

THE EXALTED HUMBLED
Parable 19: The Pharisee and the Publican
Lk 18:9-14

I. ILLUSTRATION—HOW TO ENTER INTO THE PRESENCE OF GREATNESS

RITA SNOWDEN (New Zealand Methodist minister/author) TELLS THIS STORY

Tourists visited house where Beethoven composed Moonlight Sonata (1801)
Shown the piano he used—American girl sat the piano and played first movement
Guide said—former Polish Prime Minister and pianist Jan Paderewski—had visited week before
Girl said—“And I’ll bet he did just as I did; I’ll bet he sat down and played the sonata.”
Guide said—“No, madame, he did not. Everyone asked him to, but he said, “Ah no! I am not worthy.”

II. CONTEXT FOR THIS PARABLE

1. FIVE THEMES INTERWEAVE **LUKE 15-19**—AS JESUS APPROACHED JERUSALEM

- o Encounters with the Scribes and Pharisees
- o Kingdom of God
- o Wealth—and Stewardship in the Kingdom
- o Righteousness—as prerequisite for entering the Kingdom
- o Prayer—in anticipation and preparation for the Kingdom

2. ENCOUNTERS WITH SCRIBE AND PHARISEES

- a. Opposed Jesus eating with **sinners and tax collectors**—the ‘unclean’
 - Since He ate with them in Matthew’s home (tax collector)—**Lk 5**
 - Renewed criticism in **Lk 15**—followed by three ‘Lost Parables’
- b. Pharisees—lovers of **money**—scoffed at Jesus—**Lk 16**
 - Jesus rebuked them—for self-righteousness and worldliness
 - **Lk 16:15**—*You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.*
 - Jesus told Parable of **Rich Man** and Lazarus
- c. Pharisees—asked Him—when was the **Kingdom** of God coming?—**Lk17**
 - Jesus warned about its suddenness and need to be prepared
 - Set stage for next three parables—**Lk 18-19**
- d. Encounters in **Temple**—**Lk 20**
 - Render to Caesar
 - Warning about scribes’ arrogance and greed—parallels woes to Pharisees—**Mt 23**

3. POSITION OF THIS PARABLE—IN **LUKE 18-19**

- a. After—**Persistent Widow**—how to pray awaiting the kingdom—persistently
- b. Here—**Pharisee and Tax Collector**—how to approach God in prayer
- c. Before—**Rich Young Ruler**—seeking kingdom—felt justified by his obedience to the Law
- d. Before—**Zaccheus**—wealthy tax collector repented
- e. Before—**Parable of Ten Minas**—proper use of wealth in the kingdom

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—LUKE 18:9-14

Lk 18:9-14—**Lk 18:9-14**—**9** *And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:* **10** *“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

IV. EXPLANATION

A. PURPOSE

1. ONLY 3 PARABLES GIVE JESUS’ STATED PURPOSE—ALL IN **LUKE 18-19**
 - o Persistent Widow—**Lk 18**
 - o This one—**Lk 18**
 - o Ten Minas—**Lk 19**
2. PURPOSE OF PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR
 - o Addresses problem of self-righteousness
 - o Contrasts self-righteous arrogance with humility
3. TWO PARABLES IN **LUKE 18**
 - a. Not really about **prayer**—but about the **God** to whom we pray
 - b. **Persistent Widow**—God is faithful to answer—be persistent and don’t lose hope
 - c. **This parable**—what God considers the right attitude to approach Him in prayer
4. USE OF TEXT IN CHURCH CALENDAR
 - o **Liturgical churches use it as the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday**

B. THE PARABLE

1. TWO MEN WENT UP INTO THEE TEMPLE TO PRAY
 - a. Ascending to Jerusalem—and up to the Temple Mount
 - Jesus will ascend from Jericho—rises **3500 feet** in 20 miles

- b. Prayer time
 - **4 times** daily—9—12—3—6
 - Main times—at **sacrifice**—morning (9)—afternoon (3)
 - Prayer time—**following** sacrifice—**during** burning of incense
 - One purpose—to pray that one’s sacrifice would be **acceptable**

