

Radical Desperation//Luke 18:9–14; 35–43

What I'd love for you to do this Christmas is spend some time thinking about what is most valuable thing to you... if you are a Christian, it would have to be that you know that your sins are forgiven and that you have peace with God and the assurance of going to heaven when you die, and that was given to you absolutely free. If that's true, there is no possible way you could live your life collecting stuff for yourself. There are people all over the world who have not had access to the Gospel, and this offering, 100% of it, goes to take the Gospel to them. (You can see exactly what it's spent on in your wg). I want you to pray about making a massive gift to it; not your lunch money, but a massive gift to the cause of global missions and poverty relief.

Week 2 of RADICAL: and I feel like I might need to diffuse the word "radical" for you? (Some of you see that word and that picture and think... radical? We ending this service by marching on an abortion clinic after this, or a book burning)? **The assumption in our culture is that religious radicals are dangerous.** And for some religions that certainly might be true. But think of it this way: a radical is someone who follows, fervently, the tenets of their religion, right? Well, Jesus, when it came to fight, laid down His own life in service and love for us. A Jesus-radical would do the same. I know that a lot of Christians are harsh, intolerant, or even violent... but **the problem, though, is not that their Christianity is too radical, but that it's not radical enough.** If they were really radical, you'd see them loving and serving and dying, like Jesus.

The reason we chose the word radical is because it describes the way we ought to respond to the size of God. **The size and majesty of God and the greatness of His salvation demands a radical reorientation of our lives** Jesus didn't die to make lukewarm, half-hearted, milk toast, churchified followers who come to church 3x a month. The cross was too expensive and God is too awesome for that. I'm personally tired of churches whose lazy commitments and uninspiring sacrifices tell the world a lie about the greatness of God.

At the end of the message, I'm going to give you a chance to do something radical: BAPTISM. Many of you thinking about it... You've trusted Christ; or maybe you've just never been baptized as a profession of your faith since becoming a believer... well, today is your day.

There is a running theme in Luke 18: that is that **almost all of our spiritual ills come from underestimating the size of God.**

Last week, your campus pastors led you in a study of Luke 18:1–8 and we saw that people usually don't pray because they

underestimate God's willingness to help them.

- Jesus tells this ridiculous parable about a crooked judge who doesn't care at all about anybody but himself... he's the Donald Trump of judges; the Judge Judy of the 1st century... but eventually even this grumpy old judge gives this woman what she wants because day and night needles him until he just can't bear it anymore...
- Jesus' point was this: "If even an cranky old judge would do that for a woman who was persistent in her asking, how much *more* will your heavenly Father, who is the epitome of love and righteousness, listen to you and give you what you need if you ask Him?"
- **So we fail to pray and look to God for help and peace because we underestimate the size of His willingness to help us.**

In the next parable, which we're about to go through, you're going to see a guy that underestimates the size of God's holiness, and because of that, he thinks too much of his own righteousness. Watch:

Luke 18:9–14 *9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

Tax collectors... they were basically the scum of society. Whatever you don't like about society—big business CEO's; government bureaucrats, Duke fans, Carolina fans... these guys represented that.

Listen, **these guys were not just what we would think of as IRS agents (even as unpopular as those might be anyway);** tax collectors were traitors to their people. They were Jews who worked for the Romans. **We have this romantic picture of Rome from movies like *Gladiator* which is totally wrong...** when Rome came in and conquered the Jews, they brutally massacred thousands of them, crucifying a bunch of them up and down the road for miles coming into the city just to make a statement about their strength. If there was any opposition to their dictatorship they crushed it mercilessly. **Then, get this, they charged a tax from these conquered Jews for "protection."** (They were like, "Protection from who? That's like paying Al Qaeda to keep terrorists off your plane.) **Well, they figured out it was easier to get Jews to collect the tax for them,** so they employed these Jews to collect it from their neighbors. So, these Jewish tax collectors were traitors; **in addition to that, these Romans didn't really care how much commission you charged, as long as they got their share.** So these guys charged exorbitant rates. They were thieves who used Rome's brutal power to get rich off their brothers and sisters. They were so hated they weren't even allowed to give testimony in court.

