

The Mark of Repentance – Luke 18:9-14

I. INTRODUCTION - RR

A. *The Pharisees*

1. The word *Pharisee* has come to be an *insult* in our day.
2. We call someone “a Pharisee” if we think they’re a holier-than-thou hypocrite.
3. We get this from the NT’s treatment of them; the way we see them in *opposition* to Jesus in so many encounters.
4. He had some hard words for them; exposing the Pharisees who stood against Him as nasty religious fakers.
5. It comes as a bit of a surprise to learn that the Pharisees were highly respected in their day.
 - a. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that the Pharisees were regarded by the common people as deeply pious men, with a commitment to the Law that was unparalleled.
 - b. They not only considered the *Written* Law of Moses as holy & authoritative,
 - c. They also believed God had given Moses an *Oral* law *along with* the Written Law on Mt. Sinai – and this Oral law *was as binding as the scriptures*.
 - d. The Pharisees fancied themselves the sole *possessors & guardians* of that Oral tradition.
 - e. But the fact is, those traditions were nothing more than *their interpretations & commentary* on the Law of Moses that had been added over the years.
6. Jesus ran into *trouble* with the Pharisees because while He was perfectly obedient to the Scriptures, His obedience often trampled their traditions & interpretations which were in error.

B. *Respected*

1. What we need to understand this morning as we begin our study is that while *we* see the Pharisees as religious fakers & hypocrites,
2. To the people of Jesus’ day, they were highly respected men of God.
3. And they absolutely **LOVED** this reputation, doing whatever they could to *enhance* it.

II. TEXT

A. V. 9

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

1. Luke tells us right off the bat what this parable is meant to teach.
2. *It's a rebuke*, aimed at those who did 2 things . . .
 - 1) Trusted in themselves -&-
 - 2) Despised others.
3. The one leads inevitably to the other.
 - a. Those who trust in themselves will *always* despise those they deem *less* than they are.
 - b. The truly repentant are marked by a humble heart that does *not* despise others.
 - c. Despising others, considering them morally lesser & worthless, is an evidence of self-righteousness.

B. V. 10

1. The parable begins . . .

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

2. Take careful note of that – 2 men went to pray.
 - a. They went to the temple because that's where prayer was offered.
 - b. People were allowed to pray *anywhere*, but the temple was a *house of prayer*,
 - c. Where prayer was supposed to have special power because it was at the temple God chose to dwell.
3. If we put this in modern terms, we'd say that 2 men went *to church* to pray.
 - a. They could have prayed at home, in their car, on the bus, or at the beach or mall.
 - b. But they knew that the church is *a place of worship* and went there to pray.
4. One of the men was a Pharisee, the other – a tax-collector.
5. They both *went* to pray, but only 1 of them was heard in heaven.
6. The other's words never left the temple courts.
7. Judging by *outward appearance*, of the 2, it would be the *Pharisee* who would connect with God. The tax-collector didn't stand a chance.

- a. The Pharisees *had it together!*
 - 1) They were *wealthy*; and according to the thinking of that time, wealth was God's *reward* for obedience to the Law.
 - 2) The Pharisees were deeply pious men who knew & practiced *all* the forms of religious devotion.
- b. Tax-collectors were a far different story.
 - 1) If Pharisees had it together, tax-collectors had fallen apart!
 - 2) While Pharisees lived at the center of Jewish social life, tax-collectors lived on the edge, the frayed fringe.
 - 3) While the Pharisees were respected, tax-collectors were despised!
 - 4) Oh, the tax-collectors were rich as well. They had *more* wealth than most of the Pharisees.
 - a) That ought to have *proven* to the Pharisees how goofy their ideas about 'wealth-as-God's-reward' were.
 - b) The wealth of the tax-collectors was *ill-gotten gain* that made them quite rich.
 - c) And this was an attractive lure for *others* on the fringe of Jewish society.
 - d) Tax-collectors were surrounded by others who were despised & cast-off;
 - e) Riff-raff, criminals, women of ill-reputable, shady characters of questionable morality.
 - 5) So if the Pharisees were considered as pious recipients of God's reward,
 - 6) Tax-collectors were seen as the very opposite – impious sinners worthy of God's wrath.
- 8. If we were to cast the Pharisees & tax-collectors into modern labels, we'd say that the tax-collectors were the "bikers"
 - a. They were the people you'd find at the local billiard hall, shooting pool, downing brews, playing Texas hold'em in some dark, smoke filled back room.
 - b. The Pharisees? We'd find them in City Hall, sitting on the City Council.
 - 1) They work downtown in the financial tower & live in a gated community on the hill.
 - 2) They avoid Target & the outlet center because that's where the "commoners" shop. They shop exclusively at *Fashion*

Square.

