

Luke 18: 9 - 14

Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.

"Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity -- greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The word "parable" literally means mysterious speech and Jesus often teaches timeless lessons with parables. In familiar parables as the "workers in the vineyard," the "Good Samaritan," the Talents, and the "Prodigal Son" we have all learned many versions of these simple lessons. In most of His parables, Jesus uses two or three main characters to teach us multiple lessons. In different times of our lives, we can identify ourselves as each person in the parable.

In this short parable, Jesus picks only two persons: ***a Pharisee and a tax collector***. We know who the Pharisees were; they had rules for everything; you could only do this on some days but not others, and they believed in adhering to the absolute letter of the law and their religion was stern and codified. Because they practiced such a stern religion, they thought themselves better than others. Tax collectors were employed by the Roman government to collect taxes the Israelites' owed. Tax collectors sometimes exacted more tax than was owed and got wealthy at the expense of poor people. So here, we have the two persons in a nutshell; one who practices a stern religion aiming to please God by his religious efforts, and the other who represents a class of people who profit by taking more from the poor than is necessary.

Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convicted of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. We have seen these people all through history and have many words to describe them: egotistical, arrogant, self-centered, "lives in his own

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world", "has an elevated sense of self worth". I am sure you can easily come up with one or two more. The point is that Jesus represents this person as the Pharisee. The tax collector is also easy to identify with.

The Pharisee ***trusted in himself and believed in his own righteousness, thought himself better than others, despised many others, and thought his life was an example for others.*** As a result, he felt he was so holy that he did need to show humility in coming before God in prayer, even in the temple.

Jesus tells us that the ***two men went up into the temple to pray, to offer up their personal devotions, as was usual with good people at that time.*** The **temple contained a mixture of good and bad persons**, like when Cain and Abel both brought their offerings to the same altar. Jesus tells us that the good seed and the weeds will grow together until the harvest, when the good will be separated from the evil.

Jesus tells us that the Pharisees do all their works to be seen of men. In the temple, we are supposed to come to a deeper relationship with God. Instead, the Pharisee stood in a conspicuous place, where he could be distinguished, prayed with a posture that shows us that he was wholly intent upon himself, hoping to receive his own praise, and set himself with a great deal of state and formality. **In his prayer, the Pharisee tells the all knowing God** that he was free from gross and scandalous sins; was neither *extortioner* nor usurer, was not oppressive to debtors or tenants, and was fair and kind to all that had dependence upon him. As if God does not know this already, he continued by telling God that he was not unjust in any of his dealings, did no man any wrong, and was not an adulterer. He spoke of his twice weekly fasting, Monday and Thursday, as was the Pharisees' practice, and that he also gave tithes of all that he possessed. He seems so good that he needs no help from God.

Despite all these positive religious activities, why was the Pharisee not justified before God? **First**, the Bible tells us that if we get to heaven, we will hear "***Well done good and faithful servant.***" The Pharisee certainly does not show this attitude in the temple. **Second**, his thanks to God seem a mere formality. He does not say, "***By the grace of God I am what I am***", as Paul did, but turns it off with "God, I thank thee." **Third**, he *trusted* in his righteousness, and because of it, he felt that God owed him something. **Fourth**, all his temple activity was to tell God Almighty how very good he was. **Fifth**, there is not one word of humble prayer in what the Pharisee "prayed". **Sixth**, when he said, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are," he showed an arrogance that would be repugnant to God. **Seventh**, when he demeaned the tax-collector and very uncharitably concluded that the tax collector was an unjust extortioner, he was practicing judgment of others, a task solely relegated to God. In the end, the Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, but forgot his errand, because he did not deem God's grace and favor worth asking for. He tooted his own horn and despised

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others as inferior. The old TV commercial used to say, "**Where's the Beef?**", here we ask, "**Where was the Pharisee's humility?**" **The Pharisee denies that he is a sinner**; his neighbors cannot charge him with anything amiss, and he sees no reason to charge himself; he thinks **he is clean and pure from sin.**

