

“I Give Up...Superiority”

Luke 18:9-14

March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

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A doctor says to the patient, “Your lab tests came back. Your cholesterol, weight and self-importance are all too high.”

We are not to think of ourselves better than we really are. In the Biblical parable/story that our new members read we find someone who just might have an ego or superiority problem.

Some may remember a hymn written in the 1700’s...not that any of you were around in the 1700’s...but the hymn was sung for many years and included in most hymnbooks. Speaking of hymns...don’t forget the Gospel Jubilee this Saturday at 6:30. Vote for you top favorite hymn and put it the box in the Multi-Purpose Room. The hymn Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed was written by Isaac Watts.

“In the Fall of 1850 at the age of thirty, Fanny J. Crosby went to the altar at the Thirtieth Street Methodist Church in New York City. She had been to the altar twice before but had not received the peace she sought. While at the altar the congregation was singing the hymn "Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed", according to her own testimony and in her own words she says:

"...it seemed to me that the light must indeed come then or never; and so I arose and went to the altar alone. After a prayer was offered, they began to sing the grand old consecration hymn, 'Alas, and did my Saviour bleed, And did my Sovereign die?' And when they reached the third line of the fourth stanza, 'Here Lord, I give myself away,' my very soul was flooded with a celestial light. I sprang to my feet, shouting 'hallelujah,' and then for the first time I realized that I had been trying to hold the world in one hand and the Lord in the other." (Story behind the song...hymnology)

It’s as if Fanny Crosby said, “I Give UP.” No longer the world in one hand and the Lord in the other. But all for Jesus. Fanny Crosby would go on to write more than 8000 hymns including one of my favorites, “Blessed Assurance.”

Now back to the hymn “Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed.” In the mid 1800’s Ralph Hudson added the refrain (the chorus) that said,

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away,  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!

Now growing up I seem to remember singing that song with the first verse being...

Alas! and did my Savior bleed  
And did my Sov’reign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?

In most hymnals they changed the words “For such a worm as I?” to “for sinners such as I. I guess to be a sinner is one thing...but a lowly worm...oh my... I don’t want to think of myself like that. Why that is degrading. I guess it is easier to confess, “Yes, I am a sinner.” As opposed to “I am a worm.”

Now please don’t get me wrong I am very concerned about people with low self-esteem. As one who has battle self-image and self-esteem issues this sermon is not about that. It is about the realization that with Jesus we are nothing. Worm, caterpillar, crawly thing or sinner...without Jesus we cannot think of ourselves as we ought to think.

With pun intended...Lego of my Eggo (**image**). Or Lego of my ego!

So we find 2 men, 2 prayers and 2 attitudes and 2 results.

The 2 men: A Pharisee and a Tax Collector. Now if you happen to use the King James Version of the Bible it will say a Pharisee and a Publican. But we are keeping Democrats and Publicans out of this conversation today!

A Pharisee was a religious leader. He knew the Law...the Law of Moses. He was often very legalistic in his behavior and his interpretation of the scripture.

Then we have to tax collector. A tax collector was often lumped in with the term sinners...such as “sinners and tax collectors.” They were Jewish people that worked for the Roman government (shame on them) and not only that they often overcharged for taxes and pocketed the extra. They were looked on as outcasts. But by the way...one of the Disciples, Matthew (Levi) was a tax collector.

Now let’s look at their prayers. The Pharisee’s prayer is more than 4 times longer than the tax collector’s.” The tax collector’s prayer is only 7 words.

I grew up where we had Sunday morning service, Sunday evening service, and Wednesday prayer meeting. Although I went to youth group and Sunday evening service I hated missing Sunday evening TV. Yes I even missed the 2 most popular shows: Bonanza (**image**) and The Wonderful World of Disney (**image**). Oh the sacrifices I had to make to learn about Jesus!

Particularly on Sunday evening or Wednesday night the pastor would often call on someone from the congregation to pray. He didn’t ask them ahead of time. I was often amazed because they would change and lower their voice tone, raise their volume and change their speech pattern and the words they used. “Ohhhhh, Goooodddddd...thou knowest we are thine and we beseech thee for thy comfort...” Wow...they didn’t talk that way before or after church.

Just a reminder friends that prayer is conversation with God where we talk and listen. Here is the prayer of the Pharisee,

**‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.**

Interesting prayer. And now here is the Tax Collector's prayer: **'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'** A little different.

