

Jesus' Personal Invitation, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-26

Code: 2288

Matthew 11:25-26

We have had the great joy of spending hours and hours over the last months and even several years in the gospel of Matthew. It has been so enriching in my own life, so formative in my own understanding of Christ and His Word. And in our ongoing study of Matthew this morning, we have come to chapter 11 verses 25 to 30. This is the next unit of thought that we want to consider and that we want the Lord to teach us.

And what especially is wonderful about the gospel of Matthew is that we are indeed walking in the footsteps of Christ and He is directly our teacher as He speaks. And I guess there's a special, special quality about that.

But, as we come to verses 25 to 30 which we'll consider today and in the following week, we come to what I like to call "Jesus' Personal Invitation." "Jesus' Personal Invitation"

Our Lord came into the world, the Bible says, to save sinners. That is the purpose of His incarnation. God came to earth to save sinners, to save them from judgment, to save them from wrath, to save them from hell, to save them from sin. And Jesus Christ expressed this purpose of the incarnation when He said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." That is the purpose ... salvation. That is the message of Christianity ... salvation.

Now this certainly expresses the heart of God. If we go back just for an illustration sake to the prophet Isaiah we find that even through the prophet Isaiah God is giving an invitation to people to be saved. In Isaiah 45:22 it says: "Look unto Me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else. I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness and shall not return that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

"Look to Me and be saved: even to Him shall men come." That's an invitation. And that is the heart of God, a heart of salvation.

In Isaiah 55, one other text from the prophet Isaiah, verse 1 says: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters and he that hath no money: come buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me and eat that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto Me. Hear and your soul shall live and I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David."

And again in those three verses in Isaiah 55, God gives an invitation. Come ... no price, but come and take freely.

At the end of the Bible, the 22 chapter of Revelation and the 17th verse, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The Old Testament, the Apocalypse, God is always inviting people to come for salvation. And we find that this was the character of our Lord. Our Lord is God incarnate; we should expect Him to carry on the same effort.

In John 6:35, after just feeding the multitude, providing for them fresh ... fish and bread, He said unto them: "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." And so, He calls men to come and to believe. And by the way, you will note from that verse that coming to Christ and believing on Christ are synonymous... and that is a note you want to keep in your mind. When Jesus says, come He is saying, believe on Me. I am bread and I am water.

In the seventh chapter of John, in the 37th verse, "'In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me," and there you have the same equation, coming is believing, coming is believing.

As the Scripture has said, "Out of His heart shall flow rivers of living water." So, He says, "Come, and eat, I am bread. Come, and drink, I am water."

In chapter 8 verse 12, He says: "I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." He says, "Come to Me for I am not only bread and water, I am light."

And then in chapter 11 as He gathered with those who were brokenhearted over the death of their brother, Lazarus, He said: "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." Come unto Me, He says, for I am life, I am bread, I am water, I am light, I am life. And coming is believing. Believing is coming.

Now, those are beautiful invitations but nowhere in the Scripture is there one more lovely than what we see in our own passage. Look at it with me, Matthew 11:25 to 30.

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me by My Father and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, except the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

What a great passage and you have heard it and read it, perhaps memorized it. But I wonder if you understand the fullness in this wonderful text? To begin with, the key to understanding it is to know what Jesus is offering. If He says - Come unto Me - what is the reason? Simply stated, I will give you rest. And He says it in verse 28 and He says it in verse 29. Verse 28 says: "I will give it," verse 29 says, "You will receive it." But the promise of our Lord is for rest. That is what Jesus offers people, rest.

Now, just what is this rest? Now that is an essential question. What is it? We don't understand the invitation unless we understand what the rest is. We do not know to what Jesus calls men unless we can define that term rest. What is rest? The literal Greek says I will rest you, or I will refresh you, or I will revive you, but of what does our Lord speak when He uses the word anapauo? I think for a clear understanding of this we need to go to the third chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, and I'd like you to turn to it. And we're going to spend a little time, this morning, in this chapter because we cannot understand the rest unless we understand this section of Scripture.

