

**John Bunyan**



*The Pharisee and  
the Publican*

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*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.—Luke, xviii. 10-13.*

IN the beginning of this chapter you read of the reason of the parable of the unjust judge and the poor widow; namely, to encourage men to pray. “He spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;” and a most sweet parable for that purpose it is: for if through importunity, a poor widow woman may prevail with an unjust judge, and so consequently with an unmerciful and hard-hearted tyrant, how much more shall the poor, afflicted, distressed, and tempted people of God, prevail with, and obtain mercy at the hands of, a loving, just, and merciful God? The unjust judge would not hearken to, nor regard the cry of, the poor widow, for a while: “But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” “Hark,” saith Christ, “what the unjust judge saith.” “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?—I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.”

This is therefore a very comfortable parable to such of the saints as are under hard usage by reason of evil men, their might and tyranny: for by it we are taught to believe and expect, that God, though for a while he seemeth not to regard, yet will, in due time and season, arise and set such in safety from them that puff at them; Psalm xii. 4.

Let the good Christian pray always; let him pray, and not faint at seeming delays; for if the widow by importunity prevailed with the unjust judge, how much more shall he with his heavenly Father. "I tell you," says Christ, "that he will avenge them speedily."

But now, forasmuch as this parable reacheth not (so directly) the poor Publican in the text, therefore our Lord begins again, and adds to that other parable, this parable which I have chosen for my text; by which he designeth two things: First, The conviction of the proud and self-conceited Pharisee: Secondly, The raising up and healing of the cast down and dejected Publican. And observe it, as by the first parable he chiefly designeth the relief of those that are under the hands of cruel tyrants, so by this he designeth the relief of those that lie under the load and burden of a guilty and disquieted conscience.

This therefore is a parable that is full of singular comfort to such of the sinners in the world that are clogged with guilt and sense of sin; and that lie under the apprehensions of, and that are driven to God by the sense of the judgment that for sin is due unto them.

In my handling of this text, I shall have respect to these things—

1. To the persons in the text.

2. To the condition of the persons in the text.

3. To the conclusion that Christ makes upon them both.

*First,* For the persons. They were, as you see, far one from another in their own apprehension of themselves; one good, the other bad; but yet in the judgment of the law, both alike, both the same, both sinners; for they both stood in need of mercy. True, the first mentioned did not see it, as the other poor sinner did; but that altereth not the case: he that is in the judgment of the law a sinner, is in the judgment of the law for sin condemned, though in his own judgment he be ever so righteous.

Men must not be judged, or justified, according to what themselves do think, but according to the verdict and sentence that cometh out of the mouth of God about them. Now, the sentence of God is, "All have sinned:" "There is none righteous, no, not one;" Rom. iii. It is no matter, then, what the Pharisee did think of himself; God by his word hath proclaimed him a sinner: a sinner, by reason of original sin; a sinner, by reason of actual transgression. Personally, therefore, with reference to the true nature of their state, they both were sinners, and both by the law under condemnation. True, the Publican's leprosy was outward; but the Pharisee's leprosy was inward: his heart, his soul, his spirit, was as foul, and had as much the plague of sin, as had the other in his life or conversation.

*Secondly,* As to their conditions (I do not mean by condition, so much a habit of mind, as the state that they had each of them put themselves into by that mind.) "The one," says the text, "was a Pharisee, the other a Publican." A Pharisee: that is, one that hath chosen to himself such a

course of life. A Publican: that is, one that hath chosen to himself such a course of life. These terms, therefore, shew the divers courses of life that they had put themselves into. The Pharisee, as he thought, had put himself into a condition for heaven and glory; but the Publican was for this world and his lusts. Wherefore when the Pharisee stands in the temple, he boasteth of himself and good condition, but condemneth the Publican, and bitterly inveigheth against him. But, as I said, their personal state, by the law, was not at all changed. The Pharisee made himself never the better; the Publican also abode in his place.

