

Jesus and the Pharisees

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Summary

A.W. Tozer critiques religious leaders who prioritize rules over compassion, highlighting the conflict between Jesus and orthodox religion. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the true conflict is with religious leaders themselves, rather than with sinners. Tozer also explores the Pharisees' understanding of sin and purity, contrasting it with his emphasis on God's unlimited nature and desire to be with sinners. He challenges the idea of religion as a change of prison and encourages listeners to examine their own hearts and minds for true freedom in Jesus Christ.

Message

In the Book of Luke, 14th chapter, Luke 14, the first six verses. And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees saying, is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And He took him and healed him and let him go; and answered them, saying, which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.

Now, we have here in this brief passage, a scene from the great real-life drama of redemption. The persons are about the same as in the other scenes, the self-righteous religionist, the poor needy man, and the Lord of Glory. And the circumstances are about the same, with a man who is marked with death. Luke, who wrote this story, was a physician who trained in the finest schools of his day. And the commentators pointed out that Luke says that a man had a disease and was healed of it. And he names the disease. And this man had a disease with a specific name which in our English they've called dropsy. But this man was marked with death. And here alongside of him, callous to his need, were the self-righteous text quoters who cared not for him, and who could not help him.

And here is the hardest and the heaviest thought to bear. But these were the orthodox people of their day; they were right. They could quote you Scripture to prove that they were right. They were not cultists. They were not fanatics. They were not wild, unorganized, unauthorized religionists. They sat in Mose's seat. They taught the Scriptures. They were orthodox. They could show you books, proving they were right, and yet they were cruel hearted and arrogant and unbelievably wicked. Can it be so that a man can be orthodox, sound in his creed, faithful to his

denomination, loyal to the church of his father's and still be blind and cruel and bigoted and wicked? It would seem so from the story of Christ in the home of the chief Pharisee.

And then we have in addition, the strong Son of God present. And He was tolerant toward their blindness and their cruelty, not that He in anywise condoned it. For He would die for them, but not compromise with them. But He was tolerant, nevertheless. And He was eager to help the man marked with death. The man who had the swelling disease, the disease that refuses to allow the body to discharge its excess liquid contents and piles it into the cells until the body swells and swells. And finally, the poor heart can't take it and dies.

And here is the man marked with death and the strong Son of God is present to help. Now, even here in this story, we get an accurate picture of the conflict, the conflict of Jesus and the religionists of His day. And could it be, brothers and sisters, could it be that we have failed? As we've looked out upon the world and have tried to appraise and identify ourselves and our times, could it be that we have placed the battle where the battle is not? Could it be that we've located the conflict where the conflict is not?

Could it be that we have looked to communism and said there is the enemy? And it is an enemy undoubtedly, the devil's religion. Could it be that we've looked to the gamblers and horse racers and said there's the enemy? And certainly, they are no friends of God. Could it be that we have looked at the narcotic peddlers and the marijuana pushers and said there is the enemy? Could it be that we have looked at the much-abused American businessman with his careless attitude toward heaven and His absorption with earth and said, secularism, there is the enemy? And could it be that we have placed the battle where the battle is not and found the conflict where God doesn't find? Could it be that the conflict of Jesus is not today with the harlot and the gambler and the worldly businessman, but with the religious? And could it be that the trouble with the world is the type and kind of religion that we have? I believe that it is.

And I believe that the conflict of Jesus today is not with the sinner. For He came to die for sinners, but with the correct and proper religionist who can look at me but not care, who can behold dying men and not feel a tremor of sympathy. Who can wrap the cloak of their respectability around them and congratulate themselves once a day on their soundness and their creedal correctness and yet have no heart for the poor and no love for the harlot and no sympathy for the ignorant. But here they were, confusion, opposition to goodness. And in this scene, the only strong hand was the One that was soon to be pierced by a nail. And the only truer heart, was One that was soon to beat itself out and stop on a hill cold and gray. And the only clear head was the One that was soon bow in death and the only significant voice was the one that was soon to be silenced in the thickness of death.