Now, rest is a common Old Testament word. It is used many, many times, for example, in the prophet Isaiah. God repeatedly in the Old Testament promised His people a rest, or a refreshment, or a reviving. And in the Septuagint version uses the very same term, anapauo that is here translated rest. It is translated rest in Matthew 11; it is translated rest here in Hebrews chapter 3. But the concept of rest was a Jewish kind of concept. They thought of God's promise as a promise of rest.

Now, precisely, what is that rest? Look with me at chapter 3 and let's begin at verse 7.

"Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit saith," and he quotes from Psalm 95 which is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Old Testament, "today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation," or actually in the temptation, "in the day of trial in the wilderness. When your fathers put Me to the test, proved Me and saw My works forty years." Now we'll stop there.

This is a warning. Don't harden your heart like your fathers did in the time of testing in the wilderness, when they put Me to the test, I passed the test for forty years they saw My works and didn't believe. Now this opens to us a very important understanding. In the book of Hebrews there are three different audiences in mind periodically. First of all, Hebrews is written to a community of Jewish Christians, but periodically through the book there are warnings because there are some people who are outwardly convinced, Jewish people, outwardly convinced that this is all true and they believe it but they will not commit themselves to Christ, they will not go all the way because they fear being ostracized from their Jewish friends and family, and being unsynagogued as the Old Word would say it. And so because of that they linger at the crossroad, as it were. They are in limbo, they have come out of the past in the sense that they brought themselves to understand the reality of the gospel and they believe it, but they have not entered into it because they have not activated their faith to receive Christ. And so, they sit on the fence and that is the place of a potential apostate who knows it all but never makes the right decision and finally hardens himself into the most severe kind of condemnation because he who knows the most will be condemned the most.

And so, the writer of Hebrews is here giving the second warning section of the book to these intellectually convinced Jews who will not come to Christ. They know it's true, they just won't make the move. So he says, today, hear His voice and do not harden your hearts like your fathers did in the wilderness.

Verse 10, he says: "Wherefore," still quoting the Holy Spirit, "I was grieved with that generation and said, They do always err in heart and they have not known My ways so I swore in My wrath they shall not enter into My ... what? ... rest." And there's the word--rest. Now what does rest mean to the Jews in the wilderness? Well, what it meant to them was the land of Canaan. They had come out of Egypt, as it were, they had moved...they had made the move away from Egypt, but they never had the faith to take the step into the Promised Land, they all died in the wilderness, an entire generation, if you will, of apostates. Now we believe that there were some among them who believed and were probably truly redeemed in actual history, but in the analogy that He's drawing here, He is saying - These people came out of Egypt. In other words, they started to move in the right direction and they believed that there was a better land, and a better way, and that's like the Jew who sees the truth of the gospel, but they

wandered in limbo until they died without ever entering into that. And He says don't be like that. Don't be convinced that the gospel is really true but stay in the limbo of indecision until finally you feel nothing but God's wrath, but rather enter into His rest.

Now, in His analogy I believe rest must speak of salvation. These people are not Christians and I know that because of the way He puts it. For one thing, it says it assumes in verse 7 that they do not hear God's voice ... they do not hear God's voice. And if I read my Bible right in John 10 Jesus said: "My sheep ... what?... hear My voice, and they know Me." So, these are people who don't hear.

Secondly, verse 8, they harden their hearts. And if I read Ezekiel right, when God redeems a soul He takes away the stony heart and puts in a heart of flesh. And not only that, in verse 10 it says, "They always erred in heart." They were sinful. And then it says, "They have not known My ways." Now you show me a person who does not know God's ways, who always errs in his heart, a person who hardens and resists God and who doesn't hear His voice and I'll show you an unbeliever. These are unbelieving people who do not enter into rest.

Rest was Canaan. And rest in the analogy is the equivalent of salvation. That is rest ... salvation. That is the essence of what I believe the writer of Hebrews is saying, and our Lord as well.

