

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Final Week of the 3-Week Series, "Parables of the Bible"

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A young woman was waiting for a flight in the VIP lounge and, since it was a long layover, she decided to buy a book and a packet of her favorite cookies to snack on while she waited. She found an armchair and sat and got herself all settled in. Then a man came and sat down next to her, opened his magazine, and started reading, as well.

After a few minutes, she opened the first cookie in the packet and put it on the table next to her. And to her amazement, the man reached out and grabbed one of her cookies. She couldn't believe it. She was so stunned – so upset about it – but didn't want to make a scene, so she just remained silent. A few minutes later, she grabs another cookie. Immediately, he grabs one of her cookies again and even smiles at her.

And now she is just incensed. She feels like she could just lose it on this guy, but she doesn't want to make a big scene. So she tries to bottle up the anger and just keep it inside of her. And so, she would just give long stares to the guy of disapproval.

But this pattern continued all the way till the last cookie. And then he reaches out for the last cookie, breaks it in half, hands it to her, and smiles again. She is so mad she can't even speak. So, she gathers up her stuff, gets up in a huff, and sneers one last time at this guy, she stomps off.

So, she gets on the plane. She's getting herself all settled down. And she looks in her bag for her reading glasses. And there is her packet of cookies.

So, she thinks this guy was taking her cookies and smiling in her face as he was doing it. And then she had all kinds of judgments on him about how arrogant he was and how rude and inappropriate he was. And it turns out she was actually stealing his cookies.

You know, sometimes I think when it comes to judging, that the judger actually suffers more than the judgee. Look how angry she got. Look how annoyed she got. Look at the stuff she held in her mind towards this guy.

How many people have ever judged someone? Anybody ever judged someone? How many people ever judged someone and it turned out to not be true, and you misjudged them? And how many people have ever been judged yourself and felt how harsh and painful that is, being judged?

You know, it is amazing how quickly, how easily, and how abundantly we, as human beings, judge one another. We judge all kinds of things: how people look; what they wear; what they eat; how they decorate their houses; how they raise their children. We judge people based on their education or lack thereof; how much money they have; or who they marry, who they date; their political views; religious views. I mean, there is almost nothing that a human being can say or do that another human being couldn't or wouldn't judge.

I saw this quote, and it said, *"If you are not judging others, and complaining on a regular basis, then you are not using the internet correctly."* [Congregants laugh]

So, today we're going to look at the impact of judging, and also the impact of humility. You know, we are in the last of our three-week series on the parables from the Sermon by the Sea that begin, *"The kingdom of heaven is like ..."*

The kingdom of heaven, we are told in Luke 17, 21, is within us. The kingdom -- we've come to realize -- is really -- the kingdom is our mind. You know, it is our mind that is the kingdom that we rule over.

The first two parables that we looked at: The Parable of the Sower talked about seeds falling on different soils. And it really proved that the soil is the key determining factor of how much growth that seed will have. And similarly, with ideas -- our mind is the soil that really determines how much we will succeed in any idea or any venture that we take on.

The mind is a powerful thing. And these parables are written to help us understand how the mind works, and how to utilize it in the most positive way to live life more fully right here and now.

And so, first I'm going to read today's parable -- which is the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector -- and then we'll look at it both literally and then metaphysically to see what it has to teach us. So, this is in Luke 18:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tenth of all my income."

But the tax collector was standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

So that was Jesus telling this powerful Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

You know, in that time, Pharisees were seen as the model of religious devotion. That's what they represented, you know: discipline with knowledge, outwardly righteousness. And if anyone would say who had their spiritual stuff altogether, you would say a Pharisee.

Now, tax collectors back then in the Bible were not seen in a positive light. Tax collectors were seen as corrupt, dishonest, traitorous ... because they were working for the Roman government and often would exploit their own people.

Now today, the view of tax folks has not really improved that much. [Congregants laugh] Let me give you a couple of joke examples of how we make fun of them. What is the difference between an IRS agent and a carp? One is a bottom-feeding scum sucker, and the other is a fish. [Congregants laugh]

If a lawyer and an IRS agent were both drowning, and you could only save one, would you go to lunch or would you read the newspaper? [Congregants laugh]

So, when Jesus tells this story to this audience, between a Pharisee and a tax collector, everybody listening would predict that the Pharisee would be the hero and that the tax collector would be the villain. But Jesus flips the script, just like he did with the story of the Good Samaritan.