It came to pass that Jesus, as they went, says the text, went into the Pharisee's house. And I've let my imagination roam sometimes and I've thought of the wanderings of God, the odyssey of the Redeemer, the wide travels of Almighty God over the regions of the earth. And if the Gospels had been written by man's mind, if it's Shakespeare or Agetti or Eugene O'Neill, had written the story of the gospels, how different they would have been. Where they would have placed the prints in the halls and palaces, and they would have had Him walking among the great. And they would have had Him surrounded by the mighty and the important and the significant. Potentates and kings would have been His companions.

But how sweetly common was the real God Man. Though He had inhabited eternity, now He had come down and was obeying the rising and the setting of the sun. And with the sunup and the sound of the cocks crow, He rose and stretched and yawned and smiled and said it's time for breakfast. And with the setting of the sun and the sound of the bird song heard no more, He looked around for a place to lie down and said once, the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And though He had inhabited eternity and walked with angels and dwelt in the palaces beyond the power of the human mind to describe, to understand or the tongue to describe, yet now, He is in the house of a Pharisee. And though He was the author of all life, here He is eating bread like any other man. And though He was so holy that angels veiled their faces before Him, now he mingles with sinners.

I'm glad He mingles with sinners. Because to Him, sin was not contagious. Sin was a disease of the soul and could not be passed on by contact, and that's what contagious means. It was not contagious. And Jesus knew that a pure heart needed no protection. The Pharisees thought that sin was contagious. And so, they ruled out from their houses, these common people that knew not the law. These harlots from the red-light areas, these publicans and tax gatherers, these common masses that crossed and crisscrossed the streets of the cities. They ruled them all out. They were the elite, the elect, the religious, the friends of God, the chosen ones. God's pals. They were indeed, so they thought. But they kept their religion pure by keeping it insular and away from the crowds.

The poor church of our day, the poor church of the centuries, has had to seal up its pitiful, little purity and take its tiny mite of godliness to a monastery and cut it off from the flow and flux of the marketplace to keep it pure. The poor, pitiful, handmade godliness, we've had to clothe it in black robes and hide it in a cave to keep it pure.

And even in Protestant circles, we've had to clothe the clergyman in the robe so that he wouldn't lose his godliness on the way to the pulpit. And some of the stricter sects have shut themselves off completely from the world. And some of our friends out in Indiana and Ohio and Pennsylvania won't yet ride in an automobile. They drive buggies. There's less likelihood of springing up a moral leak and losing your spirituality if you ride slow behind a horse than if you ride fast behind a wheel.

Now Brethren, the fountain of spirituality flows out. And you can't contaminate a fountain, because the fountain flows out. Out from within Him shall flow says the Lord Christ. Out from within Him shall flow. In any contagion or infection that comes from the outside is automatically rendered nil by the outflow. If it was the inflow from the world, it could bring its pollution with it, but because it's the outflow, it carries the pollution away. Out from within Him shall flow. So, there is no real godliness that can be preserved by hiding.

Here where they were, these self-righteous religionists, this dying man, and the Lord of Glory. And they watched Him. They watched and suspected this radical Jesus. And all their trained, hairsplitting minds, they watched Him. But remember one thing, He is not now on trial. He was then, but He is not now. Then, He stood before men for their approval. Now, God hath raised Him to His own right hand and the message now is twofold. It is an offer of life and a sentence of doom.

And the Son of God is no longer standing before the watchful judges of earth. Since the Holy Spirit has come and has confirmed His deity and declared Him to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. There is no trial and no criminal and no judge who stood and would watch; by the religionists of His day, has risen beyond their power to help or hinder and has been declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. And God made the evil Pharisees approve it.

I preached a sermon one time and I'm going to resurrect it and preach it again because only about a third of you or a quarter of you were here then; On Jesus Christ Approved by His Enemies. And I will mention it only here that God made the evil Pharisees approve Him, because they were in command, and don't forget it. And they had the power instantly to arrest, and if He had stepped aside one inch, they would have been on him like a pack of hungry wolves. And they would have had Him in prison in one hour's time. But He outmatched them all. He stood in their midst and forced them by their silence to admit that in this man they found no guilt.