So, verse 12, then, draws it into the very practical application to the Hebrews ... take heed, brethren. And I believe that is a Jewish brethren as opposed to chapter 3 verse 1 which is a Christian brethren and there he says, "holy brethren." But here it's just Jewish brethren, you better take heed lest there be in any of you as there were in those an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. That cannot describe a believer ... cannot. An evil heart of unbelief departing from the living God? And yet, many people have tried to make this chapter apply to Christians entering into a sort of a second level rest. These are unbelievers. Don't be like that...departing from the living God with a heart of unbelief.

Verse 13 says that these people were hardened "Through the deceitfulness of sin." So, I think in the analogy here, rest has to equate with salvation.

Verse 14, he says: "We have become partakers of Christ," literally, only, "if we hold on to our confidence to the end." In other words, people who depart from the living God, who harden their hearts, who don't believe, who do always evil, who don't hear His voice and don't know Him, obviously have not become partakers of Christ. And so he goes on to emphasize again as in verse 15, "Today, hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the day of provocation." And goes back through some of the same thought.

Verse 19 sums it up. "So we see they could not enter in because of ... what? ... unbelief." You see, what keeps you from rest is unbelief because if you enter into salvation, you enter into salvation this way, "For by grace are you saved through ... what? ... faith." You believe unto salvation. When they did not believe they did not enter rest.

Then in chapter 4 verse 1 he follows along, "Let us therefore fear," let's take that illustration and learn from it, "lest the promise being left for us entering into His rest, we should still miss it," is what he means. In other words, we have the promise of rest, too ... salvation rest ... and yet we can come short of that same thing "For we have had the good news preached to us just as they did, but with them there was no benefit because it wasn't mixed with faith."

Verse 3: "For we who have believed do enter into rest." And then he goes on talking more about it. I would just draw you down to verse 9: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. And he that has entered into His rest has ceased from his own works." Now there was the key right there. The Jew believed he could enter into rest by ... what? ... by works. The writer says if you're going to enter into true rest, you cease from your works. And yet in verse 11, most interestingly, he says, "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." You cease from works in one sense and yet you labor to enter in, you strive to enter into that rest and not to fall by the wayside ... after the example and illustration of the people in the wilderness who died because of unbelief.

Now, that's just a little look at Hebrews that I hope will help you. Go back to Matthew 11. What is rest, then? And I believe you have the same concept here, Jesus says: "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest." You shall find rest for your souls; I think He is offering them salvation, saving rest. Now just to take this a step further, I looked up in the dictionary, and you really don't want to do Bible study out of a dictionary, but just to kind of deal with the ... the English concept of rest I looked it up and found there are five definitions given for rest and they marvelously parallel what salvation rest is.

Number one, the dictionary says that rest is to cease from action or motion, to cease from action or motion, to stop labor and exertion. And that is a marvelous parallel to, I believe, the rest that our Lord offers. To enter into God's rest means no more self-effort to earn God's favor, no more fleshly works to seek His mercy. All works-righteousness systems end as a way to God. We rest from legalism, from self-righteousness. We rest in His consuming grace.

Secondly, the dictionary says that rest is to be free from whatever wearies or disturbs. Sometimes you'll hear somebody say, "You kids don't give me any rest." It's just relief from whatever wearies or constantly disturbs. In the spiritual sense, to enter God's rest means to be at peace with God, to possess, not only peace with God, but the peace of God which

passes understanding, to have your heart totally calm in the midst of a storm, to have no more frustration and no more anxiety over life and destiny, no need to worry, sin is forgiven, no guilt is there. To be free from whatever wearies or disturbs.

Thirdly, the dictionary says to rest is to be settled or fixed. Something rests somewhere. It's fixed there, it's settled there. And I believe in a spiritual sense that's a wonderful analogy as well. To enter God's rest means to be positionally secured in God, to end the running from philosophy to philosophy, religion to religion, guru to guru. The vacillating that comes from terrible insecurity in not knowing the truth, but now in Christ we are settled, unmovable, firm, rooted and grounded in Him.

Fourthly, to rest means to remain confident or trustful. And to enter into God's rest means to enjoy faith without fear, to enjoy security, to have perfect trust that our time and eternity is in His care and He loves us.

And fifthly, the word rest means to lean on, or to repose, or to depend on. And to enter God's rest means from now on we depend on Him for everything and He supplies our needs.

