Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Humbling the Exalted--Exalting the Humble
Scripture: Luke 14:7-14
Code: 42-193

2005

This morning we continue in our study of Luke's gospel. We come to Chapter 14 and verses 7-14. Luke 14:7-14. Some of you will remember some years back a very famous incident with a religious cult leader by the name of Jim Jones. It's become pretty much legendary. Jim Jones led his followers down to a South American country known as Guyana and there he managed to convince them to all drink Kool-aid laced with cyanide and hundreds of people committed suicide in a mass demonstration of how effective a leader Jim Jones was.

What happened that day in Guyana when all of those people, men, women, and children, committed suicide and believed that they were following Jim Jones into heaven was really a parable. It was really a metaphor. Really a picture. In fact, it was a very dramatic and unforgettable picture of what all false leaders do to their followers. The real tragedy of Jonestown was not that all those people died physically. The real tragedy was that they died eternally.

The real tragedy was not that their bodies were left in a South American jungle. The real tragedy was their souls will spend eternity in eternal hell; everlasting punishment. But Jim Jones is not solitary monster by the way. He is no solitary figure, though there have been I suppose few who have been so dramatic in the way they have led their followers to physical to death. All false teachers, in effect, do the same thing spiritually.

The great tragedy of false leaders is that they lead people into hell. And like so many in the history of the world who follow false teachers, the Jews trusted their religious leaders. They trusted their religious leaders with their lives as people do today. All across the planet and always since there has been religion, people have put their souls in the hands of their trusted religious leaders. Who like Jim Jones lead them down the path to eternal destruction.

And the leaders of the Jews were no different. The people expected to follow their leaders into heaven and instead, they followed their leaders into hell. That is standard for people in a religion. They trust their leaders. The expect that their leaders know the path to life. That they know the way to heaven. But the horrible reality is people follow their religious leaders away from God forever. There is only one way to heaven and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Savior and the true gospel is the only way to enter heaven.

The leaders of Israel, as they had done throughout the Old Testament, led their people into judgment. And they were doing it again during the ministry of Jesus Christ. Chapter 13 ends "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her." You have always done it this way. "How often I wanted to gather your children together just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you would not have it. Behold your house is left to you desolate."

This is their history. Kill the prophets that are sent from God with the truth. Stone the messengers that come from heaven with the message of salvation. They will take this all the way to the point where they will kill the Son of God, the Messiah Himself. And the people will do it under the leadership of their trusted religious leaders. This is nothing new. This is the way it always is. People follow their false leaders into deception and lies and destruction.

Now as we have been working our way through the gospel of Luke, we have come to understand that the leaders of the people during the time of our Lord were a group called the Pharisees. And though there were only 6,000 of them, they were the influencers. Pharisee comes from a word that means separated. As we saw last time, they found their prominence before Christ. They found it in a period between the Old and the New Testament called the intertestimental period. They rose to prominence in that time when Greek culture was having tremendous inroads into Israel and into the thinking of the Jewish people and they wanted to pull the people back from the influences of pagan culture. They were the fundamentalists.

They are a kind of a branch of the Hasidim, the pious ones. They opposed the encroaching influence of Greek and Roman culture especially under Antiochus Epiphanes the Greek ruler who did such horrific things in Israel. Their archrivals in Jewish society were a group called the Sadducees. They were wealthy, the Sadducees were. They were aristocratic. They were priests and Levites at the top of the sort of social food chain. While the Pharisees were middle class and they were lay people, but they had the influence with the people and even though they knew their movement needed to reach the people, they treated the people with a great measure of contempt, as we read in John 7:49.

They viewed the people in a condescending fashion as contemptuous and ignorant and beneath them. But at the same time, they felt the responsibility to the law of God to protect the people from the encroaching influences of pagan idolatry. It was 70 A.D. after our Lord had gone back to heaven and three decades later or so when the temple was destroyed. With the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and the destruction of the city, the Sadducees disappeared from history, because they basically were concentrated in the temple. They were concentrated in the leadership of the nation and when the temple was destroy and Jerusalem was destroyed it was the end for them. That left one other somewhat well-known group called the Zealots. They were the terrorists. They went around stabbing Romans as we know.

