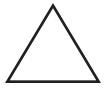


Two Men—Two Prayers



Study Word



fast: (fast) to go without food for a time

Jesus saw them in the crowd that day. He knew immediately what kind of people they were. They had not come to learn about God. They were not crippled or blind, so they had not come for healing. The Master's stories about the kingdom didn't interest them. And they paid no attention when He told the people to repent of their sins and live holy lives. So what kind of people were they?

They were the best people in the whole crowd that day. At least that is what they thought. Of course, they had not come to Jesus for help, because they didn't need any help. God knew how good they were. Their own righteousness was all they needed. That is what they trusted in.

More than that, they despised others. They despised the ragged children who hung around Jesus. They despised the lame and the sick who trailed after Him, begging for healing. And they despised the hordes of common people who so eagerly listened to

the Master's teaching.

Possibly they even despised Jesus for wasting His time with such low-down people. He could have become really great if He had used His miracle-working power to make a name for Himself. So why had these so-perfect people joined the crowd around Jesus that day?

Who knows? Maybe they enjoyed mingling with the people because they imagined others envied and admired them for their righteousness. Maybe they knew Jesus had noticed them and thought He was glad to see a few good people among all the sinners He had to preach to.

How surprised they would have been had they known why Jesus suddenly began telling a parable. They had no idea that He told the story because He had seen them and knew all about their proud hearts.

Were those self-righteous people Pharisees? We don't know. But Jesus' story was about a Pharisee, whom they likely admired,

and about another man whom those proud people despised.

“Two men went up to the temple to pray,” Jesus began. “One was a Pharisee.”

Everyone who listened to Jesus’ parable knew about Pharisees. To be sure, a few of those leaders loved God and lived holy lives. However, most Pharisees at that time were not holy. They pretended to be righteous because they enjoyed praise and loved having others think they were good men of God. They prayed out loud in public—sometimes right out on the street corners. That was a good place for lots of people to see and hear them. When they gave money for the poor, they made sure many people noticed them.

The Pharisees thought it was a fine thing to have people admiring them for their holiness. The temple was a fine place to let people see how good they were. That was why this Pharisee had gone to the temple to pray.

“The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself,” said Jesus, as He went on with the story. “He said, ‘I thank You, God, that I am different from other men. I don’t cheat people out of money

(as some men do). I don’t treat others unfairly (as some men do). I am not unfaithful to my wife (as some men are). And I am glad I am not like that publican over there.

“I **fast** twice a week (as holy men are supposed to do). And I give God ten percent of everything I own (as the Law of Moses commands). Thank you, God, that I am not like other men.’”

Jesus had said two men went up to the temple. The Pharisee was one. Who was the other?

That other man did not go to the temple very often. For one thing, he made his



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living by telling lies and cheating people. Surely he hadn't gone there to worship a holy God.

For another thing, people hated him. They stayed away from him. So he hadn't gone there to meet friends. More than that, he would have met a lot of Pharisees in the temple. And he knew Pharisees despised him more than anyone. Who was this other man anyway?

He was a publican, a hated tax collector. And he had gone to the temple to pray. He had no good deeds to thank God for, as the Pharisee had. All he could think about was his many sins. He stood far away from the other people. He didn't want others to see him. He was too ashamed of his wickedness to even look up to Heaven. And his prayer was very short. "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

That was the end of Jesus' parable—a simple story of two men and two prayers. One man saw himself as very righteous. The other saw himself as very wicked. And maybe that is how they looked to the other people in the temple also. But how did the

two look to God?

When God looked at the Pharisee and the publican, He saw something very different because He looked at their hearts.

Jesus said the publican went home that day with a clean heart in the sight of God. He knew he was a sinner and called on God for mercy. So God forgave him. But God saw that the heart of the Pharisee was full of ugly pride and hidden sins that no one knew about.

Jesus ended His story by saying that God will bring down people who try to lift themselves up by boasting about their righteousness.

How about those proud self-righteous people who stood in the crowd and listened to Jesus tell that story? Did they catch on to what the Master meant? Did they realize they were like the proud Pharisee in the parable? Did they repent of their sinful pride?

We do not know. But we know Jesus told that story for everyone, even for us today.

FROM THE STORY

Write *Pharisee* or *publican*.

1. The _____ thought he was perfect.
2. The _____ despised the poor and crippled.
3. The _____ wanted people to hear him pray.
4. The _____ didn't believe he needed help.
5. The _____ didn't have friends at the temple.
6. The _____ made a living by cheating and lying.
7. The _____ was ashamed of his sin.
8. The _____ left the temple with a clean heart.
9. The _____ left the temple with a proud, ugly heart.

Complete the sentences.

10. The Pharisee was proud that he . . .
 - a. didn't cheat _____.
 - b. didn't treat _____.
 - c. wasn't unfaithful _____.
11. The Pharisee was proud that he . . .
 - a. did _____.
 - b. did give _____.
12. The publican prayed, "God, _____."

THAT'S OUR GOD

Underline the correct words.

13. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were full of **mercy and humility**, **pride and sin**.

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- 14. God has mercy on those who **are perfect, admit their sins.**
- 15. God will bring down people who **boast, humble themselves.**

FOR ME TODAY

Tell which person from today's story you would you be like.

- 16. a. Another student gets in trouble for talking during class. You smile and think how good you are for never talking when you shouldn't.

- b. In family devotions, your father reads a verse about being slow to anger. Then you remember yelling at your brother and apologize. _____

WE REMEMBER

Complete the sentences.

unclean	uncover	nine	priest	ten	love
healed	cover	brothers	Abraham	feed	torn

- 17. In Hell, the rich man tried to tell _____ what to do; he wanted someone to warn his _____ about that terrible place.
- 18. The Law said a leper must _____ his head, _____ his upper lip, wear _____ clothes, and cry, "_____."
- 19. Jesus healed _____ lepers, but _____ didn't return to thank Him.
- 20. The lepers were _____ as they went to show themselves to the _____.
- 21. The rich man knew that God said to _____ God and your neighbors and to _____ the poor.