Now what is rest? To cease from action, to be free from whatever disturbs, to be fixed and settled, to be confident and trustful, to lean on, to repose, to depend. All of that is embodied in our salvation.

And now you can go back and look at verse 28 again. When our Lord says, "I will give you rest," He is encompassing all of that and infinitely more than that.

Now, let me take it a step further. Rest was also a Jewish term for the Kingdom. The Kingdom is called the time of rest, or the time of refreshing. Rest is also a term for heaven. For in the Revelation it says: "She shall rest from her labors, and her works do follow." So when the Lord says you will enter into rest He means personal, immediate, eternal salvation with its Kingdom relationship, and its heavenly relationship as well. The fullness of all that God can give to calm the troubled soul ... rest. And this is what the Lord offers. Jesus came into the world to give rest to those who would come to Him. And what did we say the word come means? To believe. For those who believe in Him there is salvation; that is the simple gospel invitation that our Lord gives. But in its simplicity there is profundity. For as you look at those verses, six choice verses, you find the five essential elements in a genuine invitation to salvation, five essential elements in a genuine invitation to salvation. And I really believe it's important for us to look into these because I think there are so many times nowadays when we think we're giving a true invitation to salvation but it is missing some of these ingredients.

If we are to understand what a true invitation is, we must understand how our Lord gave an invitation, and that's what He does right here. This is Jesus Christ's own call to people to come to Him. And how did He do it? It's so essential for us because we so often leave out the essential elements, as we shall see when we go through.

Now, before we look specifically at the first of these five, and we're only going to look at one of them today, and I hope all four of the other ones next time, they're not as long as this one ... kind of getting started. But before we do that, let me set the context for you, look at the first part of verse 25; "At that time Jesus answered and said." Now, that just kind of frames a little bit for us to help us know where we are ... "At that time." The question immediately that hits you as you study is what is the antecedent of that? What time? Well, it could be the very moment of time preceding in which He upbraided the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, and pronounced doom and judgment upon them for their rejection of Him and His message. It could have been at that very time that Jesus turned immediately and gave an invitation.

It is also very possible that He gave these similar teachings on many other occasions and that it was at that time in which, in a more general sense, the Galilean ministry was coming to a climax. At the time when all of the reactions to Jesus were starting to crystalize. At the time when He had pretty well filled out the Galilean ministry. When the Messianic evidence had been presented, when there was no other possible conclusion then that He was God incarnate, the Christ, the Messiah ... the time that He had sent out the twelve, according to chapter 10, and then according to Luke 10 He had sent out the seventy. And so, He has these eighty-two people out and they're proclaiming the message and now they have come back, Luke 10 tells us, and they've reported to Him the same thing that He found out, that the vast majority of the people in Galilee had rejected His message, and His person. And it may have been at that time when knowing their full rejection He reproaches those evil cities for rejecting Him, but then turns to a personal invitation. He knows that the nation has turned their back on Him. He knows that they are willfully denying their Messiah, but He still offers a personal invitation to those who are working and bearing heavy burdens and seeking rest. And He calls to them to come to Him.

So, whether it be immediately on the heels of the former speech in judgment, or whether it simply be in the general time-context of the Galilean ministry and the crystalizing of its opposition as the folks that He sent out have come back and reported to Him, or not, it fits in either way. We don't know which one, but either one, it all fits into the same basic chronology.

Now in the sections that we've been looking at, 11 and 12, the Lord gives us all the different reactions that people had to Him. We've already seen the reaction of doubt. We've seen the reaction of criticism. We've seen the reaction of indifference. We are yet to see the reactions

of amazement, fascination, rejection and blasphemy. And all of these are the crystalizing reactions against Christ, but in the middle of it comes this lovely invitation. And it's as if He says even if the whole nation turns their back on Me, My arms are still extended to those who are weary and heavy laden. You can still come.