2. THE PHARISEE

- a. ‘**Separated**’ sect—maintained absolute purity
 - To **justify themselves**—as holy, pure, and perfect keepers of the Law
 - It was **impossible**—for everyday working people to keep their strict code
 - **Positive**—led and taught people in righteousness—to keep Israel holy
 - **Negative**—considered almost everyone else to be unclean
- b. *Was praying this to himself*
 - 1. Probably means he did this silently
 - 2. But also highlights the self-centered nature of his prayer
 - **No awe** before God—but dismissive and disrespectful
 - **No humility**—but self-centered—the focus was only on him
 - **No thanks** to God—for His blessings—only for what he himself had done
 - **No positive thoughts** for others—not even the poor—only criticism
- c. *I thank you that I am not like other people*

1. Mishnah example

I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth ha-Midrash [the study hall] and Thou hast not set my portion with those who sit in street corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labor and they labor, but I labor and receive a reward and they labor and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction.

2. Problems

- a. **Arrogant**—holier-than-thou attitude
- b. No real **sense of sin** in his life
 - ☆ Notice—there was no prayer of confession here
 - ☆ So he deceived himself—and had become a ‘liar’

I Jn 1:8—If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us

- c. **Comparative** righteousness

- ☆ Justified himself—in comparison with other people
 - ☆ Not by the standard of God’s own holiness and expectations
- d. **Negative** righteousness
- ☆ Justified himself partly—by what he **did not do**
 - ☆ He did behave like those ‘unclean’ breakers of the law
- d. *I fast twice a week*
1. Only one fast—was required by Torah
 - Day of Atonement—**Lev 23**
 - Now Yom Kippur—in 2019 on 8-9 October
 2. Public fasting—set by tradition
 - a. Monday and Thursday
 - ☆ Moses ascended Sinai on 2nd day (Monday)—descended 5th day (Thursday)
 - ☆ Separated fast days from Sabbath—and gave time for recovery in between
 - b. Most Pharisees—did not fast every week
 - c. ‘Men of standing’
 - ☆ Rotation—in villages—to fast Monday through Thursday—occasionally
 - ☆ To pray and intercede for community and nation
 3. Private fasting
 - a. Anytime could fast for any length—but not on Sabbath or Feast Days
 - b. This Pharisee—exceeded all others—including ‘Men of Standing’
 4. Problems
 - a. Probably he made it known publicly—Jesus said to keep it private—**Mt 6**
 - b. Self-made righteousness—by works
 - c. Empty pattern of external ritual—that was hypocritical
 - d. Such a problem—Early Church distanced itself from those two days

Didache example—But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites [i.e. the Jews], for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day [Wednesday] and the Preparation [Friday].
- e. *I pay tithes on all that I get*
1. Biblical requirements
 - a. **Three types—Nu 18 and Dt 14**
 - ☆ For God—given to priests and Levites
 - ☆ For attendance at Feast Days—to pay travel expenses
 - ☆ For the poor

- b. Required only from personally earned income/produce
 - ☆ Not on purchased goods—for which tithe already had been paid
- 2. This Pharisee exceeded the requirement
 - Tithed on all his acquired possessions
- 3. Problems
 - a. Again—self-made righteousness—by works
 - b. Pharisees’ legalism—a superficial attitude that misunderstood God’s heart

Mt 23:23-24—*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*

3. THE TAX COLLECTOR

- a. Tax-farming system
 - 1. ‘For profit’ venture
 - Romans contracted with Jewish agents—to collect a certain amount
 - Anything they could extort beyond that—was profit
 - Made even more—loaning people money to pay—at exorbitant rates
 - 2. At least six kinds of tax
 - Poll tax—for existing
 - Land tax—10%
 - Income tax—1%
 - Sales tax
 - Inheritance tax
 - Customs and tolls—probably this man’s vocation
 - ✓ Goods entering a port or a walled city
 - ✓ Using main roads
 - ✓ Owning a cart—taxes each wheel—and the animal drawing it
 - 3. Reputation
 - a. Notorious for graft and corruption—cheating people—remember Zaccheus
 - b. ‘Jews’ considered them traitors—for conspiring with Romans
 - c. Could not be judges or give evidence in court
 - d. Pharisees—said they were ‘unclean’
 - e. **Mishna** description
 - ☆ Categorized them with robbers and murderers

☆ Said other Jews were not obliged to tell them the truth

b. His **reverential position**—*at a distance*

- Probably at the **Eastern Gate**—known as the ‘Mercy Gate’
- Where the ‘unclean’ were required to stand
- He was respectful—not presumptuous—knowing he was ‘unclean’

c. His **humble attitude**—*even unwilling to lift his eyes up to heaven*

- Overcome by awe—at coming into God’s presence
- Reminiscent of Isaiah in the Temple

