

=THE CONVERSION=

Lesson 3
The Publican

Objects to have:

A pitcher and a square of cloth
A picture of a temple
A black heart pasted over a white heart
A white heart pasted over a black heart
Something red, either a sheet of construction paper or some red fabric
A bar of soap
Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Using a pitcher and a square of cloth as symbols, review the stories of the past two Sundays. Allow the children to fill in some of the details, as time permits.)

Let's remember a Bible story in which someone carried a pitcher. It was a lady. Where was she going with her pitcher? Yes, to a well—Jacob's well—in Samaria. Who was sitting on the wall that was around the well? Yes, Jesus was. The lady needed to be saved from her sins. Did she ask Jesus to be her Saviour? Yes, she did!

Now, let's remember another Bible story. This square of cloth makes me think of a man. Do you know why this square of cloth could make us think of a man? Yes, beds were made of cloth; they were just like mats made of blankets. What about the man and his bed? Yes, he was badly crippled, and he had to lie on his bed all the time. God let him be crippled because the man had done a terribly wicked thing, the Bible says. Remember the Pool of Bethesda and the five porches? Did someone put the man into the water after the angel stirred up the water? How, then, did he get healed? Yes, Jesus healed him! Jesus healed the man only after the man trusted Jesus as His Saviour.

Those were good stories! Now, for today's story. Sit up straight, put your hands in your laps, and listen.

Telling the story:

(Hold up the picture of the building.) See this big building. The temple was a big building. The temple was in the big city of Jerusalem. The temple was a beautiful building! Some things inside the temple were covered with gold! One thing that was covered with gold was a special box. The Bible was kept in that gold-covered box! People in their homes could not have Bibles because they did not have enough money to buy them. Bibles cost too much money then.

(Point to your picture.) Look at the door of the temple. A man walked into the temple. We don't know the man's name. We know what he was, however. He was a Pharisee. A Pharisee was a man who studied the Bible very much. This Pharisee had taken the Bible from its special gold-covered box many, many times. This Pharisee had opened the pages of the Bible and read the words that were on the pages over and over again. This man had read the rules that God had given for His people to obey. It was good that this Pharisee had read the Bible, and had read the rules that God had given. But, uh-oh, this Pharisee also had made up other rules for the people. This Pharisee had sat in a room with other Pharisees, and together they had all made up other rules for the people to keep—not rules that God had given to the people. God did not like it that these Pharisees made up other rules for the people. The Pharisees did it anyway. Their rules were not good rules.

Look at the door of the temple again. Another man walked through the doorway into the temple. This man was not walking proudly. He was walking as an ordinary man should walk. He was probably taking long steps as a man should, and walking with a straight back. Yet, this man had a worried look on his face. His face was not

proud as the Pharisee's face was. We do not know the name of this second man. But we know that he was a publican. A publican was a man who collected taxes from the people. Most publicans took more money from the people than they should have taken. They kept that part of the money for themselves and turned in the tax money to the government. That means that most publicans stole money from the people. Why would such a man as this walk through the doorway of the temple?

Think about the Pharisee again. As the Pharisee came into the temple, he put his hand into his pocket. He pulled out a large amount of money; he had his offering. He went to an offering box in the temple. Standing there beside the offering box, with his money in his hand, the Pharisee looked around to see whether people were watching him. He wanted everybody to say, "That Pharisee is giving a lot of money. Look at how good he is!" Oh, how terribly proud the Pharisee was! The Pharisee also put a very sad look on his face. He sucked in his cheeks like this. (Suck in the sides of your face so as to make your face look thinner.) The Pharisee wanted people to know that sometimes he did not eat for a whole day at a time. He wanted people to think that he was busy doing good things and that he did not care to eat because he was doing so many good things. After the Pharisee dropped in his offering, he went and stood in a place where everybody could see him and hear him pray. He certainly was proud! He called it praying, but God did not call it praying. The Pharisee was saying, "God, I am thankful that I am not like other men. Look at that publican over there. I am glad that I'm not like him. I'm glad that I give You all the money that I should give You. I'm glad that two times a week I do not eat food all day long. Aren't I good, Lord?"

What was the publican doing while the Pharisee was proudly praying? The publican was thinking: "I have done wrong; I have sinned." He was remembering that he took some money which did not belong to him. Perhaps even though the publican had done wrong and stolen some money, he was a man who loved his children. Perhaps the publican was very kind to his wife. Perhaps he was very polite to everyone. The publican, however, knew that there was sin in his heart. He did not hold his head up high and proudly as the Pharisee did. He closed his eyes and bowed his head. He was feeling badly about the sin which he had committed. He said, "Dear God, I am a sinner. Please forgive me of my sin; be merciful to me. Help me to do right."

(Hold up the white heart.) Children, this is how the Pharisee saw his heart. He thought that his heart was white and clean and that there was no sin in it. (Hold up the black heart.) This is how the publican saw his heart. He knew that there was sin in his heart. The Pharisee was wrong about his heart. The publican was right about his heart. The Bible says, "For all have sinned." Both of these men finished praying. The Pharisee and the publican left the temple.

God said, "I did not hear the prayer of the Pharisee." (Hold up the white heart.) This is how the Pharisee thought that his heart looked, but, look, this is how God saw his heart. (Turn the white heart around and reveal the black heart to the children.) The Pharisee thought that his heart was clean, but it was dirty!

God said, "I heard the prayer of the publican." (Hold up the black heart.) The publican saw his heart as black as it was—it had sin in it. God said, "The publican is forgiven of his sin." (Show the white side of that heart.)

(Lay down the hearts.) How can hearts be washed clean? (Pick up the bar of soap.) We can't use soap to wash our hearts clean. (Pick up the "something red.") The blood of Jesus makes us clean in our hearts. Jesus' blood came out when He died on the cross. Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. Jesus' blood washes our hearts clean if we believe that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. But, we have to ask Jesus to wash our hearts clean; the minute that we ask Him to wash our hearts clean, He will do it.

(Lay down the soap and the "something red." Pick up the hearts again, the one turned so that the children see black, the other turned so that the children see white.) The proud Pharisee was not good at all. He refused to see the sin in his heart. The publican admitted that there was sin in his heart. He asked Jesus to forgive him. The publican got saved!

Everybody needs to pray what the publican prayed: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." (Show Luke 18:13c to the children.) Learn those words with me.

Have you ever told Jesus that you know you are a sinner? One day I told Him that I knew that I was. Have you ever asked Jesus to save you from your sins? One day I asked Him to save me from my sins. He washed my heart clean so that I can go to Heaven. Now, everyday I can realize that I cannot be perfect. Everyday I have to tell Jesus about the wrong things that I have done, and I have to ask Him to forgive me and ask Him to help me to do better. You need to do that, too. Jesus loves you and He loves me.