

LOOKING AT LUKE
AN “I” PROBLEM

Monday, August 31

Reading: Luke 17-18

Luke 18:9 *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. 11 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.' 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."*

The story is told that one day Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, visited a prison and talked with each of the inmates. There were endless tales of innocence, of misunderstood motives, and of exploitation. Finally, the king stopped at the cell of a convict who remained silent. “Well,” remarked Frederick, “I suppose you are an innocent victim too?” “No, sir, I’m not,” replied the man. “I’m guilty and deserve my punishment.” Turning to the warden, the king said, “Here, release this rascal before he corrupts all these fine innocent people in here!”¹

The two attitudes expressed by these prisoners are addressed in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Both came to the temple to pray, but they came with very different attitudes. The Pharisee in this parable has an “I” problem. His prayer is all about himself – “Look how good **I** am - Look at all the good things **I** have done - See how much better **I** am than others— especially this most despised tax collector.” His prayer was not so much directed to God as it was to himself. It was a very self-centered, prideful prayer.

The tax collector’s attitude is very different. The common posture for prayer in Jesus’ day was to stand with arms raised and gazing upward. In his humility and shame, the tax collector will not even raise his eyes to heaven. While the Pharisee falsely proclaimed that he was not a sinner, the tax collector knew full well the depth of his sin and throws himself on God’s mercy. Jesus reports that tax collector went home right with God, not the Pharisee.

The prayer of salvation must come from a humble heart that recognizes its sin and realizes that Jesus is their only hope for forgiveness. Following salvation, this humble attitude must be shown in all our prayers. We do not come to God demanding that He give us what we want because we are such fine, upstanding citizens. We come to God knowing that it is only out of His mercy and love that we can expect anything from the Father’s hand. God honors those who come to Him with the right heart attitude.

Answered prayer depends as much on God’s grace as salvation does.

Do you have an “I” problem?

Is much of your prayer life centered around what you want?

Do you demand God to meet your requests?

Or do we fall on our knees and plead for God’s mercy and love to be shown in our lives and the lives of others?

¹ quoted @ http://www.preceptaustin.org/luke_commentaries_3#18