

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**
Chapter 14- Luke 14:7-14
257- An Examination of Humility- Part 2

September 28, 2014

Luke 14:7-14

7 And He *began* speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor *at the table*, saying to them,

8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him,

9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give *your* place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.

10 "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 at the table with you.

11 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

12 And He also 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, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment.

13 "But when you give a reception, invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,*

14 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."

To the Glory of God

On January 7, 1855, the newly installed Pastor of New Park Street Chapel in Southwark, England, opened his morning sermon like this:

“It has been said by some one that ‘the proper study of Mankind is Man.’ I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest Science, the loftiest Speculation, the mightiest Philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the Name, the Nature, the Person, the Work, the Doings, and the Existence of the great God whom he calls his ‘Father’. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, ‘Behold I am wise.’ But when we come to this Master-Science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with the solemn exclamation, ‘I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.’ No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God...

But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. He may be a naturalist, boasting of his ability to dissect a beetle, anatomize a fly, or arrange insects and animals in classes with well-nigh unutterable names; he may be a geologist, able to discourse of the megatherium and the plesiosaurus, and all kinds of extinct animals; he may imagine that his science, whatever it is, ennobles and enlarges his mind. I dare say it does, but after all, the most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the Science of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in His Immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.”

Those words, spoken by Charles Spurgeon 159 years ago, were made while he was only 20 years of age. And they were true then and they are true today. Well over 500 years before the birth of The Lord Jesus- the Prophet Jeremiah spoke these words:

Jeremiah 9:23-24a

23 Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;

24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me...

Indeed all of the great Reformed Catechisms begin with something like this:

Question: What is the chief end of Man

Answer: The chief end of Man is to know God; to love God; and to enjoy Him forever.

41 years ago- a man was arguing with JI Packer about this very thing, and he told Packer,

“Wait a minute. Is this journey to knowing God really necessary? Back in Spurgeon’s day, we know people found theology interesting, but I find it boring. Why need anyone take time off today for the kind of study you propose? Surely a lay person, at any rate, can get on without it? After all- this is the 20th Century, not the nineteenth!”

But Packer replied:

“That is a fair question- but there is, I think a convincing answer to it. Your question assumes that a study of the Nature and Character of God to be impractical and irrelevant for life. In fact, however it is the single most practical project anyone could ever engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, and put him down, without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world, without knowing about the God Whose world it is and Who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, and painful place and life in it a disappointment and unpleasant business, for those who do not

know God and who do not know about Him. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. That is how you waste your life and lose your soul.”

There is an unspoken assumption that we make that when somebody talks about God. We assume that he knows what he is talking about. And when someone talks about God as a matter of his way of life- we assume that he knows God a lot- and that we should listen to what he has to say.

Even God says this is true. For example- God the Holy Spirit moved upon the Apostle Paul to guide him to pen down these words from **1Thessalonians 5:12&13a**

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work...

... and the writer of **Hebrews** said this in **Hebrews 13:17:**

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Now there are rebels today who think they can know God- isolated from the people of the Church. They believe that they know God just fine- and that being a part of the Church and participating in what the Church is doing is a waste of time, and that they don't need to either be taught or to follow.

A wise man once said that the man who represents himself in court has a fool for a client, and the same thing is true about those who walk in isolation to the Church- the man who teaches himself has a fool for a student.

So the reality is that- in our pursuit of knowing God rightly- we are all the students of somebody else. And those of us who live in the 21st Century- are very rich indeed in this respect. God has provided us with a vast sea of people who have come before us- who down the 2,000 year line of Church History- who have preached magnificent sermons

and who developed powerful Bible Studies and who have written books- and who struggled with hard verses and who struggled with their own flesh- so as to be our Teachers- who have the ability to teach us what to do and what not to do; what to believe and what not to believe; what to embrace and what to shun- in our daily walk to know God.

So there is absolutely no reason for anybody to be self-taught about God. The idea that we can actually walk in isolation to God's Church and 2,000 years of rich and full history and be self-taught and still know God rightly and fully is the very height of arrogance.

