

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 7TH MARCH 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS; THE PHARISEE & THE TAX COLLECTOR (LUKE 18:9-14)

Welcome

"Hello and welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 7th March 2021. There are two ways to pray. Which one describes you? In today's sermon on the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector from Luke 18:9-14, we will be encouraged to pray with humility. I hope that this transcript will be uplifting to you today." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 19:1-6, 14

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.*

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, we are powerless to save ourselves. Guard us outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all afflictions which happen to the body, and from the evil thoughts that hurt and harm the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." 13 But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Prayer for others

Almighty God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our hope is in you. Please look after our families, and keep us safe and healthy. You are our healer. God of peace, give us patience and courage to endure changing times, including times of solitude and times apart from the ones we love. God of love, please keep the spirit of fellowship strong within our church family while we are apart, and bring us back together to worship soon. Our hope is in you. May your love and the truth of your word protect us and encourage us always. Amen.

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Pharisee and the Tax Collector'

There are two ways to pray. I wonder which one describes you? Over the last several weeks we have been looking at different parables of Jesus. These are simple stories that Jesus told to communicate deep spiritual truths about who he was, what the kingdom is like, and what it means to be his follower. In today's parable we are going to see two very different people, two very different prayers, and two very different outcomes. This simple story holds up a mirror and it exposes the content of our hearts, as we ask ourselves which person represents me?

In chapter 18 verse 9 Luke explains who Jesus is telling this parable to, *“To some who are confident in their own righteousness and look down on everyone else Jesus told this parable.”* Righteousness has to do with a right standing before God. There are some people who thought by obeying all the laws, and by trying really hard, that they were able to trust in themselves to achieve their own righteousness, rather than needing to trust in God to be made righteous. But self-righteousness leads to pride, and pride leads to a lack of love for others, and ultimately for God.

This parable is part of a series of teachings of Jesus to his disciple, but there is also a crowd of people listening in, including some of the opponents of Jesus. At times Jesus is talking to his disciples, and another time he is addressing the religious leaders that are critical of him and his ministry. So who is this parable directed at? It's obvious to make the connection between the self-righteous people that Jesus is talking about in this parable and his opponents that he has accused of being self-righteous before. But possibly he is also speaking to the disciples as a warning. The sad truth is that the longer that one is a Christian, and the more involved someone becomes in church life, the greater the danger it is to fall into self-righteousness. But as Jesus tells the story he does so in such a masterful way that those listening in on the crowd, who knew very well that they were not righteous at all, are being encouraged to receive justification through God's grace. So this is a parable that we all need to hear.

This parable is about two people, so let us meet them in verse 10, *“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”* The pharisees were a group of people that were at very centre of religious life. They were community leaders, well respected, and would have been widely considered to be upright, good, moral people. Tax collectors would have been at the complete other end of the religious and social spectrum. At

this time Judea was under Roman rule, and the tax collectors would be considered as working for the enemy. They often took advantage of their position, and exploited others for their own profit. People would have viewed them as dishonest crooks and shady outsiders. These two people are poles apart, and in the culture of the original listeners they would have unconsciously looked up to the pharisees and looked down on the tax collectors.

These two very different people pray two very different prayers. Let us look first at how the Pharisee prays, “The pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evil doers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all that I get’” This prayer gets off to a great start by thanking God, but then it takes a very bad turn. Instead of thanking God for who God is, and what God has done, this prayer is focused on the man himself. He prays about who he is not, and what he has done. He is showing off! He is boasting before God. This is a perfect example of somebody who is confident in their own righteousness and is looking down on other people.

Now of course all those things he does are good. It is good not to cheat, not to steal, not to be unfaithful, to fast, and to give. But God has always been more interested in the inside of our heart rather than only our outside actions. And this pharisee’s heart is a sin, just like everybody else, but he cannot see it. Our hearts were made to worship God, and we are never more satisfied in life than when our hearts are filled with love towards God. But sin seeks to fill our heart with other things, sometimes turning towards idolatry which causes us to love money, power, relationships, possessions, and pleasures above God. And sometimes sin causes us to turn inwards on ourselves and we fill our hearts with pride and self-accomplishment.

Self-righteousness is no righteousness at all. Religious pride only leads to spiritual blindness. The purpose of prayer is to give glory to God, to seek forgiveness, and to ask for help to love others. The Pharisee in this story was giving glory only to himself, and using his prayer to look down on others. His heart was full of the sin of pride.

But what about the tax collector, what is his prayer going to be like? Let us look at verse 13, “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” As contrasting as these two men are, is how differently they pray, but in the complete opposite way to what is expected. The tax collector is a picture of humility, he knows he is a sinner and he asks God for the only thing he can, mercy. He beats his chest as a sign of sorrow and repentance, because he knows that he needs God. Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We all look different on the outside, but on the inside we have the problem of sin. Our fallen human nature is to love sin and not God, to love ourselves and not others. No matter who we are, no matter what else we have accomplished in life, we cannot get rid of that root of sin in our hearts by ourselves. We can ignore it, hide it from other people, and try to cover it up with other things, but we can never do enough to remove it from our heart by ourselves. The only thing that can take away our sin is the power of the cross.

Jesus was the only one who lived a righteous life, he perfectly loved God and loved others. But he did not come into this world to show off, but to serve. He chose not to exalt himself but to humble himself. And through his death we can receive forgiveness of all of our sins, and be purified from all our unrighteousness. Through his resurrection we have hope for the future, and the promise of eternal life. By his spirit living in us we are enabled and empowered to love God and love others. All this is a gift, it is not something

we work to earn. We receive it through humble daily dependence, trusting not in ourselves but in Christ alone.

Verse 14 Jesus says, *"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all those who humble themselves will be exalted."* Lent is a time of self examination. We desire to see the sin in our hearts not so that we can live in sorrow and shame, but by exposing our need we will turn to Christ in repentance, so that we can live in joy. There are two ways to pray. Which describes you? Are you like the pharisee, trusting in your own righteousness and looking down on others? Or are you like the tax collector, knowing that you need God? Those who come to the cross trusting in themselves will receive nothing. But those who come to the cross seeking mercy will find it. Their sins will be wiped away, and their unrighteousness will be forgiven. They will be given the power to serve and obey, and will live with God in his kingdom forever.

The Pharisee and the tax collector went to the temple to pray, but that temple was destroyed because it was no longer needed. Now the meeting place between God and man is through Jesus, so we can pray today wherever we are, right in our own homes. Let us be like the tax collector. Let us confess our need for God, and seek his mercy.

Prayer

God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Forgive my self-righteous attitudes and my unrighteous actions. Lord Jesus, you had no sin, but you became sin for us, so that in you we might become the righteousness of God. Send your purifying Spirit into my heart; lead me in repentance, and help me to live for you in humble daily dependence, until I am lifted up in your eternal kingdom. Amen