

CONVERSATIONS...

that never happened

Luke 18:9-14



Image by Tom Crew

Special Music: “A Little Less Like Me”

Zach Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hawc0emHq8c&t=15s>

Luke 18

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

13 “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.’

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

A CONNECTION WITH CREATION

I found a man who wondered
At the colors of Creation.
So, I gave his eyes a blindfold.
That created desperation
Light is gone.
Darkness spawned.
And colors lost. Devastation.

I found a woman who loved
The sounds of nature in her ears.
So, I filled her ears with molten wax
Which only brought her tears.
Singing lost.
A heavy cost.
And now silence is all she hears.

I found a boy that loved
The sweet taste of cotton candy.
So, I gave to him a block of salt.
Which at first he thought was dandy.
But now his lips
Are no longer kissed
The bitterness of life is uncanny.

I found a girl who loved to smell
The fragrances of flowers.
So, I gave her a garlic necklace.
Which tended to overpower
The sweet scent of life
And left only strife
As her disposition soured.

I found that people loved to touch
So, I gave them gloves of cotton.
And now that very sense of touch
Is lost and long forgotten.
No hand to hold
No heat or cold
Another window closed. Rotten.

Perhaps it is not for me
To kill the precious majesty
Of God's gift to all humanity,
The senses of our sanity.
Our sight and touch.
Our ears and such.
God's answer to our vanity

There is a big push among leadership coaches today that teach that someone who wants to grow as a leader should do two things.

1. You should surround yourself with successful, intelligent people that can lift you up, keep you focused and make you a better leader than you are.

2. You Should Remove the people from your life that hold you back or suck up your energy.

This is pretty good advice from a personal and human perspective. We all want to be successful and in order to achieve that it only makes sense to follow these rules. You want to gather people around you that you look up to and can show you a better way; who can teach you and speak into you; that can do those things that are beyond your skill set; who will hold you accountable; who will magnify your vision and help you to carry it out.

And those people who drag you down? You know the ones. The ones who are always complaining. The ones who are always interrupting. The ones who question your every move. Who needs them? You certainly can't make any headway when you have people draining your energy and let you know that you are falling short in their eyes. They seem to need so much from you, and it takes you away from the things and people that matter most to you. They squelch your vision, diminish it, try to give it boundaries that seem appropriate to their own wants and needs.

So, this really does make sense. Embrace those people who are willing to invest in you and lift you. Invest in those that love and care for you. Invest in

those who embrace your vision. Invest in those people that want to see you succeed.

While at the same time, remove the chaff that is holding you back. Kiss the naysayers goodbye. Don't let them be impediments to what you are trying to accomplish. Diminish the negativism. If they can't or won't lift you and move your plans forward, then get rid of them and let them be someone else's burden.

You were meant to soar! You were not meant to get bogged down in the mire of malcontents, needy, or high maintenance individuals. You can't soar through the clouds if you have a concrete block tied to your leg. It's such a simple concept.

As you begin to embrace this kind philosophy of growth in your life, I want you ponder the following seven conversations that... never happened; that never occurred. Seven extremely important conversations that tie into this current concept of raising you to a higher level of potential:

JESUS TO PETER

Peter, you have been ever so very faithful. I just love your simple approach to life and your willingness to learn from your mistakes. You have grown so much. But let's be honest here. It just takes you way too long to catch on to many of the things I'm trying to teach you. Don't you understand what is at stake? You are holding everyone back. I have to stop and make everyone else wait while I explain things over and over to you. Why can't you just go along with

what I tell you, knowing that it is the right thing even if it is something you are not used to hearing. I just don't have time to spend trying to bring you up to speed. You are slowing the mission down. You have become a millstone around my neck. It's been a good ride, but I think it is best for everyone that you go back to Galilee and do what you do best. Fish. It's really what you were made to do anyway. It was a mistake on my part to believe that you were right for this task.

JESUS TO THOMAS

I just don't understand, Thomas. You've seen the miracles. You've seen the deaf made to hear once again, vision restored to the blind, lepers healed, the dead raised. You've seen the compassion that I have shown to the masses. You've seen the truth... and still you doubt. Why can't you just accept and believe? Everyone else is on board. Why do you insist on bringing your disbelief to the table? It's somewhat depressing and it's beginning to affect my other followers. I just can't have you doing that. It seems like every time I turn around, you find a new reason not to believe what is happening. I should have seen this coming. It is for the best if you just go back home to your family and find a career where you don't have to accept the impossible as possible, something where the world can only be measured by your five senses.

