

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Luke 18 :9-14

LESSON 181 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation" (Psalm 85:7).

[BIBLE TEXT in King James Version](#)

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹ 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. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ 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. 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.

[BIBLE REFERENCES:](#)

[NOTES:](#)

Parables

Jesus often spoke in parables to the people. A parable is a story that explains some spiritual truth in a simple way so the people can understand.

One day Jesus was among a group of people who thought they were good followers of God because they did many good deeds. They had not asked God to forgive their sins so they could be saved and be ready for eternal life; but they were sure that the Lord would be glad to have them in Heaven because they gave money to the church, and they made long prayers while standing on the street corner where people could see how religious they were. On some days they would not eat any food. This is fasting, and they thought that it would make them righteous.

Two Jews on Their Way to the Temple

Jesus wanted to teach these people to whom He spoke that they would need much more than their own righteousness to prepare them for Heaven. So He told them the story about two men who went to the Temple to pray.

Perhaps those two men looked very much alike. They were both Jews, and might have worn much the same clothing. But how differently they prayed!

One man was a Pharisee. That meant that he was very strict about his religion. He had studied the Law of Moses and all the traditions that the priests had handed down from one generation to another. The trouble was that he had paid more attention to the traditions than to the Law. The Law said he must love his neighbor as himself, but we shall very soon see how much this Pharisee loved the man who went to the Temple with him to pray.

The Publican

The publicans were Jews who had been hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from the Jewish citizens. They did not receive much pay. To get more money for themselves and become rich, they overcharged the people from whom they collected. Of course they were hated for doing that.

This publican about whom we are studying realized one day that he was doing wrong. His conscience must have hurt him, because it really was stealing to take money the way he did. And the Law said, "Thou shalt not steal." So he went to the Temple to ask God to forgive him for breaking the Law.

The Pharisee's Sin

Why did the Pharisee go to the Temple? Did he really want to talk to God from an honest heart? No. The Word tells us that he "prayed thus with himself." He felt very important. Just look at this pious man who stands here! "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, . . . or even as this publican," who takes money that does not belong to him. To be sure, the publican had broken the Law, but the Pharisee was breaking it then in hating the publican. And he was not even sorry.

Then the Pharisee recited how good he was: "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." That was good, but it was not enough. At another time when the Pharisees were telling

Jesus about their good works, He said: "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Luke 11:42). What were they leaving undone? They did not love the poor, and help the widows. They had no mercy. And they did not love God more than themselves.

This Pharisee did not ask God for anything. He thought he had everything he needed. He just wanted to impress God, and the people who watched him pray, with his outward goodness. Jesus described this kind of person when He said, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). God could look right inside and see that he was not nearly so good as he looked on the outside.

The Publican's Prayer

Let us now listen to the publican's prayer. He is standing alone, way over in the corner, because he knows that the Pharisee does not love him. He knows he needs help from God, and he prays in a way that *he* will receive it.

The publican is sorry for what he has done, and he is so ashamed he will not even look up toward God. He realizes that God is holy, and he himself is but a sinner. Will this God who made the heavens and the earth and everything in them, look down upon his wretchedness and help him? Will He listen to the prayer of this poor, trembling sinner?

The prayer is short, but it comes from the depths of his broken heart: "God be merciful to me a sinner." He knew he was a sinner, but he did not want to be. Oh, the mercy of God who stooped so low to answer that cry for mercy!

Humility

One must humble himself in order to be able to confess his sins; and humility is precious in the sight of the Lord. One time when David was king of Israel, he committed a terrible sin. Although he was king, he humbled himself and confessed: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" He pled, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness" (Psalm 51:1). Nothing we can do will earn forgiveness. It is only the mercy of God and the Blood of Jesus that take away our sin.

**"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."**

Promises to the Penitent

There are promises to the penitent which the publican had perhaps read or heard. One is: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). When he prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he believed God would forgive him.

He might also have read the Psalm of David: "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

We do not have to stop to consider which of these two men received the greater blessings from the Lord through their visit to the Temple. The publican did, of course. Jesus said, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." God had heard his prayer, had forgiven his sins, and now he was a child of God.

And the Pharisee? He was still a sinner who prayed "with himself " He had not asked God for anything, and he had not received anything. All his hatred for the publican was still there. He probably went on paying tithes and making long prayers, but God did not own him as His child.

God wants us to serve Him with all our heart. When we pray,

we must yield our will to Him and mean what we say. Then we must live so that we prove that we mean it.

The Change in Paul's Prayers

The Apostle Paul had been a devout Pharisee, known as Saul of Tarsus. He had no doubt prayed many long prayers, but they are not mentioned in the Bible. One day on the road to Damascus, he was struck to the ground, and the Son of God called him to repentance. After Paul had gone to the home of Judas, God told Ananias to visit him, "for, behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). What was the difference between this prayer and all the long prayers he had said before? His former prayers must have been such as those of the Pharisee who prayed "with himself." Now Paul was repenting and calling upon God for mercy — and God heard and forgave his sins, and he became a mighty man of God.

The Israelites' Offerings

God had told the Israelites to offer sacrifices in their Tabernacle worship to show them that the Messiah, or Lamb of God, would some day offer Himself as the great Sacrifice to wash away their sins. With their offerings, they were supposed to pray from their heart, and believe in Him who was to come. But too many times they did not pray from the heart. They killed the animals and held special feasts for their own pleasures. One time in their history, God startled them by crying against them: "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth.... When ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isaiah 1:11-15).

But just that little prayer from a repentant heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner," God does hear and answer. Everyone can be saved who prays that prayer. If he believes that God forgives him, he will go "down to his house justified."

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who went to the Temple to pray?
- 2 How did the Pharisee pray?"
- 3 Name a commandment he broke as he stood there.
- 4 How did Jesus describe the Pharisees?
- 5 Who were the publicans?
- 6 How did this publican feel when he went to pray?
- 7 Whose prayer did God answer, and why?
- 8 What happened to the man whose prayer was answered?
- 9 What kind of prayer brings an answer from God?
- 10 What must a man do to be saved?