

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

LESSON 8

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: Luke 18:9-14

Context

1. The Pharisees were deeply religious men, committed to upright behavior and religious tradition. They were highly respected by the general public as good men, but their fundamental religious assumptions stood opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees were pious and self-righteous and were trying to work their way to heaven by keeping the Mosaic law. This was opposed to the message of grace and forgiveness of sin that Jesus was offering. According to Luke 18:9, who did the Pharisees trust for salvation? What was their attitude about themselves? How did they view others?

2. The Pharisees were considered by themselves and others as righteous men. Jesus' original audience would have expected the Pharisee to be the hero of the story rather than the tax collector. Who did Jesus come to save? Who did He sacrifice Himself for? Romans 4:5, Luke 5:30-32, Mark 2:17, Matt 9:11-13 According to these passages, who did the Pharisees have the most contempt for?

Read Luke 18:9-14

3. In first century Jerusalem, tax collectors were considered traitors and thieves. They were seen as the worst kind of sinners. Tax collectors worked for the Romans and had a reputation for dishonesty and corruption. Who did Jesus tell this story to, or to whom was it directed? How would you describe and contrast the two characters of this parable?

4. In the Pharisees' prayer (v.11), who was he comparing himself to? On the other hand, when the admitted sinner prayed in v. 13 did he compare himself to anybody or just admit his own sin and pray for mercy? According to Jesus Christ's own statement in v. 14, which is the proper prayer? Does it do us any good to labor under a system of relative righteousness such as the Pharisees (2 Cor. 10:12, 18), or do we need to focus on our own shortcomings and ask forgiveness? In the Lord's prayer given to all of us in Matt. 6:12 what are we to ask God for on a regular basis (I John 1:8-10)?

5. One very clear and recurring theme throughout the Bible is that all men are naturally sinful (Gen. 6:5, Jer. 17:9, Ps. 143:2, Isaiah 53:6, Isaiah 59:1-2, Rom. 3:23). How could the Pharisees believe they could ever be good enough by their own merits to please God (Prov 11:2, 16:5, 21:4; Luke 20:46; I Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:3; James 4:6)? What happens to the proud (I Peter 5:5, Matt. 23:12, Luke 18:14)?

6. In this parable Jesus contrasts the arrogant, prideful Pharisee with the humble and repentant sinner (Matt. 5:20). The Pharisee was very much like his ancestors who held their good works up to God as their justification and yet had no internal heart relationship or faith in God (Titus 3:5). In Isaiah 64:6, to what does the prophet liken the good works of man which are not done in faith or from the right motivation?

7. The religious leaders were good at making sacrifices, at keeping religious tradition, at praying out loud, at giving money to their own charities, and at pleasing men. What condemning statement did Jesus make to them in Matt. 9:13? From where will the Pharisees only rewards come (Matt. 6:1,5)?

8. The Apostle Paul says (of the religious leaders) that they are zealous and hard working in their religion. In Romans 10:2-3, what is their problem? What is more important, religion or truth? What is truth (John 17:17)? According to the Word of God, what is the truth about salvation (Eph. 2:8-9)?

9. In Luke 18:14 the sinner is "justified." This is a passive verb that means God justified him and not that the man justified himself. Another way of saying it is that he is "declared righteous." Why was he declared righteous? What is the fate of those who seek to justify themselves? Where is my righteousness to be found (2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 3:8-9)?

10. The Lord wants us to have the tax collector's heart, a heart sensitive to sin and totally dependent on God's grace. The Pharisee comes to recount his own merits and his superiority to others. What merits does the sinner recount (Rom. 3:10-12)? What excuses does the sinner give? What does the sinner ask for (v. 13)? Eph. 2:4-5