Our Lord knew the attitude was going to come to a full rejection on a national scale, and yet He reaches out to those who wish to come. The early days of popularity had passed, opposition has formed itself, but in the midst of it all, the Lord is still tenderly giving His invitation. And it always kind of interests me that right next to a cursing of just a ... amazing strength comes an invitation of equally amazing tenderness. The last passage and this one, side by side, speak of the heart of God. He's a God of justice and a God of judgment and a God of wrath and yet a God of love and grace and mercy.

The phrase also says, "Jesus answered and said." Now that does not mean there was a question, that is a Hebrew idiom, somewhat familiar in Scripture, that simply means that He openly spoke. He spoke out openly. His invitation was not a private one. It was not a secretive one. It was an open one. An invitation to salvation. He calls people to come personally to Him.

Now, as the invitation starts I want you to notice how it starts. He begins this way: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Why does He do that? Because, I think, this is very basic to any presentation of the gospel, or any call to people to come to Christ, and that is this, a recognition that all responses, negative and positive, are in the ultimate sovereign control of God. To begin with, the Lord says - I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. And He uses a title that fills up all of our thinking, sovereign of the universe, Lord over everything. A recognition of God's utter, absolute sovereign control. Lord of heaven and earth. Nothing outside of that sphere. I thank You because You are in charge.

Verse 26: "You are doing that which seemed good in Your sight." In other words, in all of an approach to an invitation there must be a recognition that God is the one who must be praised, who must be determinative ... determinative in what happens. And so our Lord recognizes the sovereignty of God.

I've had people say to me, "Do you get upset when people don't get saved? Do you...does it bother you?" And on the one hand I say, "Yes," just as it would bother Christ when He wept over the city of Jerusalem. Yet on the other hand, I see Christ here saying Father, I thank Thee that the thing is going according to Your plan, even though the mass of people are rejecting, it's still Your plan working out and not frustrated at all. Sovereign of the universe, You do all things right, it seemed good in Thy sight to do it this way and I thank You for that.

That is a great confidence, people. Whenever you go into any kind of a situation where you present Christ, to believe in your heart without a shadow of a doubt that God is the sovereign behind everything. He is behind everything. It is His plan right on course. And our Lord can rejoice in it even though it involves a persecution of Himself and His own, even though He looks at the unrepentant, vindictive, bitter, hateful, cynical rejection of people, He knows they can't thwart the purpose of God, so the Lord praises God that the plan is His and it is working out as it seemed good in the Father's sight. What a great confidence to be able to preach. You know, if I didn't think ... if I thought I was responsible for who got saved, it would just drive you out of your mind. I mean, I couldn't survive. But I'm not responsible for that.

I remember someone who was baptized at Grace Church and they were just a new Christian and I knew what they meant, but they came into the baptistry and they said, "I'd like to thank John MacArthur for saving me." If you got saved by John MacArthur, you didn't get saved, you're lost. I remember a pastor, I was holding a week of meetings, and we were sitting in the front row and some music was going on and he said, "See that fellow over there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "That's one of my converts." "Oh," I said, "isn't that wonderful?" He said, "Yeah, mine, not the Lord's." I knew what he meant.

It's not our job to save people. That's God's job. And the plan is going according to His good pleasure. It seemed good in His sight. And He was the one who determined it. And, of course, when the Lord came into the world, He said, "My meet is to do the will of Him who sent Me." He had an unyielding trust in God's perfect will. And so He rests in the sovereign, good purpose of the Father and thanks Him that He is the one who makes salvation a reality. And with the affirmation that the Father's in control, He then turns to the invitation, and there are five elements in His invitation. Five features, five truths that are key.

The first one, let's call humility, or dependence, you can use either term. Humility or dependence, and those are just key words to key the thought we're going to look at.

Verse 25: "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because ..." and here it comes, "Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good, or right, in Your sight." Father, I thank You that the plan is ... that you don't get saved because you're intelligent. I thank You for that. I thank You, Father, that no one is shut out because they're stupid; no one is shut out because they're dumb.

Now, some people have thought maybe you were shut out if you were smart. You've heard - He's too smart for his own good. Some people might take this verse to mean, You've hidden these things from the wise and prudent. In other words, the smarter you are, the more trouble you're in because God just doesn't want smart people in heaven. That's not what it's saying.

