



During this short series we'll be examining a number of passages from the gospels that expose something of the latent Pharisaism in many of our hearts, and apply the glorious gospel afresh as we're convicted of our need to trust Christ again. We began the series by re-thinking the Sermon on the Mount, and especially Jesus' words that conclude the sermon, encouraging to build, not upon sand, but upon rock. This week we examined a story that Jesus told about a Pharisee & a Tax Collector at a prayer meeting.

We began our time by talking about self-image and self-identity. What matters to each of us (appearance, employment, grades, relationships, money, cars etc etc) and spoke of the obsession of our culture in finding and creating identity. And we thought that in church we're not immune. Too easily we make comparisons. Too easily we find identity as we look down on others... rather like the Pharisee as he looks down on the Tax Collector. We noted 3 things from the text that helped us to understand the point that Jesus was making:

- 1) **Unfounded confidence.** The Pharisee is good. Very good. And so he is confident. And yet his confidence comes from what he has done. Specifically that he gives a tenth of all he gets and that he fasts twice a week. This is above and beyond what was necessary. And so, in his mind, he's done his side of the bargain. Which means, before God he is confident. Confident because of what he's done. We explored some of the 'righteous' things we do, in which we can find a wrong confidence.
- 2) **Unhelpful comparisons.** His confidence though is not where it ends, he also makes unhelpful comparisons as he looks down on others. In contrast to the Pharisees 'righteousness', the tax collector would be an easy contrast. They were the regional Roman money collectors and were often corrupt. Thus traitors to their people in 2 senses. He is 'far-off', that likely means at the extreme outskirts of the gentile court. Not even wanting to look up. Again we explored the kind of ways (in church and outside) we find value in looking better than others in a whole variety of ways.
- 3) **Unexpected conclusions.** The sting in the tail of the account is that the humble Tax Collector receives grace and mercy, as opposed to the 'righteous' Pharisee. The position in the temple is nothing, the position in the heart is everything. Rather than looking at ourselves and what we've done, or looking at others and what they've done, we ought to look at God and see what he's like. And so see our need of him. We're to be in the shoes of the tax collector, knowing that we bring nothing but our sin and corruption and asking God for mercy.

Here are some questions that might get things going, feel free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What things did the Pharisee find confidence in? What are our equivalents today? Was he wrong to do the things he did? So what did he do wrong?

Why do you think he prayed in the way that he did?

How are we tempted to look down on others? Why do we do this?

- give examples from 'outside' church

- give examples from 'inside' church

What kind of people do we look down on?

Why was the tax collector shown mercy?

How does our tendency to look down on others & our fear of being looked down upon shape what church is like?

What kind of practical ways can we change this?

(for example it might be that people aren't prepared to ask 'stupid' questions because they fear others thinking they're silly, or that they're not really honest about how they really are for fear of not being the 'perfect Christian')

Which direction did the Pharisee look for security? Which direction should he have looked? How can we 'be more humble'?, is it a question of will or something else?

For info here are all the passages / topics we'll be considering / have considered...

...We build foundations upon what we do. (Matthew 7v24-29)

...We compare ourselves with others. (Luke 18v9-14).

...We love money. (Luke 16v13-31)

...We do not see our own sin. (Luke 7v36-47)

...We feel like slaves rather than sons. (Luke 15v1-2, 11-32)