

## 102322 Sermon "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" Luke 18:9-14

In Muhammad Ali's heyday as the heavy weight champion in boxing, he had taken his seat on a 747 which was starting to taxi down the runway for take-off. The flight attendant walked by and noticed Ali did not have on his seatbelt, and said, "Please fasten your seatbelt, sir." He looked up proudly and snapped, "Superman don't need no seatbelt." Without hesitation she stared at him and said, "Superman don't need no plane."

In today's Gospel of Luke 18, we see a Pharisee who is full of pride and feels he has no need for God's mercy and grace in his prayers. In conclusion, there is no one who does not need God's mercy and grace.

Today's story is well known as the "Prayer of the Pharisee and the tax collector". Speaking of tax collectors at that time, they were regarded as sinners and they were hated. They were Jews who worked for the Romans, so this made them traitors. People resented paying taxes to foreigners who ruled over them. Tax collectors were not paid an actual wage by the Romans, they were expected to take extra money and keep some for themselves. In this system many tax collectors were dishonest and abused it by taking too much. On the other hand, when we say Pharisees, we mean those who believe in God and are righteous enough to be recognized by others. These people were supposedly at the opposite ends of the good and the bad. In his parable, Jesus compares the two.

Nevertheless, listen again to Jesus' intro to this parable in verse 9. "He also told this parable to some who **trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.**"

In verse 10, what the Pharisee and the tax collector have in common is recorded. They stood before God at the same time, at the same temple, and with the same purpose, which was to pray. Then the difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector is described. Verse 11 says that the Pharisee was standing by himself and praying, and in verse 13 the tax collector was standing far off and praying.

Now, look at their prayer attitudes and contents. In verse 11, the Pharisee's sense of superiority and bragging in verse 12 were his prayers. On the other hand, verse 13, the tax collector did not dare lift his head, and repented, and asked only for God's mercy.

The Pharisee prayed about how good he was, but the tax collector asked only for God's mercy as he was a sinner. Jesus said that it was the tax collector who went home justified before God. He concluded, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Through this parable, Jesus wants to teach people not only the importance of prayer, but also the importance of praying with the right attitude. At that time, pious Jews had to pray three times a day, (not three times a week) and people went to the temple for private prayer.

It was a common practice for the Pharisees to stand up and pray. As the Pharisee prayed about himself, he told God the wrong thing he had not done, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." Then he talked about his religious practices he had observed, fasting twice a week and giving tithes. The Pharisee thought he was praying, but the only one he was praising

was himself. If you find this part in the original Greek Bible, *pros heitou*, that is, he prayed toward himself. He prayed not to God, but to himself.

What is prayer? When we hear the prayers of the two in the temple, what does Jesus' appreciation of the tax collector's prayer tell us about the purpose of prayer? He is teaching us that prayer is to thank God for what he has done in my life and to ask for what we need most: to ask for grace and mercy.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:6, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." We tend to be overly conscious of people even when we pray, but the truth is, we pray to God, who sees in secret. If we miss this part, we stumble.

God wants us to be conscious of the Lord and live with him even in quiet and secret times and places that people do not see us. Living by faith does not end in the church, it begins in the church and extends into our lives, and then fulfills the role of light and salt in the world. Please remember that God who sees in secret will reward you.

A turtle once wanted to spend the winter in Florida, but he knew he could never walk that far. He convinced a couple of geese to help him, each taking one end of a piece of rope, while he clamped his vise-like jaws in the center.

The flight went fine until someone on the ground looked up in admiration and asked, "Who in the world thought of that?"

Unable to resist the chance to take credit, the turtle opened his mouth to shout, "I did."

There is a saying, "You will probably do more damage to your spiritual life than anyone else around you. Yet, in your pride you will try to blame someone else for your faults and take credit for the successes."

We are all so easy to think of ourselves as good and "they" as evil. I hope that you will find holiness in a life that glorifies God, not yourself. And ask God's mercy and grace all the time for the transformation of yourself and the world. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Our role is one of bridging, not dividing or grouping.

1 Corinthians 15:10 says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, may you be humble people who not only ask God's mercy but also rejoice in a life of pleasing God, loving people. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.