The Tax Collector had the opposite attitude; he was full of *humility, humiliation, repentance* for sin, and *desire* towards reconciling himself before his God. He stood far off, keeping a distance because he felt unworthy to draw near to God, and perhaps for fear of offending the Pharisee, whom he observed to look scornfully upon him, as if he were disturbing the Pharisee's precious devotions. He knew he was distant from God; that is why he was in the temple praying, begging and hoping for that ultimate reconciliation we all long for in our lives. He would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, much less his hands, as was usual in prayer. He lifted up his heart to God in the heavens. He felt shame and humiliation and such a heavy burden for his sins that he could not even lift up his eyes to God in the temple. The dejection in his demeanor shows his shame at his own sinfulness. He **beat his breast, mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa**, and then he smites his heart with penitent remorse. In short, he expressed all this in one powerful and single minded prayer "**God, be merciful to me a sinner.**"

The tax collector's prayer was answered and he went to his house justified. So shall our prayers, if we pray like he did, "**God, be merciful to me a sinner.**" Then the God of infinite mercy will be merciful to us. We will feel the ultimate release of God's closeness as we rid ourselves of our burdens before God. The tax collector knew that he was a convicted sinner by nature and thus, guilty before God. **He knew he needed God's mercy!!** His only hope and reliance was on the mercy of God, and he knew that nothing but mercy, mercy, mercy will rescue him. He earnestly prays for the benefit of that mercy: "**O God, be merciful to me; forgive my sins; be reconciled to me; take me into thy favor; receive me graciously; love me freely.**" The tax collector's eternal plea that shows us how to pray. Our Lord Jesus, who opens all hearts, knows all our desires, knows all our innermost secrets, and who is perfectly acquainted with all proceedings in heaven, assures us that this poor, penitent, broken-hearted tax collector went to his house justified, rather than the Pharisee.

Jesus affirms with the utmost assurance that the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, who goes home from the temple justified. The proud Pharisee's thanksgivings are an abomination to the all knowing God. He was not justified, his sins are not pardoned, nor is he delivered from condemnation, and he is not accepted as righteous in God's sight. Why? Because in his own self-righteousness, he shows no need for God's mercy, and no humility whatsoever, **even in the Temple when he is praying.** Proud men, who exalt themselves, are rivals with God, and will certainly be humbled before God. Humble men, who humble themselves and are subject to God, shall be exalted into the

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love of God and communion with Him, with heaven as the ultimate reward. Here we have the ultimate **risk reward** scenario, "**He who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.**" **What clearer definition of how to approach the Throne of Grace can Jesus give us?**

In his classic Christian book, "**My Utmost for His Highest**" **Oswald Chambers** writes about prayer. He wonders why we ask God in prayer, when we know that God knows all the things we want and need. He said that prayer is not designed to get answers from God. If we pray because we want answers, we will get huffed with God. We pray to become living monuments of God's grace. When prayer seems to be unanswered, do not try to blame someone else. That is always a snare of Satan.

How can we apply these powerful words to our role as husbands and fathers? For too much of my own life and in too many ways, I know that I have been the Pharisee. My life has been cluttered by too many judgments of my fellow brothers and sisters. As Father Z says often, "we are to love one another. It is God's job to judge us." This short parable convicts me that I have too often been the Pharisee and not the humble tax collector. I ask you a simple question, "**Look into your own life and ask yourself if you have ever been the Pharisee?**"

As a father, I just cannot be the Pharisee. If we toot our own horns, are brash, bold, aggressive, self-centered, and judgmental, our children will grow up believing this is the behavior they are to show as adults. Do we truly want our children to grow up like this? On your own, read this parable carefully. Do not become the Pharisee. Our goal as fathers is to plant lasting seeds of faith into our children so that they will grow to have a mature faith and acceptance of God as their creator. **This means that we need to teach our children how to pray.** There is no clearer example of how to pray than the lesson Jesus teaches us in this parable. Before God, I must aspire to be like the Tax Collector; to know that I am always a sinner, and without God's grace and forgiveness, I will not go home rewarded and my family may be in permanent spiritual ruin. Our fatherly hope is to lead our children to be all that God created them to be.

Our job as fathers is to teach our children right from wrong and to lead them to a Christian approach to life. My second question to all of you "**Is the human being we are leading our children to be like the Pharisee or the Tax Collector?**" Let us pray each and every day that we can be that person who knows he is a sinner and needs God's grace and mercy. We are not seeking a plenary indulgence, as the Pharisee thought his practices gave him. We want that daily spiritual manna so that in the deepest parts of our being, we seek and listen to Jesus and His teachings. If we do this, we will teach our children to admit their wrongdoings, to be humble before God, and to seek God's mercy in the face of their own failings, just like the tax collector did.

In short, if we do this, we can become true Men of St. Joseph!!