Then He turned on them and asked them, I want to ask you theologians, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? And that question had in it a whole world of irony and accusation. He was saying by that question, I know you Pharisees. I know you're strict religionists. I know you'll bring your children to the temple when they're eight days old and circumcise them. I know you'll return when they're 12 and confirm them. I know what you do to them, and I know what you'll make out of them. And I know what you are, He was saying by that question. I know your religious theories and I know you're cold, hard hearts. You care nothing for the blind and for the poor that hobbled by.

And then, to rub in the salt into the trembling, jerking wounds, He said, if you had an ox and it fell into a ditch, would you get him out on the Sabbath day? And they knew they would. For they had

so manipulated the law as to permit them to save money on the Sabbath day, but their hearts couldn't rise to believe that you could save a human life on the Sabbath day. And He knew that, and so He pressed at home on them. And they looked at each other until they couldn't bear the sight of each other's eyes and looked down and we're still. And He said, if you had a common donkey, an ass, a burro that's worth \$3, and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath day, to save him, would you not get him out of there? And He knew they would, and they knew they would. They'd break the Sabbath for \$3, but they wouldn't break the Sabbath to save a dying man.

One of the southern states, I've forgotten which one, has come forth with some statistics. To my mind one of the most terrible indictments of human nature possible to imagine is this. Perhaps it was a New England state, I'm not sure, but I believe it might have been Vermont instead of a southern state. And here is what the findings of the law are. They had very high penalties for traffic violators and speeders, but they didn't cut down the deaths and the crippling accidents. They didn't cut down the number of pedestrians that were killed. They fined them, but it didn't help. Then they said, now, we'll change the law; and they changed it and it read that any man guilty of driving a car in a manner to endanger human life should have his license taken from him for six months. And instantly the death toll dropped magically.

Do you see the horrible significance of it? To say, don't kill a man, that went on and killed a man. But to say if you do, we'll take your driver's license away and they stopped it instantly. If you believe in the total depravity; if that isn't a proof of it, what is?

T. De Witt Talmage told this story. I thought it was kind of funny in a sour way. He said, a Universalist went into a certain neighborhood and thought he'd start a Universalist Church. So, he looked around, inquired of the neighborhoods if any Universalist lived in that neighborhood. They said, yes, there was one man who said he was a Universalist. So, the minister went to visit this man and said, I understand you're a Universalist and I am trying to establish a church of that denomination in this area, and I think I'll start with you. Would you support it? Well, Reverend, he said, I'm a Universalist all right, but I'm a little bit of a different kind of Universalist from what you are. You believe in the universal salvation of everybody, but he said, I've been out in the world awhile. I've traveled around a little. I've lived a lot. And he said, I have been betrayed and exploited and lied to and cheated and abused and injured until I've come to believe in the universal damnation of all men. His universalism was rather backfired a little.

Brethren, he's nearer to it than the other. For a people supposed to be a soft-hearted people such as Americans are, if you take their toy away from them, take their pretty toy away from them, they'll say, all right, all right. I'll be careful. I won't kill anybody. I won't run over a baby buggy and kill the baby. I will be careful. Don't take my toy away. But just say, don't know it, and they'll do it anyhow. But take their toy away and they'll whimper all right. I won't. If that doesn't argue universal damnation, it's only by a sovereign act of God.

My brethren, they watched Him there. And He knew, and He knew how bad they were. He knew they loved the ox and the ass more than they loved the human nature. Now, do you know my fear for this church? Do I have any fear that this church will go liberal? It would take one generation at least. I will have been dead 35 to 40 years before this church could go liberal. Do I fear that this church will have a sudden invasion of movies. I'd roll over in my grave then. Do I fear that this church will cease to be missionary? No, you're so ingrained with missions that you will have missions and be sending out missionaries long after you're not spiritual anymore at all.

What do I fear? I fear that we will become a respectable, godly, self-contained people who have money, dress well, have good educations, speak good English, read good books, but have no heart for the flow of damned humanity, or half-damned humanity that flows everywhere. Care not for the white trash. Care not to the colored. Care not for the poor and the distressed. I'm afraid. I'm afraid. Aloof godliness. You lovely women. You're aloof from the very woman that needs you. You respectable men with your money. You hold yourself aloof from the very man that needs you the worst. I'm afraid you will, that's all. I don't say you do yet.