The other guy praying—the Pharisee—these were the good guys. They were the backbone of society; they were patriotic; honest in business; no doubt this guy was faithful to his wife; he was a regular at church; I'm sure he went to the PTA meeting and did community service; see, (v. 11) he even thanks God for all the blessings he has. Today, this guy would be a seminary professor or a respected elder at a church.

11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers—especially this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ("I" is not a good prayer pronoun!)*13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'*

Now, you have to understand Jesus to get this story. Jesus is not saying there is really one guy in this story who is righteous and another who is unrighteous. He is saying that there are two unrighteous guys, but only one realizes it.

Jesus taught that religion has a way of covering up the evils in our heart and hiding them from us so that we don't realize them. Inwardly, a lot of religious people are every bit as self-centered and greedy as "sinners" are, if not more so, but religious people have laid on a moral, religious coating over it all that makes them blind to the state of their heart.

- I don't have long to go into this, but let me just tell you one story I've told before to illustrate this: **Kid and sexual prowess**
- (Why some of Western culture's critics, Marx and Foucault, have pointed out that religion and the quest for power often go hand in hand).
- That's why a lot of times religious people, like the Pharisee in this story, are some of the worst people to be around... they are proud and condescending and despise other people.

I'm at church, so I'm talking to a bunch of religious people... Jesus taught us that if we have never come to terms with how devious our heart is, we've never really known ourselves.

And like this religious guy, we tend to look at others and think about how much better we are than them.

Now, we all do this:

- religious people look down on non-religious people and think, "I'm religious, and that makes me better than you";

- and if you're not religious you look down on religious people and think, "Well, at least I'm an accepting person and not one of those religious hypocrites who is always judging everybody else by their moral standards (not realizing of course that you are doing to the religious person, at that moment, the exact same thing you think they are doing to you)"
- if you are on the political left you think about how much better you than those money-grubbing, big-business loving, SUV driving hypocrites on the political right; and if you're on the political right you think about how much better you are than all those truth-hating, free-loving, big government-spending, abortion-promoting communist pinkos on the left; mutual contempt society... always lifting ourselves up above other people.

So, here's the really scandalous part of this story, the part that knocked everybody there off their camel: the guy who was really bad, the tax collector, (*14 I tell you, this man*) went *down to his house justified, rather than the other.*

- How?
- Strange Greek word in the tax collector's prayer in vs. 13: "God be merciful to me a sinner." *Hilaskomai* = "Propitiated." Word that means "substitution." Word they used in their animal sacrifices. Once a year Israel's high priest would take a lamb on behalf of the whole country and he would lay his hand on the head of the lamb and slit its throat, then collect its blood and pour it out on the altar, at the "place of propitiation." And it was saying that God's anger was poured out on the substitute instead of the sinner. It was the word that was used when He suffered the wrath of God (the penalty of our sin), in our place.
- Then there's that word "justified." Justified means not just forgiven, it means paid for. If you owed a debt and paid it off, when you paid it off they would say your debt is "justified." This guy's sin and wrong doing was paid for, covered. This is the whole basis of biblical salvation. God poured His wrath out on Jesus, who propitiated God's wrath and paid for our sin by dying the death we had been condemned to die, in our place, for us.
- Because the tax collector knew he was unworthy, he threw himself, desperately, on the mercy of God and God gave Jesus' perfectly spotless record. The tax collector walked in with a list of sins a mile long and walked out with the spotless record of Jesus Christ credited to his account. Not righteousness he had earned, but righteousness given to him as a gift.
- But because the Pharisee thought he was righteous, he never threw himself on that mercy (he didn't think he needed to) but trusted in his own righteousness to impress God!

Did you get this? SCANDALOUS. Jesus is saying that the prostitute, porn addict, adulterer, murderer, embezzler, or child molester is in many ways *better off* than the good, religious person who never cheats on his homework, goes to the PTA, obeys all the rules, drives a Yaris and recycles **because at least the outwardly bad person realizes how *badly* they need the mercy of God... and because of that they are more likely to throw themselves on it.**

- If you throw yourself on the mercy of God, there is a never-ending supply. But your false sense of goodness (however you define it) keeps you inflated with a sense of pride that keeps you from realizing just how much you need God's grace.
- **It's not most people's sin that sends them to hell; it is their RELIGION.**

14 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." If you **overestimate** your own holiness, you won't realize how much you need God's mercy. And if you **underestimate** the size of God's mercy, you won't throw yourself on it!

