

Upside Down Kingdom (11): This Man Rather Than the Other

(Luke 18:9-14)

I. Introduction

- A. Man with three young sons hit it big and suddenly was worth \$5 billion
 - 1. It wanted to give his sons something, so he asked, “*What would you like?*”
 - 2. The boys didn’t realize how rich he was, so they asked for normal stuff—
 - a. Oldest- asked for new car, so he bought him GM (*didn’t cost him much*)
 - b. Middle- asked for new golf club, so he bought him Augusta National
 - c. Youngest (6) asked for Mickey Mouse outfit; he bought Dallas Cowboys
 - 3. Last week’s parable from **Luke 18** taught us to be persistent in our prayer
 - a. We serve a big God, and that means we should pray BIG PRAYERS
 - b. But the point Jesus stresses in His parable is *continue* to pray (**Lk 18:1**)

- B. The parable this week tells of the Prayer of Pharisee and Tax Collector
 - 1. This is a familiar parable, so I thought what I needed was a catchy title
 - a. Maybe a little **alliteration** like, “*The Pesky Problem of Prideful Prayers*”
 - b. Or something more literary, like “*A Tale of Two Prayers*” and then begin
It was the best of prayers, it was the worst of prayers, it was a prayer of wisdom, it was a prayer of foolishness, it was a prayer of belief, it was a prayer of incredulity, it was a prayer of Light...
 - c. Or maybe go for some clever, “*The Two Prayerables*” (*Prayer + Parable*)
 - 2. But the problem is that this parable is really **not** about prayer at all
 - a. It follows a parable on prayer, and the story of parable is two prayers
 - b. Luke is clear that the point of parable is about more than prayer (**18:9**)
To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else
 - 1) This parable is no more about prayer than Sower is about farming
 - 2) This parable is about message is how we see ourselves before God
 - 3. Several years ago, a member confessed that this parable really confused her
 - a. Pharisee did a lot of good things—moral, charitable, religious things
 - 1) These are precisely the things that we encourage our members to do
 - 2) So why was this Tax Collector accepted when he did nothing but pray?
 - b. We’ve been looking at the *Upside-Down Kingdom* in Luke’s parable.
 - c. Few of the parables are more topsy-turvy and counterintuitive than this!

II. This Man Rather Than the First (Reading: [Luke 18:9-14](#))

- A. **Pharisee:** When Pharisee suggests that he is a holy man, take him at face value
1. Jesus often condemns the Pharisees hypocrisy, but that isn't the point here
 - a. This guy man really does pious things; fasting and tithing aren't easy!
 - 1) He fasts twice a week when the Law only commands one fast a year
 - 2) He gives a tithe of all he gets— not adjusted gross annual income
 - b. These were all things that God commanded, and he was obeying God
 2. Paul Duke suggests he was the type of member churches love to have

It's people like the Pharisee who hold the community together and keep the faith with diligence and passion. We can't color him sinister. He's not J. R. Ewing in a choir robe. He's a better man than I am, and probably better than you.

 - a. We want people involved in doing things for God and others— *he was!*
 - b. When Pharisee suggests he was more holy than the tax collector—*he was!*
- B. **Tax Collector:** There is no reason not to take him at face value either
1. When he says that he was a sinner, we need to trust him on that .
 - a. He was like was most tax collectors—dishonest, disloyal and unclean
 - b. We should not suppose he is a good person who is misunderstood
 - c. It's not he just doesn't go to church enough— *he is a tax collector!*
 2. Jesus' uses these men as examples or stereotypes of holy and the unholy.
 - a. Jews saw Pharisees as impossibly holy paragons of virtue and religiosity
 - b. Jews saw all tax collectors as unholy and unredeemable reprobates.
 3. So this parable would have shocked them— it should shock us too!
- C. Whatever is Jesus' point here, let's make sure we see what his point is NOT
1. He isn't saying that the religious service of the Pharisee was unimportant
 - a. Those were all things that God commanded, and they were important
 - b. Something in the Pharisee's attitude was wrong— but not his service!
 2. Years ago when I started preaching about grace, a member pulled me aside
 - a. **Concern:** If you stress grace, we won't **motivate members** to do work?
 - b. Is that realistic concern? *Isn't it easier to be the tax collector?*
 - 1) **Friend:** 85% of Sunday a.m. attendance comes back Sunday p.m.
 - 2) How? Preacher convinced them they'd go to hell! *Does that work?*
 3. **Point:** *Grace doesn't mean God no longer cares if we do good works!*

