

Puzzling Parables

The Pharisee and the Taxman

April 30, 2017

Welcome to where we're becoming less self-conscious and more God-conscious.



Dinner with Jesus. Imagine that.

Who would *you* invite? Who *wouldn't* you invite?



We don't know much about Matthew. He only offers three words of self-description:

... Matthew the tax collector ... – Matthew 10:3b NIV



It's like titling yourself, "the despised politician"!

He was most certainly a *humble, honest*, taxman; **Jesus chose him as an *Apostle*, even though taxmen couldn't serve as witnesses.**



Capernaum sat beside a major trade route (today's International Coastal Hwy), which had a major Roman customs agency, charging import and export fees, use tolls, and various taxes. That's why a Roman commander (the Centurion whose servant Jesus healed) was headquartered in this little fishing village. (Luke 7:1-4)



Capernaum was the home of fishermen and taxmen.



And so, when *Matthew* had dinner with Jesus, he invited his co-workers and ne're-do-well friends.



The parable of "The Pharisee and the Taxman" is recorded only by Luke. And, it's a floating story that anchors into only one context in the woven Gospels: Matthew's banquet (where we left off).



[The Pharisees] asked his disciples: "Why does he *your teacher* eat with *tax collectors* and '*sinners*'?" [And, at this point, they didn't have an answer; they're probably wondering the same thing] On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For **I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**" to repentance." – Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32 NIV

Remember why He didn't come to call the righteous? There aren't any!

It's like a cattle driver saying, "I didn't come to round up unicorns!"

And, right here is where we anchor our floating parable.

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. – Luke 18:9-10 NIV

I can't help but picture poor Matthew shrinking at the table.

Any time we rate ourselves a higher Christianity "score" than someone else, or **whenever we say something like, "Well, they're not a very good Christian," we're looking down from our confidence in our own faith.** Ever think to yourself, "Why *me*, Lord?" Attached to that thought is a very subtle, "I get why this happens to *those who have it comin'*; but, why *me*?"

We miss the parable's original impact. *Know why? We're prejudiced against Pharisees; they were prejudiced against taxmen. Taxmen were regarded as highway robbers, treated as evildoers, and considered adulterers of Israel, "in bed" with the enemy. Pharisees were respected as givers instead of takers, treated as good-deed-doers, and considered utterly devoted to Israel.* So, when I read "Pharisee", you yell "Yea!" When I read, "tax collector", you yell "Boo!" And yell "No!" when it's on the screen.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee [Yea!] and the other a tax collector. [Boo!] The Pharisee [Yea!] stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this [all-three-in-one] tax collector. [Boo!] I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But the tax collector [Boo!] 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." [No!] ["He *better* plead for mercy!" Now, here comes Jesus' big pull-the-rug-out punchline] I tell you that this man, [pointing at Matthew] rather than the other, [gesturing toward the door] went home *justified* before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. [At which point the party would've erupted!] – Luke 18:10-14 NIV



Here's a model of the Temple. The Pharisees stood in the exclusive, restricted, inner court; "knocking" at God's front door with their very respected, very public, prayers.



The taxman would've stood in the outer court, where the left-out were left out. **We have far more in common with the self-absorbed Pharisee than we think, which is *what makes us have more in common with the Pharisee!***

"The Pharisee stood up and prayed ..." In Jesus' first teaching to His Twelve newly appointed apprentices, (in His Sermon on the Mount) *Matthew* records Him saying ...

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



This is the Capernaum synagogue.

Matthew was excluded from entering it. Want to see the irony of the Capernaum synagogue, and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees? **The Roman Centurion overseeing security and operations at the customs agency is beloved by the elders and Pharisees.** *Know why?*

The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they ***pleaded earnestly*** with him, “This man ***deserves*** to have you do this, ***because he loves our nation*** and ***has built our synagogue.***” [CHA-CHING! “That’s love baby!”] – Luke 7:2-5 NIV

But, when the Centurion discovered his intended humility was turned into leveraging Jesus’ blessing based on his merits ...

... the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ...” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” – Luke 7:6-9 NIV

Jesus was the friend of sinners. **The Pharisees were the friends of sinners’ money.** They commend the Centurion even as they condemn Matthew for working with the likes of ... *that Centurion.*

And, that’s the only synagogue from the time of Christ that God chose to preserve: the one built by the taxmen in Jesus’ hometown.

Pride isn’t always bad (I’m *proud* to be your pastor); **it becomes destructive if it makes me feel superior or self-sufficient.**

God wants to build up our sense of self-worth even as He tears down our sense of self-importance. Ever noticed *this* verse:

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

Jesus is our role model; but, **who is the only living person we should regularly compare ourselves to? *Our old self.***

Otherwise we’ll reduce faith to a religion of rules that grants us the religious right to condescend and condemn anyone who’s sins are more obvious than our own that we’re blind to.

We have more in common with the Pharisee than we like to think.

I tell you that this man, [pointing at Matthew] rather than the other, [gesturing toward the door] 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".

The Pharisee *looked* clean.

The Tax Collector *left* clean.

Question is: **are you more interested in *looking clean* or *leaving clean*?**

How often do you come to church, sing the songs, hear the Word, drink the coffee, and then, other than the caffeine jitters, return home entirely unaffected and unchanged by you what did?

If you go out the way you come in, why are you coming in?

To what degree are you self-conscious and hesitant to pray and worship authentically in public?



This is another bad side of pride.

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

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

Let's test ourselves: **when I worship or pray, am I more *self-conscious* or *God-conscious*?**

The "good" Pharisee was self-conscious.

The "bad" taxman was God-conscious.

The taxman didn't care *who* heard him or saw him.

And, he didn't allow their opinions to direct or deter his devotion toward God.

It took guts for the guy to just show his face in the Temple.

And, *that's the guy* Jesus celebrates and supports and selects.

And, when the parable of the Pharisee and the taxman concludes, **the evildoer who emptied his pride is reconciled; and, the good-deed-doer, who's full of himself, leaves empty handed.**