This is good stuff. Let's keep moving; then I'm going to make some conclusions.

In the next story, vv. 18–25, you have a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and he's interested in following Jesus but Jesus looks into his heart and realizes that this guy loves money more than he loves God and so Jesus says, "OK, leave your money, and follow God," and the guy won't do it. He values his money more than he values God. Ideally, he'd like to have his money AND God, but if he has to part with one, he'll choose obedience to money rather than obedience to God. **And so this store reveals a guy who underestimates God's value and so clings to something more tightly than he clings to God.** (That's all about that because we're going to spend all next week on it.)

Finally, in the last story you see a crowd that underestimates Jesus' willingness to help any who are in need that call on Him! (Watch, this is a great story): **Luke 18:35–43** ³⁵ *As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶ And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷ They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."* That's all this guy needed... He just goes crazy making a scene, disrupting the peace, yelling out... ³⁸ *And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* Everybody's telling him to shut up but he won't do it. Reminds me of that scene in *Talladega Nights* when Ricky Bobby is on fire and he's running around the racetrack screaming, "Help me Jesus! Help me Jewish God! Help me Allah! Help me Tom Cruise! Tom Cruise, use your witchcraft on me... make the fire stop."

³⁹ *And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"* ⁴⁰ *And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?"* **I love that question...** think about it for a minute: What is the purpose of that question? I mean, think about it... even if you weren't the Son of God, you could have figured this one out... There's a blind man in front

of you saying, “*Messiah, with all the power in the universe, have mercy on me!*” (Hmm... what does this guy want... whatever could it be?) No, Jesus knew. The purpose of the question was this: **Jesus was putting the ball in this guy’s court so that Jesus could show us that the initiative for miracles lies with us.** (*that’s a place to grunt and write stuff down*) God’s miracles come to those who ASK.

(The blind man) said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” **42** *And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”* **43** *And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.*

Here has been my big point today: All of our spiritual problems (and yes, I am using the word all on purpose and I’m not exaggerating) **begin with overestimating our own size and underestimating the size of God.**

Sin thrives by a combination of pride (which is thinking too much of yourself) **and unbelief** (which is thinking too little of God).

Let’s look at the spiritual problems addressed in this chapter:

1. Prayerlessness

- We see prayer addressed in the story of the widow and again in the story of the blind man.
- Prayerlessness is the inevitable result of pride or a lack of faith, usually both. You fail to pray, instinctively, because you are too proud to realize you need God or too unbelieving to grasp God’s willingness to help.
- 1 Thess 5:17 is a two word verse in Greek that says simply, “pray continuously.”
- Prayer ought to be like breathing (none of you consciously discipline yourself to breathe... not like a “physical discipline”—where you have to have accountability groups: “How you doing physically? “I feel pretty guilty... my breathing-life really stinks. I haven’t been breathed in like 3 weeks.” You just do it.
- When you realize how much you need God for everything and how willing you are to help.
- As I’ve often said, the analogy God uses for us is what we are sheep. Not flattering to you. Sheep are idiots, not athletic; not savvy. **Around here, in RDU, we have a lot of smart people, and a lot of you feel pretty smart. All your life people have told you that you are smart... yeah, you’re smart... for a sheep..** but that scale is not very good and at some point you are going to realize that life is bigger than you... and hopefully you’ll realize just how much God

cares about you and how willing He is to help! God is compassionate and willing in every situation, no matter how you got yourself there, to help you!

- Do you realize how ridiculous a proud sheep is. Think about how silly that looks to a shepherd.
- Church, I struggle to obey the verse “pray continually,” because I’m full of pride and unbelief. The answer is not to get more disciplined or to develop a new system or a prayer notebook. Prayer is the natural result of desperation and faith. When the Gospel has cultivated humility and faith in us, we will obey that verse in 1 Thessalonians, “Pray continuously,” instinctively.
- Tax collector and blind man and the persistent widow knew they were desperate and that God was willing so they asked and screamed and begged and God heard them.
- They were done with their pride, they knew they were sheep. They were **undignified**.
- Listen, we hear that word “pride”... “yeah, yeah... pride is bad. Proud people stink.” I’d say, “Do you have pride?” No.

