

# The Pharisee and Tax Collector Interview

CHARACTERS: 3

COSTUMES: Modern day for host, Biblical for others

PROPS: none specified

SETTING: on the streets of Jerusalem

RUN TIME: 7 minutes

SCRIPTURE/BASED ON: Luke 18

HOST: Good evening and welcome to our show Man at the Temple. Our series continues from last week when we interviewed moneychangers remembering the day they were driven out with whips. Today we will be interviewing two men – a Pharisee, one of the religious leaders and a tax collector, considered by many to be a self serving cheat and a traitor for working for the invading Romans.

To begin, let's cut to a scene earlier today when the two men went up to the temple to pray

PHARISEE: (*Looking up toward heaven*) God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this (*glances over at TAX COLLECTOR*) tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

TAX COLLECTOR: (*looking down humbly but projecting voice forward, beating his breast*) God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

HOST: Which man went home justified before God? Let us talk to each of these two men. Mr. Pharisee, tell me a little bit about your religious practices.

PHARISEE: Jews are required to fast only on the Day of Atonement. I, on the other hand, fast 2 days a week. That would be 51 more times a year than a (*with some disdain*) regular Jew.

HOST: Do you tithe?

PHARISEE: Absolutely.

HOST: Tithing means giving 10%, am I correct.

PHARISEE: Yes, 10% of everything. Not just your money but everything right down to the seeds you possess. (*with some pride*) It takes my wife and kids about 2 days to count all the mustard seeds to make sure we tithe exactly one of every ten seeds.

HOST: You seem to be a well respected member of the community.

PHARISEE: So you've noticed. I try to "set a good example", make sure everyone sees what I do so they can see how to do things right.

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HOST: Do you feel God owes you special treatment?

PHARISEE: Let's just say I'm sure he notices I go above and beyond and will get what I deserve.

HOST: What would you like to improve?

PHARISEE: I think other people *(interrupted by host's hand)*

HOST: I mean self improvement.

PHARISEE: Oh. *(momentarily at a loss for words)* The tassels on my garments are already long. I know the law forward and backwards. *(getting an idea)* I think I could improve the timing of my prayers or where I pray.

HOST: How would this help?

PHARISEE: More people to watch me.

HOST: What do you think of the teachings of Jesus and some of his disciples? Specifically, that he came to call the sinners, not the righteous.

PHARISEE: Obviously if that's the class of people he wants to spend his time with, he's no concern of mine.

HOST: Paul, a Pharisee... *(PHARISEE cuts him off)*

PHARISEE: Please, Former Pharisee. The man is a deluded wreck. Going around writing letters that not one of us is righteous and trust God who justifies the wicked. What rubbish.

HOST: He also said one should not think too highly of oneself.

PHARISEE: Well he certainly has nothing to brag about – throwing away his position, his education at the feet of Gamaliel and for what? We can only hope he comes to his senses before it is too late. *(looking about)* If you'll excuse me. I see a crowd starting to gather and I want to bless them by praying aloud for them. *(exits)*

*Host goes to TAX who has been praying silently the whole time, head bowed. He raises his head when HOST arrives.*

HOST: You work for the Roman Government, don't you?

TAX: Yes. I collect taxes for them.

HOST: How do others in your community view you?

TAX: Many think I'm a traitor to my people. Some think I'm a crook because sometimes tax collectors collect more than they have to and pocket the difference.

HOST: Does that bother you?

TAX: yes. But I'm more concerned about what God thinks of me. I'm a sinner, I don't deserve his grace or mercy, yet he has promised that even though my sins are as red as scarlet he will make them as white as snow.

HOST: How do you see yourself compared to others, such as the Pharisees.

TAX: I don't like to compare myself with others.

HOST: Why?

TAX: Two reasons. One, if you are looking down on others you aren't looking up at God. Not that I deserve to look up at God.

HOST: And the other reason?

TAX: It reminds me of the summer I herded sheep with my Uncle up in the mountains. During the summer one of the families that lived up that way whitewashed their barn. It stood out in contrast with the other buildings around it.

HOST: It seemed very white?

TAX: Yes. Until the day it snowed. I'd never seen snow before. It dazzles the eye, it is so white. Compared to God's snow, that whitewashed building was dingy. I always remember that sight when I think of God making my sins white as snow.

HOST: So you're saying that comparing yourself with others is like comparing a whitewashed barn to other man-made structures?

TAX: Yes. There is no comparison between the whitewashing of man and God's snow. I try to keep in mind what God sees, not what man sees.

HOST: Why did you stand off at a distance when you prayed?

TAX: The Psalmist said that the Lord is near those with a broken heart and that he saves those with a contrite spirit. I figure my job is to be sincere in my repentance and reverence and wherever I am, he'll find me.

HOST: What do you think of the teachings of Jesus?

TAX: Once I heard him say “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”. I have tried to humble myself ever since. Even when I pray, keeping my head bowed, acknowledging specific sins I wish him to forgive and of course forgiving others who have hurt me.

HOST: Including your fellow Jews who say unkind things about your profession and relationship with the Romans?

TAX: Especially them. I want to be forgiven and justified.

HOST: What’s the difference?

TAX: Say you commit a crime. But the judge forgives you. You go free but you still have a record. But if you are justified, the slate is wiped clean, the record of your wrongdoing is destroyed.

HOST: Clean as in snow clean, not covered over whitewashed clean.

TAX: Exactly, though my sins are as scarlet he makes them white as snow.

HOST: Thank you. And thanks for joining us for our man at the temple interview series. Next week: The Widows at the temple. Join us then. Good night.

# The Pharisee and Tax Collector

CHARACTERS: 5

COSTUMES: Biblical

PROPS: none specified

SETTING: Jerusalem at the time of Christ

RUN TIME: 1 minute

SCRIPTURE/BASED ON: Luke 18

NARR 1: To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

JESUS: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself:

PHARISEE: God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.

NARR 2: But the tax collector stood at a distance.

NARR 1: He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said

TAX COLLECTOR: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

JESUS: I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

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