

LET GOD BLOW YOUR TRUMPET!

Today's Text: Lk 18: 9 -14

Extracts:

Also [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray; one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘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.’ 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!’ 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” [Lk 18: 9-14]*

Chen Wei-yih is a 30-year-old office worker in Taipei, Taiwan (China).¹Late last year, she enlisted the services of a wedding planner, posed for a set of photos in a flowing white dress and rented a banquet hall for a marriage celebration with 30 friends. She planned a honeymoon in Australia. The total bill came to US\$5,675. However, there was no groom. She planned to marry herself! She claimed that having not met the man that she loved and being under social pressure to marry, she decided to marry herself.

Officially, Chen remained single, no matter what she had told the world. She could have done it for fun or to get back at her ‘enemy’ -society. The bottom line is that she was blowing her trumpet. Most of us are engaged in the practice. If you doubt so, look at your résumé (CV-curriculum vitae) to see how much exaggeration, half-truths and subtle lies decorate it! Yet, the word of God says “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger and not your own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. Even so, others can also deceive you by saying what you want to hear about yourself! So, why don't you let God be the one to blow your trumpet? In this week's Bible text, Jesus tells the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector. Both went into the temple to pray. While one blew his trumpet, the other humbled himself. Which one did God justify and which one did He condemn? Let us find out.

¹ Based on “Bride-to-be set to say ‘I do’ - to herself,”

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39793033/ns/world_news-weird_news/?GT1=43001# ; October 22, 2010

1. Background: Self-justification is blowing one's trumpet!

There is the story of a man who was fond of boasting before his colleagues that he was the boss of his house. Soon, some of them went to tell his wife what her husband had been telling them about their home. So, one day, without his knowledge, the woman slipped into the club where her husband was again getting carried away over a glass of beer. As usual, he cleared his throat and said as loud as possible, "I am the boss of my house!" Just then, to the man's surprise, his wife showed up. Suspecting that she had overheard him, he said, "As I was saying, I am the boss of my house, and I have my wife's permission to say so!"

Blowing one's trumpet is as common with us as the common cold. There is as yet no known cause of the common cold but happily, blowing one's trumpet is curable. That is what Jesus is going to teach us in this week's study. He "spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" [Lk 18: 9]. Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a Publican or tax collector. The Pharisees were a Jewish sect that insisted on the strict observance of the Law of Moses. They had a running battle with Jesus over, for example, fasting [Mk 2: 18], how to observe the Sabbath day [v. 24] and divorce [Mk 10: 2]. They were rich and powerful members of the Sanhedrin [Acts 23: 9]. Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was a Pharisee [Phil. 3: 5]. Some Pharisees were friendly and even invited Jesus to dinner [Lk 11: 37]. Tax collectors, on the other hand, were stigmatized as corrupt [Lk 3: 12-13] and not worthy to be associated with [Lk 7: 34]. Matthew (Levi) who later became an apostle of Jesus was a tax collector [Lk 5: 27], same as Zacchaeus that hosted Jesus [Lk 19: 1-10]. Therefore, *we should be careful not to paint every Pharisee as hypocritical or every publican as sinful and corrupt*. That is profiling which can easily breed prejudice for no just cause. The parable is about a typical self-righteous person and a typical despised person. *In any situation where people blow their trumpets, one party is trying to lord it over another party they perceive inferior to or weaker than themselves. In truth, trumpet-blowers may actually be trying to hide their own weaknesses!*

Both men supposedly came to the temple to pray to God. The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself. He thanked God that he was not like other men that were extortioners, unjust, adulterers, "or even as this tax collector" (apparently pointing in his mind in the direction of the man that his group despised). He went on, "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" [Lk 18: 11-12]. That is trumpet-blowing!

Who was the Pharisee trying to impress? It could not be God because He already knew the Pharisee's fasting and tithing habits. God also already knew whether the Pharisee was free of the sins that he was accusing others of. The truth is that the Pharisee was trying to blow his own trumpet before God! Without any

prompting, he began to reel off his self-proclaimed advantages over other people, especially those that he despised.