So we should be reading or listening or studying somebody else who came before us and who dove into knowing God and who- to one degree or the other either- soared amazingly or who failed miserably. And we can follow their soaring and we can learn so much from their failures- and so I pray that somebody is teaching you and somebody is leading you and you are the student of somebody else.

But as you engage yourself to sit at somebody else's feet and learn about God- you must also know that it is impossible for you to rise above your teacher in your knowledge of God. Whoever is leading you is at the forefront of your life and they are the height. A person cannot and does not go above a person in the knowledge of God and still be led by him. Because if you go ahead of him- then he is no longer leading you. So pick your teachers carefully and have more than one and then know your God.

My point is that it is perfectly normal and natural for people to be led by somebody else- whether that is in school or at home or on the job or in Church- somebody is leading you and somebody is teaching you and you are a student of that person.

And this is why there are great and profound requirements and qualifications for leadership in the House of God. Those who would lead us into the knowledge of God have the highest standards- not only morally- but also in knowing. I really do not wish to sit at someone else's feet to have him teach me about God who really does not know God himself. So, at a minimum- those who teach me and those who lead me in knowing my God must know God, too. And that is also why there is great judgment for those who lead people astray. In fact- the greatest Divine Judgment in the Bible is not reserved for child molesters or mass murderers- but the very worst judgment of God is

reserved for false teachers and for heretics and for those who would turn you aside to follow other gods.

So as you read the Bible- you see that murderers and adulterers and thieves and liars and all sorts of immoral and violent and sexually perverse people were, indeed, forgiven by God and saved, and they really did know God- while many who professed to know God and who were leading others- supposedly to know God also- did not know Him at all.

So the great tragedy of false leaders is that they are not only deceived themselves- but they lead people into hell. They do not know God themselves and they cannot possibly help you to know God either. Instead- they encourage sin, they make sin look attractive, they teach you to disobey God, they teach you to think of God wrongly and to formulate ideas about God and Salvation and Heaven and hell that are wrong and destructive. So it is incumbent upon us to pick our spiritual leaders and our spiritual teachers carefully.

Now many people have asked me why I spend so much time on this subject. And the answer is easy- the issue of knowing God correctly and fully is the dominate issue of our day. And because that is true- the issue of false teachers and false teaching is also the dominate issue of our day. Knowing God rightly and avoiding deception is the single highest honor and the single most noble pursuit and the single most vital issue that we could ever engage in. Because if we are deceived about God- nothing else matters

And so I would suggest to you that the all of the major visible social issues of our day- from abortion to euthanasia to the issue of human sexuality- in all its manifestations- all these were *theological* issues *before* they were cultural and social issues. They were and are issues of belief about God and Who He is, and what He does and does not do, and what He favors and what He opposes. And they are issues of doctrine *before* they became issues of politics and policy. Because remember- that people cannot do long term contrary to what they believe.

So as we see more and more transformation in our culture toward barbarism and paganism and ungodliness abounds- the need for us to know God and to know Him rightly and to know Him fully grows. Because, knowing God is the answer.

So the only *real* way to get the culture to change is to get the people in the culture to change, and thank God- that is the sovereign Work of God the Holy Spirit- Who has promised to convict them of their own human pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency and bring them to a place of utter desperation, and empower them to see and hear the Gospel, and Who will grant them the gift of Repentance and give them saving faith, and Who will take out of them a stony heart and give them a heart of flesh so they can believe the Gospel and be forgiven and saved, and then they can know God and they will love Him whom they know, and then they may enjoy Him forever.

Biblical Christianity teaches that we are forgiven and Justified and made Righteous before God because of what we *believe*- not because of what we *do*. And so what we believe is the most important thing in all the world. The Holy Bible doesn't teach that sinful human beings can earn Salvation by anything that we do. We cannot make ourselves to be attractive to God based on anything that we do or that we refrain from doing.

