

The Parables of Jesus #37
The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector
(Lk. 18:9-14)
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INTRODUCTION

A. Has anyone ever “cut you down to size”

1. We know what that means
 - a. it happens when we’ve bragged, boasted, or in some way thought of ourselves as “Mr. Big”
 - b. someone then comes along and, with a word of two, deflates your pride
2. We seldom like it, but it can actually help us become a better person

B. The truth is, there are quite a number of people who need “cutting down to size”

1. In tonight’s parable, we are introduced to some of them
2. I find it interesting that the ones Jesus most often had to confront this way were the most “religious”
3. It may well be that this would still be true today

C. Once again, we are told the “why” behind the telling of the parable -- it was directed against three destructive, self-centered kind of problems

1. Those who trusted in themselves
2. Those who believed themselves to be righteous
3. Those who despised others
4. There was a fallacy at the heart of people like this that Jesus exposed
5. There was also a simple attitude of humility that Jesus knew was valuable to the man seeking God

D. This parable should result in some serious self-examination

1. However, it may be that the real lessons will be avoided by those who need it most
2. It may be heeded best by those who already understand the kind of heart that God is looking for
3. Nevertheless, it is an important parable for those seeking God’s will

I. THE THREE KINDS OF PROBLEMS ADDRESSED (Lk 18:9)

A. People who trust in themselves

1. PEITHO -- is a word that means “to persuade or be persuaded” and thus “to be confident” in something
 - a. people can be persuaded to become confident in themselves
 - b. perhaps they have seen the failure of others
 - c. perhaps they believe that God only responds when they “measure up”
 - d. perhaps they had fooled themselves into believing they were truly the answer to their own problems
2. There is a great amount of pride and conceit in the self-sufficient
 - a. Prov 26:12 -- Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (NKJ)
 - b. Isa 5:21 -- Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (NKJ)
 - c. 1 Cor 10:12 -- Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (NKJ)
 - d. Gal 6:3 -- For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (NKJ)
3. Perhaps the worst thing about this kind of person is that if one trusts in himself, he cannot, at the same time, trust in God -- he has no faith

B. People who think themselves to be righteous

1. This is actually the reason for trusting in themselves to begin with
 - a. some think they are good enough just as they are -- they cannot conceive that God might not think they are wonderful people
 - b. others focus on their good deeds and think they deserve for God to reward them -- they cannot conceive that God would fail to recognize their wonderful efforts
 - c. therefore, both conclude that they deserve to be trusted
2. These attitudes are addressed and condemned in Scripture
 - a. Prov 20:6 -- Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man? (NKJ)
 - b. Prov 21:2 -- Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts. (NKJ)
 - c. Prov 28:26 -- He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered. (NKJ)
 - d. Prov 30:12 -- There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. (NKJ)

- e. Jer 2:35 -- Yet you say, "Because I am innocent, surely His anger shall turn from me.' Behold, I will plead My case against you, because you say, "I have not sinned.'" (NKJ)

C. People who despise others

1. EXOUTHENOUNTAS -- means to "set at naught" -- in other words, to make something worthless, unimportant, insignificant
2. People who think this way, believe themselves to be better than others, more important, of greater value to the world
3. This is the natural result of thinking oneself to be righteous, and thus becoming persuaded to trust in self
4. This prideful, haughty, self-promoting attitude is doubly destructive
 - a. it destroys one's ability to relate to his fellow man
 - b. it destroys one's ability to relate to God
 - c. it destroys because such a person has no need of either man or God

D. Now, it was to people like this that Jesus spoke the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector

II. THE PARABLE (Lk 18:10-14)

A. Two men went up to the temple to pray

1. One was a Pharisee
 - a. on one hand, the Pharisee represented the best of religious man
 - b. on the other, he represented the man who trusted in himself, saw himself to be righteous, and despised others
2. The other was a tax collector (publican)
 - a. on hand, the tax collector represented the worst of man
 - b. on the other, he possessed a totally different attitude about self and God

