

Self-Righteous Religion or Soul Saving Redemption?

Luke 18: 9-14

Today we have read one of the many parables of Jesus. These are simply earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus often used parables to reveal great truth to men. This particular parable was given to religious sects who trusted in their own righteousness, but despised others.

Jesus often had trouble with the religious crowd. They were more concerned with good works than the condition of their hearts. The church faces this same problem today. I am convinced that many in our churches are depending on their works to get to heaven. They have been deceived to believe that good works are all that is required to reach heaven. Jesus told Nicodemus, “**Ye must be born again.**”

Each of us is represented in this parable. You are trusting in one of two things: good works or saving grace in Christ our Lord. I want to consider the [certainties](#) in the text as we think on: [Self-righteous Religion or Soul Saving Redemption?](#) As we look at these two men, consider which one you can identify with.

I. The Self-righteous Pharisee – The Pharisees were the most numerous and wealthy sect of the Jews. They followed strict, legalistic practices, including separation from others and strict adherence to the law of God. Great care was taken as to how they presented themselves in public. They were devoutly religious, but religion is all they had. Let’s look closer.

A. His Attendance (10) – **Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.** This came as no surprise. He was likely there every time the doors were open. He of all people was faithful to the house of God.

- Often the Pharisees could be found praying on street corners and public places. He would’ve been the one to receive the perfect attendance award year after year. No doubt he rose early every Sabbath day to ensure that all was in order to go to the temple. When he arrived he would take great care to be noticed of those who had come.
- Now, don’t get me wrong, we need to attend the house of God. If you are saved there ought to be a desire to be at church when the doors are open; but, being here isn’t about you and me, it is about serving the Lord! Church attendance is good, but that alone cannot save your soul. You could be as this Pharisee and never miss a service and still die lost and find your soul in hell. Wouldn’t it be awful to go to hell from a Bible believing church pew?

B. His Attitude (11a) – *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.* He was there in the temple going through the religious motions, but he wasn't sincere in his prayer. Words were being said, and to those around they probably sounded good, but his prayer wasn't being offered to God. He prayed so that others could hear and testify to his "righteousness."

- That type of praying doesn't get above your head, much less to the throne of grace! Apparently he saw no need for a daily relationship with the Lord, just recognition from others regarding his religious activity. He was more interested in the glory of men than the grace of God.
- Our time here ought to be a time when we offer praise unto the Lord and seek His guidance and will for our lives. This thing of serving God is serious! We need to get in touch with heaven and get a word from God for our lives. God help us to cast off that form of godliness and get His power and presence on our lives. *James 4:3 – Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* It is time to quit playing church and start living for the Lord!

C. His Assessment (11b) – *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* He thanks God that he has been kept from engaging in public sin that would bring scandal and reproach, after all he has an image to uphold. He was thankful for his purity in marriage.

- These are blessings worthy of thanks, but all of this seems to be a reminder to God of his personal goodness and morality. There is no mention of thankfulness for forgiveness, mercy and grace, or redemption. I am thankful for a lot of things, but most of all for Calvary and the blood that was shed for me. Without salvation, all of the religion and moral goodness are of no value.
- And then he thanks God that he is not as this publican. I can sense the sarcasm in his voice. He has judged the publican because he didn't meet his standard of acceptance. Churches are filled with people of that attitude. They put on a form of godliness and pray for sinners to be saved, but they don't want them in their church.
- Listen, Christ died for whosoever; all people have a soul in need of salvation. There is nothing more beautiful than a lost sinner coming to know Christ in the free pardon of sin. We don't need legalistic Pharisees, we need compassionate Christians. There was a day when we were no better, but Jesus saved us and washed us in His cleansing blood. He is all that we can boast of. The saved are nothing but sinners saved by grace!

D. His Assumption (12) – *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* Here the Pharisee reminds God of the good deeds he has faithfully kept. He has placed his trust in his own works.

He is counting on his eloquent prayers, his fasting, and the tithe he gives. This poor, deceived Pharisee actually feels good about the condition of his soul.

