

BECOMING A GOOD TEST TAKER

I recently had a dream I believe the Lord wants me to share with this congregation.

For those of you who may not be wondering if God really speaks to His people in dreams, let me remind you of what the Scriptures say.

Acts 2:17

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

Therefore, dreams and visions are a normal way that God communicates to His people, particularly in the last days.

With that said, here's my dream...

I was back in SCHOOL. It was SENIOR YEAR and the class was preparing to take a TEST. This was not a FINAL EXAM. Instead, it was more like a unit QUIZ of about 20 questions. I'm feeling really CONFIDENT in my ability and readiness for this test, unlike my classmate Donald. Donald seems very nervous and less than confident in his ability. We are given the test. It's a vocabulary test and, as I said, I believed I performed REALLY WELL on it. Again, my classmate, Donald, didn't feel he performed all that well. However, when the test was returned, Donald scored surprisingly well. (He only missed 2 out of 20 questions.) I, on the other hand, missed 5 out of 20. Fortunately for me, the teacher wrote that I still had a few MAKE-UP EXAMS left before the end of the semester. This made me feel a little better.

There are several key points in this dream I would like us to consider. The first has to do with the *contrast* that I see between how I approached the test and how my classmate approached it. In the dream, I came to the test feeling *very confident* in my ability. On the other hand, my classmate, Donald, came to the test feeling less than confident, even *humble*. Moreover, this contrast reminded me of the parable of the pharisee and publican in **Luke 18**.

Luke 18:9

9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

We are told from the outset that this parable is about those who are confident and trust in themselves that they're righteous.

Luke 18:10–14

10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Can you see the comparison between this parable and our dream? In this parable we are shown two different ways people enter into prayer. Our dream describes two different ways people approach tests.

For example, some people approach tests the way the publican approached prayer—**humbly**.

Luke 18:13

13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

People who approach afflictions humbly will recognize their need for mercy, and will use their time of testing as an opportunity to repent and seek God.

But, not everyone approaches their tests humbly. Some approach their tests the way the pharisee approached prayer—**pridefully**.

Luke 18:11

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

Notice how this pharisee used prayer to congratulate or praise himself. There are people who will use their trials as a way of commending themselves.

There's a *danger* of approaching tests with a prideful attitude (i.e. justifying oneself). The danger is that it will cause you to *condemn others*.

Luke 18:11

11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

The more this pharisee *commended* himself, the more he *condemned* his brother! You can tell when you are behaving proudly in your trial because you will exalt yourself (put yourself in the right) at the expense of others.

Job 32:1, 2

1 So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2 Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.

Job was so eager to justify himself, that he began to *condemn* God!

Job 40:6–8

6 Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 7 Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. 8 Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?

There are people who insist that they are righteous and, therefore, undeserving of the trial they are experiencing. By doing this they inadvertently accuse God of wrong doing (injustice). Yet, the truth is that whatever pain we experience in this life is only a small *token* of what we really deserve!

2 Thessalonians 1:4, 5

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: 5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

Notice we're made to suffer that we may be *counted worthy of the kingdom*.

Many assume that they're ALREADY worthy (or ready) for the kingdom. Yet, God is the only one qualified to make this decision. Moreover, He makes this decision based on how *humbly* we walk (behave) in our tests!

Deuteronomy 8:2

2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

A person who is truly *humble* will trust God to save them.

Psalm 34:18–20

18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; And saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: But the Lord delivereth him out of them all. 20 He keepeth all his bones: Not one of them is broken.

Notice who the Bible calls the “righteous”—those of a contrite (humble) spirit. This is a person who has had their self-sufficiency completely broken (often by guilt or disappointment).

Also, a person who is truly humble knows how to be quiet and remain silent.

Psalm 131:1

1 Lord, My heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

David had to learn how to be quiet and not concern himself with things that did not concern him. This included learning to accept God’s judgments even when he didn’t understand them.

Finally, a person who is humble is like a “weaned child” that no longer needs to be coddled or given extra attention.

Psalm 131:2

2 Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, As a child that is weaned of his mother: My soul is even as a weaned child.