What if we changed the word to “dignity?” Do you have dignity? Do you want people to look at you with admiration and respect? Yes.

- What keeps people from God in this story is their sense of dignity; their self-respect. **In these stories you have 3 undignified people:** An annoying old woman; a tax collector, causing a scene in church because he’s in the back wailing on his knees and beating his chest; and a beggar who is disrupting peace and annoying everybody trying to get to Jesus. All 3 of them get what they want. **In these stories you have 2 dignified people:**

- Morally upright, good person
- The other is a rich, young, ruler. He’s morally impeccable; very successful. They miss God entirely.
- If you want to know God at all, if you want to walk with God, it begins with knowing the desperation you have for Him. You have to know how unable you are without Him, and how willing He is to help.
- Let your **desperation overwhelm your dignity**.
- Do you realize how much you need Him? Do you know how willing He is to help you? **James 4:2**... a verse that should flood your heart with hope: “You have not, because you *ask not*.” Ask about your children. Ask about your marriage. Ask about your job. Ask about your addictions. Ask about your screwed up heart. Shed your dignity and grab hold of the willingness of God. Let your **desperation overwhelm your dignity**.

2. Failure to come to Jesus for salvation

- What all 4 of these stories in this chapter show you is that the question is not really do you need God’s mercy, the question is do you realize that you need it?
- All your life you’ve wanted to be the good Pharisee who didn’t need God’s grace. But you’ve got to realize you are the

tax collector! Whoever it is you despise, that's who you are in God's eyes. If you're religious... you are the prostitute. (Left wing, you are in God's eyes like Ann Coulter; Republicans, you are disgusting as Howard Dean); and you've got to throw yourself on the mercy of Christ as your only hope.

- Let me explain this: there are two ways people try to come to God, one is one taught by every religion in the world, and that is **you obey enough, if you're good enough, if you keep religious rules enough, then you will be accepted by God.**
- Then there's Jesus' way, which is that **our acceptance is not based on our performance, but on His grace and forgiveness given freely to us in the cross.**
- In our hearts we have this instinctive pull toward works righteousness (the idea that God approves of us based on how good we are **that He loves us more or better when you are doing well and less when you're struggling.**
- That keeps us from coming to Christ. Because we think that we can earn His favor, we fail to receive the gift God has offered, which is the only way we can be saved. The righteousness you need to have peace with God and get to heaven is not something you can earn, it's something you have to receive as a gift. Not earned-righteousness, but gift-righteousness.

3. Disobedience

- Disobedience is the 3rd spiritual problem dealt with in these chapters that begins with an overconfidence in our own size and an underestimate of God's size.
- You see it in the story of the rich young ruler who would rather hold on to his money than follow Jesus. Disobedience is a sign that you overestimate your own abilities and underestimate our desperation before God.
- Let me explain: Careful obedience is a sign of desperation.
- If you fly a lot, which I tend to do, you get those little safety briefings. Do you listen closely to them? No, you ignore them. I don't know if I've ever really listened to a whole presentation. (They always try to tell you, "Please pay attention." (Right... in this aircraft they encourage us to approach the cockpit... No, I get it. If the plane starts spiraling to the ground make sure my tray table is in the upright and locked position because that's going to make a lot of difference when we barrel into the ground at 3000mph; if the little masks drop down make sure I get mine on before anybody else and if anyone gets in my way punch them in the throat because I can't help anyone else if I'm passed out. I get it." So, I never pay attention... and neither do you. Except... anybody fly right after that guy crashed that plane in the Hudson? I just remember listening a little more closely. "Where is that little boat? Lifejacket... can I try that on? Could I practice blowing it up?"
- **If you know instruction is critical to your life, you follow it closely.**

