

The Tax Collector and the Pharisee

by [Greg Laurie](#) on Apr 7, 2022

“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”

-Luke 18:13

This may come as a surprise to some people, but God is not mad at sinners. Rather, God is mad about us. He loves us.

What angers God is when someone who thinks they’re spiritual or call themselves religious stand in the way of a sinner coming to believe. We find a story in the New Testament about a sinner who went to pray. This man was a tax collector, and tax collectors were not loved a lot in those days.

But there also was another person who went to pray that day, and he was a Pharisee. He said, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:11 NKJV).

Interestingly, the King James Version describes him as praying “thus with himself” (verse 11). I think, in reality, that his prayers didn’t go any higher than the ceiling because that wasn’t a prayer to God; that was a boast.

Meanwhile, the man who knew he was a sinner simply said, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (verse 13 NKJV). Another way to translate it would be, “God be merciful to me, the sinner.” He knew who he was.

Jesus said of him, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (verse 14 NKJV.).

Really, for the Savior to forgive you of all your sin, that’s all you have to say: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” You can know with certainty that you will go to Heaven when you die. You can be ready for Christ’s return. You can enter into a relationship with the God in Heaven who loves you; the God in Heaven who has a plan for you.