

Tale of Two Prayers
(The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector)
#6 in Series: *Stories from The Master*

We are sharing a series entitled; *Stories from the Master*... Jesus was a Master Storyteller – but for the reason many people think... Jesus told stories to teach life-transforming truth. He didn't tell stories to entertain.

Too many people simply want to see Jesus as a great religious leader in history and fail to understand that He is the very source of the truth of God!...

We need to hear every word He spoke as recorded in the Bible – and hear them with a heart that is yielded to Him and a mind that is teachable...

Luke 18:9-14 (NASB)

⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

1. The Audience

⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

- The scope of His target audience – “... to some people
- The attitudes of His target audience –

Self-confident – “who trusted (believed in – persuaded of) in themselves that they were righteous”

Other-condemning – “and viewed others with contempt”

2. The Story

- **The Principal Characters**

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

Pharisees – as we have seen – were a particular group of Jews who regarded themselves as being the experts in the Law and religious practice... They became the most defiant to Jesus and His messages...

Tax Collectors – were made up of both Jews and Gentiles who worked for the Roman government to collect taxes for the empire... They had developed a notorious reputation for fraud – for in many cases – a tax collector would extort more money than the government required, and would enrich himself... As a result – they became the most despised in that day...

- **The Deception of Pride**

¹¹ The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

The Pharisee was deceived about prayer... You might even say that he wasn’t praying – but bragging... He was actually praying “**to himself**” and telling God (and perhaps anybody else listening) how good he was...

Jesus exposed the heart of the Pharisees and their attitude toward prayer when He accused them of praying in order to receive public recognition – and not as a means of glorifying God –

Matt. 6:5 (NASB) “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners ^[a]so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Matt. 23:14 (NASB) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”

The Pharisee was also deluded about himself – because he thought he was

accepted by God on the basis of what he did or what he did not do...

The O.T. required that the Jews would observe an annual fast, on the day of Atonement ([Lev. 16:29](#)) – but this Pharisee boasted that he fasted twice a week...

He gave a tenth of everything he had to the Temple... He was meticulous in making sure he tithed even the tiny herbs from his garden –

[Matt. 23:23](#) (NASB)

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

The Pharisee was also deceived about the publican who was also there praying... The Pharisee thought that the publican was such a great sinner that God could only condemn him...

We need to be careful not to adopt the same attitude of the Pharisee in our attempt to condemn his proudful attitude... We might as we say; *“Lord, we thank you that we are not like other people: hypocrites, overly pious, self-righteous, or even like that Pharisee. We come to church each week, listen attentively to Scripture, and we have learned that we should always be humble.”*

Oh how deceptive our pride can be...

But as it turns out, the publican will go home justified by God – while the arrogant Pharisee would go home only self-satisfied...

... That leads us to –

- **The Display of Humility**

¹³ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful (*propitious – disposed to bestow favor or forgive*) to me, the sinner!’

standing some distance away – “as unworthy to draw near; but that was the way *to get near*” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, 1871).

[Psalm 34:18](#) (NASB)

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted

And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 57:15 (NASB)

For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
“I dwell *on* a high and holy place,
And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven – as if blushing and ashamed to do so...

Ezra 9:6 (NASB) “... O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.”

The tax collector's prayer is authentic and brief... First, he addresses God, just as the Pharisee had done – but instead of telling God all the good things about himself – he openly describes himself as a **sinner**.

The word translated “sinner” – is “pertaining to behavior or activity that does not measure up to standard moral ... expectation – ‘sinner.’” (BDAG 51-52)

Notice that he makes no excuse for his behavior – he offers no mitigating circumstances for his actions... He is simply confessing his sinfulness before God and taking full responsibility for it.

A fact seen in the action of –

beating his breast – The publican repeatedly struck himself on his chest – which seems to illustrate that he knew where his greatest problem was!

C.H. Spurgeon – “Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self.”

beating his breast – was a sign of brokenness, even contrition or mourning...

It is what the crowd did as they left the scene of the cross, having witnessed how Jesus died (**Luke 23:48**).

be merciful (*propitious – disposed to bestow favor or forgive*) **to me**

There are two different words in the N.T. for “**mercy**” – and the difference between them is significant... The most common word refers to “compassion

and pity for one in tragic circumstances” – but the less common word – used here – asks for “forgiveness from one who has been wronged”. (BDAG 315)

a sinner—literally, “the sinner” – as if to say; “If ever there was ever a sinner – I am the one”... This is the attitude of those who have come to understand their true condition before a Holy God.

Even Paul maintained a healthy attitude of his own heart, when he said –

1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV) “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

The Pharisee’s pride condemned him, but the publican’s humble faith saved him – It is picture of the prodigal son and elder brother all over again –

Augustine – “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.”

Luke 14:11 (NASB) “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

3. The Pronouncement

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other;

Ultimately, to be “justified” means to be declared righteous by God on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Rom. 3:19 - 4:25).

The parable is not primarily about the Pharisee or the Tax Collector – but as one commentator put it – “Rather, this parable is about God: God who alone can judge the human heart; God who determines to justify the ungodly.” (The Company of Jesus, A devotional theology of the Gospel of Luke, Ken Baker, p.321)

4. The Lesson

... for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

There are several lessons we need to learn from this simple story:

- We are saved by God’s grace and mercy – not by what we do.
- God despises the haughty, but welcomes the humble.

We must see ourselves here... We must guard against the sin of pride that is so repugnant to God – and instead – we must humble ourselves and be grateful for the grace of God.

Martin R. DeHaan (1891-1965, American pastor, author, and physician. Founder of Radio Bible Class.) – “Humility is something we should constantly pray for, yet never thank God that we have.”

- We cannot – we must not look down on others.

While everyone is a sinner – we must not see anyone beyond God’s ability to forgive...

In the final analysis – the only thing that saves any of us – is the grace of God – and not our lifestyles...

Questions to consider in Community Group:

How are we like the Pharisee in this story? Is “confidence” about one’s relationship with God something to be suspicious of?

What did the Pharisee’s prayer consist of? What does that tell us about him? (18:11-12).

In what ways do 21st Century Christians look down on others? Who are the people we have the tendency of looking down on? How does this attitude affect our witness to the world?

What did the tax collector’s prayer consist of? What does his prayer and his body language tell us about him? (18:13).

Should Christians consider themselves righteous persons? How can this be consistent with humility?

There were three quotes concerning humility shared in this message. Which one challenged you the most?

C.H. Spurgeon – “Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self.”

Augustine – “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.”

Martin R. DeHaan – “Humility is something we should constantly pray for, yet never thank God that we have.”