

Luke 18:9-14

We have all heard of, some of us may even have, an i-pod, an i-pad, or an i-phone. In today's text we encounter the i-prayer and i-worship. Five times the Pharisee uses the word, "I." "God, I thank you...I am not like other men...I fast...I give tithes of all that I get..." We may wonder why that man was even in church. It's obvious that he was not there to receive anything from God, except for His praise and a big pat on the back. He asked for nothing in his prayer. He was simply there to tell God how good he had been. Oh he begins by thanking God, so at least he realizes that God had a hand in making him the good man that he was. But he most certainly wasn't there for mercy. He was not there to confess any sins. He was not there for forgiveness. He was there for appearance's sake, wasn't he? Good people go to church. If he did not go to church then he wouldn't be the good man that he claimed to be.

You are in church today just like that Pharisee was. But there is a big difference between your worship and his...that is, between the things that you speak with your mouth compared with what he spoke. Your heart may be another matter, and we will deal with that later. But comparing your external worship to his, his was i-worship; yours is Christ-worship. The only time you will say the word "I" today here in church, apart from the hymns, is when you confess in the Creed, "I believe." And the hymns? My word! What a difference between your singing, your praying and praising and that of the Pharisee. "I humbly call," you just sang. "I see my sins against Thee, Lord...That truly penitent I be, O God, be merciful to me!"

That's not the i-prayer of the Pharisee; it's the prayer of the Publican. He was also in church that day; the same time as the Pharisee was there. But that tax collector was there for a different reason. He was there to receive. He was there to confess his sins, and he was there for mercy. The difference between these two men is striking...night and day, black and white, heaven and hell.

Now at this point I'm going to ask you a trick question...and I admit this is a "trick" question. "Do you know any Pharisees?" If you do, then you are a Pharisee. "Do you know any Publicans, tax collectors, sinners?" If you do, then you are a Pharisee. Let me explain. The Pharisee's eyes were on everybody else. He was judgmental. He was good; others were not like him. If you see someone else as a Pharisee; if you see them as being judgmental, then you are judging them. And if you do not have the authority by God to judge them, then you are a Pharisee. If you see the sins of others and you compare yourself to them, you are the Pharisee. He judged the Publican. He judged extortioners, adulterers, and what-have-you. If you count yourself to be better than another, then you are the Pharisee.

The Publican's eyes were on himself and on no one else. He did not say, "Well, I am better than so-and-so." He did not even see himself as one sinner among many. In the original Greek his words are, "God, be merciful to me, *the* sinner!" His eyes were on his sins, and they were on God. That's not i-worship. That's not i-praying. It's true worship. It is the cry of faith. And it's something which is quite lacking today.

There are people, some who are members here, some not, who do not want to worship here because they believe you are judging them...I'm judging them. Now that's wrong. That Pharisee was judging the Publican, but the Publican went to church anyway. He was a sinner in need of God's mercy, and no Pharisee was about to come between him and that forgiveness he needed. He did not care who else was in church. All that mattered to him is that God was there with His mercy for him.

Anyone who says, "Well I'm not going to church because you're all a bunch of judgmental Pharisees who think you're better than me," is himself a Pharisee because he's judging all of you.....even though he may be right. That Pharisee was judging the Publican. Do we do that here? Better said, "Do I do that?" Every time you and I point our finger at another's faults, unless it's the finger of God and you are that person's parent, pastor, or elder with authority to rebuke them, then you and I are acting as the Pharisee. Every time you and I think ourself better than someone else, then we are that Pharisee.

And keep this in mind...Jesus says that the Publican went home forgiven; the Pharisee was on the road to hell. Is it any wonder that Jesus says, "When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?" This Pharisaical, judgmental, unwilling to repent attitude is like an infection spreading all through the church; and we're all sick. We need help. We need the medicine. We need mercy from God. We need to become like that Publican, not in his past sinful life, but in his sorrow, and in his utmost desire for mercy.

If you are that Publican; if you have been acting as the Pharisee, but now you realize your sinfulness and you repent and desire mercy, then lift up your eyes, for here is the medicine for you. It is Jesus Christ. If anyone had the right to act like a Pharisee, it was Him. If anyone had the right to say, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men..." it was Him. But that was never His prayer. Jesus never prayed an i-prayer. He only prayed u-prayers. He prayed for you. He lived for you. He died for you.

Though He was not like other men, Jesus became like other men for your sake. He became the extortioner, the unjust, the adulterer. He became the cheating tax collector. He even became the judgmental Pharisee. He became the sinner that everyone of us is, so that you would receive mercy from God. Jesus' hands were clean of any wrongdoing, yet they nailed His hands to a cross, and now God calls you forgiven because of that.

Here is the truth, friends...no matter how you have lived; whether you have been as bad as that tax collector had been, or as vile as the worst adulterer, or as judgmental as that Pharisee, God today declares that you are forgiven. Just like the Publican who refused to see the sins of others, so God refuses to look upon the sins of your past and judge you by them. He looks only at His Son dying on a cross for you, and He says to each one of you, "No matter who you are, or what you have done, I forgive you."

Believe this. With all your heart believe this--that you, too, like the Publican, are going to your home today justified, forgiven of every sin. And you know what? As we believe this good news of Jesus, it will show in our life. We will desire to be less like that Pharisee, less judgmental, and more like the repentant Publican. When your eyes are fixed on Jesus and His death for you, they will not fasten so easily upon the sins of others. When you live with God's mercy in your heart, there will be less room there for i-prayers and i-worship. When you come to church because you need to come, it will not matter to you anymore who else is here and what they may think of you. Because Jesus is here. And He is here for you. He is your Savior. He is the reason you will go to your home forgiven. And He is the reason you will go and live forever in your Father's home in heaven. Amen.