

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

7. Pride and Prejudice

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 18v 9-14

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Pride and Prejudice: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

The Bible is full of examples of people who prayed. Describing their motives, situations, their posture, and of course their words, Scripture introduces us to a subject on which there is much to consider. Paul rightly says to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” - Ephesians 6v 18 Whether we lift our hands, kneel in humility, or fall prostrate on the ground, prayer, it seems, opens us up to a world of possibilities when we turn humbly to God and cry out to Him.

However, what appeals most to God is not so much the wording or the posture that people adopt. As far as we are concerned, an erudite prayer, or impassioned plea often impress us with the seeming genuineness of the pray-ers heart. The posture he or she adopts can equally grab our attention as we see a person kneeling, reaching and even lying prostrate as an outward sign of an inner reality.

Not so with God. He is not interested in oratory, nor is He impressed by demonstrative physical expression: “The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” – 1 Samuel 16v 7. What God is looking for is sincerity of heart and awareness on the part of the one praying of how insufficient they are in comparison to the Almighty power of the One on whom they call. Israel’s religious leaders had lost sight of this and their dependence on God had been usurped by zealous law keeping. When Jesus told this parable, prayer had become something of an art form as a sign of superiority Jesus was about to warn those guilty of such public self aggrandizement that “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me....” – Isaiah 29v 19 (Quoted by Jesus in Matthew 15 and Mark 7)

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Read: Luke 18v 9-14

Key words: Pharisee, tax collector, pray, I, sinner, justified exalts, humbles,

- **The Temple: A Sacred Centre for people to pray – 18v 10**
The parable begins with an innocuous scene: Two men going to the place of prayer to pray: The curious combination arouses interest.
- **The Pharisee: A Self Confidence and the lure of law keeping -18v11-12**
The much respected Pharisee prays in some ways, an undeniable prayer, but beyond his practice, reveals a self-reliant lifestyle
- **The Tax Collector: A Sinner's Cry for the mercy of God– 18v13**
The surprising recipient of God's mercy and justification is the sinful tax collector, whose self-awareness and subsequent cry is answered.

Ears to Hear?

- **Prayer and Practice:**

How does your prayer life look?

What "kinds of prayers" do you major in? Are there any biblical forms of prayer that you tend to overlook as part of your prayer life? If so, why do you think that is?

- **The Point of the Parable:**

What is the main point of the parable?

Explain it in your own words.

How would you apply this parable's teaching today?

Is the Pharisee entirely wrong in what he prays? Or is it his heart that is wrong?

- **Self-reliant Christianity?**

In what ways could you lapse into self-reliance rather than reliance on God in your Christian life and service?

How can we all take steps to avoid lapsing into self-reliance and the delusion of the Pharisees?(Who, after all, started out sincerely before they grew so far from the truth they sought to uphold!)