God set His Love upon us to save us- *before* the foundation of the world- *before* we were born and *before* we did anything "good" or "evil"- and His great Desire is for us to be forgiven and saved so that the sin barrier between us will be removed so that we may know Him and love Him and enjoy Him forever.

And so to know God rightly is vital if you desire to live in such a way that will please God. Because right living flows out of right believing. So if a person desires to live rightly before God and to do those things that bring honor and glory to Him- the first step is to know God. And the depth of our knowledge of God will inform and guide and transform and empower the way we live our lives. So when we see people who say they know God and yet live in such a way that dishonors the God they say they know- we must understand that these people are deceived. The Apostle John had a lot to say about those who say they believe in God and who say they know God and yet who live contrary to what God has said. Like in **1John 1:6** when he said:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

... and in **1John 2:4:**

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

... and in **1John 3:7-9:**

7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

So why do people do this? Because, they are deceived. They are either self-deceived or they have been deceived by somebody else. They do not know God and they really don't know *about* God either- or else that knowledge of God would transform their lives. So following the wrong spiritual leader is death to your soul.

And like so many in the history of the world who follow false teachers- the Jews of the 1st Century trusted their religious leaders. They trusted their religious leaders with their lives as people do today.

The Jews expected to follow their leaders into heaven, and, instead, they followed their leaders into hell. Because their leaders- the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Essenes and the Zealots- the four major groups of Teachers who were leading the people in the 1st Century- didn't know God. And as a result- the average Jew who was following one of these four groups of Teachers didn't know God either.

And that is par for the course for people who live in a man-made religion. They expect that their leaders know the pathway to life- the way to heaven. But the horrible reality is that these people follow their false 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.

Now we have come to understand that the main leaders of the Jews during the time of our Lord were a group called the Pharisees. And even though there were only 6,000 of them- they were the influencers of the whole nation. And as fantastic as it sounds- almost to

a man- these Pharisees did not know God; they were not saved at all- and they were all deceived.

Now the word "Pharisee" comes from a word that means: "to be separated". And these men rose to power when Greek and Roman culture was having tremendous inroads into Israel and into the thinking of the Jewish people, and the Pharisees wanted to pull the Jews back from the influences of these pagan cultures- back to God.

So the Pharisees were the fundamentalists of their day. They were the conservatives of their day. They were the ones who said they knew God, and they are the ones who said they could lead you to God. And so they were opposed to the pagan influence of Greek and Roman cultures that had dominated Israel for centuries.

And from the second century on- Phariseeism is Judaism, and so today- orthodox Judaism as we know it- is the remaining vestiges of these Pharisees. So, after 2,000 years- the orthodox Jews of our day are no closer to the Truth about God and Salvation than these men were back then. They are deceived themselves and they go about to deceive others. And I have said this before- but there is nothing about orthodox Judaism of our day that will lead a single soul to Salvation through Jesus Christ.

And during Jesus' earthly Ministry- they had ritualized everything. Everything they did and everything they believed was wrong and it was all external show- but their hearts were never changed. They were full of pride and self-righteousness. But everybody who is trying to earn Favor with God by what they do has the very same arrogance and the very same self-righteousness, and everybody who is trying so hard to earn Salvation is just as deceived and just as wrong about God as these people were.

And instead of seeing Jesus as the Messiah for Who He was- the Pharisees saw Jesus as being a threat to their rule and a threat to their way of life and a threat to their hold over the people.

And as we have journeyed through 13 Chapters now- Dr. Luke shows us how the confrontation between Jesus and these religious hypocrites was constantly tense and constantly vicious and constantly escalating. And you have seen how that unlike what so many in the modern Church teach today- Jesus was not content to just "live and let live". Jesus was not interested in just "going along to get along". Jesus was not interested in just "turning the channel and ignoring them".

No, Jesus confronted them to their face. And it isn't that Jesus was rude or a smart aleck or a mean Man- no that is not what they had ought against Jesus about. Jesus attacked the single most important aspect of these people's lives- their religion. And in His attack- Jesus mocked their religion, He violated their man-made teachings, and He ignored what they said, and He condemned their most important rituals as the evil that they were.

