

# The Tax Collector and the Pharisee

## Stories to Live By-part 2

**Luke 18:9-14**

February 21, 2016

### **DAY 1: The power of parables**

1. We continue with our series on the parables of Jesus. The word "parable" comes from a Greek word made up of two roots-*para*, which means "alongside of," and *ballein*, which means "to throw."
2. When Jesus wanted to teach a principle about the kingdom of God, He would throw out a story and see who would "catch" it. He was, in effect, playing a spiritual game of catch with those who listened to Him.
3. Imagine you are playing "catch" with your six year old son. When you toss him the ball you hope that he "catches" it.
4. Though Jesus often spoke truth through principles, He knew that most people would simply nod their head in affirmation and say, "Got it. I know already know that," with little sense that they really *caught it!*
5. Parables contain mental pictures and images which strike a chord, not in the head but in the heart. They rattle something inside us that *catches* our attention.

*Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others:*

*Luke 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

*Luke 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*

*<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'*

*Luke 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*

*<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

6. What's your first impression of the Pharisee? Jot down every word or image that comes to mind.

7. What's your first impression of the tax collector? Jot down every word or image that comes to mind.

## DAY 2: Comparison

1. We live in a world where often, the real driver of our behavior is trying to overcome what we call "low self-esteem." We're trying to feel better about ourselves.
2. Sometimes we feel guilty, sometimes we feel we aren't doing enough or are good enough. Sometimes we feel too selfish. The "downward" feeling reminds me of a time when I was whitewater rafting and got hurled out of the raft in a Class 4 rapids. As I was "bobbing" along in the churning, turbulent and roiling water, I had trouble getting high enough out of the water to get "clean air," air without water drops in it.
3. I felt compelled to kick harder, to lift myself higher in order to breathe.
4. Whether we're aware of it or not, the desire to "elevate" ourselves in the real world can become a driver of our everyday behavior, attitudes, and style of relating.
5. Such is the case with the Pharisee in this parable. A Pharisee was a Jewish religious leader who prided himself on his outward conformity to God's law and regulations. This became the standard of how he saw himself.

*Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others:*

*Luke 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

*Luke 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*

*<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'*

6. What did he have to do in order to "elevate" himself in his own eyes?

7. Comparison is a double-edged sword. While the Pharisee temporarily felt better about himself, how do you think his thinking and comparison affected his attitude toward someone like the tax collector?

8. If you were the tax collector, relating to the Pharisee, what attitudes would you have picked up from him?

9. Can you relate to the Pharisee? Do you find yourself critical of people who don't meet up to your "standards?"

### **DAY 3: Critical attitude: the wrong measurement**

*Luke 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others:*

1. Luke records who the intended target of this parable was.
2. He also identifies the reason for the parable. What two problems is Jesus going to address in this parable?
3. The second problem was that the Pharisee "despised" others. The Greek word means to hold in contempt; be critical of, or look down on. Is this a problem or pattern you see in your life? How so?
4. The first problem is those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Restate this problem in your own words.
5. One wonders, does the second problem, that of "despising others" stem from the first problem, "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous"? Do you see a connection between the two? Describe the connection(s) you see.
6. The first problem, those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" begs the question. How should we see ourselves, and does our opinion of ourselves correct? Does the opinion of ourselves even matter? Or, is there another measurement by which we could accurately see ourselves?  
*1 Corinthians 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.*  
*<sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.*
7. How would Paul answer the questions raised in question 6?
8. What strikes you about Paul's measurement of himself?

## **DAY 4: Humility rewarded**

*Luke 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*

1. The parable is a parable of contrast. While we've looked at the Pharisee, we can see in the tax collector a very different attitude toward God and toward himself.

2. What strikes you about the tax collector...

a. ...as to how he sees himself?

b. ...as to how he sees himself in relation to God?

3. Someone might look at how the tax collector sees himself as something of a downer. But the story doesn't end with v. 13.

*Luke 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

4. Jesus then gives the two-sided lesson of the parable.

a. The tax collector went back to his house a changed man. He confessed his sin and did indeed receive mercy from God. His humbling of himself led to God's exalting him.

b. In contrast, the Pharisee, who exalted himself came tumbling back down to earth.

5. This principle is embedded in the very fabric of life. It's applications are seen in every facet of life, from relationships, to attitudes, to our behavior and work.

6. As you think about this principle of life, how have you seen it lived out in you?

a. How have you see God exalt you after humbling yourself first?

b. How have you seen yourself humbled after exalting yourself first?

## **DAY 5: Humility vs. pride**

1. This passage in James lays out the principles we picked up in our parable. Underneath each verse, jot down the same principles of humility and pride that we learned about in our parable.

*James 4:6 But he gives more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

*James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

*James 4:8 Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind.*

*James 4:9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to dejection.*

*James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.*

2. Pride is very appealing to fallen man, but pride comes with devastating consequences. It sets us up for discouragement when we don't measure up to those around us, it sets us up for a critical spirit when we compare ourselves and seem superior. Pride cuts the heart out of our relationship with God by minimizing our need for God.

3. What struck you most about pride this week?

4. What struck you most about humility?