The tax collector, on the other hand, did not so much as “raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” [v.13]. We see here evidence of humility and contrition. He knew that he was praying to God and when the Lord is in His holy temple, “let all the earth keep silence before Him” [Habb. 2: 20]. We do not know what sins he had committed or what good he had ever done. He kept them to himself and spoke only to his God. He did not blow his trumpet because he knew that that would not impress God.

In concluding the parable, Jesus told us that the tax collector went home justified “rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” [Lk 18: 14]. In other words, the Pharisee who was self-righteous and looked down on the tax collector prayed in vain. The tax collector who was contrite and humble before God was justified before Him. So, we can conclude that *those who blow their trumpets will be humbled while those that God blows their trumpets will be exalted*. Do you know where you stand before the Lord on this matter?

2. Diagnosing and treating self-praise

How will you know that you are “suffering” from blowing your own trumpet? The following are some of the tell-tale signs:

a) *When you allow yourself to be flattered!*

Sometimes, you may be quite taciturn, keeping as much information about you as possible to yourself. However, there are people who may be around you, such as spouses, children, colleagues, subordinates and others who may know more about you than you have disclosed. Do you stop them from speaking out in your favour when they face a tempting opportunity? Do you allow yourself to be flattered every now and then? If you do, you are indirectly blowing your trumpet, especially when you do not immediately correct any embellishments of the truth about you.

Take the case of King Herod (Herod Agrippa I) that persecuted the early church. After killing James, the brother of John, he locked up Peter, hoping to kill him after the Passover. However, God sent an angel to set him free. The following day, Herod commanded all the guards to be put to death. Thereafter, he went from Judea to Caesarea to stay. The people of Tyre and Sidon with whom he had been angry came there to try to appease him. He arrayed himself in royal apparel and gave an oration from his throne. In response, “the people kept shouting, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’” He certainly allowed the flattering to continue because “immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did

not give glory to God.” He was eaten up by worms and died [Acts 12: 1-10, 18-23]!

When you find yourself being flattered, do what Paul and Barnabas did in Lystra after God had healed a cripple through Paul’s ministry [Acts 14: 5-18]. The local people raised their voices and said in their local language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” They named Paul *Hermes* and Barnabas, *Zeus* (Greek gods)! The priest of Zeus brought oxen to sacrifice to them. When Paul and Barnabas came to understand what was going on, “they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out . . ., ‘Men, why are you doing these things? *We also are men with the same nature as you*, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.” They rejected the flattery and immediately set the record straight. Why would God not justify such disciples?

So when you find, for example, your congregation ‘worshipping’ you, calling you a great man/woman of God that you know you are not, quickly and firmly stop it because it is not good for your résumé with God!

b) *When you reveal secrets about yourself without prompting*

Sometimes, we are tempted to tell others about ourselves without their prompting. You are sitting with a stranger on a long bus or train ride or air flight. You are a neighbour to a family that recently moved in. You are preaching a sermon. You are at a dinner with professional colleagues. Without any need or reason, you reel off your “achievements”: how many houses, bank accounts, investments, etc, you have. You carry pictures of your successful children to show others at the drop of a hat. It gets worse if your listener tries to beat your record! Do you know that you are actually reducing rather than exalting your status by so doing?

Take the example of King Hezekiah of Judah, after God had healed him of a life-threatening illness. God extended his life by fifteen years [2 Kgs 20: 1-7]. When Berodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon (an enemy of Judah) heard that Hezekiah had been sick, he sent letters and presents. The Babylonian messengers were well received by Hezekiah who, without any prompting, “showed all the house of his treasures-the silver and the gold, the spices and precious ointments and all his armory-all that was found among his treasures.” In fact, “there was nothing in his house or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.” God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that for blowing his trumpet and revealing all his secrets to his sworn enemy, a time was coming when all that he and his fathers (ancestors) had accumulated

would be carried into Babylon where some of his sons and their descendants would serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon [vv. 12-18].