Indeed the Publican is here found to recant, and repent of his condition, and of the condition that he had put himself into; and the Pharisee to boast of his. But the Publican's repentance was not of himself, but of God, who can also, yea, and sometimes it is evident (Acts ix.) he doth, make Pharisees also repent of that condition that they have chosen to be in themselves; Phil. iii. 3-8. The Pharisee, therefore, in commending of himself, makes himself never the better; the Publican also, in condemning of himself, makes himself never the worse. Nay, contrariwise, the Pharisee, by commending of himself, makes himself much the worse, ver. 14; and the Publican, by condemning of himself, makes himself much the better. "I tell you (says Christ) this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

But, I say, as to men's commending of themselves, yea, though others should commend them also, that availeth, to God-ward, nothing at all. "For not he that commendeth

himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." So then, men in "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise;" 2 Cor. x. 12.

Now, this was the way of the Pharisee; I am not, saith he, as other men: I am no extortioner, nor unjust, no adulterer, nor yet as this Publican.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray;" and they two, as I said, as opposite one to the other, as any two men that ever went thither to pray. One of them was over righteous, and the other wicked over much. Some would have thought, had they not by the word of Christ been otherwise described, that they had been both of the same religion; for they both went up into the temple to pray; yea, both to pray, and that at the same time, as if they did it by appointment, by agreement; but there was no such thing. The one was a Pharisee, the other a Publican: for so saith the after words: and therefore persons as opposite as light and darkness, as fire and water; I mean, as to their apprehensions one of another. The Pharisee could not abide the Publican, nor could the Publican brook the Pharisee; and yet both went up into the temple to pray. It is strange to see, and yet it is seen, that men cross in their minds, cross in their principles, cross in their apprehensions; yea, and cross in their prayers too, should yet meet together in the temple to pray.

"Two men;" men not of the middle sort, and them too picked out of the best and worst that was: two men, a Pharisee, and a Publican.



To be a Pharisee was in those days counted honourable for religion, and for holiness of life. A Pharisee was a man of esteem and repute among the Jews, though it is a term of reproach with us; else Paul would not at such a time as he did it, have said, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;" Acts xxiii, 6; Phil. iii. 5. For now he stood upon his purgation and justification, especially it appears so by the place first named. And far be it from any to think, that Paul would make use of a colour of wickedness, to save thereby himself from the fury of the people.

A Publican was in those days counted one of the vilest of men, as is manifest; because when they are in the word, by way of discrimination, made mention of, they are ranked with the most vile and base; therefore they are joined with sinners—"He eateth with publicans and sinners," and "with harlots." "Publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven." Yea, when our Lord Christ would have the rebellious professor stigmatized to purpose, he saith, "Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican."

We therefore can make no judgment of men upon the outward appearance of them. Who would have thought, but that the Pharisee had been a good man? for he was righteous; for he prayed. And who could have thought, that the other had been a good man? for he was a Publican; a man, by good men and bad men, joined with the worst of men, to wit, with sinners, harlots, heathens.

The Pharisee was a sectarian; the Publican was an officer. The Pharisee, even because he was a sectarian, was had the more in esteem; and the Publican, because he was an

officer, was had the more in reproach. To speak a little to both these:

1. The Pharisee was a sectarian; one that deviated, that turned aside in his worshipping from the way of God, both in matter and manner of worship; for such an one I count a sectarian. That he turned aside from the matter, which is the rule of worship, to wit, the written word, it is evident; for Christ saith, that they rejected the commandments of God, and made them of no effect, that they might keep their own traditions. That they turned aside also as to their manner of worship, and became sectarians, there is with no less authority asserted—“For all their works they do for to be seen of men;” Acts xxvi. 5; Mark vii. 9-13; Matt. xxiii. 5.

Now this being none of the order or ordinance of Christ, and yet being chosen by, and stuck to of these sort of men, and also made a singular and necessary part of worship, became a sect, or bottom for those hypocritical factious men to adhere unto, and to make of others disciples to themselves. And that they might be admired, and rendered venerable by the simple people to their fellows, they loved to go in long robes; they loved to pray in markets, and in the corners of the streets; they shewed great zeal for the small things of the law, but had only great words for things that were substantial—“They made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments;” Matt. xxiii.

