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The Parables of Jesus Christ: A Haughty Pharisee and a Humble Publican

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST

THIRTY-SIX: A Haughty Pharisee and a Humble Publican (Lk. 18:10-14)

SURVEY

Jesus describes two men who entered the temple to pray.

- Their spiritual condition upon arriving at the temple

1. The Pharisee

He was arrogant and totally self-centered, as illustrated by his prayer:

"I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else."

2. The Publican

He was humble and sorrowful, as illustrated by his prayer:

"O God, be merciful to me, a sinner"

- Their spiritual condition upon departing from the temple

1. The Pharisee—He left unchanged and unforgiven.

2. The Publican—He left changed and forgiven.

SIGNIFICANCE

This parable marks the final of three concerning the subject of prayer. For the first two, see parables 24 and 25.

SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

- The temple in Jerusalem served as a place where one could offer up both animal sacrifices and personal prayer to God. Both were of equal importance. Jesus Himself had emphasized the prayer aspect:

"And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mt. 21:13).

Here our Lord quotes from both the Old Testament prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11).

There are various instances of temple prayers in the New Testament:

1. As offered up by Simeon (Lk. 2:25-32)
2. As offered up by Anna (Lk. 2:36-38)

3. As offered up by Peter and John (Acts 3:1)

- The Mosaic Law ordered a fast on one day out of the year—the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32). Later, to commemorate various national calamities, other fasts were observed (Zech. 8:19). The Pharisees, however, had gone beyond the Law by fasting twice a week on Monday and Thursday. These days were established by tradition because Moses was supposed to have ascended Mount Sinai on a Thursday and descended on a Monday.

Note that the Pharisee compared himself with the worst kind of people, the extortioners, the unjust, the sexually impure, and the hated tax collectors, "this publican."

Paul later warned about this: *"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"* (2 Cor. 10:12).

In a real sense, the Pharisee was not even praying. He was rather talking to himself about himself. The true and only standard for the believer is not another saint, or a sinner, but the Savior. (See Heb., 12:2-3; 1 Pet. 2:21.)

- The publicans (greedy tax collectors) usually come across badly in the New Testament (see Mt. 5:46; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31). But there were at least two notable exceptions: Matthew (Mt. 10:3), and Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:2). In fact, on occasion, publicans responded favorably to Jesus:

"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John" (Lk. 7:29). (See also Luke 15:1-2.)

The publican correctly responded concerning his own unworthiness before God, as once did Isaiah and Simon Peter.

"Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk. 5:8).

This is surely a prayer that God hears and responds to in love.

- Thus, the Pharisee's prayer was rejected and the publican's prayer received based on the following verses:

1. The rejected prayer

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts;" (Jas. 4:3)

2. The received prayer

"I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." (Psa. 32:5)