JESUS TO SIMON THE ZEALOT

Simon, Simon, Simon. I know that you are trying to change the world. I applaud that in you. I know that you are going to make a great politician someday. But right now, your attitude and presence is way too distracting for this ministry. I don't need you on your soapbox causing dissention and distracting those who are genuinely interested in what I am trying to teach them. You are just way too zealous for this group. I truly don't need these people focused on you and your personal agenda and I truly resent that you think that the best way to build this ministry is to build a political platform around my teachings. You should just go back to where you came from and build your own political base there. Maybe you CAN change the world. But I simply don't need anyone to vote for me.

JESUS TO MATTHEW

Matthew, you really know in your heart that I shouldn't be seen with you. After all, you're a tax collector. Nobody likes tax collectors and just having you around keeps people away. The people equate tax collectors with sinners, because, let's face it, tax collectors are in the habit of overcharging cheating people. You are probably a very good tax collector. Of course, the better a tax collector you are the more you are going to be despised. Having you around makes me look greedy. As far as tax collector's go, you're a pretty good guy, but no one is going to know that because... well... you are a tax collector. Everyone is going to do their best to avoid you when they see you. You are dragging me down. I

need you to turn around and go home, focus on what you do best. Tax collecting. We will do just fine without you making me look like I condone sinners.

JESUS TO MARY MAGDELINE

People are starting to talk, Mary, and that ain't good. It is extremely important that my reputation remain intact. How can I minister to these people if they get the wrong impression about you and our relationship? I can't hide you. And I can't really find a fit for you that looks presentable when you are with me. You are a single woman and people are misconstruing our relationship. You and I both know you can't outrun your past. Maybe you should take some clues from your sister. I think that for all our sakes, you should just go back home, and I will just pretend that I don't know you. Trust me, it's the best thing for all of us.

JESUS TO JUDAS ISCARIOT

I don't know what to say Judas. You are just a bad apple. You were a thief and an embezzler when I found you. And you are still a thief and an embezzler, not to mention an opportunist looking to cash in on my popularity. I tried to help you find your way by letting you keep the money for our group. I felt that this would give you a sense of responsibility and maybe help you to become a better person. But instead, you steal from the group. And just so you know it, I know what you are up to, and I am so very disappointed in you. I don't think I can fix you, and it really isn't fair to the others. Why don't you just disappear back into

the hole you came from, and I won't say another word. Go climb under a rock so that you don't embarrass any of us anymore.

JESUS TO JOHN

I have had it up to here, John. What is this “the disciple that Jesus loved”? I love all these guys. What makes you think that you are so special. Yes, we are friends and I appreciate that friendship. But how do you think this looks when you keep saying things like “the disciple that Jesus loved,” and I don't speak up. I can't show favoritism here. You are putting a blemish on this ministry by letting people think that I favor you; that I like you best. I simply can't have it. You need to go back to your fishing boat and think long and hard about whether you truly want to be a part of my mission here. I was really hoping you would come around and start to fit in with the rest of the group, but I see that ain't going to happen. You can't seem to get over yourself.

Seven conversations that never happened. Seven conversations that don't fit into the mold of how we teach people to be Christian leaders in the world today. Conversations that didn't happen that make sense in a worldly way, but not in a heavenly way. Seven conversations built around hubris and pride rather than humility and grace. Seven conversations that turn our perception of Jesus into a plastic mold way of looking at the world. Seven conversations that attempt

to drag Jesus into the world instead of allowing Jesus to guide us on a that upsets the status quo.

When we look at our parable today about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, we find Jesus teaching a lesson in humility: **“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

When we remove humility and grace from the leadership equation, we get a message that says: “Surround yourself with people that will applaud you and remove the people from you that drag you down.” That message is totally opposite of the message that Jesus brings to the world. The message of humility and grace that he insisted on teaching. The message that he exemplified to his disciples and to the world.

