

God and our fellows. If we endure the chastening of the Lord then are we sons. As a result of our year's experiences our souls should be more thoroughly purified, our natures more fully refined, and our consecration to God more nearly complete; we should be servants of God more faithful, soldiers more valiant, sons more filial and trustful, and Christians more Christlike.

This, then, is the second lesson of the Psalm, and the second lesson of the year, that the God whose presence has journeyed with us is a God whose love for us is so that it led Him to chastise us. True, the Hebrew poet speaks of it as God's wrath and anger, but this is only its outward aspect. Its real source is God's love, and its true purpose is soul-discipline. May we not lose sight of this lesson.

Third Leaguer.—The third section of this Psalm is contained in verses 12 to 17. Let us read them. The text of this section is found in verses 12:

"So teach us to number our days that we may get us an heart of wisdom."

This is a prayer for wisdom, and for that particular kind of wisdom that comes to us through the presence of God in the experience of the years as they pass. It is a wisdom which we may have only as we experience the presence of God. If we do not now feel God in our hearts and lives, then let us take up the prayer of the Psalmist and cry:

"Return, O Lord; how long?"

It is a wisdom which will reveal in our rejoice and be glad all our days, even the days wherein we have been afflicted, and the years wherein we have seen evil. It is a wisdom which will reveal in our own lives and characters the beauty of the Lord our God. In what particulars are we wiser to-day than we were at the beginning of the year? And what factors in our experiences have tended to bring us this wisdom? Has financial misfortune overtaken us? Then we may learn the value of that treasure which is laid up in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal. Has our health been broken? Then we may see the wisdom of looking forward to the land where there is no sickness. Have our loved ones been taken from us? Then we may see the wisdom of preparing to meet them in the happy regions beyond. Have our ambitions failed? Have men proved false? Then we may see the wisdom of putting our trust, not in horses nor in chariots, nor in men, but in the Lord God of hosts. In what other ways have we as individuals learned to be wiser? If we have learned these lessons which the Hebrew poet long ago learned, then the year has been one of great profit to our souls.

*Grumble? No; what's the good?
If it availed, I would;
But it doesn't a bit—
Not it.*

*Laugh? Yes; why not?
'Tis better than crying a lot;
We were made to be glad,
Not sad.*

*Sing? Why, yes, to be sure,
We shall better endure
If the heart's full of song
All day long.*

*Love? Yes, unceasingly,
Ever increasingly;
Friends' burdens searing
Their sorrows sharing;*

*Their happiness making,
For pattern taking
The One above,
Who is love.*

—Motherhood.

Two Men at Prayer

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican

TOPIC FOR THE WEEK OF JANUARY 5, 1913.

Luke 18: 9-14.

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WHILE this contrast in characters is accepted as a parable, we can see that it differs from other parables in being more direct.

"Two men" again! The human world is full of contrasts. There is "this man" and "that man"; they may be both white men, both of the same community, church, even belonging to the same family, yet two very distinct types, like Jacob and Esau.

Christianity is essentially a life. The Pharisee may have had a good creed and the publican a bad one; Jesus ignored their creeds and contrasted their characters. It is not the tree, but the fruit, by which men are won to judge.

A glance at the background of the parable will help make its meaning clearer and more emphatic.

The parable is found in Luke only. He is the evangelist who writes particularly to the Gentiles. He and Paul show by story and argument that Christianity is for the world. They show that grace is free and for all, and that the inner life is the true measure of a man, not outward appearance.

Again, Jesus was the mediator of new ideals. The religion of the Pharisee might do for an age when there was less light and the Word of the Lord was scarce, but it was time now to repent and seek higher planes. A new day was dawning. The day of ritualistic and legal religion was passing away. This "legal" religion engendered a feeling of self-satisfaction. It measured itself by arbitrary external standards. "I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." This was more than the "law" required, consequently he was "more good." Compare with this Paul's personal experience as portrayed in Phil. 3: 4-8. He tells us that the things which were gain to him he counted (when he came to see himself in the true light) loss for Christ. Those outward rules and measurements deceived him and deceived others. More than that, they arrested his mental and spiritual growth.

