

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #228

Jesus' Final Journey to Jerusalem Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector LK 18.9-14

9 Jesus told this parable to some people who were supremely confident of their own righteousness and made a habit of despising everyone else.

10 *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11 *"The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people--thieves, unrighteous, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I make a practice of fasting twice a week and giving a tenth of all I get.'*

13 *"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and said, 'God, I am pleading with you to have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

14 *"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home in a permanent state of being justified before God.*

"For all those who make a practice of exalting themselves will be humbled, and those who are humbling themselves will be exalted."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

CONTEXT DIGEST	
Location	Somewhere on the Road to Jerusalem
Timeline	March (Month 38)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VII: Jesus' Ministry in Perea
	C. Jesus' Final Journey to Jerusalem
Title	6. Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

COMMENT:

In this reading Jesus restated one of the most consistently repeated themes of his teaching--the importance of humility. Through this brief parable Jesus reminded his disciples that humility is the prerequisite of true righteousness before God, and the foundation of a life of prayer.

Jesus' brief contrast of the prideful attitude of the Pharisee and the humility of the tax collector stresses the concept of righteousness. Luke understood that, and used his introduction to the parable to set up this crucial point: *"To some who were supremely confident of their own righteousness, and made a habit of despising everyone else, Jesus told this parable."*

Jesus then said that the Pharisee thanked God that he was not "unrighteous" like other men, who were also thieves, adulterers, and like the tax collector. On the other hand, he said that the sinful tax collector went home in a state of having been "**permanently justified**"--or "**declared righteous**" before God. This triple repetition of the word "**righteous**" in the brief story makes it plain that humility before God is the root of righteousness in his sight.

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The Pharisee in the story modeled prideful arrogance. He made two fatal errors in judgement. First, he made the mistake of comparing himself with other sinful people, rather than God's standard of righteousness. *"I thank you that I am not like other sinful people..."* If we compare ourselves with other sinful people--a flawed standard for comparison in the first place--we may be able to convince ourselves that we are better than some of them, even most of them.

The Pharisee also focused only his "good" works. He mentioned the things he did on a regular basis that he thought made him righteous before God. He omitted mention of the many "good" things he failed to do, and the "evil" things he did as well. If we only consider the "good" we do and ignore our sins, we are deceiving ourselves when we make the fatal mistake of considering ourselves better than other people, and therefore "righteous" before God.

The tax collector took a totally different approach. He did not bother to compare himself to other people--they all condemned him his choice of vocation as a tax collector anyway. This man compared himself to the only true standard of righteousness--God himself.

He knew that God was holy and perfect, and therefore expected the same from himself. However, the tax collector knew that that he had failed to meet God's standards--he was a total "sinner"--a habitual violator of God's will. He beat his chest in acknowledgement of that painful truth, and implored God for unmerited mercy because he well knew that he only deserved judgement and eternal punishment for his sins.

The surprise ending of Jesus' parable was that the "sinner" went home a righteous man, because his humility in honestly acknowledging his sinfulness enabled God to forgive him and declare the man's faith to be the source of a "right" relationship with God. In contrast, the Pharisee went home in a state of unrighteousness before God, because his pride caused him to remain blind to the reality of his unacknowledged, and therefore unforgiven sin.

Humility is the root of both righteousness and prayer, because it causes us to recognize and embrace our state of utter dependence upon the mercy and grace of God in our sinful condition.

We deserve nothing but God's wrath and eternal punishment. Only the goodness and compassion of God can forgive our sins, and provide for all the rest of our needs in spite of our sin. He is that good and loving--all the time. Humility allows us to receive the infinite riches of God's mercy and grace by faith, which makes us truly righteous in his sight, and motivates us to pray persistently as well.

APPLICATION:

Jesus told this parable to those who sinfully believed they were righteous when they were not. In fact, they were evil enough to murder the only truly righteous person that ever lived--Jesus--on the basis of lies about him. Jesus was on his final journey to Jerusalem to die at their hands when he spoke this parable, in order that we all might be forgiven of our sins. What marvelous grace!

Luke included this parable in the story of Jesus' final weeks before his death, to remind us all of the importance of humility in approaching the truth of his death for our sins, and resurrection to give us righteousness.

How often do you find yourself comparing yourself to other people as the standard of your righteousness? How does that lead to pride?

Honestly comparing yourself to Jesus as our standard of righteousness always lead to humility, and recognition of our need for forgiveness and repentance.

What do you need to confess and adjust to him today, in order to pursue HIS righteousness?