

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN



Scripture:

Psalm 65

1. Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed,
2. O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.
3. When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.
4. Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.
5. By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.
6. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might.
7. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.
8. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.
9. You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.
10. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
11. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
12. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,
13. the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Luke 18

8. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'
9. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:
10. 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector.
11. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector.
12. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income."
13. But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"
14. I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'



THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Those of you who are familiar with Luke's Gospel know that it has a series of things that go along, and today I have picked out part of the series about prayer because Jesus is teaching in Luke's Gospel and the preface to the parable before he told this one was to address the concept of prayer. So

here it is from the Gospel of Luke, the eighteenth chapter, starting at the eighth verse. Jesus is talking: And the Lord said, "When the son of Adam comes, will he find faith on earth?"

And then, for those who were confident of their own moral superiority and who held everyone else in contempt, Jesus had this parable: Two men went

up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other, a publican, a tax collector. And the Pharisee stood up and prayed silently as follows: "I thank you, God, that I am not like everybody else, thieving, unjust, adulterous, especially not like that tax collector over there. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of everything I acquire."

But the tax collector stood off by himself and didn't even dare to look up, but struck his chest and muttered, "God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am."

"Let me tell you," said Jesus, "the second man went back to his house acquitted, but the first did not. For those who promote themselves will be demoted, but those who demote themselves will be promoted."

Pray always and do not lose heart. It's not hard to catch up here. Jesus is now talking about some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. Jesus tells about two types of people with whom his hearers were familiar, a Pharisee and a tax collector, a publican. To some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and regarded others with contempt.

WHO DO YOU ADMIRE?

Now think about this. When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? Who did you want to be? Now those of you who are grown up, did you accomplish that?

**WHO IS THE PERSON
THAT YOU MOST ADMIRE?
IN JESUS DAY, THE ANSWER WAS
A PHARISEE, A DEVOUT PERSON.**

I want to be a Pharisee. They are truly religious; they stay separate from others in order to maintain their purity. Pharisees fast twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, not just on holy days like everybody else. They tithe, that is they give ten percent of everything, not just a tenth of the produce of their land and their farm and their vineyard or their garden, it's everything that comes in. They follow all the commandments, no matter what. They take their religion seriously.

Right or wrong - was it that clear cut when you were young? How is it for you now?

WHO DO YOU DISLIKE?

Who is the person you just can't stand?

- A business person who gouges you?
- A polluter?
- A drug pusher?
- A subversive? A traitor?
- A robber?
- An evil doer?
- A faithless spouse?

THE HATED TAX COLLECTOR

In Jesus' day, nearly everyone could despise the tax collector, one of their fellow countrymen who had turned traitor and was gathering taxes for the foreign occupying army. Someone you went to temple with is now collecting taxes for the Roman emperor. It's just as if the terrorists had won the war on terror here and were in control of the USA and a former American patriot, one of our friends, had taken the job of gathering exorbitant taxes for the Iraqi government now in charge. And you had to pay up or have all your property confiscated. How happy could you be with such a person? What would your prayer for that person be? To some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt. Sound familiar?

COME! ENTER WITH ME INTO MY IMAGINATION.

(Peter left the pulpit, removed his robe and walked over near the communion table, dressed in his regular clothes. He addressed the congregation speaking as a modern-day "Pharisee.")

"My parents were so strict with me when I was a kid; I had to do my homework before I could have any fun or do anything else. They were so overprotective that they wouldn't let me do what my friends were allowed to do. No unsupervised parties, not even a few minutes past curfew. I couldn't spend the night at a friend's house where there were no adults present. My mother would call and talk with my friend's parents and had to have the phone number of everywhere I went. I thought I would die of embarrassment! They said they cared about me. Big deal! Well, I guess I turned out all right in spite of it."

"I have a good job now; I earn my own pay. I earn my own way, not like those freeloaders who expect us law-abiding tax-payers to house and feed them like some people I know."

“That kid doesn’t deserve such a low grade in my class. He never made any trouble yelling and throwing things. I can re-juggle the grades in the computer here, and while I’m at it, that disruptive kid doesn’t deserve an A. I need to bring him down a notch or two.”

“Our staff took the Meyers-Briggs personality profile test and discovered that many of us have actual personalities. The test is designed to help people understand that disagreements often occur because different personalities see things in different ways, and not because some people are wrong. In my case, however, it’s because the other people are wrong. I’m an ENFP which is a really good personality type. So I think I won. The test giver said that it’s not about winning or losing, but about understanding self.

“When I pressed her, she admitted she wasn’t and ENFP, so I’m sensing some envy here.”

“The speed limit is sixty-five, so I drive sixty-five. The sign says, ‘Slower traffic keep right.’ I’m not driving slower than the limit, so I stay left. Why are all those people raging and roaring and honking past me? Where are the cops when you need them?”

