

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

The Tale of Two Sinners

Luke 18:9-14

November 4th, 2018

Main Point

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus reveals the kind of person who is right in the eyes of God.

Getting Started

What sorts of things do you find yourself praying for on a regular basis?

What might we learn about ourselves from considering the things we tend to pray for/about?

Our prayers not only reveal what we desire from God, but also reveal what we believe about God. We may claim to believe certain things about God, but when we are on our knees, our true theology shines through. By looking at the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, we will be challenged to acknowledge God's immeasurable power and grace and our own sinfulness. We will see what it means to approach God humbly in prayer.

Observation

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ Luke 18:9-14.

Who are the two characters in this parable? What makes them different? What makes them alike?

What point was Jesus making with this parable (v. 9)?

It's been said that those who trust in themselves make an idol of themselves. What does this look like in our culture? How do people in our community tend to make idols of themselves?

How might trusting in yourself result in treating others with contempt?

What characteristics dominated the Pharisee's heart (vv. 11-12)?

The Pharisee prayed about himself. He did not praise God. He thanked God for making him better than other people—especially better than the tax collector. The tax collector was grouped with robbers, unrighteous people, greedy individuals, and adulterers. The

Pharisee confidently asserted his superiority before God over all these people. He described all his religious acts. He praised himself in the face of God. This was not persistent prayer, depending on God for one's needs. This was self-adulation, giving all the credit to self and none to God.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to be "falsely confident"? What would it look like for God to bring brokenness in that area of your life?

When have you been most aware of your need for God and your spiritual helplessness? How was your faith affected through that experience?

How does your prayer life need to change to better reflect God's holiness and grace?

How might your prayer life need to change to more accurately reflect your need for God?

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11. Ask God to help you obtain true humility in your heart. Admit your inability to drum up humility and seek him earnestly through prayer.

Prayer

Thank God for revealing Himself to us in His Word and through the person and work of Christ. Pray that God would humble us and help us to see our desperate need for Christ. Ask God to help us to repent from trusting in ourselves and humbly rely on Christ in all that we do.

Commentary

18:9. The character of the two people in this parable is more important than their identity. Jesus described the Pharisees and scribes without naming them. They were religious. They kept the law. They told everyone else the requirements for being religious. They saw themselves as the perfect example of God's righteousness. They saw everyone else as ignorant sinners to be scorned and sneered at.

18:10. Two personalities take center stage in this parable. The first is a Pharisee. Hearing the word "Pharisee," the crowd would have had two reactions. This was a religious man who kept all the rules. This was also a man who opposed Jesus and constantly heard Jesus' condemnation and ridicule. The second character was a tax collector. Hearing this word, the audience would have felt disgust and betrayal. Here was a person working for the foreign government that dominated them. This one takes our money and gives it to Rome, they probably thought. This one is probably a cheat and a thief, taking far more money than Rome authorizes him to take. One might wonder what a tax collector was doing in the temple. How could such a person become ritually clean enough to be allowed inside the temple?

18:11–12. The Pharisee prayed. That would be expected. Pharisees legalistically followed every rule. Prayer was expected several times a day. His prayer was unexpected: He prayed about himself. He did not praise God. He thanked God for making him better than other people—especially better than the tax collector. The tax collector was grouped with robbers, unrighteous people, greedy individuals, and adulterers. The Pharisee confidently asserted his superiority before God over all these people. He described all his religious acts. He praised himself in the face of God. This was not persistent prayer, depending on God for one's needs. This was self-adulation, giving all the credit to self and none to God.

18:13. An entirely different kind of prayer came from the tax collector's lips. It was a prayer of humility, dependence, and desperation. The Pharisee prayed to God; the tax collector looked to the floor but raised his voice to heaven. The Pharisee was proud and confident; the tax collector grieved over his own condition as a sinner. The Pharisee described his righteousness; the tax collector begged for mercy to escape the judgment his sin deserved. Which one of them truly prayed?

18:14. Jesus had no doubts. The sinful tax collector was justified before God. He was righteous. He was clean. He was prepared for temple worship. His sins were forgiven. The Pharisee left the temple confident he had fulfilled his religious duty but still bearing his own guilt and sins. He had not prayed, because he never addressed God. He was not forgiven, since he never confessed his sins. He was not clean and qualified for worship, because he remained separated from God by his unconfessed sin. Jesus put it succinctly: praise yourself, God will humble you; humble yourself, and God will honor you.