

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18:9-14

INTRODUCTION

- Today's world frowns upon those who think and speak in "absolutes", and "black and white" terms
- We are told to be more "nuanced" in our thinking, as there are many "grey areas", and that we ought not be "dogmatic" about anything
- But the bible is a book of *absolutes*, of *black & white*, where we are presented truths in a binary manner
 - ✓ Good, evil
 - ✓ Light, darkness
 - ✓ Clean, unclean
 - ✓ Saved, lost
 - ✓ Just, unjust
 - ✓ Seeing, blind
 - ✓ Sheep, goats
 - ✓ Wheat, tares
 - ✓ Broad way, narrow way
 - ✓ Heaven, hell
- God describes these spiritual realities dichotomously – it is either one or the other, no grey areas, no in-betweens, no half-way salvation, no almost Christians
- Many of the parables of the Lord highlight this distinction, and serve to help us to understand clearly the difference between the two
- As was the case in those times, so it is today that multitudes are mistaken as to what is required to be saved and have

everlasting life, and are deceived into thinking they themselves will enter into heaven

- What the Lord Jesus teaches in this parable was revolutionary to the mindset of the Jews
- Everyone expected that the hyper-pious, squeaky clean religious class were assured of heaven, while the despised sinners were certain to be damned
- But Jesus turned all these prevailing opinions on their head
- He shows us that there *is* a way of salvation, but it has no basis in what we can do for God, but in what God has done for us

I. TWO MEN, TWO REPUTATIONS

A. The Pharisee

1. The Pharisees had their roots in the Maccabean revolt after the desecration of the temple under Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC
2. The zealots for the Law were known as the Hasidim, which were later split into two groups: the Essenes which retreated from public life and formed a community near the Dead Sea, and the Pharisees, which means “separated ones” who took it upon themselves to be the enforcers of public morality
3. By the time the Romans were in power, the Pharisees were a recognised religion, and by the time Christ appeared, they were a dominant religious and political force in Israel
4. Their oral traditions (the Talmud) came to be esteemed above the written law of God (the Torah)

5. They made the commandment of God of none effect by their tradition (Matthew 15:6)
6. This parable, featuring a Pharisee, was specifically addressed to these Pharisees who trusted in their own righteousness and despised others (v.9)

B. The publican

1. This title comes from the Latin *publicanus* which is a public contractor, a tax collector
2. The Romans would hire from among their subjects men who would be agents of Rome to collect tax for them
3. Most tax collectors were corrupt and were known for exacting more than was required and keeping it for themselves
 - a. They would overcharge (Luke 3:12-13)
 - b. They would extort by false accusation (Luke 19:8)
 - c. They were known for intimidating and threatening those who did not pay their taxes
 - d. These activities were permitted by the Romans
4. Publicans were despised by their fellow Jews
 - a. They were seen as traitors to their own people
 - b. They were regarded as the lowest class of society and the worst of sinners (Matthew 5:46-47; 9:11; 11:19)

II. TWO MEN, TWO SUPPLICATIONS

A. The temple

1. To come to the temple was to approach unto God
2. God intended his house to be “a house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:7)
3. There were two designated times for prayer at the temple, which corresponded with the morning and evening sacrifice
 - a. The first was at 9am (the “third hour of the day”), called “Shacharit” (morning), when the temple gates opened (Acts 2:15)
 - b. The second was at 3pm (the “ninth hour”), called “Minchah” (gift/sacrifice), called “the hour of prayer” and “the hour of confession” (Acts 3:1)
 - c. Note that the Lord Jesus was crucified at the hour of morning sacrifice/prayer (Mark 15:25) and died at the hour of evening sacrifice/prayer (Luke 23:44-46)

