

MEET YOURSELF IN LUKE'S PARABLES

Part 13: The Parable of the Pharisee and Publican (Luke 18:9-14)

INTRO: Christopher Lasch described Western society in his book "The Culture of Narcissism": "Self-absorption is the climate of contemporary society." That was 1979 little change – even worse. As our society moves away from biblical roots, place once reserved for God is filled with self. Values are decided by ideas like: "loving yourself is the greatest love of all". "I need to feel good about myself"; "I owe it to myself." Self is ultimate source of truth & value. A humanistic society tells us the answer to life is found in our self-esteem, a positive self-image. New Age promoters are no help telling us there is no God; we must find our own divinity in the power of self. The goal of life is the satisfaction of self.

What we think about ourselves *is* important. But God's way of giving us significance is different than world's. Only as we see God for Who He is can we view self as we really are. Meaning comes when life is *theocentric* not *ego-centric*.

MAIN TRUTH: For kingdom citizens humility is a way of life (v. 14b)..

I. THE PROBLEM (18:9)

- A. THE *DELUSION* – We are deluded when we feel our own goodness can commend us to God and we have a superior attitude to others. The foundation of the Pharisees confidence was self, which is common mark of all human-centered systems. People are deceived when they think performing religious deeds commends them to God (v.12). Allied with our deluded self-confidence is often a superior attitude for others (vv.9,11). Whenever self worth is based on performance, there will be comparison with others.
- B. THE *DANGER* - Such claims overlook basic fact of human nature – people are deeply and inalterably sinful (Rom. 3:10, 23). All the good works and religious performing in the world can never remove sin. When we are told that sin, fear, and guilt are illusions, we deny biblical truth. With all our self-absorption (maybe cause of it) our society is the most anxiety ridden, emotionally insecure, and abusive in history.

SUMMARY of problem - self has been enthroned where only God belongs. The answer to this problem is what this parable contrasting two men is all about.

II. THE PARABLE (18:10-13)

Parable paints portrait of two people who are very different. Both went to same Temple: one to perform a work, the other to enjoy a privilege; one constrained by duty, the other with a deep-felt need.

- A. (vv.11-12) THE *PHARISEE* - PORTRAIT OF A RELIGIOUS PERFORMER
 1. Identity – "Pharisee" has become derogatory term, synonymous with religious hypocrite. Then they were pinnacle of Judaism; highly

respected in community. Prayed 3 times a day, fasted 2 times per week, tithed (20-30%).

2. Activity – came to temple to pray. True condition exposed (v.11 prayed about it to himself). He did more than law required (v.12). Much of what we call prayer is little more than a dialogue with self. So full of self he had no room for God. His prayer is disguised self-congratulation (Matt. 6:5; 23:5).
 3. Error – He had an inflated sense of self (proud). No sense of his sinfulness. He had deflated sense of God. Prayer lacked confession, praise, thanksgiving. He had a distorted sense of values. Compared himself to wrong standard. He was impressed, not by what he is compared to God, but to others, esp. robbers, evil-doers, adulterers, & tax gatherers. Focused on what he did not who he was. He didn't go to pray, but to tell God and others how good he was!
- B. (V. 13) THE *TAX COLLECTOR* - PORTRAIT OF A SPIRITUAL PAUPER
1. Identity – Tax collectors were not respected, but hated traitors and extortionists. Matthew and Zacchaeus.
 2. Activity – He too prayed (7 words) but "stood at a distance." He avoids the Holy Place, eyes are downcast, body language of guilt, beats breast as gesture of sorrow and grief. Everything about him speaks of humility, brokenness, repentance. He is not deluded about who he is and what he is really like. His prayer comes from the heart. He knows his need for God and His forgiveness. He sees nothing in himself but sin and He seeks nothing from God but mercy. No desire to compare to anyone. He is "the sinner" in need.

III. THE PRODUCT (18:14)

- A. *RESULT* – As the two pray-ers were different, so were the results. Parable does not close open-ended. Jesus leaves no doubt as to His message. The tax-collector left "justified before God". He came humbly & God exalted him (Rom. 3:24; 10:3).
- B. *WARNING* – Justification never comes to those who "are confident of their own r'ness." Such confidence is deception. The Lord doesn't want us so much to copy publican's words as to have his heart – sensitive to sin & dependent on God's mercy. This is where salvation begins (Matt. 5:3). But this is not where it ends; humility is a way of life in God's family.

CONC: See yourself? *Pharisee* – proud, self-righteous, arrogant, superior, blind...? *tax man* – open, honest, sincere, needy, confessing, broken, repentant, humble, submissive ...? Pride builds a wall, leaving us unfulfilled and unsatisfied. Humility opens the floodgates of God's heart. "How can I become more humble?" Not by seeking humility, but by seeking Him. The closer and more like Him I become, the more humble I will be.