They had a revolt in the year 135 A.D., and it was called the Bar Kochva revolt. It was crushed and the Zealots were eliminated. The Pharisees then in the second century became the dominant Jewish leadership, the dominant viewpoint of Judaism was a Phariseeic viewpoint. They codified that in writings call the Mishnah. You may have heard of the Mishnah. It is the written compilation of the oral law, the oral rituals and the oral tradition. They finally wrote it all down. The Mishnah when it was all written down in that second century sealed their leadership.

Sadducees were gone, Pharisees were gone, the Essenes were gone and Phariseeism is synonymous with historic Judaism. From the second century on, Phariseeism is Judaism and today orthodox Judaism is the vestiges of Phariseeism. So they have been around a long time. And so because they captured the people through the synagogues. They were the ones that got into the synagogues, disseminated their teaching in the synagogues and the synagogues were the grass roots, local meeting places where the people went to school and were taught.

At the time of Christ, they were ritualized, they were external, but their hearts were not changed. They were full of pride. As I said, they were condescending even to the people they were trying to reach and they were hypocritical. Jesus blistered them in Matthew 23 with the worst kind of denunciation He gave to anybody. They became the arch-hypocrites and Jesus denounced them for it. In fact, they were so hypocritical and this is almost humorous if it weren't so sad, that the Jewish Talmud, the Jewish Talmud, which is the compilation of rabbinic writings from antiquity, lists seven classes of Pharisees, six of which are hypocrites. So even the Jewish rabbis saw them as hypocrites, and certainly they were.

Jesus called them blind leaders of the blind, Matthew 15:14. And truly they were. They went around making proselytes and Matthew 23:15 says, "They made them seven times or far more the sons of hell than they themselves were." Now naturally they came into conflict with Jesus. In fact, most of the conflict in the ministry of Jesus is with the Pharisees and they're underlings, the scribes who were the legal experts that basically built the academic and interpretive foundation for Phariseeism. And so as we know in studying the life of Jesus He was ever and always in conflict with the Pharisees and the scribes or lawyers.

They saw Him as a threat to their popularity. They saw Him having grassroots impact in synagogues and towns and villages and being a threat to their powerbase. A threat to their religious system, a threat to their viewpoints, because He was swaying the people. Now our text is one of the confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes among many. And our Lord directs His words at them and while He minces no words, there is a measure of mercy in what He says. He speaks to them always about the sin of hypocrisy and pride. He unmasks their evil intensions toward Him. And yet there is a mercy in what He says because it is also a call for them to repent being unmasked if they can only see the truth of who they are. They can turn and recover and come to Him

and enter the kingdom.

But they must humble themselves. And so Jesus directs His words at their pride and calls for humility. Let me read this section here in Chapter 14 very quickly. We'll start at verse 1 so you get the setting. "Came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread. They were watching Him closely. There in front of them was a certain man suffering from dropsy," or edema as we said last week. "And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees saying, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they kept silent and He took hold of him and healed him and sent him away. And He said to them, which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day? They could make no reply to this. And He began speaking a parable to the invited guest when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table saying to them, when you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor. Lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him and he who invited you both shall come and say to you give place to this man and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.

But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you friend move up higher. Then you will have honor in the sight of all who are the table with you for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." And he also went on to say to the one who invited him, "when you give a luncheon or a dinner do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors lest they also invite you in return and repayment come to you, but when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed since they do not have the means to repay you for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Lunch at the home of a Pharisee. And last time we saw how it began. It began with a miracle as Jesus healed the man with edema. Jesus violating their Sabbath tradition, but not violating the law of God. There is no such prohibition for healing on the Sabbath in the Bible. This was their own embellishments. But He unmasked their hypocrisy by saying, do you think I'm breaking your law to heal this man who's drowning in this fluid in his body? But if you had a son or an ox that fell into a well of fluid and it was the Sabbath day, you'd get him out because you love your son and because your ox is worth money.

And He unmasked their hypocrisy and that's why they couldn't reply. Having done that He then turns to speak in verse 7 and He speaks, it says, a parable. Actually there are a couple of stories, a couple of scenarios that He paints here that are so fascinating. Let's just look at three things, first the illustration, then the assumption behind the illustration, and then the application, very simple.