Is 6:5—*Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips*

- He was ‘blessed’—with a ‘poor spirit’

Mt 5:3—*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

d. His **mournful action**—*beating his breast*

1. Traditional response—in the face of death

- Just as the crowd beat their breasts—after Jesus died—**Lk 23:48**

2. Also meant—one was contrite—truly repentant

3. He was ‘blessed’—with the beatitude of mourning

Mt 5:4—*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*

e. His **sincere prayer**—*God be merciful to me, the sinner*

1. Its **simplicity**—just 6 words [in Greek]

2. Admitted his **need**

- Sinful—in need of forgiveness
- THE sinner—of everyone present—he was the chief sinner—most in need

3. Total **resignation**

- Relied completely on God—not on self

4. Its **boldness**

- Despite feeling unworthy—he still proclaimed his inmost desire to God

5. Pled for **mercy**

a. Not relying on his works

b. But—**not** just an appeal to God’s **kindness**—*have mercy* = **ελεεω**

c. Instead—asking God *apply* mercy—to *accept* the sacrificial atonement

☆ [Be merciful’ = **ιλασκομαι** = verb form of noun ‘**mercy-seat**’—**Heb 9:5**

☆ Verb used only one other place in NT—of **Christ’s payment**/atonement

Heb 2:17—*Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in*

things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

4. WHO WAS JUSTIFIED?

a. The meaning of the question

1. Who was **forgiven**?
2. Who inherited **eternal life**?

➤ Like the Rich Young Ruler's question—**v18**

b. The **answer**

1. The Tax Collector

- Was reverent—humble—repentant—sincere
- Pled for mercy—that only God could supply
- Who did not seek to justify himself

2. **Not** the Pharisee

- Was arrogant—disrespectful—self-centered—ungrateful—disdainful of others
- Rested on his legalism—and needed no mercy
- Tried to justify himself—by his works

c. The essential difference

James 4:6—*God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble*

d. The shocking revelation

- Jesus' great reversal—must have stunned the crowd
- The 'unclean' sinner—was made right with God
- The pious saint—got it all wrong

D. MAIN POINTS

1. WHAT IMPRESSES GOD

- o Not superficial pious acts—ritualism—and self-assurance
- o But humble—sincere searchers—who even feel inadequate

2. WHAT COUNTS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH GOD?

- o Not self-generated works—designed to impress God
- o Not our inherent goodness—or even obedience

'Rock of Ages'—stanza 3

Nothing in my hand I bring—simply to thy cross I cling

- o But only Christ's sacrifice that pays for our sin

- o His ‘mercy’ is applied to us—so that God declares us righteous

What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus

3. RIGHTEOUS ACTS WITHOUT COMPASSION ARE FUTILE GESTURES

- o To show God we love Him—we obey Him—by loving others
- o God wants mercy—justice—and faithfulness
- o We cannot love God—we cannot obey God—if we show disdain for others

IV. APPLICATION

A. WATCH OUT FOR—COMPARING OURSELVES WITH OURSELVES

- This is comparative righteousness—that is worldly
- Paul says it is ‘without understanding’—and ‘boasting beyond our measure’—[II Cor 10](#)
- Our standard of measurement—is Christ alone
- When we boast—we boast in the Lord alone

B. WATCH OUT FOR—RELYING ON NEGATIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

- Success is not—just *avoiding* the sins of this world
- It is following Christ—being obedient to His calling upon our lives
- God won’t ask us—“What did you not do?”

C. WATCH OUT FOR—OUTDOING THE CHARACTERS IN THIS PARABLE

1. DON’T “OUTPHARISEE” THE PHARISEE

- o “I thank God I’m not like the Pharisee”
- o That is both comparative righteousness—and negative righteousness!

2. DON’T OUTDO THE TAX COLLECTOR

- o He was—humble—contrite—with deep personal need
- o God does not encourage—self-abasement—groveling—needing to please others

3. GOD WANTS US TO COME TO HIM

- o **Reverently**—entering into His presence with awe
- o **Passionately**—desiring to know Him intimately
- o **Transparently**—willing to let Him to know us fully
- o **Genuinely**—‘just as we are’

V. INVITATION

JUST AS I AM

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Hath broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.