

Luke 18:9-14 – "Humility in Prayer"

Text: Luke 18:9-14 (CSB)

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Key Background:

- **Jesus's Audience:** Luke specifically notes this parable was directed at those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" - people confident in their own moral standing before God.
- **Temple Prayer:** The Jerusalem temple was the center of Jewish worship where people came for daily prayers, especially during the morning and evening sacrifice times.
- **Pharisees:** Religious leaders known for strict observance of the Law and additional traditions. They were highly respected by the people for their knowledge and apparent holiness.
- **Tax Collectors:** Jews who collected taxes for Rome, often charging extra for personal profit. They were despised as traitors and sinners, excluded from synagogue worship and polite society.
- **Standing Prayer:** Standing was a normal posture for prayer, but the Pharisee's position may suggest he was prominently positioned to be seen by others.
- **Fasting and Tithing:** The Pharisee's practices exceeded biblical requirements. The Law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement, but he fasted twice weekly. He tithed everything, even items not required by Law.
- **Chest-Beating:** The tax collector's action was a sign of deep grief and repentance, similar to mourning practices. This physical expression showed his internal anguish over his sin.
- **Justification:** Being "justified" means being declared righteous before God - having one's sins forgiven and being accepted by God.

Questions from the Story:

- **To whom did Jesus specifically direct this parable (v. 9)? What two attitudes characterized Jesus's audience?**

- Where did the two men go and for what purpose (v. 10)? What does this common destination tell us about their shared religious background?
- How does Jesus describe the Pharisee's prayer posture and focus (v. 11)? What does praying "about himself" reveal about the direction of his prayer?
- What does the Pharisee thank God for regarding other people (v. 11)? What does this comparison with others reveal about his heart attitude?
- What specific religious practices does the Pharisee mention (v. 12)? How do these exceed the minimum requirements of Jewish law?
- How does the tax collector position himself for prayer (v. 13)? What does his physical distance and posture reveal about his sense of unworthiness?
- What does the tax collector's inability to "raise his eyes to heaven" show about his spiritual condition?
- What physical action does the tax collector perform while praying (v. 13)? What does this chest-beating demonstrate about his internal state?
- What is the content of the tax collector's prayer (v. 13)? How does this simple prayer contrast with the Pharisee's lengthy self-commendation?
- Which man does Jesus say went home justified (v. 14)? What does this surprising verdict reveal about God's standards?
- What general principle does Jesus state about exaltation and humiliation (v. 14)? How does this principle apply to both men in the parable?
- What was fundamentally wrong with the Pharisee's prayer despite his religious activities? What does this teach us about the difference between religion and relationship?
- What made the tax collector's prayer acceptable to God despite his sinful lifestyle? What does this reveal about the nature of saving faith?
- How does this parable challenge our tendency to compare ourselves favorably with others?
- What does this story teach us about the proper attitude to bring before God in prayer?
- How does this parable warn against trusting in our own righteousness rather than God's mercy?
- What does the contrast between these two men teach us about genuine repentance versus religious pride?
- How should this parable shape our understanding of what God looks for in our hearts when we approach him?