

Attitude

Intro. When we say someone has an “attitude,” we often mean he or she is snarky or acting superior.

We think they need an “attitude adjustment.”

Although what that means is often vague. In the parable we know which character needs the adjustment even before the Lord tells us.

I. The Pharisees were a group within Israel which advocated a strict observance of the religious law while at the same time their personal practices were less so. They also exuded a superior attitude toward other people. Like most groups, not all were bad. Remember Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was so intrigued by the Lord’s teaching that he came to see him under the cover of darkness so he wouldn’t be seen. Pharisees did enjoy a certain respect and some

fear among people and were constant critics of the Lord. That is why they were often targets of his parables. Tax collectors were *not* respected and were almost universally hated. They worked for the Roman oppressors and were seen as betraying their people. Tax collectors had a reputation for taking more than necessary and fattening their own purses. Not all tax collectors were bad. The one in the story is portrayed as unlike the characterization of the Pharisee. This is yet another parable in which the Lord reverses, turns upside down the supposed understanding of who is good and who is not. The prayer reveals the heart of each man. The Pharisee took his place in the temple area, meaning up front and “prayed to himself.” That could mean he prayed quietly or it could mean he prayed about himself, not to God. It seems more likely he was talking *about*

himself. He gave thanks not for his blessings, but for not being like other people; in other words, Mr. Wonderful. The tax collector's whole posture was different. He stood just inside the door. His head was bowed and eyes lowered, in the same way we do when we know we have screwed up. His gesture of beating his breast is one of sorrow. Like the Pharisee, his prayer was also about himself, but that he was a sinner. He asked for mercy. He got what he asked for while the Pharisee didn't ask for or get anything because he didn't think he needed anything from God.

Concl. Our attitude when we pray tells us much about ourselves and our relationship to God. It reveals whether we are friends, acquaintances or strangers passing in the night. It says a lot about who we are or pretending to be. In the parable it is

easy to choose sides between the two people who came to the temple to pray. It is unlikely you or I would at first identify with the Pharisee's prayer. But like most parables the Lord told, we should be able to see ourselves in both characters. If we see ourselves as Mr. and Ms. Wonderful, then we are clearly a Pharisee in prayer. If on the other hand we get an *attitude adjustment* and admit we are sinners, we have a good chance of having our prayer answered as the tax collector's was. **If we say no other prayers daily, repeating the tax collector's prayer is a good one. "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

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