Jesus was born in a manger, not a palace.

Jesus healed the blind, the deaf, the leper; the people that were shunned.

Jesus washed the disciple’s feet.

Jesus fed the hungry.

Jesus pushed no one away, even those that did not agree with Him and wanted to argue with Him.

Jesus gathered people around Him that were beaten and broken.

His disciples were not people of wealth and power. They were men and women from backgrounds that were not considered leadership positions. They were not people sitting on pedestals of power, but sinners in need of mercy and grace.

Jesus did not choose His disciples so that he could be lifted, but that by choosing them He could teach the world that the model for leadership that we should embrace is one where we stand in humility and allow others to be lifted. In Matthew 5:45-48 we hear the core of Jesus' message to all men:

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We simply cannot follow these words or write them on our hearts if we are not willing to humble ourselves before God and admit that we are no better than the people around us, even those struggling and damaged. We can't spread this message if we are unwilling to wash a few feet, touch a few lepers, feed people that are hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned. We cannot sit in judgement of those around us and still embrace the message that Jesus is presenting to us. We can try to justify it by pointing out how flawed everyone else is, but our Savior is expecting us to look inside our souls and understand how flawed we ourselves

are. We are all damaged goods and it takes the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ to remake us into the souls that he needs us to be in this world given to chaos.

We need to realize that Jesus chooses us in our brokenness; in our filth. He doesn't wait for us to get cleaned up and be presentable. He doesn't wait for us to have full bellies or be healed of our sicknesses. And when we stand in His presence, He doesn't cast us out because we are dirty, sick and sinful. Instead he bends down and washes our feet. Instead, he opens his arms and welcomes us just as we are. He doesn't reject us because we are broken, but, instead, heals our brokenness and remakes us into the tools that he needs in order to reach others.

The story in John 8, where Jesus comes to the aid of the woman caught in the act of adultery is a perfect example of how Jesus expects for us to react to those around us. The fact that the woman was caught in the act of adultery is not the object of the lesson that he is teaching. Jewish law stated that the crowd had every right to condemn the woman and stone her. There was no court of justice involved, just men passing judgement. It would be remiss of me to not mention that the man involved in the adultery seems to be missing from this important scene in the Bible. But, by Jewish law, it was the woman who was to be held accountable for the situation that had occurred. And Jesus does not address that because, if he had, he would have been accused of questioning Jewish law, and the teaching here is not about questioning the law. Jesus truly needed the people see beyond the law and see the woman as a broken vessel, just like each

and every one of us are. The teaching was about mercy, compassion and forgiveness, not condemnation.

We know that Jesus knelt down and drew in the sand. We do not know what he drew. I'm not sure that it matters so much as the fact that Jesus does not want to look at the crowd in a way that makes them felt judged, so much as allowing them the opportunity to feel compassion for the woman without making anyone feeling shamed. He wasn't telling them that they were wrong, but that they needed to examine their own hearts and remember that they, too, were not blameless. The lesson here was that in order to receive mercy, you need to be able to show mercy. When Jesus says, *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* It is an opportunity for self-reflection; not an opportunity to cast judgement.

When Jesus looks up, and the crowd is gone, He speaks to the woman, not with condemnation, but with compassion and mercy.

John 8:10-11

10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

We all need to look around at the people in our lives. Do we have a tendency to surround ourselves with people who will make us feel better about ourselves? Or have we surrounded ourselves with people that need lifting;

people who are broken? Perhaps there is room for both in our lives. I know that is not what current leadership trends are telling us. But are we modeling our lives around the philosophies and teachings of men, or of Jesus?

I want you to take time this week and think about some of the people we have talked about today. The tax collector, pharisee, the adulterer and her accusers, the disciples. Ponder the seven conversations that never happened and then look at the people who around you and see if you are seeing those people through the eyes of Jesus. Or perhaps we are trying to mold the teachings of Jesus to fit our own world view.

Albert Schweitzer is a personal hero of mine and I want to close with a quote by him:

*I don't know what your destiny will be,
but one thing I do know;
the only ones among you who will be really happy
are those who have sought and found
how to serve.*

Albert Schweitzer

Such wise words to live by from a man who truly embraced the message of humility, exemplified by our Savior.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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