The inevitable result of that form of religion is the creation of invidious distinctions between the "good" and "bad" people, saints and sinners, Christians and the "world." The temptations to exalt ourselves are very great. When you hear people talking sanctimoniously about "see Christians," look out for the old type of the self-righteous Pharisee. They are the descendants of the old "legal righteousness," which had its satisfaction in "living up" to some standard. "We Christians" implies "you sinners." "We" are better than "you," of course! In other words, we thank God we are not as other men, being so much better! The piety that exalts itself in that way shall be abased. Professionalism in religion is a dangerous thing.

The teachings of this parable seem to be more difficult to lay hold of than some of God's others. Two lessons are emphasized in particular: first, to those who trusted in themselves as being righteous (margin), and, second, to those who exalt themselves. Indirectly it forms a lesson on prayer, because it shows the proper spirit and frame of mind for prayer.

The Pharisee and publican are introduced, we are inclined to think, not as types of the whole class of Pharisees or publicans, but incidentally. It would manifestly be unfair to judge all by one. That would be arguing from a particular

premise to a general conclusion. We are too apt to do that. If we find one bad Roman Catholic, we are too ready to conclude that all are bad. They are apt to reach the same conclusions about Protestants.

"Went up to the temple to pray." Is there any better or surer way to read men's characters than by the way they pray? The hand or head cannot compare with that. There is where we show our real selves. Tell us how you pray and we will tell you what you are! Prayer is self-revealing.

What was the matter with the Pharisee's prayer? We have no reason to suppose that he was lying. He was not consciously a hypocrite. The trouble with the prayer appears on the face of the parable—"He prayed with himself." It did not rise very high. It wasn't the prayer such as God can hear. What kind of a prayer does He hear? He begins right any way—"God." But it is characteristic of the Pharisee to make self the centre. They may go away from that, but back they will come. "I" is the end, other factors are the means to that end. Even thankfulness is to be measured by its quality. He thanked God. What for? Not that he shared in a common redemption with them; or for the privilege of serving and suffering for them, but that he was better than any one else—especially this publican. How many "I's" are in his prayer?

According to his own estimate he was a paragon of piety. He was not required by law to fast more than once a year, and the law did not require tithes of all a man possessed. It is here we have a glance at what are called works of supererogation. Look the expression up and see what it is. It is the right to see grace and justification by faith—the truths which brought about the Reformation.

One great trouble with this man's estimate was that he looked at himself outwardly, and illogically concluded that because he was all right in some respects he was all right in all respects. It does not do to look at our lives in patches. No man liveth to himself. We are socially and morally members one of another. Our brother's burden is ours too. His joy or shame is ours.

Some member of the League might be asked to contrast the Pharisee's prayer with Solomon's—1 Chron. 29:13, or with David's—Psa. 51: 6. These were ideals with which the Pharisee should have been familiar. There was no confession in his prayer, no short-comings to mention, no deficiency anywhere. All was complacent and satisfactory. Great man he! Why, to think he needed to pray at all!

In the Publican's prayer we have evidences of the elements of true prayer, a conception of God's holiness, a sense of sin, of God's mercy, of an atonement, a sense of humility and the proper way to seek justification. See Titus 3: 5-7; Psa. 51:17.

These are the men who are justified in God's sight. They are more concerned about their own short-comings and sins than about other people's. The judgment that Jesus pronounced shows the affinity between the human and divine natures. Does not human nature despise the man who boasts of himself, of his own goodness, the man who "pushes himself," who "engineers his own applause"? So does God. But the man who is humble, who seeks another's good, esteems others better than himself, condescends to men of low estate, is greatly esteemed among his fellows; and he is of great worth in