B. Their similarities

1. The same place – the temple
2. The same purpose – to pray
3. The same predicament – they were both sinners

C. The Pharisee’s prayer

1. He had a wrong view of God
 - a. He thought that God heard him
 - i. He prayed “with himself”, not unto God

- ii. Rather than hearing the proud, the Bible says that God *“resisteth the proud”* (James 4:6).
 - b. He thought that God was pleased with him
 - i. God is not pleased with our attempts to gain acceptance with him by our works (Isaiah 64:6; Proverbs 16:5)
- 2. He had a wrong view of himself
 - a. Note the repetition of “I” throughout his prayer (cf. Romans 10:3-4)
 - b. He spoke of his righteous character
 - i. Not an extortioner (cf. Matthew 23:25)
 - ii. Not unjust (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:20)
 - iii. Not an adulterer (cf. Matthew 12:39)
 - c. He spoke of his righteous conduct
 - i. He fasted
 - ii. He tithed
 - d. According to his own standard, he was righteous, but according to God’s standard he was condemned (Romans 3:19-20)
- 3. He had a wrong view of others (Proverbs 14:21)

D. The publican

- 1. His shame – standing afar, eyes downcast

2. His sorrow – he smote upon his breast
 - a. The verb tense indicates continuous beating
 - b. He knew that his heart was desperately wicked
 - c. It was a godly sorrow that this poor sinner exhibited (2 Corinthians 7:10)
 - d. One thumped his chest in pride, the other smote his breast in penitence

3. His supplication – “God be merciful to me a sinner”
 - a. He calls himself literally “the sinner” (*to hamartolo*)
 - i. When the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin, the sinner feels not merely that he is one sinner among many, but the very chief of them
 - ii. The Pharisee saw himself righteous and all others sinners, while this man saw himself the sinner, and all others righteous in comparison
 - b. He begged God for mercy, knowing that his alone could save him
 - i. This word (*hilastheti*) translated “mercy” means to “be propitious”, and is the word for an atoning sacrifice (cf. Hebrews 2:17)
 - ii. The publican has seen the priest cut the lamb’s throat, collect its blood in a basin, which was then offered upon the altar to atone for the sins of the people
 - iii. He understands that if he is to be reconciled to God, it must be through the blood of atonement –

through the blood of “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)

- iv. God’s mercy is the only basis of salvation (Titus 3:5)

III. TWO MEN, TWO DESTINATIONS

A. The publican was justified

- 1. To be justified is to be pardoned of sin, and declared as righteous in God’s sight (1 John 1:7)
- 2. The very moment a sinner repents and believes, he is accepted with God, and receives everlasting life

B. The way up is down

- 1. The exalted shall be abased
 - a. This refers to what happens on the day of judgment, when such self-righteous hypocrites will be eternally condemned to the torments of hell
- 2. The humble shall be exalted
 - a. Salvation is simple, and within reach of every person who will humble themselves before God
 - b. But admitting you are a vile sinner before God, worthy of a thousand hells, acknowledging your “good works” are nothing but filthy rags in God’s sight, is not easy for any whose heart is proud and self-loving

CONCLUSION

- 1. Every one of us will spend eternity somewhere, and it is a binary option – heaven or hell

2. Like the Pharisee, multitudes think they have done all they need to in order to attain heaven, when in reality they are condemned before God
3. Your problem is not that you are “unfulfilled”, empty, lacking peace, having “a Jesus shaped hole in his heart”
4. Your problem is that you are a *sinner* deserving of hell
5. “The greatest enemy to human souls is the self-righteous spirit which makes men look to themselves for salvation.” (Charles Spurgeon)
6. Examine yourself and see if you have that self-righteous pharisaical spirit in your own heart which says:
 - I’m may not be perfect, but I’m not as bad as some people
 - I try my best to be good, and I think God will accept that
 - God is too loving to send me to hell
 - Words like vile, wretched, evil, wicked don’t really apply to me
7. Until you see yourself as God sees you, as “the sinner” in whom dwells no trace of goodness, then you are not ready to be saved
8. Yet you may be fully confident that if you humble yourself before God and cry out to him for mercy in Christ, that he will save you (Psalm 34:18)
9. *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 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 55:6-7)