

## Thought for the Day 8th July - John Reed

Read Luke 18:9-14

We are probably all very familiar with this parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, who both went to pray, but only one went home justified. What I want you to particularly notice is who Jesus told this parable to. It was to “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (v. 9).

I thought of this when I read the story in the *Sydney Morning Herald* which reported that more people die from cold temperatures in Sydney than in Stockholm in Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, 42 people on average turn up at emergency departments in Sydney every month in winter because of prolonged exposure to cold, which can lead to hypothermia. Why would people in a hot country like Australia die from cold more often than in a cold country like Sweden? Because, according to the article, we don't see ourselves as a cold country. Therefore, our houses are not well setup for heating and withstanding the cold.

It struck me that there was a similar reason that the Pharisees didn't think they needed Jesus – and why the Pharisee in this parable didn't ask for forgiveness, and therefore didn't go home justified. They simply didn't think they had a problem.

To us today the term “pharisee” is a pejorative term for someone who is overly legalistic, or stuck in their ways, or heartless. We need to remember that it has come to mean that largely because of the way Jesus spoke to and about Pharisees in the Gospels. We must understand that in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel, the Pharisees were the religious elite of the day – those everyone assumed to be good and religious. If you wanted to pick a character in your story to represent a good, upright, godly, loyal Jew, you chose a Pharisee. On the other hand, if you wanted a character who was obviously evil and corrupt, you went with a tax collector, those traitorous, greedy, servants of the occupying Romans. These were the two polar opposites. So, for example, in Mark 2:16, the Pharisees complain that Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners.

But it seems that the Pharisees began to believe their own publicity too much. They began to believe they were above the level of the sinners who were beneath them, and that unlike the tax collectors they didn't need saving. Which means that they could see no need for a saviour – in the same way as Sydney-siders don't see the need to set their houses up to withstand the cold. But when the winter comes – or the day of judgment comes – they will be caught out.

On the other hand, the tax collector *knew* he had a problem with sin – just as the people of Stockholm know they have a problem with the cold. And so he confronted the issue, and threw himself on the mercy of God. And went home justified.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/we-don-t-see-ourselves-as-a-cold-country-why-is-it-so-hard-to-stay-warm-in-sydney-20200703-p558n1.html>