

WHICH ARE YOU?

“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.” Job 9:20

By Pastor Del Wray

Job, the wisest man who ever lived when confronted with God’s purity and all-knowing righteousness, discovered what God has wanted to teach all of mankind through each and all the Seven Dispensations. That being that man is helpless and hopeless without God. Job came to the conclusion after his exhaustive search for the meaning of life and the Lord’s much questioning through all forty-two chapters of the Book of Job. He then made the ultimate discovery and cried out *“Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* Job 42:6. That’s the Ultimate Discovery that every man must come to before he can be saved. God has given us His Book to instruct us and to test us to see if we will believe His Word and come to Job’s same conclusion. Yes! God is testing man through each dispensation to see whether we believe Him or not. Brethren, folks that is the test, don’t scoff and snicker when it comes right down to it, the WORD will be held in front of every man and he will be ask, What about my Word? Why didn’t you believe me? *“I exalted it above my own Sons name.”* Jesus used parables and factual stories to bring this same truth to bear all through the Bible.

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus often taught in parables. One of the shortest, yet one of the most profound of all his parables was that of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Bible tells us that Jesus said and I quote, *“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others”* Luke 18:9.

Before we read the actual parable, it might be helpful to know exactly what a “Pharisee”, and what a “Publican” is. The Pharisees were the most influential of all the Jewish religious sects of Jesus' day. The word “Pharisee” literally means “the separated ones, separatists”, which sums up the basic nature of their beliefs. They were the strictest legalists of the day, who pledged themselves to obey and observe all the countless restrictive rules, traditions and ceremonial laws of Orthodox Judaism. They considered themselves to be the only true followers of God’s laws, and therefore felt that they were much better and holier than anyone else. Thus they separated themselves not only from the non-Jews whom they absolutely despised and considered pagan “gentile dogs” but they even set themselves above and apart from their own Jewish brethren.

The Publicans, on the other hand, were considered by their fellow-Jews to be the absolutely worst kind of characters! For the Publicans were tax collectors for the foreign occupier and ruler of Palestine, imperial Rome. They were officially-appointed Jewish tax collectors for Caesar, and were therefore considered traitors by their brethren. The Romans would instruct the Publicans how much tax to collect from the people, and then the Publicans could charge whatever they wanted more than that for their own income. So they were usually extortioners, cheaters and robbers of the Jews, and were therefore absolutely despised by their Jewish brethren who considered them the scum of the earth.

So when Jesus told this parable, comparing a Pharisee and a Publican, he had chosen the two most opposite figures in the entire Jewish community. The one was held to be the best, the most righteous, the most religious, the most holy, the most godly of all men. Whereas the other was looked on as the worst, filthiest, traitorous scoundrel imaginable!

Here is the parable itself in Jesus' own words: "Two men went up into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a Publican. The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus within himself: "oh God, I thank you that I am not like other men are; robbers, extortioners, unjust, evil-doers, adulterers. Or even as this Publican! I fast twice every week and I faithfully give tithes, one-tenth, of all that I get."

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even lift up his eyes to look toward heaven, but he beat upon his breast and said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

"Then Jesus said to those around him, I tell you the truth that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted!" Luke 18:9-14. Quote not exact.

Which one of these two men did Jesus say was actually justified before God? The Pharisee who appeared to be so righteous and holy, and who no doubt felt that he was a very righteous and good man? Or the tax collector, the sinner, who was despised by others, and who apparently even despised himself, who felt so ashamed of himself that he wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but simply begged God to have mercy upon him and forgive him? So often, God's way of looking at things is very different from ours! He says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts! Neither are your ways my ways! Isaiah 55:8-9. Although that Publican's sins were undoubtedly many, because of his honest and humble confession and recognition of the fact that he was a sinner, one who needed God's help. Jesus said he was the one who left the temple justified that day! Not the Pharisee who was so proud of his own goodness and his own righteousness, that he didn't even think he needed God's help at all! If anything, he probably felt that he was doing God a favor by honoring him with his prayers!