- I notice, when I get scared... things not going right in health, family, job... I tend to review where I am with God to make sure I am in His will because I know that when the storm comes I might not be able to handle it, but He will, and I want to make sure I am in His will so I can depend on Him. And that's a healthy thing.
- Some of you need to let life's "scares" wake you up so that you can see that in a moment you could lose everything, and let that drive you to trust in God, careful examination of His word to make sure you are right with Him; He's the only Rock whom you can really hold onto in the storms of life. He's the one whose purposes nobody can mess-up. He's the only one to build your life on.
- When will some of you wake up to realize that you can't handle life? You're so dignified, I can handle it, going through life like a little idiot, not realizing that one germ, one cardiac arrest, one stock market fall, one divorce, one accidental death, and you whole life could crumble!
- Some of you are not really concerned at all... do you realize that if there is a God who designed and created the universe, who designed the molecule, and raised Jesus from the dead... do you realize how utterly stupid it is to ignore him?
- Listen, if you decide there is no God, and decide to ignore him, that makes sense to me. But if you're one of those people who thinks, "Yeah, there is a God" but you don't give Him that much thought, that is crazy! Do you realize how big this God must be and seriously you must take Him? All the money in the world is useless if you lose your soul!

4. Ugly self-righteousness

- In the story of the Pharisee you see an ugly religious person. He does that thing that religious people do that has turned off so many of you here to religion, he looked down on others and thought he was better than others. Around here we call that "theological b.o." and we say it is a sure sign that you've never really experienced God.
- People purchased by Christ have a sweetness to them, a humility, a graciousness, kindness and forgiveness because they realize how deeply they have been forgiven.
- To those of you skeptics that are here, because you don't like religious people. I'm going to say this: Me neither. And neither does Jesus. Religious people are some of the ugliest people in the world. Religion leads to arrogance, pride, judgmentalism; the Gospel leads to humility, sweetness, kindness, forgiveness and generosity.
- A lot of people who call themselves Christians have religion but have never really met Jesus.

5. Apathetic worship

- At the end of this chapter, you see this blind man following Jesus and praising God to everybody he talks to. You thought he was annoying when he was blind; even moreso when he was healed.

- *Here's the thing: Nobody instructed him to do it.* The disciples didn't pull him aside and say, "Now, go glorify God. I want you to discipline yourself, 5 minutes a day, just to praise God. Here's a little book called 'now I can see, thank J.C.' to get you started... just 5 minutes a day"
- His praise, his giving glory to God out loud, exuberantly, was instinctive. It was completely uncommanded. It was the natural result of having seen God and experienced His mercy and help.
- **True worship is involuntary praise.** Something that rises up from your heart. If praise has to be commanded, it's not real worship. What you really adore, you naturally talk about. Like C. S. Lewis says, the world rings with praise! People are always talking about whatever they love and adore. You might praise a new boyfriend, a sports team, a political candidate, a star athlete, a new outfit, a new gadget—a cell phone, a TV show, a comedian, the beauty of nature, a favorite music group. What you love and adore and really worship you don't have to be compelled to praise, you do it involuntarily.
- **Many of us are awesome worshippers; we're just not worshippers of God.** God doesn't delight and enthrall us, and that's why we don't talk about Him. And that's because we don't see Him, understand Him, or believe in Him.

(There are) **Two things God must absolutely go to war on in your life: pride**, or dignity, (which is too large view of yourself); ...AND **unbelief** (too small view of Him).

Let me give you a really important component of all of this: Don't use these 5 things I've given you (prayer, humility, obedience, worship) as commands. Use them as tests. If you are not doing these, there is **asign** that pride and unbelief are at work in your heart. These things are not commands; they are reactions to seeing the size of God.

You get that?

- Are you prayerless? Then you haven't seen desperately you need God and how willing He is to help.
- Are you self-righteous and condemning? You have no concept of grace.
- Have you not desperately run to Christ for salvation? Then you haven't seen the size of God's holiness and how guilty you are before it, or the greatness of His mercy and how willing He is to receive you if you'll throw yourself on it!
- Are you exuberant, undignified in your worship? Then you haven't really seen God's size, majesty, or the price He paid for you.
- Are you fully obedient in all areas? Then you haven't seen how much more valuable He is than all things, and that you'd never want to hold on to anything—romance, money, success—more than Him.

Don't look at these as commands; **if you'd seen the size of God, of course you'd do these things!** All of your spiritual

problems come from having a dwarfed view of God and an inflated view of yourself. This is what I want to do when I preach... I want to help people see the size and beauty of God, pictured most of all in the cross, and I wouldn't have to command you a bunch of stuff, you'd just do it. God, open our eyes!

