**August 11th 2024 Eleventh Sunday after Trinity/Baptism of James Wade Mansfield**

**Text: Luke 18:9-14** 0732

**Theme: In the Courtroom of God.**

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied unto you all from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear friends in Christ: When a man is brought up on charges and appears in the courtroom, before a judge and jury, he seeks to prove his innocence. It is the duty of a lawyer to discredit those who brought the charges, to prove the charges false, and to release the man from guilt. Very often in the courtrooms of men, it so happens that guilty men are found to be innocent for lack of evidence, or some other reason, and are set free; and often innocent men are found guilty because of evidence falsely interpreted, false witnesses, or corrupt courtrooms. Men have served decades of prison time for offenses that were later proved to be inaccurate or false. However, there is a courtroom where mistakes are never made. The truly guilty are found guilty, and the innocent are found innocent, though having never occurred. This perfect courtroom is the judgment seat of God. It has never happened that men are damned when they were innocent, never has it happened that a guilty verdict is passed upon someone who is innocent. Not even one second of a false sentence is served. This is because God is perfect, He does not make mistakes in His judgment of those accused of a crime. He is the perfect Judge of mankind.

The crimes which we are accused of are contained in the Law of God: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me, Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal.” These are just some of the Laws God has given to mankind to be obeyed without fault. Never will a crime go unpunished, never will a man get away with breaking one of these Laws. He will be brought into the courtroom of God, before the Judge of all men, and will have the guilty verdict brought upon him, and sentence passed: *“Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17)* As we all sit here today, what has been said makes us shift in our seat uneasily, as we think on the thousands of times we have served another god; when we have stolen; when we have killed; and when we have committed adultery. I tell you that these things are not hidden from the eyes of the perfect and righteous God. We hear in Hebrews: *“For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:12-13)* Thus all those things that we have done and are hidden from the eyes of all other men; those things that we have kept locked away from everyone else, God has seen. He knows every secret of our heart, He uncovers them and judges each one with the same verdict: guilty. After hearing all these things it is the natural reaction to do as did many on the day of Pentecost: *“They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)* Like unto the courtrooms of men, the courtroom of God is filled with those who seek, even when they are guilty, of bypassing the sentence spoken. How can this sentence be avoided? How can we, being found guilty, not serve the sentence? The answer to these questions is simple: we must be justified. This word, though heard often in the church, is not always understood. Thus, it will be helpful to define the word, it means first: to show to be just, right, or in accord with reason, and secondly: to declare guiltless; acquit; absolve. Therefore, we will see, according to our text these two ways of being justified, of avoiding the sentence passed upon us. Our text for today is found in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke beginning at verse nine.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most righteous Judge of all the earth, Thou who didst declare that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, keep from us the opinion that we may somehow justify ourselves in Thy sight. Help us to confess our sins unto Thee, not making excuses, not trying to pay the penalty, for the end of these things is death. Rather, by Thy Law, rid our flesh of all pride and self-righteousness, and teach us to be humble and contrite like unto the Publican. Knowing our corruption and sinfulness, beating upon our breast in contrition, and throwing ourselves on the mercy of the court. Lord this we do here today, do not charge our sins to our account, but have mercy upon us and forgive us for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, who went to the cross to serve the sentence passed. We implore Thee to be gracious unto us in our frail and weak flesh, be long-suffering toward us; heal us, strengthen us, and keep us on the Way which leads to life that we may hear the blessed verdict: I have put away thy sin, thou shalt not die, whereupon we may enter eternal paradise with Thee. We ask all these things in the name of our beloved Savior. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn first that in the courtroom of God:

1. **Men may seek to justify themselves.** We read verses nine through fourteen of our text: **read verses here.** The questions of how one may avoid the sentence of death passed upon all men is one that has occupied the hearts and minds of men from the moment of the fall into sin. There is no question however to the guilt of all men. It clearly states in Scripture: *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)* every man is a sinner, every man has received the sentence of death, and in truth every man knows this, whether he will admit it or not. Even little James, baptized here today is a sinner because he was born to sinful parents. This is called original sin, and holds the same threats by God’s Law toward actual sins that we have committed. Likewise, God has written His Law into our hearts so that our conscience bears witness to our guilt. However, many men have silenced their conscience to the point that they no longer hear the verdict of guilty. They are as the Pharisee in our text which believes that he is righteous and just in the sight of God. Standing in God’s courtroom, the Pharisee is using the first definition of justify. He seeks to show that he has been charged wrongly, that he has not committed any crime whatsoever. Rather, he has done many good things in his life. He enumerates them for the Judge to hear. What he is saying, while standing before the Judge is: “No I have not done any wrong, quite the opposite, I have done many good things which should earn me praise from the Judge.” The Pharisee believes this because of their loose understanding of the Law of God. The sect of the Pharisees, and most Jews in general, believed that a Law of God had been kept perfectly by omitting the outward deed. Therefore in his mind the Pharisee had never knelt down to an idol, and he checks off the First Commandment; he had never taken the life of another man, and he checks off the Fifth Commandment; he had never lain with another man’s wife or someone who was not his wife, and he checks off the Sixth Commandment; he had never stolen anything, and he checks off the Seventh Commandment. Once he has done this with every Commandment he deems himself perfect and righteous. Yet our Lord said: *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you , that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matt. 27-28)* Here the Pharisees justification of himself falls flat, he has no leg to stand on, as John says: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” (1 John 1:8)* His purity and righteousness were nothing but a deception, an imagination which has no basis in reality.