The illustration, Jesus uses this social event on a Sabbath afternoon following the synagogue service in the morning where He has been invited to be a guest at the home of a Pharisee not because they

wanted to honor Him, but because they wanted to discredit Him. That's why they had the man with dropsy there right in front of Him. They wanted Him to violate the Sabbath so they could then have in the view of everyone a violation of the law that would prove to everyone that He had no regard for the law of God, no regard for the law of Moses, no regard for the religious traditions of Judaism, and therefore He could not be from God. So they were setting Him up. But in the end, they were unmasked as hypocrites and sat there in silence. And so He had then commanded the attention of everyone. They had nothing to say and He had plenty to say.

And so He says does, Luke...that Jesus began speaking a parable to the invited guests. The invited guests back in three, lawyers and Pharisees. They hung out and they didn't open up to embrace anybody outside their circle. They were the spiritually superior and they didn't like the riffraff to be in their midst. The only reason Jesus was there was to set Him up. The only sick man with edema, by the way as I said last time, which was believe to be related to sin particularly sexual sin or some horrible bodily uncleanness. The only reason they would allow an unclean man like that and a sinner which they believed was under the judgment of God in their midst was to be part of the set up to discredit Jesus.

And so Jesus speaks to these Pharisees and their scribes a parable, a parabole. Now let me tell you what a parable is because it's very broad. I think sometimes you think of a parable and you think it's kind of an allegory. It isn't. A parable has a variety of meanings. It is not allegory. That is to say it is not a kind of story where everything has a secret meaning. It's not a story where there's some mystical spiritual meaning that is the true meaning. It's simply a story to make a point. It is a figurative story. It is a figurative example. It is a metaphor. It is an analogy. A story that illustrates. And in this case as typical in the use that Jesus gives to them, they are earthly stories that illustrate heavenly issues.

They are a simple story about something with which people are familiar that opens to their understanding something with which they are not familiar. This is just an earthly kind of behavior that illustrates a heavenly kind of behavior. As I said the silence has set the stage for Jesus to speak and the miracle has been done, the questions that they would not answer leave them in silence and He launches His teaching. And He does, verse 7, when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table.

While they were watching Him, as it says back in verse 1, watching Him closely, He was watching them. They were watching Him to try to catch Him in a violation of the law. He was watching them for the moment when they would reveal their self-promoting hearts, and there it was. Middle voice in the Greek, picking out for themselves the places of honor at the table. This is a mad Phariseeic scramble for the best seats. Now, if I can just give you a little bit of a background in terms of Jewish history.

In later years, they wrote a lot about this. Typically the table would be in the middle. It would be a long table. And around the table would be people seated in a U-shaped fashion. There was only one head of the table and then down both sides to the far end. It could be a long table or a series of tables so that it could be a long way. The host would sit in the middle at the head of the table and then in importance the guest would sit on his right and his left and then it would begin to flow all the way down to the least important people being way down at the other end.

That's pretty much how it still is at important events. The places of honor were not marked with a sign. They were determined by the host. But the nearer you were to the host, the more honor you had. And honor was a big thing for them. I mean, they lived in an honor, shame kind of world and that was a part of the culture itself, but in particular was a part of their perspective because they were desperately desirous of being elevated in the eyes of men.

In Matthew Chapter 23, in verse 5, "they do all their deeds to be noticed by men." That is an indicted of the Pharisees and the scribes. They do all their deeds to be noticed by men. "They love the place," verse 6, "of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues. And they loved to be called rabbi and teacher and father and leader," and so forth. They love that and so there was this mad scramble to get the seats nearest to the host who was a prominent Pharisee. In Luke 11:42, "Woe to you Pharisees, you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb," He says. And then in verse 43, "Woe to you again, you love the front seats in the synagogues." They were into the front seat, the seats that were reserved for those to be honored. And this is such an obvious characteristic that it appears a number of times in the scripture. In thinking just here off the top of my head, Luke 20:46. "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and love respectful greetings in the marketplaces and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, but who devour widows houses. And for appearance sake offer long prayers."

It was all about appearance. So here they are in a mad scramble to get the best seats nearest the host. The display gave the Lord the necessary parable to teach the truth that was so critical. And at the same time a gracious truth as well. He gives them essentially what amounts to an indictment of their pride and an invitation to the kingdom. If you go down in verse 15, He even says "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom." This is one of the guests who says this and he knows that Jesus has been talking about the kingdom.