D. So what DO we learn from this parable? Three quick points

1. **First**, the Pharisee's problem wasn't his prayer or his piety—it was PRIDE
 - a. He thought he was accepted by God because he was so good and so holy
 - 1) He enumerates all the reasons why God owes him admiration
 - 2) He's humming, "*O Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect...*"
 - b. Pharisee's prayer was all about himself; most translations put it
 - 1) It begins, "*Pharisee stood and prayed about himself*" (NIV/NAS/NET)
 - 2) May also be, "*Pharisee stood by himself and prayed*" (NLT/ESV/NCV)
 - 3) Maybe the Message hits it best, "*The Pharisee posed and prayed*"
 - c. Regardless of your translation, this prayer was all about the Pharisee!
 - 1) This prayer was about making sure that God knew all that he did
 - 2) He was holy and he was proud of it! *That is Jesus' warning for us*
2. **Second**, this spiritual pride led the Pharisee to miss **TWO THINGS**
 - a. **First**, he totally missed God. *There's nothing in his prayer about God!*
 - 1) He doesn't **ask God** for anything or **acknowledge God** in anything!
 - 2) This might as well be board meeting, "*And under 'Old Business'...*"
 - 3) He may mention God in the prayer, but he really totally misses God
 - b. **Second**, he others. Parable set-up, "and looks down on everyone else"
 - 1) Pharisee shows utter contempt for tax collector ("*holier than thou*")
 - 2) When girls were little, they'd tattle—"She didn't have her eyes closed"
 - a) So we'd ask, "*Why were you watching her?*" Good question here
 - b) Why was the Pharisee watching the tax collector so closely?
 - 3) Spiritual pride keeps us from seeing things as they are (*C.S. Lewis*)
A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you...
3. **Third**, tax collector was forgiven when he humbled himself & asked God
 - a. Tax collector pointed to nothing in himself; he had nothing to be proud of
 - b. In abject humility, he asks for forgiveness even tho he doesn't deserve it
 - 1) Pharisee saw the sinner and said, "*He doesn't have a prayer*"
 - 2) In reality, a prayer was ALL he had, and in the end, it was all it took!
 - c. When you get rid of self-pride, then you make space for God to work!

III. Conclusion

- A. Pride is always the great danger of religious people... like Moses
1. Remember why Moses missed entering the Promised Land (**Num 20:12**)
 - a. It wasn't God said to speak to the rock and Moses got mad and hit it
 - b. No, Moses wanted to share the credit for giving Israel water (**20:10**)

¹⁰ *He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"*
 - c. Moses temporarily forgot that there was one God and he wasn't Him!
 2. Pharisee forgot there's one God and Pharisee wasn't him. *We can forget too!*
 - a. Our piety, prayer, performance cannot add to God's work of salvation
 - b. Even if we did everything God required—only our duty (**Luke 17:10**)
 - c. Grace doesn't lower bar of obedience—shows us that Jesus only clear it!
 3. The failure of Pharisee wasn't works, but that he **TRUSTED** in them!
 - a. Despite all the good things the Pharisee knew, tax collector knew more
 - b. He knew that he wasn't good enough and needed God desperately
In the eyes of Christ, a person confessing sin is nearer to true goodness than a person boasting of his goodness." (F.F. Bruce)
- B. The parable also reminds us of the terrible toll pride has on relationships.
1. What were the chances of Pharisee and Tax Collector going for coffee?
 - a. You can almost feel the contempt in, "...or like this, uh, tax collector"
 - b. Pharisee was superior and that meant the tax collector was inferior
 - c. They prayed only a few feet apart; they might as well been million miles
 2. It's hard to fellowship people that think they are better than you— *right?*
 - a. Do you like to hang with judgmental, holier-than-thou, snobby people?
 - b. **Well, neither do they!** Pride always short circuits fellowship. *Always!*
 - c. Why does Paul say this to church having problems? (**Phil 2:3**)
- C. Jesus said of tax collector, "*This man, rather than the other, went home justified*"
1. Tax collector was *justified* or *made right*. Same word as **Romans 3:24**
 2. We will never be good enough to save ourselves. Never. Ever.
 3. Tax collector saw that clearly; Pharisee was clueless! (**Lk 18:14**, MESSAGE)