

### 3. Contrasting Outcomes

*I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." - Luke 18:14 NLT*

The conclusion of Jesus' parable was shocking to His audience. The tax collector was justified, and the Pharisee was not. Jesus used the word *hoytos* or "this one" to describe the tax collector and *ekeinos* or "the other" to describe the Pharisee. That's because God's distinction was made between "this one" who humbles himself and "the other one" who doesn't, not by their reputation or by their occupation.

*When Jesus said the man was justified, He meant that the tax collector was declared not guilty, as a judge would render a verdict. God is our sovereign judge. But the Pharisee presumed that role when he declared, "I am not a sinner". Why does pride threaten our relationship with God? What does it mean to humble yourself?*

When someone is exalted, they are raised to a place of honor and when they are humbled, they are brought low. The Pharisee's mistake was relying on his own actions to produce righteousness. It is by faith in Jesus that we are justified- nothing else will suffice.

#### **WRAP-UP**

As we see these two men in the Temple, we find the Pharisee praying a self-congratulatory prayer steeped in pride. While the tax collector sorrowfully beat his chest, a reflection of what's happening in his heart. The key to this story is that it is God who justifies based on the condition of our heart, not our prideful performance.

#### **PRAYER (20 MIN)**

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

#### **MEMORY VERSE**

*5b ...and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." - 1 Peter 5:5b NKJV*

*Challenge – Do a spiritual health check-up this week. In what areas do you need God's mercy and grace? Humbly seek God in this area.*

**Stark Contast**  
Storyteller #8

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sometimes the parables of Jesus can be mysterious and challenging to interpret, but at other times they are as plain as day. This parable is pretty clear. In fact, Luke prefaces the parable by telling us who it is directed at. He says this story was told to "some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else". Nobody wants to admit they are in this category, but let's not assume that this doesn't apply to us before we hear what Jesus has to say. This parable paints a picture of two worshipers, starkly contrasted in many ways. In a shocking reversal, it is the unlikely man who is justified before God.

### **Ice Breaker**

*Do you have regular health check-ups or has it been a while since you "peeked under the hood"?*

### **Key Passage**

**Luke 18:14 NLT - 14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."**

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

#### **1. Contrast between Men**

*Luke 18:10 NLT - "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector."*

The story begins with two men in the Temple. They couldn't be more different. The first was a Pharisee (*pharisaios*) from an Aramaic word *peras*, signifying "to separate," owing to a different manner of life from

that of the general public. *They sought for distinction and praise by outward observance of external rites and by outward forms of piety, such as ceremonial washings, fastings, prayers, and alms giving; and, comparatively negligent of genuine piety, they prided themselves on their fancied good works*<sup>1</sup> - <sup>1</sup> *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*

*How do you think the Pharisee was perceived by his fellow Jews? Do you think we generally hold people in high regard based on their outward actions more than their genuine godliness?*

Most of us want to be viewed as good people, doing the right thing. But when we value the praise of men over pleasing God we have missed the mark.

*Why were the religious leaders offended by Jesus' healing the crippled man?*

*9 Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, 10 so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!" - John 5:9-10 NLT*

The Pharisee's were zealous for following the rules, but not for God. In their zeal for distinction and praise they developed excessive rules to follow the laws of God, but missed the point of why God gave those laws.

The second man in Jesus' story was a tax collector. *The tax-collectors were, as a class, detested not only by the Jews but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception*<sup>2</sup>. Tax collectors had a reputation for being evil wicked sinners. When Jesus introduced this man in the story his listeners would see him as the villain.<sup>2</sup> *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*

Jesus didn't despise tax collectors. In fact, he befriended one named Zacchaeus shortly after telling this parable.

*5 When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." ... 7 But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. - Luke 19:5, 7 NLT*

*The listeners to this parable would expect the Pharisee to be rewarded for doing the right things and the sinner to be punished. But Jesus was going to set up a dramatic reversal.*

## 2. Contrast in Prayers

*11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' - Luke 18:11-12 NLT*

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' - Luke 18:13 NLT*

Certain aspects of these two men's prayers were notably different.

- *What was the self-perception or attitude of each man? How was this reflected in their posture or position as they prayed?*
- *Who is the subject of each man's prayer? (Remember from your grammar lessons- the subject of the sentence is doing the action)*
- *What was the main content of each prayer?*

*16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. - Hebrews 4:16 NLT*

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. - Ephesians 2:8 NLT*

*5b ...and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." - 1 Peter 5:5b NKJV*

Praise God, He has grace and mercy for us, but we must recognize our condition as sinners and our need for mercy before we can receive God's gift. The Pharisee was so confident in his own righteousness that he failed to see his need for God's mercy and grace. However, the tax collector was painfully aware of his condition as a sinner and his need for mercy. *How often do you think we need God's mercy and grace? How often do you ask for it?*