I mean, his people got the message. The people sitting around. One of those reclining at the table says to Him, "Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom." They knew what He was talking about. These illustrations had to do with the kingdom of God and they knew it. By the way, they had interesting seats in those days a little reading about that called triclinium; it seated three people. It was a couch and it seated three people on each couch. So there'd be one couch at the head with the host in the middle and the most important dignitaries on either said. And then those couches would go along. They reclined on their elbow and ate at leisure as you know.

Now how did you get the chief seat? How did that work? How did you get to the front? Well, Jesus explains how you get to the front. Because you have the capability to reciprocate. The end of verse 12. "Repayment come to you." This is how the whole system worked, okay? The host honored you because you honored him. That was the game they played. The closer to the host, the more important you were. Because the host honored you, you then had to honor the host. If you show him honor, he'll show you honor. It was all about reciprocation. And so in a sense only the people who were able to reciprocate could scramble for the chief seats. The rest who didn't have what it took to reciprocate wouldn't want to be held to that standard. So it was the more prominent ones. Perhaps the more wealthy ones.

Now Jesus says to them, let me say this to you. "When you're invited by someone to a wedding feast, don't take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him. And he who invited you both shall come and say to you give place to this man and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you're invited go and recline at the last place so that when the one who's invited you comes he may say to you friend move up higher. Then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you."

I mean, what does He say? Is this etiquette? Is He giving them good advice to be a better hypocrite? No, this is an analogy, parable. Something placed alongside something else. This is an illustration, an example, an analogy, a metaphor, a picture. And He's not even talking about lunch. He's talking about a wedding feast. So He moves Himself away from that event so as not to directly criticize that and He picks the most formal and the biggest event that a community that would have, a wedding feast.

And He says, "When you are invited to wedding feast don't take the place of honor." Don't rush to that chief seat and find that all of a sudden somebody shows up who is more distinguished in the eyes of the host or more capable of reciprocation than you are. And you're going to find yourself being told get out of that seat, give place to this man. And then in disgrace you're going to find yourself at the back. You've gone from the proverbial penthouse to the outhouse. The wise thing to do, He says in verses 10 and 11, is start at the last place so that when the one who has invited you comes and sees you there, he's going to say, ah prasan abino, move all the way. You belong in the front. And then you're going to have honor in the site of all who are the table. They're going to say oh look, oh look at him going way up. That's good advice. I think that's practical advice, you know, be humble when you go to an event like that. Don't rush to sit in the chief seat.

You know, in a sense this was nothing new, nothing really revolutionary. These guys were experts in the Old Testament. They were experts in the law of God. They probably remember Proverbs 25:7. "It is better for it to be said to you come up here than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince whom your eyes have seen." Just built on that Proverbs 25:6-7. It's a lot better to be told to

come to the front than to be told to go to the back. Is that all it's about. No, it's way more than that. This is all about the kingdom of God. This is all about clamoring for the chief place in the kingdom of God. Rushing in a display of pride and arrogance to the front only to be told by God get out of that seat.

In your effort to get prominence before the host of Heaven, before the master of heaven you think to elevate yourself. Like the Pharisee in Luke 18, "I thank you that I'm not like other men. I tithe." I do this, I fast twice a week, etc., etc. I'm a righteous...and this is a rush for the chief seat next to the host of heaven in the kingdom. And what's going to happen is you're going to be sent to the very end. Think not to elevate yourselves only to end up shamed. Only to end up reassigned. Only to end up removed from any proximity to the host. Sent to the farthest most remote place in the domain of the host. Jesus is saying, you've got to learn how to humble yourself. You've got to learn how to take the last place. This is the message He gave over and over and over and over. Humble yourself. Humble yourself. Take the lowly place and God will lift you up.

And then in verse 12, He turns to the host who's not a part of the mad scramble because his seat's already determined. But He's not going to let him off the hook. So He says to him, verse 12, went on to say to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and repayment come to you," there's that reciprocation system. "But when you give a reception invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed since they do not have the means to repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Ah, now we know we're talking about a spiritual reality. And so did they know. That's why one of them commented about the kingdom of God in verse 15. They knew exactly what He was talking about. In fact, he may have said more and this is just a condensed part of it.

By the way, we know here in this section that the man had invited Jesus because verse 12 says, "He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him." Jesus wasn't a drop-in guest, it was all set up to trap Him. He was there on their perspective for evil purposes on His. He was there to give them mercy and an invitation to come to the kingdom. Since this man was left off the hook because he wasn't in the scramble, Jesus had to come up with another perspective to help him view his own pride.