- 3) They meet their friends at the clubhouse of the Country Club.
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9. But in this story, they both went to the temple to pray.
 - a. The Pharisee went because ***a religious exterior*** was part of his routine.
 - 1) It was the façade he wore that gave him access to his fellow Pharisees & privileged lifestyle.
 - 2) It secured him a place of esteem in society.
 - b. The tax-collector went to pray because deep inside he knew he was morally bankrupt.
 - 1) He knew the life he was living was wrong but desperately wanted to be right.
 - 2) He didn't know nearly as much about religious things as the Pharisee, but he knew enough –
 - 3) He knew he needed ***to be forgiven***, & that only God could give it.
 - 4) So he went to where forgiveness was to be found – the temple, where sacrifices were made.

C. Vs. 11-12

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

1. Notice the way Jesus says it in v. 11: The Pharisee prayed **WITH HIMSELF**.
 - a. He didn't pray to God. He didn't have a conversation WITH the Lord.
 - b. He was talking to himself, though he ***thought*** he was speaking to God.
2. The reason this wasn't ***real prayer*** is because prayer is a ***spiritual activity*** & there was nothing of the Spirit in this.
3. It ***sounded very*** pious, ***very*** religious; but it was nothing more than foolish boasting.
 - a. He bragged about his ***superiority to others***, people he saw himself as ***better*** than.
 - b. Then he listed the things he did that ought to impress with his

tremendous piety.

- 1) Just like a good Pharisee, he *fasted* every Monday & Wednesday.
- 2) And just like a good Pharisee, he *tithed* scrupulously.
 - a) The Pharisees were so careful about tithing, they didn't limit it to their paychecks. They gave a tenth of *all* their increase.
 - b) When their gardens matured, they set aside 1/10th of their produce,
 - c) Imagine setting aside every 10th carrot, every 10th head of lettuce, every 10th cucumber & sprig of broccoli.
 - d) In Luke 11:42, Jesus said they even tithed every tenth seed & leaf of their herbs!
4. This Pharisee felt himself *safe* in his observance of the Law.
 - a. He *just knew* he was *better than others* & bragged to God about it.
 - b. Little did he know God wasn't listening.
 - c. He wasn't listening because the Pharisee wasn't *really* talking to Him.
 - d. If he was, if he'd been *sincere* in his approach to God, he'd have realized that those who come before the Lord have *nothing* to boast of.
 - e. Those who commune with God are painfully aware of their *need*, not their sufficiency.
 - f. The heart in touch with God is humble, not boasting.
5. That's the kind of heart we find in the tax-collector, of all people .

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D. V. 13

13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

1. The tax-collector stood afar off, from what?
 - a. Not the Pharisee. He was near the Pharisee there in the court of the temple,
 - b. Close enough that the Pharisee could point to him & claim his superiority.
2. The tax-collector stood afar off – *from God!*

- a. He dared not approach the altar.
- b. He felt unworthy to come close to the holy presence.
3. While the Pharisee thought himself so holy, the tax-collector knew he wasn't.
4. He had no right or ability to draw near.
5. So he stood afar off, as close as he dare come.
6. When the Pharisee prayed, as it says in v. 11 He stood, arms outstretch, eyes looking to heaven. This was the customary posture of prayer at that time.
7. But the tax-collector dared not come so boldly before the Lord.
 - a. He stood there humbly, eyes averted, & hands pounding his chest;
 - b. Not in bravado like Tarzan, but in the reflex of a soul tormented by guilt & sorrow.
8. Maybe you understand this gesture of beating the breast.
 - a. There have been only a few times in my life when I was *overwhelmed* with grief.
 - b. And I've found myself doing something I do at no other time.
 - c. My hand curls into a fist and I smite myself. I strike my thigh or my chest.
 - d. I don't know why – but at that moment of extreme sorrow, there's no other gesture that communicates the pain.
9. This man, this wretched tax-collector was in soul-agony.
10. He was broken, convicted of his sin, in desperate need of God **& KNEW IT!**
11. His prayer was very different from the Pharisees.
12. He cried out the only thing he could – “Mercy, Lord!”
13. He knew what he deserved, but pleaded for what he *needed* instead, God's forgiveness.
14. He didn't claim *anything*. He knew he had no ground to stand on before a Holy God.
15. Instead, he admitted who & what he was – *a sinner*.

E. V. 14

1. Then Jesus drives home the point of the parable. And as he does, He turns the tables on those who hear Him.
2. They thought for sure it was the Pharisee who God approved while the tax-collector would be turned away with nothing.

14 I tell you, this man [the tax-collector] went down to his house justified *rather* than the other [the Pharisee]; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

3. The tax-collector went away *right with God* because he *trusted in God*, not self.
4. The Pharisee *trusted in self*, not God, & though he walked away, smug in his self-confidence, he was very, very far from the Lord.
5. Jesus makes it clear –
 - a. If we trust in ourselves, claiming how good we are, we will be put down, only to realize too late we’ve been a fool, who’s fooled no one but ourselves.
 - b. But, if we put *self* down, refusing to put any trust in ourselves, then God will lift us up.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Trust

1. What are you trusting in today? Where is your trust: Self, or God?
2. You Christians, don’t be too quick to answer that.
 - a. We all know what the right response *ought* to be.
 - b. We all know the *theologically correct* answer.
 - c. And like dutiful, little modern day Pharisees we may say,
“God, I thank You that I’m not like the self-righteous Pharisee in
this story.
I’m an evangelical Christian & go to church twice a week.
I *regularly* ask You to forgive my sins.”
3. But don’t be too quick to reply with a pat answer. Think about it. Meditate on it.
4. That’s what the Spirit wants *us* to do with this parable.
5. The sect of the Pharisees has passed away, but the error of the Pharisees lives on.
6. What are you trusting in today; Self, or God?

