

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Part 26 - February 10, 2008

[VIDEO: THE GATHERING]

Q: Ever wondered what impresses God? Giving lots of money to the church? Fasting and praying *more* than anyone else?

Good works really can't do it. He's perfect; so, even our best efforts pale in comparison. But, in the parable of "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector", Jesus shows us what God values most in our worship: sincerity, honesty, and humility.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "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.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." - Luke 18:9-14 NIV

There are two reasons that we fail to hear this parable through the ears of Jesus' original listeners. First, *we* relate to the flawed but humble tax collector. They would've considered him as vile as a rapist, a robber, or a murderer. He's the "bad guy". He was a traitor; working with Rome against his own people. And he was an extorter; charging excessive amounts for himself.

And they would've admired the godliness of the Pharisee whose primary concern was keeping God's Law. He's the "good guy".

Second, Luke tells us Jesus' point *before* He even begins.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: - Luke 18:9 NIV

This is aimed at those think that God keeps score; they were: "confident in their own righteousness"; which always comes with a "side" of condemnation. They: "looked down on everybody else". Self-righteousness has to compare itself to something.

People say, "I'm not that bad a sinner." And they're probably right ... compared to *other* sinners (like say, robbers, evildoers, and adulterers). But that can make anyone look good!

There were two rich, immoral brothers. One died. The other bribed the funeral pastor with a huge sum of money if, at the service, he'd simply say that his brother was a saint. At the funeral, the Pastor told how the deceased had cheated, lied, stolen, and was wicked to the core. Then he winked at the shocked brother and said, "But compared to his brother, that man was a saint!"

But we're not supposed to compare ourselves to the imperfections of others, but to the perfection of God, revealed in Christ.

Q: Have you ever thought in the midst of pain: "Why me, Lord?!"

This is a *Pharisee's* perspective! "Lord, I know there are people who deserve to suffer like this; but not ME. I'd understand, if this happened to THEM (*they* have it coming), but Lord, why ME?!"

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." - *Luke 18:11-12 NIV*

The Pharisee: "stood up and prayed". Standing and looking up was a typical posture for prayer; but this reminds me of something Jesus said in Matthew:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues ... to be seen by men. - *Matthew 6:5a NIV*



Here's a model of Herod's Temple. The Pharisees would stand in the inner court, just outside the holy-of-holies; where they assumed God could hear their prayers best ... *and* they could be heard and seen by the most important leaders.

Pride isn't necessarily a bad thing: I'm *proud* to be an American; I'm *proud* to be your pastor; and I'm *proud* of my children. Pride only becomes sinful and evil when it makes me feel superior. Have you ever noticed this verse Galatians?

Each one should test his own actions. Then he can **take pride in himself**, without comparing himself to somebody else ... - *Galatians 6:4 NIV*



And in the parable, Jesus says that he: "prayed about himself"

What percentage of your prayers focus on the Lord (e.g. worship, dependence, gratefulness), on others (i.e. intercessory prayer), or on yourself? If I'm wrapped up in myself, I'm overdressed.

I'm sure that his prayer was true on the surface. He was *not* like "robbers" or "evildoers" or "adulterers". Pharisees would close their eyes when passing women in public, to prevent being tempted with adultery. They'd often walk into things and fall down ... all the more attention on their piety!

Pharisees had reduced their religion to a set of measurable rules, so they could check off their "feel-good boxes". God wants a relationship; the Pharisee gives him ritual.

- The Law only required a fast once a year (on the Day of Atonement); this guy says: "I fast twice a week"!
- The Law only required a tithe (10%) on certain items; this guy: "[I] give a tenth of all I get"! He had an "I" problem!

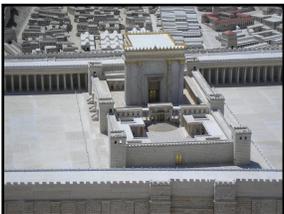
He was morally upright, religiously devout, and grateful to God. BUT, he thought this gave him the right to condescend and condemn those whose sins were more obvious.

The temptation isn't just a *holier-than-thou* attitude, but a *holier-than-God* attitude; condemning those He longs to forgive.

And he believed he'd *earned* the right to draw close to God.

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." - Luke 18:13 NIV

The Pharisee prayed as one who needed no forgiveness; and he got none. The tax collector: "stood at a distance". This was in recognition of his unworthiness.



The Pharisee stood in the inner court by the altar; then there was the court of women; and outside the walls, was the court of the Gentiles. I'm guessing the Tax Collector stood back in the shadows. Jesus says: "He would not even look up to heaven". This was in recognition of his unrighteousness.

Q: Haven't you ever stared down at the ground when you had to fess up to a wrongdoing and tell someone you're sorry?

The Pharisee puffed out his chest, the Publican: "beat his breast". He was in *agony* over his sin: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner". This was the original *Sinner's Prayer*!

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. - Luke 18:14a NIV

We're not "justified" by how we compare to others ("*I am not like other men*"), by what we do for God ("*I fast twice a week*"), or by how much we give to His church ("*I give a tenth of all I get*").

This would've shocked Jesus' listeners! They *so* admired the performance of the Pharisee; and they *so despised* the practice of the Tax Collector; (and they hadn't heard Luke's opening).



The Pharisee *looked* clean on the outside; the Tax Collector *left* clean on the inside. Are you more interested in *looking* clean or *leaving* clean? Have you ever come to church, sang the songs, heard the Word, drank the coffee, and then gone home completely unaffected and unchanged?

- We must not go out the way we came in.

Q: How much *effort* do you put into listening to and loving on Him?

It means getting our eyes off of ourselves and onto God. And if you're hesitant to express your worship authentically in public, if you're self-conscious, this may be another side of pride.



- [Because] Pride not only promotes – it protects.

How many of you sometimes feel inhibited to raise your hands? ... Raise your hands!

The Pharisee was self-conscious; the Tax Collector was God-conscious. He didn't care *who* heard him; and he didn't allow the opinions of others dictate or direct his actions toward God.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. – *Luke 18:14b NIV*



The "bad guy", in spite of all he has done, is reconciled with God. The "good guy" despite all his good works, leaves empty. God leaves us empty when we're full of ourselves. Righteousness requires humble recognition of my sin, *and* total dependence upon His mercy.

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. God is against fasting and tithing.
2. Pride can cancel out a ton of virtues.
3. Humility can triumph over many a sin.
4. Righteousness isn't given, it's earned.