Now the Passage that Brother Andy just read to you is one of those confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees. 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 unmaskes 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- if God will grant them eyes to see the Truth of who they are and Who God is.

They are called to turn and repent and come to Him and enter the kingdom- but they must first humble themselves. They must first denounce and abandon their false and man-made religion in every aspect and they must fully and finally embrace Him as Lord and Savior. And that is the way it is with us today. Anybody who is trying to earn their Salvation today by what they do for themselves must first repent of that effort at building his own self-righteousness, and he must completely and utterly denounce that effort, and he must then fully embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Master and Savior or he will die in his sins.

And so here in this Passage- Jesus directs His words right at their spiritual pride and He calls them to come into godly humility and be saved.

Now the illustration that Jesus uses here is a 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 and trap Him.

And that's why they had pre-arranged to have a man with dropsy to be right in front of Jesus when He got there. They wanted Jesus to violate the Sabbath- so they could then equate that violation of their man-made rules as being a true violation of the Law of God- which would prove to everyone that Jesus was false.

So they were setting Him up. But in the end, they are the ones who were unmasked as hypocrites and they sat there in silence. And so now Jesus commanded the attention of everyone. They had nothing to say while He had plenty to say.

And so Dr. Luke says that Jesus began speaking this Parable to the invited guests- who all hung out and 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. And 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 parable. 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* an 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 simple stories about something with which people are familiar that opens their understanding about something about which they are *not* familiar. So this is 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 also watching them. They were watching Him to try to catch Him in a violation of their man-made law which they equated as being the same as God's Law. But Jesus was also watching them for the moment when they would reveal their self-

promoting hearts, and here it was- picking out for themselves the places of honor at the table. So this is a mad Pharisaic scramble for the best seats. Now, if I can just give you a little bit of a background in terms of Jewish history.

After the Resurrection- the Jews 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 closer you were to the host- the more honor you had. And honor was a big thing for these guys. 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 the perspective of these religious bigots because they were desperately desirous of being elevated in the eyes of men.

In **Matthew 23:5-7** Jesus described these hypocrites this way:

5 "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

6 "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.

.. and their phylacteries were small leather boxes containing Hebrew texts on vellum which were worn by these men at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the Law of God.

So 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 a Call to repent and

be saved. So if you go down to verse 15, one of these men who heard Jesus teach this said,

"Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom."

.. because he knew that Jesus has been talking about the Kingdom in His Parable. So they knew what He was talking about. These illustrations had to do with the Kingdom of God and how that they themselves will not enter into it and they knew it.

So how did a person get into the chief seat at the table? Jesus explains in verse 12 how a person gets to the front- because he has the power to reciprocate. Look at the end of verse 12:

... *that will be your repayment.*

And this is how this whole system worked. The host honored you- only because you had honored him. And that was the game they played. The closer to the host- the more important you were. And because the host honored you today- you then had to honor the host tomorrow. So if you show him honor- he'll show you honor. So this was all about reciprocation. And so in a sense only the people who were *able* to reciprocate could ever sit in the chief seats. The rest who didn't have what it took to reciprocate would never be able to keep pace. So their entire pecking order was all about prominence and wealth- rather than love.

So in the midst of all this display of self-righteous pomp and circumstance- Jesus says:

8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him,

9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give *your* place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.

10 "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 at the table with you.

11 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Now keep in mind that Jesus is not simply giving these lost people good advice about how to be a better hypocrite. So while humility is the general theme here- this Story is really about Salvation and being in the Kingdom of God and how religious self-righteousness won't get you there. So this Parable is all about spiritual humility in the face of incredible spiritual self-righteousness whereby these men honestly believed that they deserved to sit at the front table with God.

And this was really nothing new to these men- because they were experts in the Old Testament. And they knew **Proverbs 25:7** that says:

For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here," Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen.