B. Different Places

1. As I look out at this group, I see people at all different places on their spiritual pilgrimage.
 - a. Some are *brand new believers*.
 - b. Others are *novices*; they’ve known the Lord for several months & are growing in their faith.

- c. Some are *seasoned saints*, men & women who've known the Lord for many years & have gone far with Him.
 - d. Then, there are some here *who have yet to start*, yet to begin the journey though they've heard the invitation to Christ.
2. A danger for all, but *most specially* for the *unbelievers* & the *elder Christian* is the problem of *self-righteousness*.
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3. For the *unbeliever*, the danger comes from saying,
- “I'm not perfect, but I'm *better than some*.”
 - “I'm certainly no saint, but I'm no *sinner* either.”
- a. If that's you, *watch out!* You're *trusting in yourself*.
 - b. You're *not* perfect, but you can't claim an excuse for your failure by comparing yourself to others.
 - c. The only One you have to compare yourself to is God, the *Perfect One*.
 - d. That's the standard you're measured by.
 - e. You don't measure yourself. *God* measures you.
 - f. And His rule is the Law, the Commandments. You've broken them.
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4. Self-righteousness is a danger for *mature Christians* too.
- a. It's a danger because as we grow in Christ & are changed into His likeness, we can see the ways He's given us victory over sin.
 - b. Bad habits are broken, a wonderful transformation takes place.
 - c. And we come to the place where we say,
- “Hey – I'm a pretty solid guy now!”
 - “I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.”
- d. We forget that it was God's amazing grace that changed us.
 - e. We did not change ourselves! What *we did* was slow the change down; we opposed & resisted it. It was God's mercy & grace that faithfully prevailed and made us what we are today.
 - f. All we see now is the *effect* of the grace, the *result* of the mercy – & we begin to feel superior.
 - g. As mature Christians we now *know* God's Word.
 - h. We've developed new, good habits. All of that is good. It's great!
 - i. But are we now trusting in *that*, in what we've *become*?
 - j. Do we still feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit or have we moved *beyond* that?

- k. Does sin *within* still trouble us, causing us sorrow?
 - l. Are we *more aware* of the need of God's mercy today, or feel *less* a need of it because we're *closer* to God than when we began?
 - m. The fact is – it doesn't matter how holy you are – the closer you are to God, the more aware of your need for mercy you will become.
5. Consider Peter – Jesus told him to go fishing one morning.
 - a. Peter had just returned from a fruitless night with empty nets.
 - b. But being polite to the new rabbi, Peter launched.
 - c. Jesus told him to drop his nets & when he drew them in the catch was so big it nearly sank the boat!
 - d. In the middle of stowing the fish, the reality of who Jesus was hit him like a ton of bricks, he dropped to his knees and cried out, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"
 - e. Proximity to the Lord, realizing who He is, yields conviction of sin.
 6. Consider the prophet Isaiah –the holiest man of his generation.
 - a. He tells us in ch. 6 he was given a vision of the throne of God.
 - b. It was so glorious, so pure & right he felt *utterly corrupt* in comparison.
 - c. The vision *nearly killed* him.
 - d. Again, closeness to God reveals our desperate need of man for forgiveness, for mercy.

C. A Test

1. Here's a test we can all take this morning to determine what we're trusting in.
2. It's found in v. 9 –

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:
3. Do you despise others?
4. If you do, *to the degree you do*, to that degree you fail to see yourself in need of God's mercy.
5. If you see yourself as better than others, despising them as morally or spiritually inferior – that's evidence of a heart out of touch with God.
6. **God** does not despise sinners – He loves them & yearns for their repentance.

7. He wants to forgive and heal them, if they will but turn from their sin.
 8. Yes, God is angry with sin, and his wrath will be turned upon those who refuse to repent.
 9. But Jesus died to save them from that fate.
 10. The heart that is open & broken before God is too overwhelmed with its own need of mercy to despise others.
 11. Rather, it takes pity on the needy because it identifies with them.
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12. What is God looking for this morning?
 - a. Is He looking for self-righteous boasts of goodness,
 - b. Or broken-hearted honesty of need for mercy?
 13. In Psalm 51, David tells us about his discovery of this.
 - a. After his sin with Bathsheba, he tried to cover it up & acted as though everything was hunky-dory.
 - b. He played the religious game, and kept up appearances by attending to public worship.
 - c. He donned the mask of the Pharisee, & did such a good job of hiding, he almost convinced himself he was okay.
 - d. Then Nathan the prophet came and busted him, and David broke, confessing his sin and throwing himself on the mercy of God.
 - e. It was only then that his bitter soul was healed.
 14. In vs. 16 & 17 he says –
You [Lord] do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.