

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25) – October 23, 2022

“[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.”

–Luke 18:9–

The above verse introduces the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus, the masterful storyteller, opens his parable with a sentence sure to elicit strong assumptions and bias: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector” (v. 10).

Immediately his listeners would recognize the social and religious chasm between the two. Tax collectors were social outcasts. Jews considered them traitors because they collected taxes for Rome and often collected more than required to keep for themselves. Pharisees, on the other hand, enjoyed social status and respect. They scrupulously obeyed Jewish Law and demanded others do the same.

In fact, the pharisee in Jesus’ parable goes above and beyond the law: He fasted twice a week and tithed everything he received (see v. 12), although Jewish law only required fasting once a year and tithing a portion of one’s income. Truly this pious pharisee had an “in” with God, or so he believed. “Thank God,” he brags, “I’m not a sinner like that pathetic, ungodly tax collector standing over there” (my rendition of v. 11). By contrast, the tax collector, burdened by his sin, eyes cast down in shame and regret, and knowing his desperate need for God’s mercy and grace, cries out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (v. 13).

To which pray-er do we most relate? Do we, as followers of Christ, pride ourselves in our godly lives, believing on some level that God loves and accepts us because of the way we live? Do we, even subtly, look down on those who appear to sorely miss the mark? I confess, I can be like that pharisee without even realizing it. Only when God shows me the degree of my sinfulness in light of Jesus’ perfection do I realize I’m that tax collector in desperate need of mercy.

So, here’s our promise: when we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled, giving us opportunity to repent, turn to God, and receive his grace. And when we feel the awful weight of our sin, and we humble ourselves and turn to him, we will be exalted and receive his grace (see v. 14). Either way, we are sinners saved by grace.

Sola Worship Resource — Weekly Devotional © 2022, Sola Publishing (www.solapublishing.com), written by Tania Frankie. Scripture taken from ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25) – October 23, 2022

“[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.”

–Luke 18:9–

The above verse introduces the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. Jesus, the masterful storyteller, opens his parable with a sentence sure to elicit strong assumptions and bias: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector” (v. 10).

Immediately his listeners would recognize the social and religious chasm between the two. Tax collectors were social outcasts. Jews considered them traitors because they collected taxes for Rome and often collected more than required to keep for themselves. Pharisees, on the other hand, enjoyed social status and respect. They scrupulously obeyed Jewish Law and demanded others do the same.

In fact, the pharisee in Jesus’ parable goes above and beyond the law: He fasted twice a week and tithed everything he received (see v. 12), although Jewish law only required fasting once a year and tithing a portion of one’s income. Truly this pious pharisee had an “in” with God, or so he believed. “Thank God,” he brags, “I’m not a sinner like that pathetic, ungodly tax collector standing over there” (my rendition of v. 11). By contrast, the tax collector, burdened by his sin, eyes cast down in shame and regret, and knowing his desperate need for God’s mercy and grace, cries out, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (v. 13).

To which pray-er do we most relate? Do we, as followers of Christ, pride ourselves in our godly lives, believing on some level that God loves and accepts us because of the way we live? Do we, even subtly, look down on those who appear to sorely miss the mark? I confess, I can be like that pharisee without even realizing it. Only when God shows me the degree of my sinfulness in light of Jesus’ perfection do I realize I’m that tax collector in desperate need of mercy.

So, here’s our promise: when we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled, giving us opportunity to repent, turn to God, and receive his grace. And when we feel the awful weight of our sin, and we humble ourselves and turn to him, we will be exalted and receive his grace (see v. 14). Either way, we are sinners saved by grace.

Sola Worship Resource — Weekly Devotional © 2022, Sola Publishing (www.solapublishing.com), written by Tania Frankie. Scripture taken from ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.