

Pastor Writes

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'True humility is to know what we are in the sight of God.' Some people are over confident of their righteousness, whereas, there are others who are very humble and dare not even think of themselves as righteous. In the Gospel reading from Luke Jesus tells his disciples a parable about a Pharisee and a Tax Collector who had gone into the Temple to pray, and draws from it the truth about what true humility is.

Jesus tells them about a Pharisee who went into the Temple and began to pray. He starts off with giving thanks to God and praises him but soon deteriorates into praising himself. He says, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector." He begins to justify his righteousness before God, almost saying, 'God, What a good person I am!' He compares his righteousness with others and therefore congratulates himself on his accomplishments. Therefore there is no petition in his prayer. There is no need for God's help or assistance. He has done it all. The Pharisee genuinely wanted to please God but he was sincerely wrong. He goes on to list out his good deeds – apart from not swindling or doing evil, or committing adultery, he also gave a tithe and fasted twice a week. He used his fasting and tithing as a sign of religious superiority rather than for repentance and turning to God.

On the other side was a tax-collector whose prayer was one simple line, 'God have mercy on me a sinner.' He had no time to think about the Pharisee or anybody else. He was ashamed of himself. He had led a miserable life. He had sinned against God and his neighbor and was over-weighed with guilt. He desperately needed the forgiving touch of God. He was a man who was stark naked before God. He did not hide anything and confessed everything he did. His plea was, 'Lord you know me just the way I am with all my weaknesses.' He pleads for the Lord's mercy.

When we look at the postures of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector, they are in complete contrast. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself showing absolute confidence. He was in the front of the temple again feeling that he was close to God. His hands were probably raised high as he was praying. The tax-collector's body language was completely different. First of all, he stood at a distance, probably expressing the distance that he had created between him and God. He would not even look up to heaven because he was so embarrassed with himself and the things he had done, his own failures and sinfulness. Thirdly, he beat his breast – exhibiting his innermost despair. Here was a man who was struggling with sin in his life – who knew that he had no control over it – realizes that he needs help from God and asks for it.

Jesus then gives the verdict about these two men and their prayers. He tells his disciples that the tax-collector went home justified before God. The tax-collector knew that his sins were forgiven and that he was credited with a righteousness not his own – a righteousness that God gave him. The Pharisee on the other hand thought that he had earned his righteousness and therefore God was bound to bless him. His religiosity fooled him. He was fooling himself thinking that religious observances of fasting and tithing would be a substitute for repentance and obedience. The tax-collector knew who he was in the sight of God – a sinner who desperately needed God's forgiveness. The Pharisee did not examine himself in the

light off God's requirements, but rather compared himself with others and patted himself on his back thinking that he was a good man and that God would bless him.

The challenge for us this morning is to examine ourselves in the sight of a holy God. We must be honest with ourselves and come clean before God. May we not fool ourselves with our religiosity, but exhibit true humility in knowing who we are in God's sight and repenting and turning to God. May we truly seek his face and repent of our sins and turn to him in obedience.

Shalom

Paul Swarup

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