Let's look at what it's saying. First of all, look at the phrase "these things." We have to know what it is that He's hidden. What are these things? Well, it certainly wouldn't be mathematics and it certainly wouldn't be science and history and it certainly wouldn't be worldly wisdom and all of that because those things aren't hidden from the wise and the prudent. And certainly aren't revealed unto babies, that's nepion and it means babies, suckling little baby. I mean, it isn't...it isn't educational things, it isn't vast scientific information, it isn't great philosophical insight, these things...what things...tauta? Well, what does it refer to? Well, I think maybe the best answer is Acts 1:3. It says: "To whom He showed Himself alive," our Lord after His passion, "and He was seen by them," that is His disciples, "for forty days and He was speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom Of God." That's what He is talking about. The things pertaining to the Kingdom. The same things that He always talked about. He always talked about the things pertaining to the Kingdom. Before the cross and after the cross and the resurrection, He continued to talk about the things pertaining to the Kingdom ... the teachings of Jesus about God...the teachings of Jesus about righteousness...the teachings of Jesus about salvation ... the teachings of Jesus about Messiahship, Lordship, Saviorhood ... the teachings of Jesus about obedience and submission ... the teachings of Jesus about everything in God's Kingdom, deep, eternal, spiritual truth.

You say, "Now, wait a minute. You mean to tell me that deep, eternal, spiritual truth is not available to the educated and the wise? It's only available to the babies?" That's right. Thank You, God. The Sonsays, thank You, God, that You put down human wisdom, human reasoning.

What is this saying? Well, it's saying, in effect and stay with me and we'll see how it clears up, I Corinthians 2, saying just what that says. Verse 9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." Now that's empirical, external objective study. Eye-see, ear-hear no, you can't do it. The eye can't see it and the ear can't hear it. It is not empirically or objectively available. "Neither has it entered into the heart of man." That's subjective. It is not externally perceivable, it is not internally perceivable, "The things which God has prepared for them that love Him." There we are back to those things again. Those things pertaining to the Kingdom are not available through external perception or internal rationalization.

"God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, the deep things of God." And then in verse 14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they're foolishness, he can't understand them." Back in chapter 1 he says: "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish ... what? ... foolishness." It's a stumbling block. It's folly to them.

Now, what is He then saying? These things, regarding the Kingdom, are hidden from the intelligent people. It just doesn't quite mean that. No, it means it's ... they're hidden from the people who think they can discover the truth with their intelligence alone. Do you get that? They are hidden from those who are dependent on their wisdom and their intelligence. By the way, those two terms are basically interchangeable; it means intelligence and understanding, wisdom and prudence, they really refer to one general class of people who imagine that truth can be known through the human mind. It is especially applicable to the Rabbis and the Pharisees and the scribes who were closed to the revelation of God in Christ because they thought they already had attained to human wisdom. And if you don't think they were really involved in human wisdom, you've missed it because they depended upon human resources to interpret everything, human reason to interpret everything.

A couple of weeks ago when I was in Milwaukee, a Rabbi spoke who is the leading orthodox Rabbi in America and perhaps one of the most leading orthodox Rabbis in the world, was just offered the chair of Rabbinic studies at the Univ...Hebrew University in Jerusalem. And he spoke on some Old Testament things and he said, "We believe that the truth is not contained only in the Scripture, but it is contained in the traditions and teaching of the elders." And when he spoke, all the time he spoke, he kept going back to this Rabbi said this and this teacher said this and this rabbi said this, and all of this pile of human wisdom. He kept talking about it under the term legislation, and Rabbi--Rabbi so-and-so said ... this is the legislation and this is the legislation, and his entire life was a maze of trying to figure his way through a bunch of human reason. And he was not open or interested in the revelation of the New Testament because he already knew the truth, he thought. A victim of his own intelligence as he limited it to that.

The statement does not mean that God has withheld the truth from smart people, it just means that every person who thinks he's so smart he doesn't need it is doomed. In fact, there's a sense in which if you think you're so smart that you don't need the truth and You willfully reject it, God will then close your mind to it once and for all.

