

## The False And The True Way To Salvation.

Text: Luke 18:9-14

1) The False Way, By Which No Man Is Ever Saved

Suggested Hymns:

2) The True Way, By Which We May All Be Saved

335, 310, 175, 840, 514

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 18:9–14, *<sup>9</sup>Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’*

*<sup>13</sup>And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The story of the Pharisee and tax collector is a parable, an illustration taken from common life, whereby the Lord conveys to us a certain truth.

And what is that truth which this parable is to impress upon our minds? Christ Himself tells us at the end of our Gospel, saying, *“everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

The Pharisee exalted himself, prided himself on his good deeds, and was so pleased with his own good conduct that he forgot all about his shortcomings and faults.

We are not to believe that the Pharisee unduly exaggerated things. He certainly abstained from gross transgressions of the Law and did all the fasting

and alms-giving that he lays claim to. But he made a boast of his own good deeds and gloried in his own righteousness. And what was the outcome?

He was humiliated. He was cast away from God's presence. He was not received into God's favour. He was not justified. And all this not because he also had great sins besides those virtues of his, but because he exalted himself.

The tax collector did the reverse. He humbled himself. Perhaps the tax collector also possessed virtues and could have referred to some good acts in his life. Or he may have been a person of whom nothing at all can be said that is praiseworthy.

But if there was anything good in the tax collector's life, he did not even think of it, while standing before the glorious majesty of an omniscient God and before the shrine of His holiness. Smiting upon his breast he exclaims, "***God, be merciful to me a sinner!***" and that is all he has to say.

And what is done? He is exalted. He is raised from his downcast position. He is justified. He is looked upon from on high as if he were sinless, blameless.

This, my friends, is the important truth taught by our Gospel, "***everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.***"

However, in connection with this truth we may look at our text from another point of view. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector are in the temple addressing God, anxious to stand in His favour and to gain heaven.

But the Pharisee's way is the false way, for he is not justified; and the tax collector's way is the true way to salvation. This is what we need to impress on our minds and hearts.

Let us consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *The False And The True Way As To Salvation*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The False Way, By Which No Man Is Ever Saved.**

There is a false way, by which many are deceived, and that false way was the way of the Pharisee. We read, "<sup>9</sup> ***Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*** <sup>10</sup> ***Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*** <sup>11</sup> ***The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am***

*not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”*

Let us examine the way of this Pharisee. Is he an unbeliever who denies his Maker and refuses to serve Him? No; he is a firm believer in the true God and worships Him in His temple.

Or is he an open transgressor of the Law, is he an unprincipled man, a drunkard, a thief, a criminal? No; he is a man of good character, always striving to do that which is right. He conscientiously performs his duties toward God and toward his neighbour, and no one can find fault with his morals.

Still there is something in this man's behaviour which strikes an alert mind as most peculiar. Look at his prayer, if prayer it may be called.

His prayer is taken up with recounting his own good deeds, pleading that he had avoided crimes which many others have committed, and had practised duties which many others had neglected.

And see how ugly the Pharisee's treatment of the tax collector is, at whom he casts a disdainful side glance, and whom he despises in his devotion, thanking God that he is not like this tax collector! The Pharisee was a man who thought very much of himself but very little of the rest of mankind.

Is not many a person the very copy of this Pharisee? We are not speaking of those who go on in a course of open sin, and lead corrupt and extravagant lives. We are not speaking of those who are never seen at church, never read the Bible, never pray, and look to nothing except the gratification of their own lust.

We are not speaking of those whose characters are marked by drunkenness, lying, profane swearing, Sabbath breaking, and other sins not to be named.

These are not Pharisees. They are worse than Pharisees and Sadducees. A Pharisee is at least honourable before the world. But these people are a disgrace even to the wicked world.

No; the people who in our days resemble the Pharisee in our text are to be found among those whose characters, to the eye of man, appear unblamable and whose conduct, in many respects, is worthy of imitation.

They are moral in their outward behaviour and perhaps also regular in their attendance at the house of God. But in their heart they harbour a certain species of pride which says, *“I thank You, God, that I am not as others are.”*

And sometimes this lurking pride will come forth and manifest itself in self-praise and derogatory remarks about others.

With some people it is a principle that they should praise themselves. They think they owe it to themselves, and must let others know, and tell them in the face how much they are superior to other people.