And so He says, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner," there were only two meals a day in Jewish life. There was ariston, early in the day, deipnon, dinner at the end of the day. On the Sabbath, they added a third one in the morning, but it was only those two meals and so He says when you invite someone for any of those meals, do not invite...and let me just clarify this, do not only invite. This is a Semitic idiom. Not so much would be a way to say it. It's not so much for you to invite your friends or your neighbors or your relatives or rich neighbors. It's not that that's an absolute prohibition. Don't ever do it under any circumstance. Of course, you're going to have your friends. Of course, you're

going to have your brothers and relatives and your rich neighbors because they're you're neighbors.

But what He is saying here is don't do that exclusively. And what He's doing is addressing the pride and the superiority and the self-seeking that He saw in their separation. And what they did was they only invited the people who could invite them back. It was, how can I understand this? I guess maybe one way to say it would be this. An invitation to a meal with a Pharisee was a kind of currency in the marketplace of Jewish society. It was a kind of currency. They exploited hospitality for the sake of self-glory and elevation.

It was the "you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back" kind of thing. It was a way to elevate them. I'll elevate you and you elevate me. And Jesus says, why don't you instead of doing that all time and only inviting the people who are going to promote you the way you promote them, why don't you give a reception and invite the poor, the cripple, the lame, the blind and be blessed. Why don't you, He is saying, humble yourselves? Why don't you humble yourselves?

Reciprocity basically ruled the ethics and the action of the social structure of the Pharisees. It was a gift obligation system. It was a kind of currency as I said. Every gift had strings to accept an invitation was to agree to an equal obligation, which controlled who was invited. You didn't invite somebody who couldn't reciprocate. Only those who could reciprocate were invited and the better and more lavish could be the reciprocation, the closer they sat to the host. And the lowly, and the poor and the crippled, the lame and the blind had no capacity to reciprocate. And even if you invited them, they wouldn't accept an invitation because they would know they would then be obligated and be unable to perform. And so it would be too embarrassing to ever accept that kind of invitation.

You see the hypocritical Pharisees had no such thing as a disinterested kindness. It was all self-serving. Our Lord is deconstructing their categories you might say. He's overturning their conventional wisdom. He's exposing their selfishness. You only do this for the people who can pay you back, who can elevate you and honor you. Just a note or two here. Reception in verse 13, dochesen, a party, a banquet, a feast. Why don't you invite the destitute and the maimed and the people who can't walk and the people who can't see? Those people would never be invited, never unless as we saw with the man with dropsy, they were a foil to trap Jesus for a higher purpose.

They separated themselves from the riffraff. This would be the death of their elevation. This would defeat the whole system. The divide that defined Pharisees was the divide between holy and the unholy, the rich, the poor, the honored and the despised. And if they invited these people, the separation, the middle would collapse and the system would come crashing down. And that's why the Pharisee in Luke 18 says, "I thank you God that I'm not like that guy." Who? That was emblematic of how they viewed anybody below them.

Jesus says, if you do that you'll be blessed. Since they don't have the means to repay you, God implied who will repay you at the resurrection of the righteous. If you were to humble yourselves to that degree, you would give evidence of having the kind of heart that is prepared to enter the kingdom. Our Lord is speaking about eternity. That's what the resurrection of the righteous indicates.

The resurrection of the righteous simply means that time when the righteous come before God for their eternal reward. John 5:28-29, Jesus is going to be there as the judge of the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous. But Jesus is saying, you want to be a part of the resurrection of the righteous entering into the kingdom of God eternally then you're going to need to humble yourself and the kind of humiliation and self-effacing that is going to allow you to open your arms and embrace all the people you hate, all the people you separate from.

By the way, the resurrection was a big thing to the Pharisees. They believed in the resurrection according to Acts 23:6 and Acts 24:15. There were certainly other words that Jesus said clarifying all of this. It was all about humbling yourself. It was all about forgetting this reciprocity idea. All about knowing you're unworthy. You're no better than the lowest of the low. Jesus is saying the kingdom is only open to those who humble themselves. That's the illustrations. Look at the assumption behind them in verse 11. "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." And here again without saying so, God is the humbler and God is the exalter. This is a spiritual axiom. This is a spiritual principle. This is the assumption behind the parables. This is the presupposition. Everyone who exalts, hupsoto, who elevates, who lifts himself up shall be, tapeinoo, lowered, brought low, abased.

