

That's Not Me

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14

The parable of the rich man and the tax collector is a well-known story in Scripture. You've probably read it many, many times. I want you to think for a moment, not about the parable itself, but about the perspective from which you've read it. If you're like me, the instant the Pharisee starts talking, you picture yourself looking upon the scene from the corner of the church. When the parable comes to the tax collector, you can almost imagine yourself humbly bowing your own head to say, "God have mercy on me, a sinner."

This is a common tendency of our sinful nature: we cast ourselves in the most positive light. We don't want to admit that we are actually the "bad guy," the Pharisee proclaiming his own righteousness for all to see. While we may not publicize our conceit like the Pharisee, we often harbor thoughts in our hearts that we are better than others. Maybe it is thoughts such as these: "I take time out of my busy schedule to attend church every Sunday. This woman I know only goes to church every couple Sundays." Or "I work extremely hard to live a God-pleasing life. My co-workers abuse alcohol, use profane language, and gossip. Thank you, Lord, that I am not like them." Such pride hiding in our hearts can lead to assumptions that we deserve something from God. However, God doesn't owe us anything. We see, through God's law, that whoever keeps the law and stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (James 2:10) This includes the sin of considering ourselves better than others. (Philippians 2:3) What we do deserve is death. (Romans 3:23)

Thankfully, we have one who was humble in our place. Our Savior, Jesus, took on human flesh and the sins of the entire world even though he had every right to flaunt his superiority over us. He came in complete humility, despite his complete perfection. His death paid for all our sins, including our sinful pride. We are redeemed children of God. Along with the tax collector, we say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." We have God's complete assurance of forgiveness. Because we have been humbled with Christ as he died the death we deserve, we too will be exalted with Christ on the last day. On that day, we can point to what Christ has done and say, "That's me." God will look at Christ's work as our own, and he will welcome us to live with him eternally.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I ask that you forgive me for all of the times that I am not humble. Please move me to imitate your humility, as you came to earth to die for me while I am still a sinner. Thank you for the forgiveness you've won for me. I ask that you quickly return to take me to be in heaven with you. Your will be done. Amen.

Written by Hannah Hackbarth

Reviewed by Professor-emeritus David Valleskey