So, be careful what you boast to others about because you may just be giving away your material and spiritual defences. If Samson had not revealed to Delilah his wife the secret of his extraordinary strength (in his unshaven hair), the Philistines might never have been able to capture him, remove his eyes and make him “a grinder in the prison” [Judg. 16: 1-21].

c) *When you exaggerate your strengths*

Another way in which we blow our trumpet is when we exaggerate our strengths before others. Some of us get so carried away by superiority complex that we do not even recognize or take account of the good qualities that others may have. For example, on the basis of skin colour or creed, gender, age or education, among others, we tend to underrate competition and make assumptions about our strengths that are false or exaggerated or misleading. In the end, we get badly beaten and shamed.

Take the example of Sennacherib the king of Assyria during the reign of King Hezekiah. He sent a great army, led by Rabshakeh, against Jerusalem. Rabshakeh stood in a prominent place in the city and said to the people, “Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his (Sennacherib’s) hand; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria’” [2 Kgs 18: 28-30]. What the general did not know was that Hezekiah had put the matter in God’s hand and through the prophet Isaiah, God had assured Hezekiah that He would fight for him and his kingdom [2 Kgs 19: 1-7]. One night, an angel of the Lord came into the camp of the Assyrians and killed 185,000 of them. When Sennacherib heard of it, he rushed back home to Nineveh, his capital, where he was assassinated by his sons [vv. 35-37]. He had despised a superior enemy.

From the forgoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

- There is no doubt that *occasions will always arise when you have to tell others about yourself or that they may want to know about you*. You may be applying for a job or promotion or completing your annual appraisal forms. You may be receiving an award for which the organizers need a short bio about you. Whatever the circumstances, always remember that anything you say about yourself can be verified, no matter how long it takes. Therefore, *always tell it like it is*.

- ***Do not speak about yourself unless you are prompted.*** Even so, first determine why such information is required of you. ***If it is for self-aggrandisement, keep tight-lipped.*** For example, during His trial before Pilate, when the chief priests and elders made false accusations against Him, Jesus kept silent. Then Pilate turned to Him and said, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” We are told, “But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marvelled greatly” [Matt. 27:12-14]. Why should He dignify false allegations with any explanations?
- ***Therefore,*** you should ***let others praise you and not yourself; preferably, a stranger*** [Prov. 27: 2]. Jesus did not write a word of His teachings and healings. Summarizing the works of Jesus, John His beloved disciple wrote, “And there are many other things [beyond those recorded in the Gospels] that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” [Jn 22: 25]. Do you know who else has been more influential on earth than Jesus?

The best that you can say about yourself is what God says you are. Rahab was a harlot but by God’s grace, she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus [Matt. 1: 5]. Job was Satan’s target for destruction but God boasted of him as “there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” [Job 1: 7]. Peter never saw himself beyond being a fisherman by the Sea of Galilee but Jesus saw him as a fisher of men [Matt. 4: 18-19] whom He used to launch a global salvation outreach ministry [Acts 2: 14-41]. Mary did not expect to be more than the simple wife of a local carpenter but God has made her blessed among women of all generations as the mother of Jesus the Christ [Lk 1: 26-32]. What do those people share in common? They walked humbly with God [Mic. 6: 8]. ***When you blow your trumpet, you want to put others down. But when God blows your trumpet, He wants to inspire others.*** Therefore, let Him blow your trumpet!

3. Conclusion: God’s praise of you is your true trumpet!

You may for now answer your earthly father’s name but God has said that you are His son or daughter if you accept His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Saviour. Your aspiration in life for now may be to prosper and live long but Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a mansion for you in His Father’s house in heaven so that when you are finally called home, you will be where He is [Jn 14: 1-3]. Can you do better than that for yourself?

God’s praise of you is your true trumpet. So, let Him blow it for you!