

The Parables of Jesus

- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Luke 18:10-14

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus and His disciples were still on their journey to Jerusalem but in the area which bordered Samaria and Judea - Luke 17:11. Jesus gives this parable in the same time frame and setting as it immediately follows the "Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge."

In the context of the parable of the "Widow and the Unjust Judge," Jesus was speaking about the coming of the Kingdom of God. In Luke 17:37, He uses the Jewish idiom, *"Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."* We discussed that this was referring to the "inner nature" of the person.

Its use was in response to the disciples' question of wanting to know "where" the people were going when He said "one will go and another will be left." Jesus taught that God would avenge, "speedily," those that had the correct attitude of heart, believed in Jesus and believed in who He was. This is the "faith" that Jesus will be looking for when He returns.

This next parable is not necessarily about prayer only. It is actually more about having the correct attitude of heart when we come before a holy God in times of prayer and worship. This parable also reveals the kind of "attitude of heart" that Jesus will be looking for when He returns. Will He find people with this attitude of heart? Will he find people with this kind of faith, honor and respect towards a holy God?

Remember, that Jesus was in the midst of Pharisees and other religious leaders (Luke 17:20), as well as being with His disciples (Luke 17:22). Luke 18:9 gives a clear explanation of the purpose of why Jesus was giving the parable of the "Widow and the Unjust Judge" - *"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others..."*

I think we can safely say that Jesus was referring to the Pharisees and religious leaders that were present when He used the phrase *"...certain which trusted in themselves..."* However, we must also keep in mind that this was not just about the Pharisees, but it was also directed towards any of the self-righteous ones who lacked true humility and who used their own self-righteousness as reason to be praised and exalted by God and/or others. (Boy, were they mistaken and Jesus was about to tell them so.) He was also teaching His disciples in this, as well.

The Parable of the "Pharisee and Tax Collector" - Luke 18:10-14 - *"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*

This is a very simple parable concerning two men: A Pharisee and a publican (tax collector). We know from previous discussions how the Pharisees and religious leaders felt and looked upon "publicans." They did not only look upon "publicans" as sinners, but they looked upon them as being "cursed by God" because of their wickedness and greed. Publicans (tax collectors) were looked upon by many in their society as thieves and robbers. Unfortunately, the Pharisees did not look at their own wickedness, greed and covetousness.

The Pharisee in this parable came into the Temple in the guise of praying to God and thanking God. However, he really came into the Temple to come before God and "boast" about how good he was and all the things he does to "prove" that he is a "righteous" man - at least in his own eyes. We also see that he did this where everyone else would be able to see and hear him. Therefore, this Pharisee was also boasting about himself to men.

The publican, being in the Temple, realizing where he was and to whom he was speaking with, Yahweh Adonai, was honest enough to admit whom he was - "*a sinner.*" He recognized his wickedness and asked God to be merciful to him. This publican came before God with a "broken and a contrite heart." He was off in the corner where it was just he and God, no one else.

Those are the sacrifices that are acceptable to God. Psalm 51:16, 17 tells us this as it reads - "*For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*"

So what was Jesus trying to teach His disciples and anyone else who was listening through this parable. What Jesus was truly teaching was that it would be the attitude of heart that God would always look at. Jesus was speaking about the "inner nature" of a true disciple of His. God desires a pure, honest relationship. He knows our heart better than we know ourselves. God can deal with an honest heart. It is the "attitude of heart" that comes before God with the incorrect attitude of heart of rituals and self-righteousness, which is totally unacceptable to Him.

We do need to make mention here that the fasting and tithing that the Pharisee "said" he did was not an incorrect "sacrifice" to be made to God. We must not take what Jesus is saying here out of context to think that these things were wrong in themselves. Not at all!!! The problem was that the "attitude of heart" that they were done with was incorrect by the Pharisee.

That is what God is after. He delights in a heart that is humble and simply delights in blessing the heart of their King in all that they do. Not because they have to but because they want to. This also needs to be addressed within the Body of Christ today. Without realizing it, we many times are just like this Pharisee. We come to our churches with our great preaching and great music in our great buildings that we have built and tend to think that these things "prove" that we are righteous before God.

We must always keep in mind that the only thing that makes us "righteous" in the eyes of God is the "Blood of Jesus." It is not what we do but it is all about what He has done for us. We must be careful that we do not get caught up in our own "Christian rituals" thinking that the things we do prove how righteous we are.

We all need to recognize that there are times, yes, even as Christians, that we will "miss the mark" and sin. We must simply "own up to it" and come before God and repent knowing that He is so merciful and that He is "*faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1John 1:9)

Jesus makes the point of this parable very clear to everyone listening, including us today as He states in Luke 18:14 - "***I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.***" The proud and self-righteous man shuts himself off from God. The person who walks in true humility recognizing their need for God's love, grace and mercy is that person who is "*poor in spirit...*" (Matthew 5:3)

James 4:6-10 tell us this as it states, *"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."*

1Peter 5:5-7 also tells us this, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."*

It is that person, the person who is *"poor in spirit"* before the Living God, who He will *"lift up."* It is that person to whom, *"...theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* (Matthew 5:3) It is that person who the Holy, Righteous Judge will *"avenge speedily"* and protect from their *"adversary,"* the devil.