When I say the Pharisee was a sectarian, I do not mean that every sectarian is a Pharisee. There were the sects of the Herodians, of the Alexandrians, and of the Sadducees, with many others; but to be a Pharisee, was to be of the straitest sect: “After the most straitest sect of our religion, I

lived a Pharisee.” That, therefore, of all the sects, was the most strait and strict. Therefore, saith he, in another place, “I was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.” And again, “Touching the law, a Pharisee;” Acts xxii. 3; xxvi. 4-6; Phil. iii. 5. The Pharisee, therefore, did carry the bell, and wear the garland for religion; for he outdid, he went beyond all other sectarians in his day. He was strictest, he was the most zealous; therefore Christ, in his making of this parable, waived all other sects then in being, and pitched upon the Pharisee as the man most meet, by whose rejection he might shew forth and demonstrate the riches of his mercy in its extension to sinners: “Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee:” such a brave man as you have heard.

2. The Publican also went up thither to pray. The Publican, I told you before, was an officer: an officer that served the Romans and himself too; for the Romans at that time were possessors of the land of Jewry (the lot of Israel’s inheritance), and the emperor Tiberius Cæsar placed over that land four governors, to wit, Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias; all these were Gentiles, heathens, infidels; and the publicans were a sort of inferior men, to whom was let out to farm, and so men that were employed by these to gather up the taxes and customs that the heathens had laid upon the Jews to be paid to the emperor; Luke ii. 1; iii. 1, 2, 12, 13.

But they were a generation of men that were very injurious in the execution of their office. They would exact and demand more than was due of the people; yea, and if their demands were denied, they would falsely accuse those

that so denied them to the governor, and by false accusation obtain the money of the people, and so wickedly enrich themselves, Luke iii. 13, 14; xix. 2, 8. This was therefore grievous to the Jews, who always counted themselves a free people, and could never abide to be in bondage to any. And this was something of the reason, that they were so generally by all the Jews counted so vile and base, and reckoned among the worst of men, even as our informers and bum-bailiffs are with us at this day.

But that which heightened the spirit of the people against them, and that made them so odious and filthy in their eyes, was for that (at least so I think) these publicans were not, as the other officers, aliens, heathens, and Gentiles, but men of their own nation, Jews, and so the brethren of those that they so abused. Had they been Gentiles, it had not been wondered at.

The Publican then was a Jew, a kind of a renegade Jew, that through the love that he had to unjust gains, fell off in his affections from his brethren, adhered to the Romans, and became a kind of servant to them against their brethren, farming the heathenish taxations at the hand of strangers, and exacting of them upon their brethren with much cruelty, falsehood, and extortion. And hence, as I said, it was, that to be a publican, was to be so odious a thing, so vile a sinner, and so grievous a man in the eyes of the Jews. Why, this was the Publican! he was a Jew, and so should have abode with them, and have been content to share with his brethren in their calamities; but contrary to nature, to law, to religion, reason, and honesty, he fell in with the

heathen, and took the advantage of their tyranny to poll, to rob, and impoverish his brethren.

But for proof that the Publican was a Jew.

1. Publicans are, even then, when compared with, yet distinguished from, the heathen; “Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican,” Matt. xviii.; which two terms, I think, must not here be applied to one and the self-same man, as if the heathen was a publican, or the publican a heathen; but to men of two distinct nations, as that publican and harlot is to be understood of sinners of both sexes. The Publican is not an harlot, for he is a man, &c., and such a man as has been described before. So by publicans and sinners, is meant publicans and such sinners as the Gentiles were; or such as, by the text, the Publican is distinguished from: where the Pharisee saith he was not an extortioner, unjust, adulterer, or even as this Publican. Nor can he by “heathen man” intend the person, and by the term publican, the office or place, of the heathen man; but by publican is meant the renegade Jew, in such a place, &c., as is yet further manifested by that which follows. For—

2. Those publicans, even every one of them that by name are made mention of in the New Testament, have such names put upon them; yea, and other circumstances thereunto annexed, as doth demonstrate them to be Jews. I remember the names of no more but three, to wit, Matthew, Levi, and Zaccheus, and they were all Jews.

