

Luke 18:9-17

Today, we come to a parable that describes 2 men who both enter the temple to offer sacrifice, to burn incense, and to pray. Yet, they both leave with 2 totally different outcomes. We see in this parable how 2 people can be at the same place, at the same time, for the same purpose, and leave on opposite ends of the spectrum.

Pray/Read

How can 2 people be at the same place, at the same time, for the same purpose...even doing the same thing! And yet leave in 2 totally different conditions and positions? Jesus reveals the answer to this question for us in our text today. Notice his purpose for bringing this up...

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

1. This parable is for those who think they have it all together
2. For those who at least make sure those around them think they have all together
3. And who have a tendency to look down their noses at others.

In this parable we see...

I. Two People v10

10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Two men went up to the temple to pray.

1. One of these 2 men was a Pharisee
 - a. The very word Pharisee means separate ones and we see that in how he describes himself
 - b. He wasn't an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer, or even like the tax collectors
 - c. No...Pharisees were some of the most religious people of the day
 - d. According to his own testimony he was a church-goer, faithful to pray, to fast, and even to tithe: he was a good man.
2. The other man was a tax collector
 - a. Tax collectors were the low life's of that society
 - b. They had desecrated and defiled themselves by purchasing tax franchises from the Romans
 1. They were extortioners, stealing money from their own people
 2. On top of that, the money that they took from their people was used by the Romans to further oppress them! Traitors!
 - c. They were the most hated people in Israel. They were, in the eyes of the people, the farthest from God.
3. Two totally opposite men went up to the temple to pray

II. Two Postures v11-13

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!'

The Pharisee stood by himself

1. It was not wrong to stand, because standing was a popular posture for prayer in this day.
2. Very likely he would take his place as close to the holy place as he can get,
3. He's as close to where the presence of God resides as he can get, he belongs there, right?

The Tax Collector stood far off

1. this man is standing as well, but far off.
2. Why? Because he knows he doesn't deserve to be in the presence of God or even the presence of those who are righteous.
3. He would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but hung his head and beat his chest
4. He cried out to God.

These 2 people are not only opposites, but their postures are polar opposites as well.

III. Two Prayers v11-13

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!'

The Pharisees prayer

1. In two verses he uses the pronoun I five times.
2. The only time he refers to God is when he thanks God that he is good enough.
 - a. He asks nothing from God, seeks nothing from God, and needs nothing from God.
 - b. We have to wonder if he was even speaking to God
 - c. Jesus even described him as praying to himself!

The Tax Collectors prayer

1. There are no thee's, no thou's, and no deep theological dissertations: there was no eloquence
2. There is no argument, no appeals, no justification, and no excuses...just a cry from his heart.
3. That is all he could offer in prayer: a cry from the heart for mercy.

Their prayers are polar opposite.

IV. Two Results v14

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."

What Jesus says is absolutely outrageous to his audience

1. This is the reverse of everything the Jews believed, everything their religious leaders taught them,
2. To say that a self-confessed wicked man left the temple ground justified rather than a self-confessed righteous man is to completely overturn religious thinking.
3. Ps 24:3-4 *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.*
4. This pronouncement by Jesus totally turned their understanding upside down...and maybe ours as well??
 - a. At the end of the best day of the best week of the best month of the best year of your life, you are not worthy to enter his presence in prayer, much less expect him to hear or answer you.
 - b. And at the end of the worst day of the worst week of the worst month of the worst year of your life, you can boldly approach the throne of grace...not because of you but because of Christ alone!
 - c. We don't grasp this well...that is why we feel better when a pastor prays for us than when we take it directly to the mediator Himself: the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. But Jesus drove his point home! The parable is for those who trust in their own righteousness and look down at those they consider less than themselves.

These 2 polar opposites saw the opposite result.

1. The Pharisee left like he came in...self righteous, squeaky clean on the outside but inwardly he was full of dead men's bones.
2. The tax collector who had so much to repent of, he couldn't even put it into words, went home still despised by the religious elite, but forgiven, clean, justified, and changed.

The parable didn't wake them up! Look at what happens.

15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. 16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

1. We don't need pharisees, religious elites
2. We need publicans, sinners...those who will come as little children
3. What describes you better?

Let's consider 3 questions to help us diagnose ourselves.

1. Are you looking totally away from yourself for your justification?

- a. I prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, joined the church, and was baptized.
- b. I have accepted Jesus and made Him Lord of my life.
- c. I am living a good life and am faithful to give, pray, attend, and worship.
- d. That is exactly what the Pharisee said who went home unjustified! I, I, I.
- e. NO! Only Jesus! GOSPEL

2. Are you looking at others, more than you are looking in the mirror?

- a. We should never look at those in sin with contempt, because not one of us is above stumbling and falling into any sin ourselves.
- b. 1 Cor 10:12 *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*
- c. If we are spending more time looking at the splinter in our brother's eye rather than at the log in our own eye, we will go home without hope.

3. Are you a repenting repenter?

- a. *When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent", he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.* Martin Luther
- b. Realization...remorse...rejection of YOUR sin?

How will you leave today?