheritance of God’s kingdom—salvation. Grace, faith, and everlasting life are gifts of God. (TLSB)

Having announced release, Jesus tells the disciples not to prevent the infants and little children from coming to him. To prevent the children from coming to Jesus is to keep from them what is there *for them*. To *such as these* (τοιούτων) belongs the kingdom of God. By their simplicity, humility, and utter inability to come to Jesus, infants and young children demonstrate the characteristics and posture of those who enter into the kingdom. The kingdom comes to those who are the least among humanity and who have nothing to offer God. Salvation is by his initiative and by his gift. Children are the best examples of the humility Jesus speaks of at the end of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (18:14). (CC pp. 688-689)

In typical Lukan fashion, the central point is reiterated, here introduced with “Truly I say to you ...” (18:17a). Luke records this ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν of Jesus only six times, all in critical locations. Jesus’ pronouncement here is momentous: to receive the kingdom of God *by faith*, one must be as a child: humble, helpless. In trying to prevent little children from being touched by Jesus, the disciples were preventing them from entering the kingdom. If the disciples were to continue to turn away children, they would show that they do not understand the nature of the kingdom, and so they themselves would not enter into it! Note Luke’s chiasmic structure: preventing children from coming to Jesus (18:15) and not entering the kingdom (18:17) frame Jesus’ exhortations that to enter the kingdom one must be like a child (18:16). Childlike humility and faith, given by God, are the means by which he brings people into his kingdom. (CC p. 689)

Jesus’ final woe to the lawyers also re-echos here: “Woe to you lawyers, because you took away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter in [εἰσῆλθατε], and those entering in [εἰσερχομένου] you prevented [ἐκωλύσατε]” (11:52). The reverberations are both verbal and conceptual. By preventing the little children from coming to Jesus, *who is the key of knowledge*, the disciples are acting like Pharisees.

D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 203, notes:

The disciples are perilously close to fulfilling Jesus’ direst warning against leading “little ones” astray (17:2)! And they are now guilty of the charge leveled against the Pharisees-scribes at table in 11:52: *they have become like the Pharisees!* For in their rebuke of the parents in v. 15, they imitate the Pharisee of 18:9–14, who exalts himself, and copy those among them who “treat others with snubbing” (18:9). (CC p. 689)

Instead of seeing childlike humility as essential for entrance into the kingdom (as exhibited by the tax collector in the previous parable), they choose to imitate the Pharisee’s arrogance by preventing infants and little children from entering into the presence of the kingdom in Jesus. (CC p. 689)

Would a first-century catechumen apply this passage to infant Baptism? Surely early Christians too must have asked whether or not infants could enter into the kingdom without mature intellectual comprehension. The worst charge that could be leveled against a disciple is that he prevented someone from entering the kingdom (cf. 11:52). Is it just a coincidence that Luke uses the word here for preventing someone from entering the kingdom twice more in Acts in connection with Baptism? The Ethiopian eunuch asks what prevents him from being baptized (8:36; τί κωλύει με βαπτισθῆναι), and Peter asks what is to prevent Cornelius and his household from being baptized (10:47; κωλύσαι τις τοῦ μὴ βαπτισθῆναι τούτους). Neither the Ethiopian eunuch nor Cornelius’ household is Jewish. Like tax collectors, sinners, and infants, they seem to be the least likely to “qualify” for entrance into the kingdom. “Stop preventing them” (18:16) also implies the mandate “Do not prevent infants or Gentiles from receiving the gifts of the King through Holy Baptism.” (CC pp. 689-690)

**18:17** *like a little child*. With total dependence, full trust, frank openness and complete sincerity (see Mt 18:3; 19:14; Mk 10:15; cf. 1Pe 2:2). See note on Mk 10:15. (CSB)

Children have to trust and receive the care of others, and only in the same way does the kingdom of God come to us. (TLSB)

WILL NEVER ENTER IT – οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν—Jesus will speak of the rich man’s inability to enter into the kingdom of God (εἰσελθεῖν) in the next pericope. This is another similarity to Jesus’ woe to the lawyers because they prevent people from entering into the kingdom (Lk 11:52; οὐκ εἰσήλθατε καὶ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους ἐκωλύσατε). Jesus has also told the disciples to “struggle to enter in [εἰσελθεῖν] through the narrow door, because many, I say to you, will seek to enter in [εἰσελθεῖν] and they will not be able” (13:24), an image that he later uses to refer to entering into the eschatological banquet (14:23). (CC p. 687)

**18:15–17** Jesus includes children in His kingdom and teaches that we must be like them to enter the kingdom. No one has a greater claim to the kingdom than a newly baptized infant, whom Jesus welcomes with loving arms—that is grace. • Give us grace to receive Your kingdom, O Lord, as babies welcome and trust their parents’ loving arms. Amen. (TLSB)