However, many then, having been shown to be guilty, seek to justify their actions. They will say something like: “I only stole the money because bills needed to be paid, my children needed to be fed, after all God commands us to take care of our children.” However, this holds no water in the courtroom of God. He has provided work for us to provide for and feed our children, and has promised to give us all that we need for our bodily welfare. It is nothing but an excuse for sin. Others, like the Synergists, the Roman Catholics, and others, will endeavor to make up for their sins by “undoing” them with good things. Thus, if I have committed adultery, I will work to fix someone’s marriage to make up for it. If I have stolen, I will give to a charity to make up for it. But again, this holds no water, for the sentence passed was not to undo wrong with right, but eternal death. Thus, only that payment is sufficient to justify a person in the courtroom of God. To men like these God says: *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” (Gal. 3:10)* It is evident, then, that a man, standing in the courtroom of God cannot justify himself. The first definition of justify cannot be applied in this case, for everyone is guilty, and the guilty verdict comes with an everlasting sentence of death. It cannot be averted by the man who committed the crime, it is impossible. Therefore, in the courtroom of God:

1. **Men MUST be justified by God.** We read verses thirteen and fourteen of our text: **read verses here.** Our Lord masterfully tells this parable to His audience, using two extremes of His day as examples. He uses the Pharisee as the example of those who intend to justify themselves in God’s courtroom, and he uses the Publican as the example of those who are justified by God. The Pharisees were considered, in that day, to be the most righteous, religious, and perfect men. They were looked up to, emulated, praised, and adored for their great deeds. While on the other hand the Publicans, who were Jewish tax collectors working for the Romans, were despised, hated, reviled, and considered the most sinful of men. As Jesus tells this parable, however, what the people expected was not the outcome. The Pharisee was not justified, rather the sinful Publican was. Why is this? It is because the Publican did not seek to justify himself at all, but simply threw himself on the mercy of the court. He admitted that he was guilty of the crimes with which he was charged, and admitted that he deserved the sentence passed, but seeking hope, he asks the Judge for mercy. Here is where the second, and most important, definition of the word justify comes in: he is declared not guilty, he is acquitted, he is absolved from any guilt. He had truly done the crimes, but the sentence was not carried out upon him. This Jesus says: he “**went down to his house justified rather than the other.”** The Publican was justified rather than the Pharisee, not because he was more righteous and worthy, not because he had paid for the crimes by good deeds, but because he had received mercy from the Judge which he requested. Notice the actions of the Publican, he would not even draw near to the altar, he would not lift up his eyes unto heaven, he smote upon his breast. These are the characteristics of someone who is guilty, and knows it. Have you ever asked a child if they did something wrong, and instead of them looking at you, they look down at the ground? They do this because they are guilty and ashamed of their deed. This very thing the Publican does. He is ashamed of his sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, and thus smites his breast, declares himself guilty, and begs for mercy. Further this very same thing we have seen this morning in the infant Baptism we witnessed this morning. The justification of God toward man is nothing else than the application of the Gospel to individual sinners, and Baptism in nothing more than the Gospel applied in visible form. We witnessed this morning that James Wade was justified before God, that is, he was forgiven and saved; he was declared righteous for the sake of Jesus his Savior.

This mercy is granted unto James and to the publican not because the Judge decides to change the sentence, nor that He determines the sentence need not be paid, for that would be injustice, but rather they are declared not guilty, because someone else took the punishment which they should have served. The sentencing was true and right, the Laws were good and right, and therefore the sentence must be served. But just as one is about to serve the sentence, the Son of God, the Judges own Son, declares that He will serve the sentence in our place; the Judge is satisfied with the payment and releases, declares innocent, the true criminal: the Publican, you, and I. This Publican in this story represents all true Christians. It represents all who, despairing of their own works, fling themselves on the mercy of the court, and believe that the Son of the Judge served our sentence, and we are acquitted. Therefore, all those thoughts that we had earlier in the sermon, all those things that made us shift in our seats and made us uneasy, are forgiven to those who believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came and served our sentence. The Publican throws himself on the mercy of the court and makes his request for the sake of Jesus Christ. God is merciful because the sentence has been served. This was done for all men, though many, like the Pharisee do not believe it and rather seek to justify themselves. John tells us: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)* There are no excuses for sin, we are guilty, but a payment for that sin has been made in our behalf by our Savior. The parable of Jesus was later played out while He hung upon the cross. There was a thief who hung on the cross next to Him. A man who did not seek to justify himself, but confessed his guilt, saying he received the due reward of his deeds, and he threw himself on the mercy of Jesus asking Him to remember him in His kingdom. What does Jesus say? No, you have not proved yourself innocent? You have not made up for your evil deeds with good ones? You have not made sufficient excuse for your sin? No, none of these. Jesus tells him: *“today thou shalt be with me in paradise!” (Luke 23:43)* Instant justification of the guilty. He believed in Jesus Christ and His work and was declared innocent. In the same manner our Savior justifies us. Though we are guilty, we are declared innocent; though we are guilty, we are acquitted; though we are guilty we are absolved. This is the reason why we sing: “*When from the dust of death I rise, to claim my mansion in the skies, e’en then this shall be all my plea: Jesus hath lived and died for me.” (TLH 371:6)* When we stand before the judgment seat of God and are asked to enter a plea, we shall with all the saints plead guilty of all accusations, but begging mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ. And the answer given will be: *“God hath also put away thy sin; thou shalt not die,” (2 Sam. 12:13)* enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord. Amen.