So this is all about the Kingdom of God and how sinful people enter into it. It is all about arrogant people who are trying to earn their own Righteousness and thereby deserve Heaven clamoring for the chief positions in the Kingdom of God.

It's like the Pharisee in Luke 18, who said:

Luke 18:11b&12

11 ... 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

... and so Jesus is telling these people that what is going to happen is instead of being able to sit at the front table with God in the Kingdom- you're going to have to sit at the back row- which in this case means hell- which is what having to sit with the poor and the scum of the earth would mean to these men. To them it was all or nothing- they either got to sit at the front or else they were doomed. And so Jesus is telling them in a way they can understand that they are doomed.

So Jesus is saying, *"You've got to learn how to humble yourself and put off all your efforts at building up your own Righteousness- which is nothing but self-righteousness- and be saved by Grace through Faith or else you're not going to be in the Kingdom at all!"*

So what Jesus is doing here is addressing the pride and the superiority and the self-seeking that He saw in the separation of these

men. And they only invited the people who could invite them back. So it was the *"you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back"* kind of thing. And it was a way to elevate them. *"I'll elevate you and then you elevate me."*

You see the hypocritical Pharisees had no such thing as a disinterested sort of kindness. It was all self-serving. So the Lord is basically deconstructing their categories you might say. He's overturning their conventional wisdom. They weren't separating themselves for God- so they could know God and love God and enjoy God forever- they were separating themselves from people that they looked at as being dirty. They separated themselves from the riffraff. And if they invited these dirty people to the Kingdom of God- their false separation would collapse and the whole system of self-righteous building would come crashing down.

But Jesus said, "If you invite the people who cannot offer you anything in return to eat with God in the Kingdom- in other words- if you will go and preach the Gospel to the worst of sinners- you'll be blessed. Since these are the people don't have the means to repay you- it is implied that God is the One Who will repay you at the resurrection of the righteous. So if only you would humble yourselves to that degree- you would give evidence of having the kind of heart that is prepared to enter the kingdom of God. 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, if 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- because in reality- you are a sinner just like they are and everybody who is going to be in the Kingdom comes the same way- underserving and in need of forgiveness.

So the narrow door into the Kingdom of God is not entered by people bloated with the fat of their own pride. It's not entered by people carrying the baggage of their own religious achievement and their own religious works.

And even though many today don't understand what Jesus was talking about here- they did- and they hated Jesus all the more for saying it.

But this is where Jesus extended Mercy to them- right at the point where it is the most offensive to them. Because by telling these men that religious works and external religion and pride in your own achievement and your own position will shut them completely out of the Kingdom- He was giving them the only answer to their problem. And instead of bowing before Him and repenting- they allowed their offense at what He said to keep them out of the Kingdom of God.

And this is the way it is today. The very point of the greatest degree of offense- is the only hope for Salvation. Because nobody is ever saved by confirming them in their lostness. Salvation only comes through repentance of what you already believe and what you already are doing. And that is the greatest source of offense. But it is also the only hope of Salvation. So in that sense- the very point where Jesus insults these men the most- is the point at which God shows them the greatest degree of Mercy.

So nobody will enter the Kingdom by merit. Nobody's going to enter the Kingdom by good works, by righteous deeds, certainly not by self-promotion, or spiritual pride. All of that is just blasphemy by people who do not know God.

But true and genuine Salvation has always been for those graced by God to see that there is no good thing in them- in other words- the spiritually humble people. Salvation comes only to the broken and the contrite and those who come and plead for a Mercy they do not deserve and a Grace that they cannot earn.

So James and Peter and Paul and John and Jesus and the OT writers were right.

"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

... so what do you do about it?

"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."

And that's the only way into the Kingdom of God. So Jesus was saying to them that day and to us today- that the way into the Kingdom of God, the way to really and truly know God- is the way of humility- humbling yourself as nothing but a wretched sinner before God- in great need of God's Mercy and Grace- and God will save you to the uttermost and you will sit at the table with God Himself in the Kingdom!

Amen. Let's pray.