In John 12:37 Jesus had done so many miracles yet they believed not. They had enough evidence, they're just like the folks in the book of Hebrews that we saw, they had enough evidence, same as the ones in Galilee in Matthew 11. They didn't believe. Verse 39 says: "Therefore they could not believe." You see, it went from a personal choice to reject, to a judicial, divine, affirmation of that. They couldn't believe, as Isaiah says, "He blinded their eyes, hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them." They wouldn't believe and they couldn't believe. That is the terrible, terrible, terrible definition of apostasy. Men who know and they will not believe and God confirms them in that and they cannot believe.

So, the reference here is to a wisdom and an intelligence that is corrupted and perverted by ... and here comes the key word ... pride. Pride. Our Lord thanks the Father that intellectual power is not necessary for salvation. But He recognizes that intellectual pride keeps men from salvation. If you could get saved by your intellect, it wouldn't be to the glory of God, would it? It would be to your glory.

One writer said: "The heart not the head is the home of the gospel."

Our Lord is not contemm... condemning intelligence, if you're intelligent, He made you that way. He's not condemning intelligence. He is condemning intellectual pride and He is also saying that you don't have to be intelligent to get saved. In fact, our Lord said: "Except you become as a little child, you cannot ... what?...enter the Kingdom."

Let me sum it up this way. It is not intelligence which shuts people out of the Kingdom. It is intellectual pride. And it is not intelligence which gets one into the Kingdom. It is humility. Intelligence, then, is not the issue. Intellectual pride is the issue. And they were too proud, too self-seeking, too egoistic, to busy justifying themselves by their own attainments.

Psalm 138:6 says: "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knows afar off," in other words, they have no intimacy with Him at all. So, He says - Father, I thank You that intelligence isn't the issue. You don't need to be intelligent to get saved. And I thank You that intellectual pride shuts men out because that wouldn't glorify You. But I'm also thankful that You have revealed these things unto babes for that does glorify You. And that lets the least of men have access to Your Kingdom.

Now, what are babes? Nepios, that just means ababy. I think it is a synonym for a suckling--that is a baby that's nursing. You're talking about a very small child, that's Matthew 21:16, babes and sucklings. I think that it's a very small child you're talking about. I mean, one who doesn't have any intelligence, any education, any whatever, I mean, it hasn't been manifest yet, we don't really know, it's just very, very limited. It is the term used, for example, of those in I Corinthians 3:1 and Hebrews 5 who drink milk and can't even eat solid food. It is used in I Corinthians 13:11 of those who have not yet learned to speak. It is used in Ephesians 4:14 of those who are helpless. So, we have a helpless child, baby, can't speak, can't eat solid food, nursing at its mother's breast and there's one word that best can sum up that kind of person and that is dependent. Wouldn't you agree? Dependent.

I think that's probably the best definition of a baby there is in terms of what it needs. It's dependent. If you just leave a baby it will die ... it will die...totally dependent.

Who are the ones who can enter into salvation? They are the dependent, not the independent, the dependent. They are the humble, not the proud, the humble. Those who are humbly confessing their dependency. They are helpless and they recognize it. They are empty and they know it. They are nothing and they're aware of it. They are deeply aware that they have no resources in life, none. And they turn in utter dependency, and that is what our Lord means when He says: "Except a man become as a little child he can't enter the Kingdom." You have to come to the point where you abandon all of your own resources, you see.

So, the comparison between the wise and the babes is not a comparison between smart and dumb people. Not a comparison between educated and uneducated people. It is a comparison between those who think by their own intellect they can save themselves and those who know they can't, and are totally dependent on God's grace. It is a grace and works comparison. It is a God and man comparison. So, the prosperous, self-sufficient, egotistical, works-righteousness inhabitants of the Galilean towns never did understand, but here and there less sophisticated people, deeply distressed over their own emptiness, humble and broken were open to the revelation of God in Christ. And so it seemed good in God's sight.

Good. Why? Because that glorifies God. And that is the supreme reason for everything in the universe. It wouldn't glorify God if the conceited entered the Kingdom.

In Psalm 34:2 it says: "The humble shall hear and be glad." In Proverbs 22:4 it says: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor in life." And so, beloved, to begin with I think in any legitimate invitation there must be an affirmation that humility is where it begins.