(1.) Matthew was a Jew, and the same Matthew was a publican; yea, and also afterwards an apostle. He was a Jew, and wrote his gospel in Hebrew: he was an apostle, and is therefore found among the twelve. That he was a publican

too, is as evident by his own words; for though Mark and Luke, in their mentioning of his name and apostleship, do forbear to call him a publican (Mark iii. 18; Luke vi. 16); yet when this Matthew comes to speak of himself, he calls himself Matthew the publican (Matth. x. 3); for I count this the self-same Matthew that Mark and Luke make mention of, because I find no other Matthew among the apostles but he: Matthew the publican, Matthew the man so deep in apostacy, Matthew the man of that ill fame among his brethren. Love, in Mark and Luke, when they counted him among the apostles, did cover with silence this his publican state (and it is meet for Peter to call Paul his beloved brother, when Paul himself shall call himself the chief of sinners); but faithfulness to the world, and a desire to be abased, that Christ thereby, and grace by him, might be advanced, made Matthew, in his evangelical writings, call himself by the name of Matthew the publican. Nor has he lost thereby; for Christ again to exalt him (as he hath also done by the apostle Paul), hath set, by his special providence, the testimony that this Matthew hath given of his birth, life, death, doctrine, and miracles, in the front of all the New Testament.

(2.) The next publican that I find by the Testament of Christ, made mention of by name, is Levi, another of the apostles of Jesus Christ. This Levi also, by the Holy Ghost in holy writ, is called by the name of James: not James the brother of John, for Zebedee was his father; but James the son of Alpheus. Now I take this Levi also to be another than Matthew; First, because Matthew is not called the son of Alpheus; and because Matthew and Levi, or James the son

of Alpheus, are distinctly counted where the names of the apostles are mentioned (Matt. x. 3) for two distinct persons: and that this Levi, or James the apostle, was a publican, as was the apostle Matthew, whom we mentioned before, is evident; for both Mark and Luke do count him such. First, Mark saith, Christ found him when he called him, as he also found Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; yea, Luke words it thus: "He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom, and he said unto him, Follow me;" Mark ii. 14; Luke v. 27.

Now, that this Levi, or James the son of Alpheus, was a Jew, his name doth well make manifest. Besides, had there been among the apostles any more Gentiles save Simon the Canaanite, or if this Levi James had been here, I think the Holy Ghost would, to distinguish him, have included him in the same discriminating character as he did the other, when he called him "Simon the Canaanite;" Matt. x. 4.

Matthew, therefore, and Levi or James, were both publicans, and, as I think, called both at the same time; were both publican Jews, and made by grace the apostles of Jesus Christ.

(3.) The next publican that I find by name made mention of in the Testament of Christ, is one Zaccheus. And he was a publican; yea, for ought I know, the master of them all. "There was a man," saith Luke, "named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich," Luke xix. 2. This man, Christ saith, was a son of Abraham, that is, as other Jews were; for he spake to stop the mouths of their Pharisaical cavillations. Besides, the Publican shewed himself to be such an one, when under a supposition of

wronging any man, he had respect to the Jewish law of restoring four-fold; Exod. xxii. 1; 2 Sam. xii. 6.

It is further manifest that he was a Jew, because Christ puts him among the lost; to wit, among the lost sheep of the house of Israel, ver. 10; and Matt. xv. 24; for Zaccheus was one that might properly be said to be lost, and that in the Jews' account: lost, I say, and that not only in the most common sense, by reason of transgression against the law, but for that he was an apostate Jew, not with reference to heathenish religion, but as to heathenish, cruel, and barbarous actions; and therefore he was, as the other, by his brethren, counted as bad as heathens, Gentiles, and harlots. But salvation is come to this house, saith Christ, and that notwithstanding his publican practice, forasmuch as he also is the son of Abraham.

3. Again, Christ, by the parable of the lost sheep, doth plainly intimate, that the Publican was a Jew. "Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear him, and the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

But by what answer doth Christ repel their objections? Why, he saith, "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it?" Doth he not here, by the lost sheep, mean the poor publican? plenty of whom, while he preached this sermon, were there, as objects of the Pharisees' scorn, but of the pity and compassion of Jesus Christ: he did without doubt mean them. For, pray, what was the flock, and who Christ's sheep under the law, but the house and people of Israel?



