

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18:9-14

"Two men went up into the temple to pray." I like that statement. People go to church for various reasons. Some go to hear the sermon. Some go to hear the music. Some go to sing. Some go to be with other people. Some go because as children they were taken, and they got the church-going habit. Some go because they consider the church a necessary institution, and they know that if people do not attend the services the church would die. So, they go because they want the church to live. But, a major reason for going to church is to pray. Christ said, "My house shall be called the house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13).

In imagination go with me to this temple of worship in the days of our Lord. Let us drop in behind these two men and watch them closely, thereby seeking to find the flaws in our own attitudes and practices. These men certainly furnish us a spiritual clinic for self-examination. They are designated as "the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." In both of these men we find numerous virtues and flaws in glaring contrast. This story presents three sharp contrasts between the two men.

I. A Contrast In Character.

1. The Pharisee.

In spite of his glaring defects, the Pharisee had certain commendable qualities that ought to make some of us who criticize him ashamed of ourselves.

(1) He was a devoutly religious man.

It is to the credit of the Pharisee that he went up to the temple. A man can neither be a good citizen of his country, nor a good example to those about him, nor what he ought to be who does not avail himself of the opportunity to go to the house of God. By his attendance at the temple he publicly proclaimed his faith in those forces which are the molders of character and the very safeguards of civilization. The Pharisee supported institutional worship and was punctilious in fasting and in observing other religious customs.

(2) He was a clean moral man.

It is to the credit of the Pharisee that no scandal was attached to his name. He was clean in his personal habits. Of his morality he said, "I am not an adulterer." We ought to credit him with the high morality which he claimed for himself, because our Lord did not dispute it. Many who criticize him cannot truthfully say as much for themselves in this regard as he did for himself. Personal purity is a good thing, even though it does not save.

(3) He was an honest business man.

The Pharisee was square and honest in his business dealings. He could truthfully say, "I am not an extortioner." He was not a swindler, cheating those with whom he did business. He was not like some people who have an unfortunate person to do some work for them and pay them only a fraction of what it is worth, and then call that charity. He did not take advantage of somebody's ignorance by charging two prices and call that good business when God calls it stealing. He was fair and honest in his dealings with others.

(4) He was a highly respected citizen.

The Pharisee lived an upright life. He was a prominent and an outstanding citizen. He belonged to the best society. Having an untarnished reputation, he had a very desirable rating in his community. He was considered a real asset.

- (5) He was a very generous man.
He favored and supported institutions for the improvement of society. Not only did he go to the house of God, but he took his tithes with him. Being an honest man, he took the tithe of his entire income, and not just a tenth of what remained after his personal expenses had been deducted. He said, "I give tithes of all that I possess." That was commendable because the Bible says, "The tithe is the Lord's" (Leviticus 27:30). In paying tithes he was simply walking in the pathway of honesty and duty. He was doing the commendable. Our Lord Himself said, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23). The Pharisee paid the tithe of all he made. How many of you can truthfully say, "I bring a tenth of my income to the Lord's house and place it in His treasury"? That is a good thing to be able to say. I wish more of you could say it, not only for your sakes, but also for the sake of the work of our Lord.
- (6) He was quite proud of himself.
The Pharisee was above the average in his community, and he considered himself to be as good as anybody he knew. He could not see any flaws in himself. In his own estimation he was the best man to be found. His high opinion of himself was expressed in his statement, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are."

2. The Publican.

- (1) He was not a deeply religious man.
- (2) He was a dishonest man.
A man could not have been honest and continued in the business in which he was engaged. Extortion and crookedness of various sorts were necessary to make the business of a publican pay. It was the basest of all livelihoods.
- (3) He was a stingy man.
Because the publican was a miserable skinflint, money was his god and upon the altar of greed he sacrificed his all. He allowed himself to become a contemptible cat's-paw in the hands of the Roman government in order to satisfy the master passion of his life, which was the getting of money. He got all the money he could and kept as much of it as possible.
- (4) He was regarded as social riff-raff.
Wearing the garb of a foreign power, he was looked upon as a traitor to his nation. Having a tarnished reputation, he was not invited to enter the exclusive social circles. He was considered a liability to the community.
- (5) He was conscious of his sins.
The publican saw many faults in himself. In his own eyes he was the pre-eminent sinner.

II. A Contrast In Conduct.

These two men, whose characters we have just contrasted, met at the house of prayer. Their prayers opened the windows which permit us to look into their very souls.

1. The Pharisee.

Notice with what prominence and frequency he flourished the big "I." He said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I

possess." There were various objectionable features about the conduct of the Pharisee in the house of prayer.

