**God, Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner**

Luke 18:9-14

Key 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.”

**Introduction**

In the first parable(Luke 18:1-8), Jesus taught his disciples to pray persistently. In the second parable of today’s passage, he contrasts two different attitudes of prayer: self-righteousness and humility. Psalm 28:2 reads, “Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.” May the Lord help us to know who we are and learn how to ask God’s mercy humbly.

1. Read verses 9-10. To whom did Jesus tell this parable? Who are two men in the parable? Why did two men go up to the temple?

1-1, Read verses 9-10.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: **10** “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

1-2, To whom did Jesus tell this parable?

***To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else,***

* These were people who thought they were already experts in prayer, faith, and just about everything.
* But their confidence was in their own righteousness, not in God. It is not easy to bear with arrogant people.
* The mistake they made was looking at things from man’s perspective instead of God’s.
* Jesus had met people like this before in Luke 16:15, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”
* But Jesus really wanted to help them. Praise Jesus!

1-3, Who are two men in the parable?

***Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.***

* a Pharisee and a tax collector



* The “Pharisees,” were a sect of Judaism, which means “separate”. They sought to live separately from those who are godless. They did this by strictly following the law.
* Although they held many of the same beliefs as many Christians such as the resurrection of the dead, future rewards/ punishments, angels/demons, they put great emphasis on good works such as feeding the poor, visiting the sick and caring for orphans.
* They were loved and respected by the people. Mothers would pray for their sons to grow up to be Pharisees.
* Jesus seriously warned about the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. 13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

* “Tax Collectors” worked for Rome. The Roman government didn’t collect their own taxes. They divided the empire up into districts, then sold the rights to collect taxes in each district.
* Tax collectors were often Jews and were considered traitors because they served Rome.
* They made their money by overcharging people. For example if Rome said a person owed $1000, a tax collector might charge $2000, and pocket half.
* They were described as having a life of “unrestrained plunder, unblushing greed and shameless business”.
* Now we would expect the Pharisee to be right with God and the Tax Collector to be condemned. But that’s not how the parable goes.

1-4, Why did two men go up to the temple?

***Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.***

* They went up to the temple to pray.
* Although both of them visited the temple, their motives were different according to the flow of the passage.
* The Pharisee went to the temple to pray, but was full of himself and his own goodness. He did not think it worth asking for the favor and grace of God.
* Let us beware of presenting proud devotions to the Lord, and of despising others.
* In contrast the tax collector was considered to be a public sinner but he was full of humility, and repentance for sin. He had genuine desire for God.
* He only relied on the mercy of God through repentance.

2. Read verses 11-13. How did the Pharisee pray? What does his prayer reveal about his attitude? How and what did the tax collector pray? (13) What does his prayer show about him?

2-1, Read verses 11-13.

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ **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.’



2-2, How did the Pharisee pray?

***The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’***

* We can imagine the Pharisee praying with eloquent words and flowing, spiritual style; anyone who heard him pray would say that he was a spiritual man.
* The Pharisee makes no mention of his own sins. People tend to have the ability to see sin in others but not in themselves.
* The Pharisee holds up his religious deeds as the reason he feels he’s right with God.

2-3, What does his prayer reveal about his attitude?

* He stood boldly before God, thankful that he was not like other people, including the tax collector sneaking in the back of the temple.
* He had no sense of unworthiness before the holy God. Instead, he condemned others in his prayer, rather than pray with tears for their salvation.
* The basis of his thanksgiving was not because of anything God did in his life. His repeated use of “I” (5 times) reveals that he saw himself, not God.
* On the basis of his righteous deeds, he bragged before God.
* But the problem is that none of these things can be our righteousness before a Holy and Perfect God.

Romans 3:10b reads,

“No matter what we have done or achieved, before God we have nothing to boast about.”

2-4, How and what did the tax collector pray? (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.’***

1 John 1:9 reads,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

* And that’s what the tax collector did. He knew his sin was great, and that he had no way of paying for his sin, so he simply begged God for mercy.

2-5, What does his prayer show about him?