The Samaritans were not considered good. They were mixed-race people that everyone thought were less than. And so, while the man who was beaten up who was Jewish, the priests and the Pharisees did not stop. And those were the ones that you would expect to stop. But the Good Samaritan did stop and even paid -- not only took care of him -- but paid for him as well.

So, this particular story is about two individuals who are going to pray at the temple. The Pharisee, when he prays -- he prays with pride. And he prays with some level of judgment and comparison and with a slight air of arrogance and superiority: *"I thank you that I am not like other people: those thieves and rogues and adulterers and the tax collector."*

Now, the tax collector prays with sincerity, simplicity, humility. And he knows of his weaknesses and doesn't try to hide it: *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."*

Jesus says that it is the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, who leaves justified -- who leaves being in alignment with God and in alignment with the spiritual laws. Because this issue was not a matter of status or power. It was not a matter of outer achievements or behavior. It was about what was happening in here: you know, in our hearts, in our minds, in our consciousness.

You know, the Pharisees once asked Jesus, *"When will the kingdom of God come?"*

And Jesus answered and said, *"The kingdom of God comes without observation, and neither shall they say, 'Lo here or lo there,' for the kingdom of God is within you."*

And so that's just the literal interpretation of this parable. Let's look at the metaphysical -- the deeper. Now, in the metaphysical interpretation, when there's a Bible story in Unity, what we do is every single character represents some aspect in ourselves -- you know, some quality in ourselves. It's to help us understand ourselves better and our own journey to know the fullness and our oneness with God.

And so **the Pharisee represents the ego that's in all of us: the mindset that thinks we know everything.**

You know, it's that part of us that compares, that part of us that judges, that part of us that defends, that part of us that tries to earn our worthiness. You know, it is that part of us that looks outside of ourselves for approval and validation. And that sometimes will go through the motions and take actions just so people will see us and be impressed with us. It is the part in us that can sometimes feel superior in self-righteousness. You know, the part of us that thinks, not only do we have it all, that we don't need any help. You know, that they are unteachable.

It's this mindset that just won't evolve, because we are so stuck thinking we know everything that there's no room for learning. There's an unwillingness and a resistance to new ideas and different perspectives.

So, in this story, this mindset that he expresses and exemplifies just can't go any higher spiritually ... even though he prays by rote and repetition. You know, even though he says affirmations over and over again, there is no feeling of passion and real commitment and heart involved in it.

So, this kind of mindset is a mindset that actually blocks us from experiencing the kingdom of heaven. Literally blocks us from feeling greater levels of peace and joy. Why? Because a mind that judges a lot tends to focus on the negative -- what isn't working -- tends to be critical; tends to label things bad and wrong.

How many people ever have had a mindset that was reluctant, resistant, or a little judgy? [Congregants laugh] And so, we need to recognize that and realize what we're doing is robbing ourselves of the kingdom of heaven; robbing ourselves of the kingdom of peace and joy and positivity.

And so, when we see this, we realize we need to do some work here. And it's not a matter of putting ourselves down. It's a part of our life journey and this spiritual process experience that we are in.

Okay, so let's look at the tax collector consciousness now. **The tax collector represents the soul awakening that can happen in us** -- our own willingness to be humble, to be honest, to be vulnerable, and to be willing to create a space for God's grace. You know, this is a consciousness of the "how-to." You know, the Pharisee is the "how-not-to," and this is the "how-to."

This mindset is the kind of mindset that allows and is willing to increase its self-awareness, because self-awareness isn't always easy. And we have a mindset in us that can look a little deeper at ourselves of what's really going on. There's a mindset that knows its limitations; expresses its humility; and is able to

empty itself and give itself fully to God. This is a mindset that is receptive to something higher and makes room for something greater, and is willing to align itself with the spiritual laws and listen to their inner guidance.

So, I saw this thing on Facebook. It was kind of like this interview with this minister and talking about AA. And he said many AA groups meet in the basement of churches, and they have a little slogan that they sometimes put up. And it says, *"You can go upstairs and hear about miracles, or you can come downstairs and see them."* I thought that was pretty cool.