And it is God who does this. He is the unnamed actor in verse 11. Proverbs 16:5, they knew that. "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord and it will not be unpunished." God judges the proud and God blesses the humble. In fact, at the very beginning of the gospel of Luke in the magnificat of Mary, Mary says in Luke 1:46, "My soul exalts the Lord, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior for His regard for the humble state of His bond slave." And then down in verse 51, "He's done mighty deeds with His arm. He scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts and has brought down rulers from their thrones and exalted those who were humble and filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty-handed."

I mean there is Mary acknowledging that God reaches out to rescue the humble and brings judgment on the proud. Now what Jesus is saying here is not about social reconstruction. It's not some kind of etiquette training to be a better hypocrite. It's not moral motivation. It's a picture of salvation that ends in final judgment. The judgment of the righteous. The resurrection of the righteous is where those who lived like this, because they were humbled and put their trust in the living God and in His son are then reward by God.

It is also, as I said, the resurrection of the unrighteous where those do not humble themselves will be humbled by God. Sent to the remotest part of the divine domain where there is darkness and torment and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth like the servants who are sent away from the banquet into outer darkness. So the assumption, the truth behind the illustration is that honor and blessing and God's kingdom, salvation eludes those who think they can scramble for it and earn it. Honor and blessing and God's kingdom comes to those who know they don't have it, they can't earn it, they don't deserve it, and they come humbly to God pounding their breast, God, be merciful to me a sinner.

By the way, the narrow door is not entered by people bloated with the edema of pride. It's not entered by people carrying baggage, the baggage of their achievement and their works. You say well, do you think Jesus explained this? I don't know. I think He probably did explain some of it. That's why when He said the resurrection of the righteous immediately they would have known He was talking about the kingdom. That's why the question comes "Blessed is everyone who shall eat in the kingdom of God." They knew what He was talking about. And yet there's a sense in which Jesus is not obligated to explain things because in Matthew Chapter 10 it says "He's hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes." And that's why in many cases Jesus tells parables, explains them only to His own disciples.

But here I think He extended mercy to them. His message to them, always the same. Works, merit, external religion, useless, pride in your own achievement, your own position, your own religiosity will shut you out of the kingdom. And then finally just to comment about the application. It's just this, nobody's going to enter the kingdom by merit. Nobody's going to enter the kingdom by good works, by righteous deeds, certainly by self-promotion, spiritual pride. Nor did God make extra laws to make some people more proud. But that's Phariseeism. The idea was they would make more laws so when keeping those more laws, they would then be more righteous. That is really blasphemy.

Salvation has always been to the humble and the broken and the contrite and those who come and plead for mercy and grace and nothing more. And we'll see a lot more on this in Chapter 18. But let me close with just some reminders. In the greatest evangelistic sermon, the one that opens the New Testament, Jesus said this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." It's about bankruptcy of spirit. It's about weeping over your condition. It's about meekness. That's the way into the kingdom.

In the wonderful 4th Chapter of James, it is crystal clear, listen verse 6. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." What do you do about then? "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil he will free from you. Draw near to God. He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners. Purify your hearts you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you."

It's always like that. That's the way to the kingdom. It was Paul, a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee, zealous killer of Christians, defender of Phariseeism, who was broken, penitent, saw himself as the chief of sinners, saw all of his merit and religious achievement as manure, Philippians 3. Who cast himself on the mercy of God and said, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost of all." Jesus was saying to them that day and to us the way into the kingdom is the way of humility, humbling yourself as a wretched sinner before God.

Father, we thank You now as we come to this table that You have humbled us, that You have brought us to this place of humility. This is not some human virtue, but You have broken us by Your spirit and Your word. And You have drawn us to an awareness of our own sin and hopelessness and then You have lifted us to look at the cross and see there the sacrifice for our sins. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who responds to our humiliation our same, our sorrow with grace and salvation. Father, we now thank You for the wondrous time we've had in Your word. It's glories are endless and may we apply its truth. Would You humble us before You, the great and Almighty God? Show us the folly of human pride and religious merit and efforts and ceremony and ritual. May we fall on our faces humbling ourselves pleading for mercy that You will always give the penitent believer in Christ and know that one day having been humbled we will be by You exalted in the glory of Your eternal kingdom. Work Your work in every heart. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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