

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

(Luke 18:9-14)

“The Prayer God Won’t Answer”

Background:

The parable is specifically addressed to those “who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else”.

Two Jewish men went to the temple to pray (either at the 9 a.m. or 3 p.m. time for prayer). Both addressed God in their prayers. But the similarities end there! The Pharisee prays boastfully about his works, how good he is, and how much better he is than other people including the nearby tax collector.

The tax collector humbly bows his head and asks God to forgive him of his sins.

In Judaism at that time there were three types of prayers:

- 1) Confession of sin
- 2) Thanksgiving
- 3) Petitions for oneself or others

The Pharisee’s prayer had none of these components!

Key characters and elements:

- Pharisee (very religious, self-righteous; felt he earned God’s favor through his personal works)
- Tax Collector (humble; contrite; felt undeserving of God’s favor)
- Prayers
- God

Contrast of the Prayer of the Pharisee versus the Tax Collector:

	<u>Pharisee</u>	<u>Tax Collector</u>
Position while praying	Standing by others; Praying out loud	Standing apart; head down; beating chest
Focus of the prayer	Himself (“I”)	God’s mercy/atonement
Comparison made	With other people	With God
External or Internal Focus	External (his works)	Internal (humble heart)
Pride vs Humility	Prideful	Humble/repentant
Response by God	Unjustified	Justified

Key Points:

v.14 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”

“True humility leads to exaltation”

“God opposes the proud but shows grace to the humble”

“God answers the prayers of the humble but does not answer the prayers of the self-righteous”

Other Relevant Scriptures:

Matthew 18:4 (humbling ourselves leads to blessing in God’s kingdom)

Matthew 23:12 “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”

Luke 14:11 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”

I Peter 5:6; James 4:6; Proverbs 3:3 “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”

Matthew 6:1-4, 5-8, 16-18 (the motive behind our “acts of righteousness” is crucial – are we motivated by pride and desire to be seen by men and receive “our glory”, or are we motivated by desire to serve and love God and see God glorified?)

Psalms 24:3-4 “we need clean hands AND a pure heart”

Psalms 51 (example of a contrite prayer from a humble heart)

I Timothy 1:15 (Paul was humble)

Matthew 11:28-29; Phil 2:5-11 (Jesus is humble!)