And somebody from AA asked the minister, *"Why can't church be more like AA?"*

And the minister answered and said, *"Well, it's possible, but it would mean that everybody who attends church must come in humility. They must be willing to admit they need help. They must surrender to their Higher Power. And you know, most of these show up in a way that is real and not hiding who they really are, what's going on. And they must be willing to do the work and keep doing the work and keep doing the work, and keep doing the work."*

He says, *"Spiritual power can flow in any circumstance, but it cannot flow in us or in our lives when we pretend to be who we're not."* That, if we are not willing to be honest, if we are not willing to be true, if we are not willing to be authentic, we rob ourselves of the spiritual power of peace and joy and wisdom and insight and all forms of goodness.

The tax collector consciousness -- if I could say it in one word -- is willing; willing to learn, willing to listen, willing to heal. Willing to laugh, to love, to let go, and to truly, you know, take their lives to a higher level. And willing to do the work that was needed within to make that possible.

So right now we're going to look at three reasons to not develop a Pharisee consciousness. Here are three things to not do.

First one; **Don't compare yourself to anyone.** How many people have ever compared themselves to somebody? Anybody ever meet somebody -- they're rich, they've got every single thing -- and you felt bad about yourself? You know, you felt like you just have not done as well in your life, or you felt jealous or something like that? And then we go meet somebody that we were doing way better than, and then we feel good. And the truth is, both aren't good.

One of the things that comparing does: it creates a level of separation; an "us versus them" thing. You know, a "good versus bad." You know, I mean, superior/inferior. There's some stuff that is created that is just not really healthy or helpful for us in our spiritual journey. In fact, it hurts us the more we compare, criticize and condemn others.

The Pharisee says, *"I don't like other people. I'm glad I'm not like other people."* And that misses out on the awareness that we are all one. There's one Presence and one Power, and we're all one with that Power and each other. See, when we compare, we forget our oneness. We forget our connection. We forget the spiritual truth. So that's number one.

The second thing is: **Don't brag.** Notice the Pharisee in his prayer was saying, *"I fast twice a week. I tithe 10%. Look at all I've done."* And while it is good to acknowledge our accomplishments and not be shy about them, there is a threshold that we cross when it is about proving our worthiness; proving that I am a success; proving that I'm great; or some need to be validated -- whether it's our parents, our family, the world, the people at work -- so that we can feel like we are enough. It is when we do things, you know, for recognition. That is not a helpful thing.

It's doing it for the joy. You know, doing it because we know that this is our calling: this is how I meant to contribute and to make a difference in the world. Don't compare. Don't brag.

And the third one we've already kind of talked about: **Don't judge**. You know, the Pharisee here judges pretty harshly everyone that he mentions. And again, judging is about holding energy that is not healthy in a variety of forms -- whether it's our own disapproval or whether it's our own ... our own whatever that might be. And I've got notes, too, and I can't even! [Congregants laugh]

And so, and we hold these thoughts of judgment, you know, towards ourselves and others. But what it's really doing is it's holding negative energy all the time -- constantly holding, constantly being critical or condemning, or putting ourselves down. Or disliking or disapproving of any and everything going on in life. And holding that negative energy constantly by The Law of Attraction will do what? Attract more of it. And we are literally taking ourselves in the opposite direction that we really want to go.

Charles Fillmore said this. He said, *"The quality of our lives is directly related to the quality of the thoughts that we hold towards other people."*

Let me say it again: *"The quality of our lives is directly related to the quality of thoughts that we hold towards other people."*

Think of some of the thoughts you hold of some of the people in your life. Because, again: we love to hear The Law of Attraction when it's always good. But if we're putting out thoughts that are not positive towards someone, we're going to attract it. Because you can't pray and say, *"God, give me peace and joy and abundance and success ... and get that dirty dog for what he did. But peace and love for me always."* [Congregants laugh]

You know, again, these are spiritual laws. What we put out ... And we love hearing it when success happens, that it'll come back. But these things come back too. We hurt ourselves. We take ourselves down. We block our own path and experience of the kingdom of heaven.

So, the three to not do to develop a Pharisee consciousness is: don't compare; don't brag; don't judge.

So now let's do three reasons why we should follow the tax collector consciousness.

And the first one is: **humility**. You know, humility is something that softens us; that calms us; and that opens us to allow the power of God -- the power of Spirit; the intelligence and wisdom of Spirit -- to move in and through our hearts and our minds and our lives. And it requires a level of surrender; a level of just being willing to give way to something greater and better for our lives.

