

Session 13 –The Parables of the Self-righteous Pharisee | Luke 18:9-14

Reminder: Matthew 13:10-11 informs us that parables reveal hidden mysteries about the Kingdom of God. We must keep this in mind in the interpretation of every parable.

Luke 18:9-14 | The Parable of the Self-Righteous Pharisee

- Verse 9 –
 - Having shown that the Jewish nation needed to *pray like your life depends on it* (previous parable) during the time of distress, now Jesus gives a specific warning to **certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others**.
 - The word **and** is important. The audience is the self-righteous who also despise others (traits that often travel together).
- Verse 10 –
 - Note that the men **went up into the temple**. This was a physical reality that was also used as a spiritual reality, as they were entering into “my Father’s house” (Mk. 21:13).
 - The first man was a **Pharisee**.
 - These were men who separated themselves by very strict observance to the Law.
 - They also believed that the Law could only be properly interpreted by the teachings of the Rabbi’s in the “oral law.” In doing this they added to Scripture (as legalism invariably does).
 - Side note: *How to Become a Legalist*
 - Apply to yourself Scriptures that don’t apply to you.
 - Elevate tradition to the level of Scripture.
 - Judge your righteousness based on your behavior to the traditional norms of your group.
 - Note that legalism can apply to *commission* as well as *omissions* and that you can become legalistic on both kinds of things.
 - The **publican** was a tax-collector.
 - The Greek word τελώνης [telones] is a compound of *telos* (a word that means “end” and came to be used contextually as the “toll”) and *oneomai* (to purchase). Thus these men “bought the toll.” That is, they collected the Roman taxes and paid the Roman government to be able to keep the “end” or “leftovers.”
 - The English word is borrowed from Latin, *publicanus*, meaning, “someone of the public.”
 - Publicans were despised and Pharisees were considered men of righteousness in First Century Judaism.
- Verses 11-12 –
 - There is no note of humility in his prayer, rather, simply gratitude that he is better than everyone else. *If you have to call attention to how righteous you are, you probably aren’t.*
 - As evidence of his “righteousness,” the Pharisee announced to God that he fasts **twice in a week**.
 - This was an oral tradition and was not instructed in the Torah (which doesn’t explicitly require *any* fasts).
 - Leviticus 16:29 says **ye shall afflict your souls** on the Day of Atonement, and this has often been interpreted as a requirement for fasting.

- Furthermore, the Pharisee said he will **give tithes of all that I possess**. This was *also* an oral tradition. The Biblical tithe was a tithe for *agricultural harvest* and not of **all that I possess** (Lv. 27:30-33).
- Verse 13 –
 - The **publican** is a clear contrast to the Pharisee.
 - Rather than standing tall and lifting his hands, he stood **afar off** and **would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven**.
 - This passage is where the *tradition* of bowing our heads in prayer came from.
 - His prayer: **God be merciful to me a sinner**. Note that **a sinner** is the translation of the Greek τω αμαρτωλω [to hamartolos], which is clearly an *adjective* and not a noun, thus *the sinful*.
 - Unfortunately, all English translations translate as a noun (an error which began with the Latin translations).
 - When the publican asks God to **be merciful**, he uses the word ἰλάσκομαι [hilaskomai] which is related to the Mercy seat and is associated with the word *propitiation* (see 1 John 2:2), here used in verb form.
 - The word *mercy* or *merciful* is used several times in the New Testament, but only translated from this word twice - here and Hebrews 2:17, where it is also referring to the completed work of Jesus Christ.
- Verse 14 –
 - Notice that the man **went down to his house**, comparing the use of **up** to describe his ascent to the Temple in verse 10.
 - This man went home **justified rather than the other**. This is not as expected to the audience.
 - The verse ends with a startling conclusion.
 - It says **for**, which is a demonstrative conjunction, that is, it shows *cause*.
 - What is the *cause* of the man's justification? According to the Scripture (not the theology books) it is the fact that the man humbled himself.
 - This teaching is also in Luke 14:11, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 5:3, James 4:6, 10, etc.
 - How can this be? Unless we *divide* this away from the age of grace, we have a clear problem, and have to translate/interpret to simply be a *result* and not a *cause* of the man's justification.