

When Christ told us stories, I believe that He meant for us to meditate on them and not just take them at face value. They were meant to provoke our thought into spiritual things. One of His most thought-provoking was His comparison of the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. The simple version gave a simple response from the tax collector, but in some instances of story-telling he elaborated on it in contrast to the Pharisee.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable¹:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner. *I am sorry that I am not like other people — those that give their lives to the poor and helpless, and are compassionate to others, and leave their homes to spread the gospel to other nations. I simply am not worthy in comparison to real servants of God.*’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

1. Luke 18:9-14