

THE PHARISEE & THE TAX MAN, LUKE 18:9-14

Salt & Light #4

Prayer of Humility

O God, be exalted over my possessions. Nothing of earth's treasures shall seem dear unto me if only You art glorified in my life.

Be exalted over my friendships. I am determined that You shall be above all, though I must stand deserted and alone in the midst of the earth.

Be exalted above my comforts. Though it mean the loss of bodily comforts and the carrying of heavy crosses, I shall keep my vow made this day before Thee.

Be exalted over my reputation. Make me ambitious to please You even if as a result I must sink into obscurity and my name be forgotten as a dream.

Rise, O Lord, into Your proper place of honor, above my ambitions, above my likes and dislikes, above my family, my health and even my life itself. Let me decrease that You may increase; let me sink that You may rise above. Ride forth upon me as You rode into Jerusalem mounted upon the humble little beast, a colt, the foal of an ass, and let me hear the children cry to You, "Hosanna in the highest." Tozer -Pursuit of God

◆**Intro:** Jesus told his followers in Matthew 5 that they were supposed to be the flavor and influence of heaven in the world. Take a look.

◆*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to*

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everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Mat.5:13-16



◆ In this series we've been looking at biblical characters who stood up when it was needed and acted as salt and light in their places, whether slaves (Naaman's maid) or rulers (Joseph, a slave who became most powerful). Joseph taught us to offer our best even in the worst of circumstances and to add compassion even in the face of injustice, because we are conscious of God. Naaman's Israelite slave girl taught us to stand up and witness to the truth out of our compassion even for our enemy. Today we'll consider what we can learn from a Pharisee and an IRS agent.

◆ Let's see if we can get a little deeper into this parable. Imagine that you are sitting in the very back bench (the one everybody likes unless there's a celebrity on the podium) in the vaulted Rockefeller Chapel in NY City, or perhaps Fourth Presbyterian Church downtown, Chicago. People are bustling in from Michigan Ave. or Riverside Dr., and hoping for a little quiet solace in the presence of God. You look up several stories to the gothic architecture of stone that drapes down to the sides of the room in columns as wide as a grand piano. Even the click of a heel can be heard throughout the acoustically perfect building.

◆ While there, in walks a clean shaven young man in a pressed white shirt, a cross hangs from a sparkling chain around his neck,

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and over his tie, and his face is aglow. He is a genuine credit to his neighborhood in the city. He erases graffiti on the side, volunteers at the mission for the homeless and hungry. You are certain that your wallet as well as your wife are safe with this man. (cf.v11). He probably carries pictures of his kids in his fashionable backpack. He certainly stands upright in posture, and you guess his moral life is similar. This man is careful enough about his habits of fasting twice a week, you know, deny himself food in order to remind himself to talk with God. He also gives away 10% off the top of every stock dividend he brings in. You secretly think how nice it'd be to have that kind of fellow attending your church.

◆ Then you hear the massive wooden doors bang shut again. Turning slightly in your pew you barely glimpse the shadow of a man ducking behind one of the huge pillars. His face is dark, with a look of pain across it. That's when it comes to you: you know that face. Yes, it's been on the internet news sites. He's part of that notorious mafia family! He usually arrives places in a stretch limo, with a couple of sexy, barely covered girls in tow. He drinks Riunite on ice, and has a big sidekick names Tony. Now you can hear him start to choke out something in a hoarse voice but you can guess what he has to pray about: probably how he "taxes" small time vendors for "protection", or how he bleeds even the poor in his home neighborhood. You've seen the bloodstained sidewalks on the news casts. Now all you can see in

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the shadow is that his head is staring hard at the floor. There is heavy breathing.

◆ Now these are the characters in Jesus parable. According to Jesus the angels in heaven must be blowing trumpets in the crystal skies celebrating at mafia man's repentance (see Lk.15) and a great smile is stretching across the face of God. How could that be? This man has begun converting!

◆ The Heidelberg Catechism reads like this: *Q: what is involved in genuine repentance or conversion? A: A dying away of the old self and a coming to life of the new.*

◆ *Q: What is the dying away of the old self? A: It is to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.*

◆ *Q: What is the coming to life of the new self? A: It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ, and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.*

◆ **1.** One thing we learn from Jesus' story is that nobody impresses God with their own achievement. **I do not get God's love and power in my life by trying to look good.** Nobody is "justified" before the dazzling throne of God who isn't having their old self die. Since dying hurts, nobody is justified who doesn't hurt over their own sin. Puritan pastor Joseph Alleine said, "When a man is converted, he is forever at enmity with sin, most of all his own... Before conversion he had light thoughts about sin. Sin is now the object of his indignation. It is sin that

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wounds him; he feels it like a thorn in his side, or a prick in his eyes.”

◆ On the other side, there is no gospel (good news of being right with God) for those leaning back with their chins in the air, and their thumbs hooked in their vests.

◆ Children who adjust their own halos when their siblings are punished, saying “God doesn’t like what Nathan did, DOES he mommy?” -these types are just as “in need” as Nathan.

◆ The young girl who is not the least ashamed of sneaking out, partying, lifting a few things from the shop -this one has much converting yet to do.

◆ Couples who talk as if struggle has been completely absent from *their* marital vocabulary. -these are more like the Pharisee.