“I like doing the right thing. I help out where there is a real need. I’m glad I have a sense or morals and am strong enough to live by them.”

To people who were sure of their own righteousness, trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt, Jesus tells this parable.

CONTINUE IMAGINING WITH ME.

(Peter removed his jacket and was wearing a very wild, bright shirt. He moved in front of the communion table where he sat on a bench and addressed the congregation speaking as modern-day “publicans.”)

“Its part of my job. I have to offer a come-on to get the customers interested. The price has to go up next or I can’t make a living. It’s all about appearances. Yes, I have to be clean cut, wear tailored clothes, and drive that big new car. It’s important to look successful so people will trust me. I tell them what they need to know. No, they don’t need to know all the details. It only confuses the issues. Can I help it if they are gullible and don’t pay attention?”

“I have to keep on the growing edge. Drugs help me speed up. I know where to get them and I can supply them to those with the money. When they can’t pay, of course I cut them off. It’s not my fault they try crime. They can go to rehab. That’s what it’s for.”

“Same as my renters – deadbeats. Throw them out. They’ll live on the streets; a lot of people do. They have their own community.”

“I’m glad I had the flu the last time I saw that creep. I sneezed in his face, and then I spit in his food when he wasn’t looking for good measure! Too bad I can’t get some anthrax powder. Then we’d see who is in charge here.”

(Peter put on his robe and returned to the pulpit.)

LISTEN TO THEIR PRAYERS

If we took this impression to our favorite conclusion, we could see that the Pharisee is right on track, and the publican is out of whack and doesn’t know it, or even worse, he knows he is despicable and doesn’t care.

Jesus asks us to look through God’s eyes. That is to listen to their prayers.

The Pharisee is an exemplar of the righteous person as measured by the traditional religious practices of the day. He’s the one that everyone looks up to. But he begins by telling God the list of his accomplishments and qualifications for righteousness. He asks for nothing because he has it all. He’s proud that he is not guilty of the sins of others. He does more than the law requires.

The tax collector sees his guilt and is overcome with remorse and grief. He can’t even face heaven, but beats himself up. Penance in Jesus’ day meant repaying fraud. The dishonest tax collector must make restitution, return the original amount plus twenty per cent. He can’t do it, so he casts himself on God’s mercy and confesses his sinfulness.

**GOD KNOWS YOUR HEART.
CONFRONT THE ATTITUDE OF THE
PHARISEE IN YOUR OWN HEART.**

Are you righteous like Joseph of Arimathea in Luke 23 or the centurion at the cross? You know, God justifies the un-Godly. God can do anything

God wants to do. It's equally defeating to leave this parable thankful that one is not the Pharisee. Ha!

HUMILITY

Jesus emphasizes in word and action that humility, service to others, and spiritual greatness are connected. Jesus cautions against the dangers of religious superiority. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

PEOPLE OF FAITH ARE ALL SUSCEPTIBLE TO SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRIDE. UNFORTUNATELY, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE OFTEN USED AS A WEAPON OF EXCLUSION AGAINST THOSE WHO ARE PERCEIVED AS LESS DESERVING OF GOD'S LOVE THAN WE ARE, LESS DESERVING OF GOD'S GENEROSITY.

We and the Pharisee forget that it is God who set the mountains in place, God who stills the roaring sea and the tumult of the peoples.

LET'S LOOK AGAIN AT OUR CHARACTERS.

We learn who they are by how they pray.

(Peter again left the pulpit, removed his robe walked toward the communion table dressed in his regular clothes. He addressed the congregation speaking as the Pharisee.)

“Thank you, God, that I am not like other people. I tithe; I give a tenth of all that I get. I fast twice a week. Thank you, God, for my good life.”

(Peter removed his jacket. Dressed in the bright, wild shirt, he sat on the bench again. Then he spoke as the publican.)

Not even looking up to heaven, and beating his breast – a changed life, he cried, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

(Peter, again wearing his robe, returns to the pulpit.)

Wait a minute here. Why is that guy who was so damn bad all of a sudden so great? And what's with this guy who was a role model?

The question is not comparison to others, but the question here is “Am I as good as God?” That can humble each of us. Jesus gives us the concept of what heaven is like, and when the tax collector

beats his breast and addresses God, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” the tax collector is praying for God's presence. No longer can he do to others as he has done.

REPENTANCE AND PRACTICAL CHANGE

This way of being on earth in prayer should be our practice. Heaven is entered into and practiced on earth through repentance and practical change. Understand and quit the oppression of others. Never participate in harming another human being.

In light of the tragic things that happen in our world, in our nation, in our community, I'm afraid that our answers to what heaven is like will leave out the common, global response: Practices of repentance and practical change that address uninhibited presence with God

Instead, we speak words of vengeance. How can we be in heaven knowing that others are in hell? How can we understand heaven as God's presence through the practices of mercy and humility? We must gain the vision of God's unrelenting love.

This man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted.



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