And the underlying part of that will be: Do you trust God enough to surrender and letting go, knowing the more you surrender and letting go, the more good will flow into our lives? Humility is realizing that -- *"Of myself, I can do nothing, but with God I am everything I am meant to be."*

Co-founder Charles Fillmore said, *"True humility is a consciousness that all our powers come from God." It's an awareness that I'm not the Source. God is the Source within me."*

"I humbly align with the Presence and Power of God within me."

"I humbly align with the presence and power of God within me."

Together: *"I am [unintelligible] align with the Presence and Power of God within me."*

Let's do that again so I can get it right. [Congregants laugh] ... he said humbly. [Laughs] Ready?

[With congregants]: *"I humbly align with the Presence and Power of God within me."*

"I am a channel for the goodness, grace, and glory of God."

Together: [with congregants] *"I am a channel for the goodness, grace, and glory of God."*

So, first thing is humility to develop a tax collector consciousness.

The second one is **honesty**. What I love about tax collector: he didn't pretend about anything. He was saying he's a sinner. You know, he felt like he wasn't even fit to go closer to pray. And I love that. He told the truth.

I love that line that Jesus says, *"You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."* Anybody ever have a time in your life where you withheld telling somebody stuff, and you withheld and you hid certain things --And then many years later, or some point later, you finally told the truth; you were honest -- and how liberating that was?

Sometimes we get scared of the truth, thinking, *"They're not going to like me. I'm going to embarrass myself and look like a fool."* But you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. You know, sometimes we carry weights of stuff around -- of things we haven't shared that we should share with the people that are close to us, and we don't do it. And yet it will be such a freeing and liberating thing for us to do it.

So, where and to whom in your life do you need to be honest with? That you need to tell the truth? Not only to set you free, but to bring a level of closeness and connection and intimacy that is being blocked by not telling the truth to those people in our lives?

And another one: What do you need to be more honest with yourself? What is it that you haven't admitted fully to yourself or owned fully to yourself? Or stepped out and get some help for that particular thing?

Humility. Honesty, And the last one is **sincerity**. My favorite line in the Book of Jeremiah 29: 31-29 is, *"If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart."* And what that is saying: the only prerequisite for praying and connecting with God is a sincere desire to seek God with all your heart. To not ask for all kinds of stuff, but just to seek and feel the experience and oneness and connection and alignment with Spirit.

Sincerity is a powerful thing. Metaphysically, it is the thing that activates spiritual law. You know, we can say affirmations all day long, but if our hearts are not in it, it stays at a surface level. When sincerity is present, our words, our emotions, our body and our beliefs come into an alignment that is so powerful it will clear a path and attract the good that we desire.

The tax collector's prayer was simple and it was real and it was especially heartfelt. And are you willing to infuse your heart and be more intentionally sincere of seeking and feeling God when you pray? When we pray? It is a powerful thing!

Humility, honesty, sincerity is how we develop the tax collector consciousness.

A guy walks into a bar, orders a beer, and has a couple of sips of it. Then he hears a voice that says, *"Nice tie."* He looks around. He's the only one in the bar except the bartender.

A couple of minutes later he hears, *"Hey, you look really good. Have you lost some weight?"* He's looking around. He's thinking, *"Man, I'm losing my mind!"*

He calls the bartender over. He says, *"Hey, you know, I've heard some voices. They say some nice things, but I don't see any people. It's kind of crazy."*

And then the bartender said, *"Oh, that's just the peanuts."*

And the guy says, *"The peanuts?"*

He said, *"Yeah; they're complimentary."* [Congregants laugh and applaud]

Thank you. That was complimentary. [Congregants laugh]

And so, the parable ends with, *“Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”* And what it's saying is: that, when you try to do it on your own and think you've got it all without turning to Spirit, somehow life will humble you. Life will bring you to your knees or give you some hit in the head with a spiritual two-by-four; that you will have to say, *“Ah, I've got to turn to Spirit now.”*

And so, we don't need to have something negative happen. We could beat the rush by humbling ourselves on our own. And the more we open ourselves to Spirit -- to allow the fullness and goodness of God to flow through us -- Spirit will exalt us. We will be lifted higher and to greater experiences.

Tax collector consciousness; Pharisee consciousness. Which will we do? Will they give us the work right here? Don't compare, don't brag, don't judge; and, instead, work on your humility, your honesty and your sincerity. And that is the message from the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

God bless you all!

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