* This man was an obvious(Public) sinner, as a tax collector, who betrayed his people and his God for the sake of money.
* Some who are obviously sinning do not see themselves as sinners.
* But this man really saw himself as a sinner before God, demonstrated by his nonverbal behavior: 1) He stood at a distance, 2) He would not look up to heaven, 3) He beat his breast.
* The tax collector praying awkwardly, with halting phrases and fear; but his prayer pleased to God.
* The ancient Greek word translated be merciful is *hilaskomai*; it is actually the word for an atoning sacrifice.
* The fullest sense of what the tax collector said was asking God to be merciful to him through God’s atoning sacrifice for sins, because he was a sinner.
* The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in [Hebrews 2:17](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Hebrews+2:17&t1=en_nas), where it is translated *propitiation*.
* In the original Greek the words are even fewer than in the English. This tax collector prayed with fewer words, but with more genuine meaning and content!
* Without saying a word, we see his contrite heart before God. He knew that he deserved judgment for his sinful life.
* But he also had a clear prayer topic in coming to God: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
* He believed that God is merciful to sinners. On the basis of this faith, he humbly came to God with his request. Perhaps he repeated it until tears welled up in his eyes.

3. Read verse 14. Who was justified by God? Whom does God exalt? How can we become truly humble before God? What can we learn from this parable?

3-1, Read verse 14.

“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 those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

3-2, Who was justified by God?

***“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.***

* The tax collector went home justified. His prayer was accepted by God. His sins were forgiven, and he was declared not guilty.
* The tax collector experienced peace with God that led to joy, hope, and the power to live a new life.
* On the basis of Jesus Christ's blood shed for sinners, he was forgiven.
* Regardless of the fact that he was a terrible sinner, when he pleaded to God to act with mercy towards him, God answered, and he was justified.
* Sinners have access to God’s mercy. God will never ignore such a humble and contrite plea.
* But the Pharisee, who was confident in his own righteousness, while being justified in his own eyes, compared to others, was not at all justified before God.
* The justification of the tax collector was also immediate. He humbly came to God on the basis of His atoning sacrifice and was justified.
* He didnt earn his justification, and he didn’t have a probationary period; he was simply justified.
* He was justified because as a sinner, he humbly prayed for mercy, and mercy in the sense of an atoning sacrifice.
* He prayed, O God, be satisfied with the atoning sacrifice, and forgive me.
* He didn’t say, God, be merciful to me, I’m not a Pharisee.
* He didn’t say, God, be merciful to me, a repentant sinner.
* He didn’t say, God, be merciful to me, a praying sinner.
* He didn’t say, God, be merciful to me – I’m only human.
* He didn’t say, God, be merciful to me, I’ll try to do better.
* He simply prayed, saying “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!
* In great contrast, the Pharisee deceived himself into thinking that he was without sin. Instead of comparing himself to God’s perfection, he compared himself to man’s imperfection.

1 John 1:8 reads,

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

3-3, Whom does God exalt?

***For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”***

3-4, How can we become truly humble before God?

* “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”
* The way of salvation is available to all. But only those who humble themselves before God will receive it.
* True humility is simply seeing things the way they really *are*.
* The Pharisee saw himself as someone great when he wasn’t, and the tax collector saw himself as a sinner needing God’s mercy, which he was.
* This principle, that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, is so important God repeated it.

James 4:6 reads,

“But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

3-5, What can we learn from this parable?

Personal Application

**Conclusion**

Proverbs 14:12 reads, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”May the Lord help us to offer the same prayer that the tax collector had offered. We are prone to become like the self righteous Pharisee in today’s passage. Have mercy on us so that we may not become proud, but humbly maintain our position as forgiven sinners before God. According to Jesus’ prayer and His vision to help those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else(1), we can see great fruit through apostle Paul who used to be a self righteous Pharisee. 2 Corinthians 1:9b reads, “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” Likewise God is looking for a person who finds themselves to be a sinner before God, asking for God’s mercy. Then it is a mere matter of time to see God’s fruit. God chose Judah among 12 brothers in Genesis to continue His redemptive work, for he was the very person who truly repented as a terrible sinner. May the Lord help us to see ourselves as sinners who are in desperate need of God’s mercy daily. Amen.

**One Word: Have mercy on me, a sinner!**