- (1) He did not approach God correctly.
Very abruptly he said, "God, I thank thee." That sounds far more like the language of a person to his equal than of a creature to his Maker.
- (2) He enumerated his virtues.
Pretending to praise, the Pharisee only boasted of his own deeds and told God what a wonderful person he was. Conceited, arrogant, self-righteous and self-centered, he said, "I thank thee," but he was not conscious of anything received; only of something achieved. He was saturated with the spirit of self-approbation and self-sufficiency. He vaunted his superiority and published his good deeds. In his enumeration of his virtues he failed to see his shortcomings. His prayer was actually a recital of his own good points addressed to himself.
- (3) He confessed only the sins of others.
Having no fault to find with himself, he did not have anything good to say of others. It is ever the rule that the better a person thinks of himself the worse he thinks of others. The Pharisee made the mistake of comparing his life with the lives of disreputable people, and then took to himself the credit of exalted superiority. Comparing himself with his fellow-worshiper, he said, "I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Surely arrogance and pride could not have gone beyond that. He dared to extol himself by directly depreciating a fellow-creature in the act of worship with himself. Very few things are more disgusting than the self-satisfied person who is never wrong. He tried to exalt himself by running other people down. Without faith in anybody except himself, he found fault with everybody.

If you would come to a just estimate of your character, look at those who are better than you, and compare yourself with them; look at those whom God has set for our examples and measure yourself by them. If you will do this, your Pharisaic trust and pride in your own goodness will melt away like frost before the sun.

- (4) He did not have any consciousness of the divine presence.
We know that the Pharisee lacked the sense of the divine presence because he did not have the slightest consciousness of sin. He was self-righteousness personified. He did not have any sense of adoration in his soul, or any craving for divine fellowship. He thought that he was well able to get along without God.
- (5) He did not have any sense of need.
The Pharisee did not regard himself as a sinner. That is why he did not ask God for the forgiveness of his sin or anything else. He was completely self-sufficient. He really needed a mirror in which to see himself as God saw him.

"Oh, would some power the Giver give us,
To see ourselves as others see us."

--Burns.

2. The Publican.

- (1) He was aware of the holiness of God.

- (2) He thought of himself as being in the presence of God.
When he contemplated the Being Whom he was approaching, he was filled with a sense of awe.
- (3) He was deeply conscious of his own sinfulness.
Overwhelmed with the vileness of his own heart, he felt unfit to approach the altar, lest the strong hand of retribution of the almighty and holy God smite him. Because conviction of sin had laid hold upon him and struck its arrow to the depths of his soul, he felt as though in venturing into the house of prayer at all he was an intruder, he stood just inside the entrance. He also sought to avoid observation as far as possible.
- (4) His confession was personal.
Dissatisfied with himself and knowing that he deserved condemnation, the publican did not offer a single excuse for his sins. He did not compare himself with anybody. Neither did he censure or say anything about other people in his prayer. He was the only sinner about whom he was thinking and for whom he was praying. Abased in spirit and prostrate in soul before God, he thought it would be presumptuous for him to lift his eyes to heaven, the habitation of God's glory. He was simply too ashamed of his sins to lift his eyes. True repentance always takes the daring out of a man.
- (5) He humbly and earnestly begged for mercy.
As if he were angry with himself, he kept smiting his breast in vehement self-reproach, anguish and self-judgment, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Beating the breast was a sign of soul anguish and a common way of expressing grief. Acknowledging himself to be a sinner, he cried unto God against whom he had sinned and pleaded for the mercy of pardon and peace.

III. A Contrast In Condition.

When the services were over the Pharisee and publican left to return to their respective homes. What was their condition as they went away from the temple?

1. The Pharisee.

- (1) He had not received anything.
The Pharisee went away without the touch of God upon his spirit. He went away unhelped and unblessed. He did not have any room for Christ in his heart because it was too full of self.
- (2) He went away worse than he came.
His self-satisfaction caused him to brag on himself instead of praying. He was therefore a victim of arrested development. The man who is as good as he wants to be will not get any better. He was a pathetic figure.
- (3) He went to hell.
Why did he go to hell? Because he trusted in his works for salvation instead of trusting in Christ the Saviour. He did not acknowledge himself to be a sinner but told God how good he was.

2. The Publican.

- (1) He was forgiven.
- (2) He was regenerated.

(3) He was justified.

He had acknowledged that he was a sinner, asked God to be merciful to him and trusted Christ as his Saviour. He recognized that there was not any mercy or propitiation except on the ground of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

(4) He had been given a new spirit.

(5) He went to heaven.

The door of heaven is open to anyone who will do what the publican did, and the door of hell is open to anyone who does what the Pharisee did.