Go with me for a moment backwards to the fifth chapter of Matthew. And here again the words of our Lord which say the same thing. "When He opened His mouth there and taught them He said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." What does that mean? A begging spirit, a person in this situation would be cringing in a dark corner with his face covered and his hand out begging. The poverty spoken of here is a word that means poverty so abjected it can do nothing but beg. The one who has no resources and knows it. The one who is ashamed to lift up his head. The one who cringes in a corner with his hand out. He is the one who gets the Kingdom, see. This was absolutely the opposite of everything that the Jews had been taught by the Pharisees and the scribes.

Further, in verse 4 it says: "Blessed are they that mourn." Who not only are aware of the brokenness of their spirit, who not only are aware of the poverty of their soul but who mourn over their condition.

And then the next: "Blessed are the meek," who are humble. And then who are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. They know they don't have it, they know they don't have righteousness. They know that and they hunger and they thirst for it. And so, the Lord said you show me the man in the corner who has no resources and who holds his hand out and who weeps over his lack of resources and who is humble before a holy God and hungers for a righteousness that he knows he doesn't have and I'll show you somebody who will get the Kingdom. God has revealed these things concerning His Kingdom to those kinds of people. And so our invitation, beloved, begins then with being an invitation to the humble and the dependent people.

That's why it's so very difficult, you see, to reach the superstars, the people who already think they have everything, and so easy to reach the broken people by comparison.

In Isaiah 57:15 there's a marvelous, marvelous verse, and this is a good place to kind of draw our thoughts to a conclusion. This and one other New Testament passage. Listen to Isaiah 57:15: "For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place." Now just stop there for a second. What a statement! I mean, Isaiah has just got God up as far as he can get Him in his vocabulary. The high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, who dwells in the high and holy place. I mean, he just pushes God as far out into the atmosphere as he can get Him.

And we say, "Oh, transcendent God ... high and holy in eternity." He says, "I dwell there." And then he says this, I love this, "With Him who is of a contrite and humble spirit." Isn't that great? Man thinks that he must attain to that, so he worships his intellect and his reason. And God is up there with the contrite, humble spirit. And then he says and using the Greek word used in the Septuagint, "To give rest to the spirit of the humble and to give rest to the heart of the contrite." Same word rest. God says I give rest, but I give rest to humble people, people who are filled with contrition, brokenness, a sense of dependency. That's the kind of invitation the Lord offers. No place for pride.

In Luke 18, two men went into the temple to pray and the Pharisee stood up and said - I thank Thee that I'm not as other men are, like this crummy tax collector over here. I fast twice a week, give tithes of all that I possess.

You see, he thought he was good enough ... intellectual pride, religious intellectual pride, religious philosophical intellectual pride, but nonetheless intellectual pride. He could attain it on his own. I'm not like other people, I'm superior.

And over in the corner was the sinner beating on his breast and saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And he wouldn't even lift his head up. And Jesus said that man went home

justified rather than the other. There's no place in God's Kingdom for pride, it's only for the humble, it's only for the babes, for the sucklings, for the dependent.

The poet said it this way: "Still to the lowly soul He doth Himself depart and for His dwelling and His throne He chooses the humble heart." I look to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word, says God. Let's pray.

Father, we hear the echo of the invitation of our Lord. First He offers it against the opposition of the world knowing full well that most will turn it down. But nonetheless in grace He offers it. Secondly, He offers it with a great sense of Your sovereignty knowing full well that all that happens comes from You and glorifying You for the plan that begins with humility ... that You have so designed, God, that men who enter Your Kingdom can have no glory for themselves for they must come dependent and broken and humble. May it be, Lord, that there are such humble hearts today in this place who are willing to become as a little child, as it says in Luke 18:4, to enter into Your Kingdom, who are willing to climb off the tower of their pride to descend to that corner where they cower as beggars and lift up an empty hand to Thee. Father, before You can save You must humble, so humble hearts and make them dependent that in their dependency they may turn to You to be fed and to be led into Your Kingdom. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).