Today, Baptism at all of our campuses:

- Baptism is a way you demonstrate, publicly, your dependence on God.
- I know it's embarrassing; I realize I'm fully dependent on God and not ashamed to say that publicly
- If you haven't been baptized, but want to, maybe because you have come to Christ recently, or maybe you just have never been baptized since you became a believer, today is your day.
- "I don't have clothes": we have them
- "It's cold." We'll do them inside.
- "I've got a few questions." We have a team of counselors.
- "I was baptized as a baby." That's great, not trying to put down your tradition, but baptism is supposed to be the sign you give of your faith. Maybe you can see your first baptism as a sign of your parents' faith, and now it's time to show your own. We have lots of people who do this.
- Maybe you grew up in a Christian environment and you only recently have gotten serious with God, and now is the time to take this new, real faith public. You are telling the world, 'This faith is mine. I am walking with Jesus on my own and I'm not ashamed of it.'
- As I mentioned, some of you are embarrassed... it seems cumbersome and messy.
- Baptism is not required for salvation... but, think of it this way:
- The blind man, unashamed of his desperate need, cried out for mercy. Then, having been healed, he praised God to everybody. What does the fact that you won't go through the "inconvenience" of baptism say about how much you understand salvation? Can you really say you've grasped the awesomeness of your salvation if you won't even obey what Jesus commanded was to be the sign to others that you were to be His follower?
- And can you really say that you have submitted to the Lordship of Jesus if you won't even obey Him in this one simple step?
- Do you realize you were as guilty as a tax collector? Do you realize how much He's saved you from, and that you are desperate without Him? Then SHOW IT by being baptized.
- OK, our campus pastors will take over...

NOTES:

- When you do that, part of showing it is baptism. A lot of people won't get baptized because they see it as undignified." "Get wet in front of all those people?" The issue here is you've never gotten yourself to a place where you can admit how helpless and hopeless you are unless Christ saved you.
- I'm all into dignity, but if my house was on fire, I would not be dignified. I'd be running around trying to save my children and my own life, and grab my favorite cigars and stuff.
- If you realize how badly you need Jesus Christ, your **desperation overwhelms your dignity**.
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- I'd rather you be a prostitute that knew desperately that you needed God. PTA; Bob—showgram.
- Your dignity kills your relationship with God. Why some of you are so unbearable to be around. Pride's cousin is despair.
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- Don't just add Jesus to your life. you are scared of getting away. When I am scared, I go back and review. When you are self-reliant, you do what you are told.
- Scuba diving:
- Airplane: parachuting

- In Luke 18–19 three groups of people are trying to get to Jesus. **(1)** children, but the disciples forbid them! **(2)** The blind beggar, and the crowd forbids him; **(3)** Zacchaeus, and the crowd and religious leaders keep him from coming! Every time Jesus seeks them out! (18:16; 18:40; 19:5).
- Appears as a very regular, run of the mill miracle
- Willingness of Jesus (see Keller, counterfeit gods, His great love)
- Initiative of faith: the question: God really can shatter your bad habits (see Wilhite)

- Beggar is like a child: needy, demanding, desperate
- Cp this story with Zacchaeus, etc.

Blind man becomes downright undignified to the point of being "shushed," and the rich young ruler is persistent in his pursuit of the law, but not in his pursuit of a relationship. It's a theme we can continue to weave together throughout the series.

- When we see the size of God's willingness to help, we pray!
- **Alexander.**
- Now, we hear that word "pride"... yeah, yeah... pride is bad. Proud people stink. Let me change the word to suit this story: Dignified. What keeps people from God in this story is their sense of dignity; their self-respect. In these stories you have 3 undignified people: An annoying old; a tax collector, causing a scene in church because he's in the back wailing on his knees and beating his chest; and a beggar who is disrupting peace and annoying everybody trying to get to Jesus. All 3 of them get what they want. In these stories you have 2 dignified people:
 - Morally upright, good person
 - The other is a rich, young, ruler. He's morally impeccable; very successful.
 - Both of them leave with no knowledge of God.

If you want to know God at all, if you want to walk with God, it begins with knowing the desperation you have for Him. You have to know how unable you are without Him, and how willing He is to help. Again, here's my thesis.