But now comes the Lord of life to the man marked with death. And it says He took him and had healed him and they let him go. He took him. I don't know what He did to him. What do you think He did to him? He walked over there and took him. How did He take him. There he was, swollen, his eyes bulging, his cells distended with water, legs heavy and swollen. If he could stand at all, it was only with great effort, perhaps, couldn't stand now. A great, round, stuffed form lying there. They knew no way to help them then.

But He took him. How did He take him? That's what we call a conviction for sin, conviction. He took him. He took David from the sheep fold. He took Elijah from a plow. He took Peter from the fisher. He took Saul from the Supreme Court. He took Augustine from the evil religion Manichaeism. He took Bunyan and Newton and Finney and Trotter and Billy Sunday. He took them and He has a way of doing that in a way that you and I can't explain.

People write in to me and say, Mr. Tozer, you speak in generalizations. Tell us exactly how God does it. How can I tell you exactly how God does anything? All you can do is say to a man, here, look, look behold the Lamb of God. And after that you're on your own. I can't help you. When I go places and preach, people come up to me and say, now, Mr. Tozer, I've heard you talk, and I've read your books. Now, tell me, just exactly how is this done? That very fact rules them out. That very fact rules them out.

Just as soon as you start to make a little trick out of it, you rule Him out. He rules you out. I don't know how He does it. I only know that a worldly, proud, sexy, young woman will come to church somewhere, trying hard to be cross between Lana Turner and the devil's grandmother. And she'll

go in and sit down and look the place over. And then during the sermon or during a song, suddenly, she's taken, and the mighty Holy Ghost lays hold of her. And He goes clear back to Eve and grabs her deep down further down than anybody will ever know her. Clear deep down He lays hold of her. Don't ask me to tell you how. He took him. I don't know how He took him. There is a place where faith must leap into the dark.

Brethren. There is a point where no preacher can help you, and a personal worker is a pest and a nuisance. There is a place where the soul sees a black abyss and God beyond and leaps into the black abyss and God grabs him. There is a place, a leap into the dark and yet it's into the light because it's toward God who is light, makes the darkness. He took him and He requires that that man under that conviction be taken.

God takes men. I've met them. And I've seen them taken. And He healed him and that's conversion. He beat back death and gave deliverance. And whoever will confine this to mere physical healing is a million miles below the meaning of it. It was and He does heal physically, sometimes, and he will. But He beat back death and gave deliverance. And He gave him the help he needed. That's conversion. And I don't know how He does it. I only know He does do it. And I can only point and say, that's the One to go to. After that you're on your own, and He'll take you. If it's drink, He'll deliver you. And if it's pride, he'll deliver you. If it's greed, he'll deliver. And of it's self-righteousness, He'll deliver you. He healed him. That's conversion. And they let him go. Notice that they let him go.

Now there are those that say, and I've read it, that religion is a change of prison. That is all. You're in prison and then you become a religious man, and you change a worldly prison for a religious prison. It is just a change of prisons. Well, I won't even answer that. I'll just ask you, what did you find? Anybody here get up and say, I was in the world's prison and now I'm in Christ's prison. Do see any bars around you, brother? Shake your hand and see if there's any manacle on it? Kick your foot a bit and see if there's any ball and chain there? Look up and see if you see a concrete roof? Look down and see if you see flagstone? Walk out and see if anybody will challenge you and say, who goes there? You're free as a bird that swings and sings in yonder blue heaven.

Now my brother, the best answer to the charge religion is a change of prisons, is to ask the people who know God whether they had found it that way or not. The only freedom I've ever known in all my years of life is the freedom Jesus Christ gives me this night. And if I would give Him up and turn away from it all, I'd be the victim of my lust and my pride and my evil temper and my sulky disposition and my bestiality and my hatefulness and my fear. And I would be surrounded by bars that I could not in 1000 years saw my way through. But when He took me and healed me, He also said, now go,

I found a bird one time, not so long ago inside a house, and we ran him down, took him and put him on my hand and took him outside and away he went. I was afraid he was hurt, but boy, he wasn't. And as soon as I opened my palm, he soared off. I picked up a butterfly up at Highland Lake, a great big moth rather than a butterfly, a lovely thing. And people gathered around to look at it, and I said, I wonder if it's injured. And then we took it out, and I let my hand go. And it beat it's great awkward wings a couple of times, and then cut the air and sailed away as graceful as an airplane among the leaves.