Ezek. xxxiv. 11. So then, who could be the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but such as were Matthew, James, Zaccheus, and their companions in their and such like transgressions?

4. Besides, had not the publicans been of the Jews, how easy had it been for the Pharisees to have objected, that an impertinency was couched in that most excellent parable of the lost sheep? They might have said, We are offended, because thou receivest the publicans, and thou for vindication of thy practice propoundest a parable of lost sheep; but they are the sinners of the house of Israel, and the publicans are aliens and Gentiles. I say, how easily might they thus have objected? but they knew full well, that the parable was pertinent, for that the publicans were of the Jews, and not of the aliens. Yea, had they not been Jews, it cannot, it must not be thought, that Christ (in sum) should call them so; and yet he did do so, when he called them "lost sheep."

Now, that these publicans were Jews, what follows but that for this they were a great deal the more abominated by their brethren; and (as I have also hinted before) it is no marvel that they were; for a treacherous brother is worse than an open enemy, Psalm lv. 12, 13; for, if to be debauched in an open and common transgression is odious, how odious is it for a brother to be so; for a brother in nature and religion to be so. I say again, all this they did, as both John insinuates, and Zaccheus confesses.

The Pharisee, therefore, was not so good, but the Publican was as bad. Indeed the Publican was a notorious wretch, one that had a way of transgressing by himself; one

that could not be sufficiently condemned by the Jews, nor coupled with a viler than himself. It is true, you find him here in the temple at prayer; not because he retained, in his apostacy, conscience of the true religion; but God had awakened him, shewed him his sin, and bestowed upon him the grace of repentance, by which he was not only fetched back to the temple and prayer, but to his God, and to the salvation of his soul.

The Pharisee, then, was a man of another complexion, and good as to his own thoughts of himself; yea, and in the thoughts of others also, upon the highest and better ground by far. The Publican was a notorious sinner: the Pharisee was a reputed righteous man. The Publican was a sinner out of the ordinary way of sinning; and the Pharisee was a man for righteousness in a singular way also. The Publican pursued his villanies, and the Pharisee pursued his righteousness; and yet they both met in the temple to pray: yea, the Pharisee stuck to, and boasted in, the law of God: but the Publican did forsake it, and hardened his heart against his way.

Thus diverse were they in their appearances: the Pharisee very good, the Publican very bad: but as to the law of God, which looked upon them with reference to the state of their spirits, and the nature of their actions, by that they were both found sinners; the Publican an open, outside one, and the Pharisee a filthy, inside one. This is evident, because the best of them was rejected, and the worst of them was received to mercy. Mercy standeth not at the Publican's badness, nor is it enamoured with the Pharisee's goodness: it suffereth not the law to take place on both,

though it findeth them both in sin, but graciously embraceth the most unworthy, and leaveth the best to shift for himself. And good reason that both should be dealt with after this manner; to wit, that the word of grace should be justified upon the soul of the penitent, and that the other should stand or fall to that which he had chosen to be his master.

There are three things that follow upon this discourse.

1. That the righteousness of man is not of any esteem with God, as to justification. It is passed by as a thing of naughtiness, a thing not worth the taking notice of. There was not so much as notice taken of the Pharisee's person or prayer, because he came into the temple mantled up in his own good things.

2. That the man that has nothing to commend him to God, but his own good doings, shall never be in favour with him. This also is evident from the text: the Pharisee had his own righteousness, but had nothing else to commend him to God; and therefore could not by that obtain favour with God, but abode still a rejected one, and in a state of condemnation.

3. Wherefore, though we are bound by the law of charity to judge of men according as in appearance they present themselves unto us; yet withal, to wit, though we do so judge, we must leave room for the judgment of God. Mercy may receive him that we have doomed to hell, and justice may take hold on him, whom we have judged to be bound up in the bundle of life. And both these things are apparent by the persons under consideration.

We, like Joseph, are for setting of Manasseh before Ephraim; but God, like Jacob, puts his hands across, and lays