

The Pharisee And The Publican (Luke 18:9-14)

Several plagues have infected our churches in this present age. One is the plague of **false doctrine (Galatians 1:6-9)**, where men would make their own words their authority, instead of the scriptures. Another is that of **apathy**, where men ignore the commands of God regarding service and follow their own lusts to continue living in sin (**James 4:3-4**). A final plague is that of **self-righteousness**, where men forget their own sinfulness and look down their nose at others in pride (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**).

Many churches suffer from these plagues, but these are not new concerns. In Jesus' day, many different religious groups existed that preached false doctrine, apathy, and self-righteousness. If they did not do this in word, they did so in deed. The Pharisees were one such group that were outwardly pious, but inwardly dead (**Matthew 23:13-33**). They were very religious and moral, but did not have a relationship with God.

I. Two Different Men (v.9-10)

In light of the groups that were self-righteous, the Lord Jesus Christ presented the people around Him with a parable about a Pharisee and a publican that both went up to the Temple to pray. Again, a Pharisee was a moral, religious leader in Jesus' day. Their order numbered in the hundreds and they had much power in Israel. The publican was a Jewish tax collector. He was employed by the Roman government to collect the taxes. Publicans were seen as traitors and the lowest of the low. When looking at these two men side-by-side, the contrast between them could not be greater.

II. Two Different Prayers (v.11-13)

The only similarity between the two was that they both went to the Temple to pray. The Temple at Jerusalem was the seat of Judaism. It was where offerings were given, in addition to the prayers of the people. This was not like a church service, but it is the closest thing we can compare it to today. The prayers offered by the two men were completely different. The Pharisee, we can imagine, stood up in the front of the crowd with his hands in the air and spoke for all to see (**Matthew 6:5**). His prayer was not one of praying to God, but more braying about his own goodness!

We see how he praises himself for not being as other men that sin. He quotes specific sins against God: extortion, being unjust, and adultery. In addition, he had the audacity to point the finger at the publican and thank God that he was not like him! Can we imagine such a scene occurring in a church service? Probably not, but such is the scene in this parable. What arrogance and self-righteousness!

What did the publican do? How did he respond? We find that he did not respond to the Pharisee, but prayed to God for himself. While the Pharisee stood in front of the people, the publican sat in the back. While the Pharisee brayed about his goodness, the publican would not even look to Heaven; such was his humility. This man did not speak about others, but beat upon his breast in frustration and begged God to be merciful to him for his sins!

III. Two Different Results (v.14)

Now for the big question: whose prayers did God hear? Did He hear those of the powerful, moral religious leader or that of a miserable, sinful publican? The answer is the publican. Why? Because of his humility and faith.

The Lord Jesus tells us that the publican went home justified rather than the Pharisee. The word justified means *to be made righteous*. At the point that this man turned to God for forgiveness of sins, they were forgiven and washed away; making him righteous in God's sight. We call this miracle that of salvation by grace through faith (***Ephesians 2:8-9***). God will turn away no man that comes to Him with a broken heart and seeks His forgiveness (***Psalms 51:17***). Why? Because He has made a way for all men to be saved through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ! If He has made a way, then we can come to Him by faith to receive His free gift of eternal life (***Romans 10:9-11***)!

The Lord also tells us that the moral, religious man went home without being justified. Why? Because he trusted in himself that he was righteous. There are no righteous men in God's sight, because we have all broken His Law (***Romans 3:10-18***). Our perceived goodness is not goodness at all, but vain works of prideful men to obtain the favor of the Creator (***Isaiah 64:6***). The Bible says that we have nothing to glory in, except the work of the Lord Jesus (***Galatians 6:14***). None of our works can gain God's favor. None of our religious actions make Him smile or look our way. This is the great difference between the two men! One was religious, powerful, and moral, but full of pride and went home lost in his sin. The other was corrupt, traitorous, and immoral, but was humble in the sight of the Lord and went home justified and free!

Where do you stand between these two? Are you full of religion and morality, but also pride and self-righteousness? Have you humbled yourself before a holy God; admitting your debt of sin that you can never pay and accepting the free gift of eternal life that Jesus offers (***Romans 6:23***)? Without this humility, you can never be saved from sin. If you have never accepted Him, believe Him today and start your journey with Jesus (***John 3:16***).

We want to help you! Rev. James Bussard is the pastor of Heritage Park Baptist Church that meets in the St. John's United Church of Christ building in Woodsboro, MD. For questions or comments about this article, please call (301) 304-2127 or write him at HeritageParkPastor@Gmail.com. For more information about the church, please go to www.FrederickforChrist.com or call (301) 304-2127.