B. The Pharisee's prayer

1. He prayed with himself
 - a. since his trust was in himself, a prayer that satisfied himself was appropriate
 - b. someone once said this is a good example of a prayer that got no higher than the ceiling

2. He was thankful that he was not like other men
 - a. it is interesting that sins mentioned are public, scandalous sins
 - 1) he was not an extortioner -- he did not rob others
 - 2) he was not unjust -- he treated others fairly
 - 3) he was not an adulterer -- he was pure and committed to his marriage
 - 4) he certainly wasn't like the tax collector -- a betrayer of of his own people and noted for lack of religion
 - b. he mentions nothing about sins of the heart, or more private sins that are less obvious
 - c. since he had not committed those open sins, he saw himself as one who was favored in God's sight

3. He noted two positive acts of worship
 - a. he fasted twice a week -- points to his seriousness about his religion; and by itself, speaks of great commitment and zeal
 - b. he gave tithes of all he possessed -- not just 10% of his income, but of everything

C. The tax collector's prayer

1. He stood afar off
 - a. his well-known sins caused him to be ashamed and embarrassed
 - b. he was unclean in the sight of others
 - c. he was the kind of man that religious people want to avoid, so he kept his distance

2. He would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven
 - a. how could a man so stained with sin even look toward God?
 - b. shame, humiliation, defeat created a burden too great to bear

3. He beat his breast
 - a. was it anger at himself for getting so far away from God?
 - b. was it anguish over the over his failure to live by God's will?
 - c. was it despair that caused his emotions to overflow in sorrow?

4. He uttered one sentence -- perhaps one of the most powerful prayers in the Bible
 - a. "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (actually, "the sinner")
 - b. with one sentence he throws himself completely on the mercy of God
 - 1) he certainly isn't trusting in himself, but God
 - 2) he knows he isn't righteous, but keenly aware of his sin
 - 3) he doesn't despise others for he is too caught up in his own problem before God

D. Jesus' conclusion

1. The tax collector returned home justified, not the Pharisee
 - a. remember -- the Pharisee wasn't actually seeking God
 - b. only the tax collector had a need for God
2. There is an important principle at work here
 - a. Luke 18:14 -- I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (NKJ)
 - b. the Pharisee exalted himself, he didn't depend on God
 - c. the tax collector was full of humility and only God could exalt such a man

III. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. Self-exaltation produces a chain reaction of more sin and problems

1. Exalt self -- become self-satisfied, self-reliant
2. Exalt self -- ignore, deny, be blind to one's true sinful condition
3. Exalt self -- lose any need for God
4. Exalt self -- degrade and count worthless, other people
5. Exalt self -- end up in worse shape than the most notable of sinners

B. Self-exaltation is a sin that is common among the religious

1. We resist this claim (at least for ourselves)
2. Look for the evidence of self-exaltation
 - a. do we trust in ourselves?
 - 1) if we don't then why are we so focused on ourselves
 - 2) why is it so hard to discuss God's work in us?
 - 3) why do we feel secure if we can speak of what "we" have done for God
 - b. do we think we are righteous?
 - 1) if we don't, then why do we so often think we are better than others
 - 2) if we don't, then why do we sometimes speak of converting people to the church instead of to Jesus
 - c. do we despise others?
 - 1) if we don't, then why do we resist any connection with certain people
 - 2) if we don't why will we allow ourselves to live with our prejudices

C. The tax collector's attitude is what God is looking for

1. Primarily because the tax collector's attitude is the only one that evidences a need for God
2. His attitude shows some important elements
 - a. instead of despising others, he despises that which took him away from God -- he knows his own problems
 - b. he admits to no righteousness, but instead admits to sin
 - c. he cannot trust himself, but instead has confidence only in God
3. We might add that it is not a contrived confession and seeking God's forgiveness
 - a. this is an honest, heartfelt admission
 - b. the Pharisee, unless he actually learned the lesson, might well attempt to copy the tax collector's action, but not the meaning

CONCLUSION

A. Anybody feel "cut down to size" after this parable? If so, join the club!

B. Don't miss the power behind the tax collector's attitude

D. Invitation