2 Prayers. 2 Men. 2 attitudes. Let's again look at the Pharisee's Prayer.

**'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'**

Hmmm....notice anything. Lego of my ego!!!! He needs to see a spiritual optometrist for his "I" problem. Now I've been called 4 eyes before...but this is 5 I's. A handful of I's. He is standing by himself...perhaps to stand out. I wondered if he lowered his tone, but raised his voice. Look at the superiority. I am not like other men. I am not an extortionist. I am not unjust. I am not an adulterer. I am not like that other guy in church. I am more spiritual than him. I fast twice a week (Jewish law only said you were required to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement), and give tithes on ALL that I get.

Look at all the things I do. I do more therefore I am better than the other person. The Pharisee thought he was righteous where the tax collector depended on God for righteousness.

Here again is the Tax Collector's prayer: **'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'** Simple, short, authentic. He did not even want to get close to the front..he was "standing far off." He would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. The Pharisee said, I,I, I, I, I. And the tax collector instead with his hand made a fist and beat his chest while he prayed. I wonder the tone and volume of the tax collector's prayer. My opinion here...I think it was not loud, but very intense. Kind of like a cry. Hand on his heart. He certainly had no pride.

2 men. 2 prayers. 2 attitudes. 2 results. Jesus says one went home justified rather than the other. Or as the Contemporary English Version says: "When the two men went home, it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God."

Who are we to think we are superior to others. Look at me...I have an education. Look at me I have money. Look at me I am successful in my career. I have a new car. While you...you.....And Jesus said, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

I Give up...my heart. I give up...control. I give up...expectations. I give up...superiority. Your will. Your way. Always.

We are not superior because of what we have done. As followers of Jesus we are who we are because of God's grace. And here is our common ground:

**Romans 3:23Contemporary English Version (CEV)**

**<sup>23</sup> All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.**

Notice the first word. Does that mean that the rich has sinned? YES. Does that mean that the highly educated person with more degrees than an oven has sinned? YES. Does that mean the one with newest fanciest car has sinned? YES. Does that mean the one with the biggest bank account and nice retirement plan has sinned? YES. Does that mean the person that is homeless has sinned? YES. Does that mean the person of another color has sinned? YES. Does that mean that the person who speaks a different language than us has sinned? YES. Does that mean the person that looks 'different' than us has sinned? YES.

Now that was kind of done in a negative way to show that we are the same. There is no class; there is no superiority when it comes to God's grace and love. It is not a we versus them. How dare we say I'm more of a Christian than they are? Really? You going to say to the person sitting by you...I am a better Christian than you? I hope not.

We give up Superiority to find that there is a common ground among us all. We are all sinners...but now here this hope.

Just as we are all sinners...notice what happens when we believe. **Galatians 3:28**  
**Contemporary English Version (CEV)** <sup>28</sup> **Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman.**

Whether you are educated or not, whether you are poor or rich, whether you live in a mansion or homeless, whether you have nice clothes or tattered clothes, whether you are white or a person of color, whether you speak English or another language, whether you know the Bible frontwards and backwards or whether you own your very first Bible....we are equal with each other. Give up superiority. What right do we have to place our ego and our Pharisaic attitude on others? Give it up. We are equal with each other because of the grace we have received in Jesus.

Let me share a story I may have shared before. It has been around awhile. May we apply it today as we give up Superiority.

His name was Joe. He had wild hair, liked to wear a T-shirt, jeans with holes in them and walk around barefoot. He had tattoos and an interesting looking hair design. He is intelligent, a little shy, but very, very bright.

He became a Christian while attending college and across the street from the campus was a well-dressed, very conservative church. They'd been wanting to develop a ministry to the millennial, but just weren't sure how to go about it.

So one day Joe decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair, tattoos and piercings. The service has already started, so Joe starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find anywhere to sit. By now people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Joe gets closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right there on the carpet in the middle of the aisle. Well, that had never happened in this church before!

The people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the pastor realizes that from way at the back of the church, an usher is slowly making his way toward Joe.

Now the usher in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and dressed very nice. A Godly man, very elegant, very dignified. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this young man, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do. But this ain't going to end well. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time before the usher reaches the young man. The church is utterly silent, except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the usher does what he has to do.

But then they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't feel alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion. When the minister regains control, he says, "What I'm about to preach, you'll never remember. What you've just seen, you'll never forget."

Let's give up superiority.

We are going to have a time of silent prayer right where you are seated.

At the end of the prayer, if you feel so led, I am going to pray the prayer the tax collector said.

I am going to say it in phrases. You are welcome to repeat the phrase out loud after I say it.

GOD...BE MERCIFUL TO ME...A SINNER!