

“Things Accomplished Among Us” (Luke 1:1)

Selected Reflections From Luke

Two Men Pray

Luke 18

I have Luke chapter 18 open. And I want to call attention to how this parable begins. Jesus identifies the target audience: “...some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” Self-righteousness is exposed in this story.

Here’s what He said: ¹⁰ *“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed^[a] thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

The Pharisee wanted an audience. He wanted people to see him and hear him pour contempt on the tax collector. He announced his resume of good works and took comfort in his belief that he was better than others.

The tax collector separated himself from the crowd (standing far off), and exhibited such humility, he “would not even lift up his eyes to heaven.” His prayer was singular in focus: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Prayer is not about telling God how good we are, comparing ourselves to others we demean or reminding God of all the good we believe we deserve credit for. Prayer is always to be offered in humility, always asking for mercy and wisdom, always admitting our need and praising God for answering our need in Christ. When prayer is founded on self-righteousness, it is vain.

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

-Warren E. Berkley