◆ The Pharisee is keeping up a good show. The text says that he’s standing there “praying to himself”. Ie, he’s not saying this stuff out loud. He’s just thinking it! He wouldn’t be as boldly condescending as the mean girls in a High School musical. No, he looks like the real deal, but what people don’t see is just as repulsive as the shadowy figure in the back of church.

◆ Think about it, do you like people who are full of themselves? Are you drawn to folks who always have the answer and know more about something than everyone else? And on the other side, don’t you feel more at ease with friends when they are honest enough to admit their

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own flaws and failures? We instinctively know there's something askew with people who look down on everybody else (v9). Which one of these two characters do *you* like better?

◆A. Now what does this have to do with being salt and light in our community? Truly converted people are those that are well aware of their own need, and flaws. Truly converted people are NOT those who have it all together. Even if more and more things are coming together in their lives, they don't think of themselves that way. They are ever aware of their own need for the forgiveness of God, and that, friends, is disarming in the world.

◆B. Do you want to flavor your workplace for Christ? Don't try to show people how good YOU are. Tell them how good GOD has been to you and don't be afraid to admit how much you need God and his love to save you. We can see this in our temple pair: the Pharisee is hiding a lot of repulsive garbage inside his perfect looking life. The tax collector is openly "beating his breast" in personal sorrow (a gesture usually only women did in oriental culture. Too lowly for a man.)

◆If you want to be salt and light, don't start by pointing out how off other folks are or where they've gone wrong. Start with how God has helped, taught, show, saved you!

◆**2. Any changing of my world must start with changing of myself.** This parable is not about how we should all be humble instead of arrogant like the Pharisee. This parable is about how

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no matter how swimmingly good you think your behavior is, it hasn't gotten you a step closer to having your sin forgiven, or overcome so that you experience God in your life (That's what we call "being justified" v14).

◆A. Sorrow for sin is the path to salvation from sin.

◆*Proverbs 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

◆B. Not only does my pride keep me from God, but it keeps others from God too. My open confession can actually help others find salvation too. Now one of the biggest deterrents to actually flavoring your culture is thinking of yourself as better than everybody else. It will show it's ugly head and nobody will be drawn to it. And this brings us to a final thought. One of the most immediate objections to Christians these days is the claim, "Your claim that Jesus is the only way to salvation is arrogant. You think you are right and everyone else is wrong." How should we respond?

◆1) Align yourself with the Tax collector, not the Pharisee. "I make no claim to be smarter than anybody else. Believe me, I am no better than anybody else. I have all the problems everyone else has. I'm a sinner in need of mercy. (Put self aside). Jesus Christ is the one who claims to be the one True God. I can assure you it's not me!

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◆ Why do I recommend this approach? People today are extremely conscious of their own sense of worth and identity. Admitting your need and brokenness lets people relax. They see you are a real person like them. The better-than, righter-than image (Pharisee) immediately keeps people from considering anything you might say.

◆ 2) Start with your experience of God, and move to biblical truths from there. “Look, I’m just telling you how in Jesus I’ve found forgiveness and when I pray to him, I find the power that changes me!

◆ (Why do I say this? People today are relativist. They’re not immediately concerned with absolute truth or philosophical discrepancies. Oddly enough, many modern people seem fine with holding conflicting beliefs. *What they most want to know is anything that works.* Good news is, God’s ways work! Sharing some ways that have worked in your life is a great way to flavor the world.

◆ How about sharing any of God’s ways that have helped your marriage? How about a biblical teaching that helped you deal with a bully? Has “a soft answer [ever] turned away wrath” for you? God said that. How about a prayer you use that

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fights temptation? Are there any bad habits Jesus has helped you overcome? These are all salt, people. Flavor that people are looking for. Flashlights in the darkness!

◆**Conclusion:** So what do the Pharisee and the Tax Man tell us about being salt and light in a world going down the tubes? First of all, it is possible to be made right (justified) before the God of Heaven! But you can't do it yourself. The Tax man went home justified because God punished his sin in Jesus death on the cross. That's what the temple was all about. You can go to talk with God at the temple, because at the temple, sacrifices were made for sin. Something died so we don't have to! You only go to the temple when you know you need forgiveness. Our part is to admit we need it, everyday, like the Tax man. The Pharisee was wasting his time and completely out of place in a temple.

◆Finally, if God can make you right, God can make your world right. If God is in you, and God is the light of the world, then you are the light of the world too. That's the second part of conversion:

◆Q: What is the coming to life of the new self? A: It is wholehearted joy in God through Christ, and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.

◆Lets pray...

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You, O God, Who gives grace to the humble, do something also for the proud person. Make me humble and obedient; take from me the spirit of pride and haughtiness, ambition and self-flattery, confidence and gaiety. Teach me to think well and to expound all things fairly of my brother, to love his worthiness, to delight in his praises, to excuse his errors, to give thanks for his graces, to rejoice in all the good that he receives, and ever to believe and speak better things of him than of myself. O teach me to love to be concealed and little esteemed; let me be truly humbled and heartily ashamed of my sin and folly. Teach me to bear reproaches evenly, for I have deserved them; to refuse all honors done unto me, for I have not deserved them; to return all to You, for it is Yours alone.

-Thomas A Kempis