

Luke 18:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

Analysis

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican—Luke introduces the parable's stark contrast. The verb anebēsan (ἀνέβησαν) means 'went up,' reflecting Jerusalem's elevated position. Phariseis (Φαρισαῖος) represented religious elite—separated ones devoted to Torah and tradition. Telōnēs (τελώνης) means tax collector, considered traitors who enriched themselves by collecting Roman taxes from fellow Jews.

The contrast is deliberate: the most respected religious figure versus the most despised collaborator. Jesus sets up a shocking reversal where the apparent saint is condemned and the obvious sinner is justified. This parable confronts self-righteousness that trusts in religious performance rather than God's mercy.

Historical Context

The Jerusalem temple had specific areas for prayer. The Court of Israel (for Jewish men) surrounded the priests' court. Jews prayed at set hours—morning and afternoon sacrifices (Acts 3:1). Pharisees were known for conspicuous public prayers (Matthew 6:5). Tax collectors were banned from serving as judges or witnesses, considered ritually unclean through constant Gentile contact. This social context makes Jesus's reversal even more shocking to His first-century audience.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus choose the most respected religious leader and the most despised sinner for this parable's contrast?
2. What assumptions about righteousness does this parable's setup challenge?
3. How might you be tempted toward Pharisaical comparison rather than humble dependence on God's mercy?

Interlinear Text

Ἄνθρωποι δύο ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ιερὸν προσεύξασθαι

men Two went up into the temple to pray
G444 G1417 G305 G1519 G3588 G2411 G4336

ὁ εἷς Φαρισαῖος καὶ ὁ ἔτερος τελώνης

the one a Pharisee and the other a publican
G3588 G1520 G5330 G2532 G3588 G2087 G5057

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 8:30 (Prayer): And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.