

END TIMES 1 – 2007

Luke 18: 9 – 14

The people to whom Jesus spoke this parable needed to hear it. It was not only the Pharisees who needed to hear it, either. The attitude, the belief, harbored by these people is an attitude (belief) as common as the sinful nature in every human being. It is only God's truth, in fact, that is able to rescue us from it.

Jesus lovingly is warning us against a hopeless, destructive, universal false religious, spiritual idea. Jesus lovingly is showing us and calling us to the only hope-giving, saving, true religious teaching of God.

For Forgiveness Rely on God's Mercy!

To whom did Jesus aim this parable? To some people who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

To rely on, to trust in, to rest one's confidence on one's own righteousness is the basic, underlying idea of every religion except Jesus Christ's religion. It is the original religious, spiritual notion of every sinner. That is everybody! In our original, sinful nature – which is still in us – that idea still haunts around, still tries to come out, still tries to take us over. We need to fight against this hopeless lie all the time. Relying on our own righteousness, goodness is a hopeless lie.

In the parable, two men went up to the temple to talk to God. It turned out only one really did. The Pharisee it says, "stood up" – way up, up front, for everyone to see – and prayed about himself. Actually he prayed to himself.

In the parable that is meant to be a bit of divine sarcasm. He prayed to himself. And he really did, too. "I'm grateful that I'm not like the rest of humanity, thieves, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector over there...I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get."

Since God in the Sinai code only required Israelites one fast day a year, he figured he was really earning righteousness points by fasting one hundred-five times a year. And since he gave one tenth of everything he got (and not just one tenth of grain, flocks, salary), again he was sure he was better than what God expected!

Wrong! What God does not command is neither good nor bad in itself. Sadly, the man made it bad by leaning on it for his standing with God instead of leaning on what God Himself gave him.

So it was with all of us when we tell God what He ought to accept instead of us listening to what God says is His will.

And this Pharisee was sure he was so much better than most other people. He quickly judged the other man quietly praying in back, that lousy tax collector. The Pharisee was absolutely blind to his own sin. For example, in the fact that he smashed the First Commandment since he essentially substituted himself for God. And God said God's Name should be known especially for mercy, compassion, grace, love, and forgiveness on top of forgiveness. This man somehow seemed to miss that altogether. So much for the Second Commandment. And since his worship focused entirely on himself, not God, and since his worship consisted in nothing but rules of man, so much for the Third Commandment. And he stole the glory of salvation from God and he coveted all honor and praise for himself and

he certainly did not hesitate to put down everybody else! Well, in his minute of 'worship' he smashed most every Commandment. And that was in one minute of activity in the temple.

Imagine that he would have been an upstanding member of society, probably a pillar in his synagogue, a good neighbor, and certainly no problem for the government. Society would have said in those days, 'He is a righteous man.' Today people would say, 'He is a good person.' That is the word English uses today – good. 'He (she) is a good person.' 'They are good people.' "I'm a good person."

But the trouble is we transfer this outward, social goodness into the religious, or as we say it now, spiritual realm of God. This is especially easy to do in regard to ourself. This is a big mistake, tragic!

God sees more! God looks far deeper. What is the heart like from where these 'good things' come? We are born sinners in heart, on the inside. Unless God is able to change that, nothing truly righteous comes from inside us, from our heart or mind.

That Pharisee was a lost sinner exactly like everybody else! So are you and I.

Most sadly, he did not go home forgiven. He had separated himself from God's mercy, from forgiveness, from God our Savior with himself. He did not deny himself and follow Jesus. His house was built on sand and when the storm of the judgement came, his house could be demolished.

The other man confessed his sin. He did not care if anyone saw him at church or not. He was there, quietly in back. He had no desire to look upward. He kept his head down. He kept hitting his chest. In Bible times, in that culture that was a way of expressing deep sorrow, upset, consternation. What so upset him? His sin. He knew very well that it was completely ridiculous and foolish even to use the word righteous, perfect, holy in regard to himself. He was not even close.

We are not even close to righteous or good in ourselves, either. Of ourselves, in ourselves, by ourselves, we are just sinful. We are hopeless and helpless of ourselves. Let us be honest about it and admit the truth. Sin is our reality!

The man says, "Be merciful to me, a sinner." 'The sinner' is what he said. He called himself 'the sinner'. He was not going to play the comparison game. That idea always tries to make self better than others. No, just call oneself 'the sinner'. That tax collector called himself 'the sinner' because sin was his original most basic character. It is me. Like Saint Paul said about himself, "I know that in me (i.e., in my sinful nature) lives no good thing" So, nothing good, only evil!

Yet this tax collector relied on God's grace, mercy, pity, compassion, love, and that abounding forgiveness. To whom did this man turn? To the LORD God. God was God. He was the compassionate God of forgiveness. Jesus is that Lord God. All of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness is in Jesus. Jesus lived for righteousness to give to us. Jesus died to give us forgiveness of all in us that is NOT good. Like this tax collector, trust in, rely on, be confident of God's salvation, Jesus Christ.

This man went home declared just, righteous, by God Himself, for Jesus' sake only. The man was forgiven. With that forgiveness came joy, comfort, relief, and great strength, Jesus' strength, which empowered and motivated him to trust, to pray, to worship, to respect every other person by loving them in Jesus. He said nothing bad about the Pharisee. Had he pointed out to the Pharisee the Pharisee's false hope, he would have done it as a fellow sinner, in love, to try to help that Pharisee also receive the free gift of forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation in Christ Jesus. He would have humbly served that Pharisee.

Be sure to see all of us in the same boat. On the one hand, lost, helpless sinners. But in Jesus – and Jesus did die for all – in Jesus by faith forgiven sinners, forgiven only because of God's awesome mercy, forgiven only because of Jesus' work on our behalf, on

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behalf of the whole world. Look nowhere but to Jesus! Rely on only the Savior. Trust solely in the Redeemer. Rejoice in God our Savior's righteousness and forgiveness. They are real! Amen.