And God took him and healed him and then said, all right, and set him straight. The Christian is the freest man in all the wide world; free to be good, free to be generous, free to be free, free from fear and free from grudge and free from revenge. He's free.

Now, everybody that ever had a Scofield Bible knows the meaning of the word redemption is threefold; to buy in the market, and to buy out of the market, and to set free. You can get a lot of good thoughts from Scofield's definitions, and that's one of them, buy in the market. He came in where he was and bought him; bought him with His own blood. He can only heal him because later He was to die for you; took him. He took him out of the market. He's not for sale anymore, you're not Christian. You're not for sale anymore. There's no tag on you saying, marked-down sale. No tag on you saying, best buy of the day; no tag on you, no price tag.

God doesn't allow any price tag. You had a price tag on you once that nobody could meet. Nobody could meet. Gabriel didn't have a wingspread broad enough. The seraphim didn't have fire enough and the cherubim didn't have purity enough and the angels and principalities and watchers and holy ones didn't have gold nor silver enough. He had a price tag on you, for as much as you were not redeemed with corruptible things, but by the blood of the Lamb of God who without spot or wrinkle, went out to die. That was the price, and nobody could pay it and He paid it. He could take this man and convert him and let him go because He had paid the price for him. Potentially, and in a few days, actually.

The love of Christ constraineth me tonight. And how about you? Are you truly converted? Have you ever had the wonder of suddenly being taken? Have you been captured by the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you been converted and set free? If you have not been then you may be the victim of religion. Just church members, a form of church members, surrounded by proud bigots who make you feel all right when you're not alright.

Friends, how about you? What about your soul tonight? What about it? Have you ever had the experience of being taken and delivered and set free? You can, but don't ask me to give you the trick. There is no trick in it. If you will go to Jesus Christ as you are, weary and worn and sad, you'll find in Him a resting place and He will make you glad. If you come to Jesus with your blindness, and He makes you see. You come with your deafness, and He makes you hear. If you come in your

bondage, and He sets you free. Thank God for the strong, strong man who walked among you. It was a strong Man who walked among them.

Those textualists, those Pharisees, in six weeks' time would have lugged that great swollen body out and lowered it down in a hole and said some Hebrew words over it, wiped their hands clean and walked away, shrugged and said, that's done. That's all they had to offer--a grave. And they were the religious leaders of their day. And all they had to offer was a grave. But Jesus Christ pushed the grave years into the future and gave him a long happy life to live. And best of all, to live in the sweet knowledge that the Messiah had come. And He delivered him.

Brothers and sisters, shall it be religion, or shall it be Christ? Shall it be churchianity or shall it be Jesus Christ? Shall it be human pride, or shall it be humility in Jesus Christ? Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you. Jesus will not walk with the proud nor the scornful. So humble yourself to walk with God. Shall we pray.

Is there one person here tonight that would say to me Mr. Tozer, please pray for me. I want your prayers. Please pray for me. I won't come down to you and I won't embarrass you by pushing in. I just want to know, is there somebody here who fears a fear or has a manacle or wears a chain.

Lord of Life, Thou walkest among men, healing and delivering. Thank Thee, O Lord Jesus. Thank Thee for the 1000s of twisted heaps of prison bars that lie useless. The victims have flown and fled like a bird from its nest and are in bondage no more. And they sing and they write, and they work and they testify and they teach. All up and down the world the prisoners have gone free.

We thank Thee tonight Lord and pray now for these friends. God bless them. Turn their eyes upon Jesus. May they look full in His wonderful face and may His light shine upon them. Now, bless these friends. We thank thee for every one of them and pray that we may go out in safety to have a good week and back here again at the appointed times in the Spirit and in the fullness of the gospel of Christ.