Sometimes they do that in a very subtle manner. But if this pride is ever so hidden and concealed, when death approaches it generally comes forth with damaging effect.

Such a self-righteous Pharisee may have heard thousands of sermons on the atonement, on the great work of redemption, that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, has saved the sinful world by His suffering and death; but he will not find comfort in the Saviour’s work.

Ask him, *“On what is your hope founded?”* and he will reply, *“I have led a decent life; I have injured no one; I have attended church, I have done my duty to God to the best of my ability.”* That is the Pharisee’s way, to get along without the Saviour, to imagine that of your own power, by your own righteousness you can gain eternal life.

And this, my friends, is the way by which no man ever was saved, nor ever will be saved. Does Jesus not tell us in our text that the Pharisee was not justified? And what does that mean: he was not justified?

It means, he was not received into God’s favour, God was displeased with him, God rejected him; he was not saved.

Certainly, if a man could perfectly keep the whole Law of God and fulfil all the commandments, letter and spirit, he would receive heaven as a reward for his perfect righteousness.

For the Law also is a way to heaven, and Jesus once said to a young man who expected to get to heaven by keeping the commandments, *“Do this and you will live.”*<sup>1</sup> But the difficulty is that since the fall we cannot reach heaven by the road of our own righteousness. We are all sinners by nature. The imagination of

our heart is evil from youth. Our very best works are defiled with sin. Hence it is that by the way of his own righteousness no man can be saved. It is the false way by which men are deceived.

## **2. The True Way, By Which We May All Be Saved.**

And now, in the second place, let us consider the True way by which we are saved.

In the parable of our text, after exhibiting the proud, self-righteous spirit of the Pharisee, the Lord thus describes the humble spirit of his fellow-worshiper, *“<sup>13</sup> And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”* What a contrast!

The Pharisee is pushing himself forward and making a great show and display, but the tax collector is standing afar off! The Pharisee is raising his head and casting his eyes upward in self-righteousness, but the tax collector is afraid to lift up his eyes before God!

The Pharisee is extending his hands and reducing to mockery his prayer, but the tax collector is smiting upon his breast and uttering only a few words of sincere repentance!

The Pharisee’s way was the way of pride, but the tax collector’s, the way of humility. He has nothing to boast of; he sees nothing but sin within himself; he commits himself to God’s mercy, and asks God to be reconciled to him through the Redeemer.

Who is it who resembles the tax collector. The person who is humble in spirit and, instead of trusting in his own good deeds and righteousness, relies on the grace and mercy of God.

Here, however, it is necessary to observe that, if we rely upon the mercy of God as the ground of our hope, we must view that mercy as it is revealed in the Bible. Otherwise we may greatly mistake the way of our salvation by an unauthorised dependence on the divine mercy as by a dependence on our own righteousness.

Some people have a very strange conception of God’s mercy. When they say, *“God be merciful to me a sinner,”* they are really thinking, *“I have done as*

*much as I can do, I have kept the commandments to the best of my ability; but O God, You know that I am a weak and frail creature; sin did, after all, get the best of me now and then. Be merciful, then, do not lay those sins to my charge, let them pass unnoticed, look upon only the good which I have performed, and do not consider my sins!*

But is there such a mercy of God, a mercy that will let man's sin pass unnoticed and without consideration? No; the Bible expressly teaches that no mercy comes from God to man, but through the Mediator Jesus. Only in His beloved Son Jesus Christ, and on account of the work of redemption performed by Him, is God merciful to the sinner.

The tax collector relied on God's mercy in this sense only, expecting mercy through the Redeemer. For his words, literally translated, would read, "*God be propitious to me a sinner,*" and propitious means as much as favourably disposed, reconciled. This very word reminds us of 1 John 2:2, <sup>2</sup> ***And [Christ] Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.***

See, then, my friends, this is the true way by which we may all be saved, the way of the tax collector, who humbled himself, admitted and confessed his sins, and relied on God's mercy in the Redeemer.

May the Lord grant us all, His grace that we shun the false way of the Pharisee and walk the true way of the tax collector. Here is salvation for all, even the greatest of sinners. For if the tax collector, a sinner of the most degraded sort, was justified before God when he confessed his sin and invoked God's mercy, how can anyone stand up and say, "*My sins are too great, they cannot be forgiven?*"

May we all, then, rejoice in our salvation, and to our blessed end believe in our beloved Saviour Jesus, who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:28