But in the sight of God, self-righteous religious pride like this Pharisee manifested is the greatest and worst of all sins! That hypocritical "holier-than-thou" attitude, that causes people who are self-righteous to despise and look down on others who they don't consider as holy or pure or faithful or good as they think they are! When people get this way, others usually find them to be the hardest, most narrow minded and intolerant folks they ever met! Because instead of loving, forgiving and understanding others, they're always criticizing, judging and condemning folks who don't do all the "good" things that they do!

The Gospels tell us that, "when the Pharisees saw Jesus sitting down and eating a meal with many Publicans and sinners who came and sat with him, they were enraged, and asked his disciples, "how can your master eat with unclean Publicans and sinners?" but Jesus answered them, "you need to go and learn what this means? "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice!" Matthew 9:10-13. In other words, what He was saying was, "I would rather see you have love and mercy, and not just you're dutiful keeping of the law and making of sacrifices! I'd rather you'd give love to others than to just be so self-righteous and condemning!"

Let's face it, none of us have any goodness of our own, anything good about us is only the Lord Jesus Christ, and his goodness! God is the only one who is good! His word says: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23. Everybody is bad except those who have faith and have the goodness of God, the love of God, the righteousness of God! Even the Apostle Paul said, "In me, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing!" Romans 7:18. Jesus got so infuriated by the hypocritical, self-righteous hypocrisy of the Pharisees that he told them that they were worse than the drunks and the prostitutes, the Publicans and the sinners that they despised! And that there was more chance for such sinners to make it to heaven, than there was for them!

Jesus told them to their faces, "Truly I tell you, the Publicans and the harlots will go into the kingdom of God before you!" Matthew 21:31. He even told his own disciples, "Truly I tell you, unless your

righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!" Matthew 5:20. In other words, unless you are better than they are, you'll never get to heaven! And the only way that you can be better than they were, is to have Christ's righteousness, Jesus living in you. That because the Pharisees were as good as anyone could possibly be in the natural affairs of men.

Jesus so hated the Pharisees' hypocritical pretense, pretending to be so righteous and right all the time, that in the most bitter denunciation he ever uttered against anyone, he publicly told them, "woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you make clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but within you are full of extortion and filthiness! You blind Pharisee, clean first that which is within the cup and the plate, and then the outside of them may be clean also!

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for you are like white-washed tombs, which indeed look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean! In the same way, on the outside you appear to others as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity!" Matthew 23:25-28.

The thing that made the Pharisees so self-righteous and hypocritical was their pride! They were too proud to confess that they were sinners like everyone else. In fact, they not only couldn't confess their sins, they couldn't even see their sins! They couldn't admit that there was anything that could possibly be wrong with them, and therefore they became "blind leaders of the blind!" Matthew 15:14. It's almost a relief to know you're bad, to honestly admit that you're not good. After all, God has said so in His Word, that nobody is good! That's why the worst kind of people in the sight of God is those who pretend to be good and look down on everybody else. His Word says, "there is none righteous, no, not one! Therefore, by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, It is the gift of God, not of our own works or goodness, lest any man should boast" Romans 3:10; Ephesians 2:8-9. We just need to be honest and confess, "I'm no good, I'm bad, I'm a sinner, of course I make mistakes! anything good about me is only Jesus Christ, God' Holy Spirit within me!"

God's idea of righteousness is not the supposedly sinless perfectionist, but the pitiful, hopeless, humble, sinful sinner who knows he needs God! Those are the ones he came to save! "For I came not to call the righteous," Jesus said, "but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13. God's idea of goodness is godliness, a sinner who knows he needs God and depends on Him for salvation. Not the self-made, self-righteous, hypocritical Pharisees who think they can save themselves by their own goodness!

God's idea of saintliness is a sinner saved by grace, a sinner who has no perfection, no righteousness of his own at all, but is totally dependent on the grace and the love and the mercy of God! And believe it or not, those are the only kind of saints there are! There are no others saints!

So which of the two are you like, The Pharisee or the Publican? When Jesus spoke this parable it was that we all would put ourselves into the place of the Pharisee, repent and abide as the Publican.

WHICH ARE YOU, THE PHARISEE OR THE PUBLICAN?