- Our salvation isn't based on our good works. Salvation can only be obtained through repenting of sin and placing your faith and trust in Christ the Lord. Works have never secured salvation and they never will, [Mat.7:21-23](#). By all outward appearances the Pharisee looked as if all was well with his soul. Those around him would've thought if anyone was pleasing unto God, he was. Jesus sees beyond our outward displays; He knows the condition of the heart. It isn't about what men think, but what Jesus knows that matters!

II. The Sorrowful Publican – The publican was much different than the Pharisee. He wasn't a man of respect; one who was held in high regard.

- Publicans were tax collectors, loyal to the Roman Empire. Often they levied their taxes with a heavy hand, taking advantage of others. They were considered traitors and thieves by those around them. Let's take a moment to consider the time he spent at the temple.

A. His Attendance (10) – *Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.* The publican also went up to the temple to pray. He probably wasn't as familiar with the temple as the Pharisee. He may have had no desire to go to the temple until this point in life. There are no fancy garments or a long list of rituals to perform. He has not come to be seen or heard of others. In fact there may have been no one who even cared whether he was there or not. He hasn't come for show; he has come to seek the Lord.

- It is possible that he is at the end of his rope. Maybe his life has hit rock bottom, but someone has told him of a God who loved him. He has come in search of that which only God can give.
- If you are troubled in your soul today, you are in a good place to find help. The Lord is ready to meet your need and give you the peace you desire. Just like the publican, you have made the first step; you made the choice to come to church.

B. His Attitude (13) - *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven.* He has not come with a proud heart as the Pharisee did. He has come in the shame of his sin. He is burdened under a heavy load. There was no goodness in himself, nothing to boast of. He had not lived the life of a Pharisee. His life had been filled with sin and he was aware of his condition. He didn't even feel worthy to look toward the Lord.

- That is how all men must come. Sinners must come broken before the Lord, realizing their need of salvation. The publican knew he would never deserve the mercy of God. None of us do, we were all born in sin, separated from God, and destined for hell.
- The saving grace of the Lord is man's only hope. Many never find the humble attitude of the publican. They never reach the point where they admit they need the Lord's touch. You will never be saved until you realize that you are lost. God seeks to save the lost, but you must see your need.

C. His Assessment (13b) – *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.* How differently the publican behaves in the temple. He has not come to barter with God or remind Him of the good deeds he has done. He has nothing to bring to God's attention. He isn't looking around at the lives of others in hopes of seeing one who is worse off than he is. He has come gripped with conviction. He is beating upon his breast crying out for mercy. He has laid himself at the feet of the Lord, admitting his life is nothing apart from God. He has come to find salvation; that is his heart's desire.

- God is mindful of you today. He is interested in the condition of your heart. [2 Pet.3:9](#) – *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
- If the Lord is mindful of your need and is concerned with your soul, why won't you look within your heart and come to Him? You may be looking at the lives of others and think that if they're OK, then you are as well. You will not be judged based on how you measured up with others, but on whether you received Christ as your Savior. You may live better than those around you, but that isn't enough! You must cry out for mercy as this publican did.

D. His Assurance (14) – *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* Here is the defining difference in the two. The Pharisee had an assumption, but the publican had assurance. The Pharisee left the temple assuming all was well with his soul, but the publican left with complete assurance. The Pharisee was counting on religious works, but the publican received salvation. [He went to his house justified](#). That is "to be declared righteous based on the finished work of Calvary."

- When we are saved we receive the righteousness of Christ. The Pharisee thought he was righteous, but the Lord declared the publican was righteous. It wasn't because of who he was, but

what the Lord had done for him. It is possible to have full assurance of your salvation. It is possible to know that you know that you are saved.

Conclusion: What about you today? Are you assuming that all is well between you and God or do you have complete assurance? Each of us fit into one of these categories. You are either trusting in the good that you have done to secure your salvation or you have seen your need and come to Jesus.

Jesus said the one who cried out for mercy was justified. The Pharisee was very religious, but he was lost without Christ. Do you know Jesus as Savior and Lord? If not you can; won't you come as the Lord leads?