

**May 12**

**Scriptures:** Read Luke 17 & 18

**Key Verse:** "...God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13)

### **Overview**

The Bible doesn't always make an editorial comment about Jesus' parables, but Luke does so in this instance. The famous parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is told to "some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else" (18:9 NIV). Of course, the temptation to us as we read, is to look down on the Pharisee. Human nature, as irrepressible as it is, will always manage to condescend somehow.

This parable is a classic. On one side you have a self-satisfied religious type. On the other side is a self-disgusted con artist. One enters confidently, arrogantly, even, into the Temple—it is familiar and much loved territory. The other enters fearfully, regretfully, and awkwardly—the Temple is foreign territory. The one saunters, the other grovels. And to the surprise of the listener, Jesus says God responds to the man with the dirty face, and rejects Mr. Clean. This doesn't seem fair, does it?

To appreciate the shock value of this parable, think of it in these terms: the Pharisee is you and the tax collector is a convicted rapist. You've never knowingly hurt anybody in your life. You've attended church faithfully, paid your tithes, and helped the poor. You are always ready to testify to your faith and intend to obey God and serve Him all your life. And, in all honesty, as you see it, God owes you something, for you've kept your part of the bargain.

On the other hand, the rapist has been nothing but trouble all his life. He was kicked around at home, so he lashed out at school. Abused by society, he paid it back with ever-increasingly abusive behavior. Finally, he went on a rampage, beating, stealing and raping. Now, as he enters the prison chapel, he throws himself on the floor in anguish, while you, on your monthly prison visitation, take a moment for prayer before the chapel service.

And guess what? God ignores you and honors him! He disregards your self-satisfied conversation and embraces his self-condemnation. What gives?

Simply this. That man recognizes his spiritual poverty and you don't. He cries for mercy, even as you casually converse. His feet are slipping into the pit; yours are merely slippery. He is in anguish; you are content.

Never forget Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt.5:3). Regardless of how wholeheartedly we've embraced Christ, it is only because He's embraced us first that we have any right to stand in His presence. And when He first embraced us, we were detestably filthy; as filthy as a rapist.

### **Prayer**

"God, be merciful to me, a sinner". Grant, O Lord, that we may see ourselves as Paul saw himself, "Chiefest of sinners", that we might live in a repentant attitude.