

To Be “Not Like Other Men”

Luke 18:9-14

Peter Hiett

October 25, 2015

Message

Small Group Bible Study Skit

[(Onscreen) A sign says: “A night at the small group Bible Study “life group”]

[Four people get up on stage and sit in front of four buckets of water; each bucket is labeled “ME” and contains a ladle.]

Susan: *Hey, it's great to see you guys. We've been praying for the new recording project. We know you'd like to pull in a little more cash.* (She puts a dipper -full of water from her bucket into Vince and Kim's buckets.)

Vince: *Thanks . . . that means a lot to me. You guys are great.* (He puts a little water in Peter's and Susan's buckets.)

Kim: *Yeah, I've really been looking forward to our life group Bible study.* (Kim puts a little water in each person's bucket.)

Vince: *Before we start, I've got to tell you this joke: There was a brunette, a redhead and a blond all going to the desert. The brunette says, “I'll take some water so we don't get dehydrated.” The redhead says, “I'll take some suntan lotion so we don't get sunburned.” The blonde says, “I'll take a car door . . . so that when it gets hot, I'll roll down the window! Wasn't that hilarious?* (Vince takes a little water out of Peter and Kim's buckets, and he takes two ladles out of Susan's bucket.)

Susan: *Oh yeah, you're a real comedian.* (Taking a ladle out of Vince's bucket.)

Kim: *Yeah, Vince, that was as funny as a heart attack.* (Taking a ladle out of Vince's bucket . . . she then waits a minute and takes a little out of Peter's.)

Peter: *Hey guys, come on. Let's edify. Scripture says to build each other up. We need to always be giving, not taking.* (Taking a ladle of water out of each person's bucket.)

Susan: *Oh, you're right. I'll try to be more like you!* (Taking a ladle out of Peter's bucket.)

Peter: *Well, how are you all doing in your walk with the Lord? We said that we'd hold each other accountable to always walk in His grace.* (Peter waits . . . then everybody puts some water in Peter's bucket.)

Kim: *That's right! This week I've been fasting. It's changed my life.* (Taking a little water out of everybody's buckets.)

Vince: *Well, you know that Scripture says that the fast God desires is to loose the bonds of wickedness. It's not just about not eating, but about getting in touch with your own brokenness.* (Taking a ladle out of Kim's bucket.)

Peter: *Gosh, you're right. This week in prayer I saw my sin and wept for an hour.* (Taking water out of Vince's bucket.)

Vince: *I was so broken I wept for two hours!* (Taking two ladles out of Peter's bucket.) and wrote a song about it. (Taking another ladle.)

Susan: *Wow. You're both really good at that brokenness thing. You're each, like, really, really broken!* (Taking two ladles out of Peter's and Vince's buckets.)

Kim: *Maybe we ought to just pray. It's not about us.* (Everybody gives Kim some water.)

Peter: *Okay, I'll close . . .*

Lord, thank you for your great love. You are the great provider, and you really do provide for those you love. Thanks for my house and all the riches with which you've blessed me. (Emptying Vince's bucket into his own.)

Lord, thank you that you've saved us with your relentless grace. Thank you that our righteousness doesn't depend on old covenant works of righteousness like . . . oh, . . . fasting . . . (Emptying Kim's bucket into his.)

Lord, thank you for my wonderful wife. Thank you for teaching me patience through her. Thank you for making me like yourself – beaten, whipped, crucified for the sake of loving your bride. Thank you for my small group. I get so much out of it. Amen. (Emptying Susan's bucket into his.)

Luke 18: 9-10a (ESV) This is the parable that immediately follows the parable of the widow and the unjust judge – which we preached on last week.

He told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous (dikaioi) and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray...”

It’s hard for us to see how this parable relates to the last parable, but they’re both about prayer before a judge.

In the temple, there was an inner sanctuary and in that sanctuary was, (originally) the Ark of the Covenant.

In the Ark of the Covenant, was the law written on stone.

Covering the Ark was the *kapporeth*, in Hebrew, translated “Mercy Seat,” in English- the place where the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the lamb on Yom Kippur, the “day of atonement.”

Kippur–atonement, was made on the *Kapporeth* for 1500 years and no one really knew what it meant.

The Greek word for the *Kapporeth*, or Mercy Seat, is *Hilaskarion*.

<p><i>Hilaskarion</i> – “Mercy Seat” <i>Hilaskomai</i> – “Have Mercy” <i>Hilasmos</i> – “Mercy”</p>

The *Hilaskarion* was viewed (like in Isaiah 6: 1) as the throne of God on earth . . .

That means: the Mercy seat is also the judgment seat – the *Hilaskarion* covering the Ark, containing the law, in the temple. So,

Luke 18: 10a (ESV)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray.”

This would have been at the time of the morning sacrifice, or evening sacrifice. Each day, the priests were to sacrifice a lamb in the morning, and a lamb in the evening. The smell of incense and roast lamb would fill the air.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee...”

The word, “*Pharisee*” likely comes from a root word meaning “*separate*.” The Pharisees believed they were “separate ones” due to their religious convictions. It was a popular

movement in Jesus' day. They were the Bible study leaders, the promise keepers, the campus crusaders, the popular pastors of their day. They remind me of me. Look around, we got people that fit that description here in this room – you've admired them.

Tax Collectors, on the other hand, had cut a deal with the Roman oppressors to collect taxes from their countrymen. It was expected of them to make a profit through extortion and betrayal.

Look around, we've got people that fit this description – you can't tell a tax collector by how they're dressed. But maybe you've had dealings with one. He or she took from you and it was just plain wrong. They may confess faith, but you know they have not been faithful. Look around.

Luke 18: 10-14 (ESV)

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (from dikaios) rather than the other."

"Justified," and he made no promises, covenants or resolutions. . .

The tax collector received *Ekdikesis*—righteousness, justice, that is the vengeance of God. The Pharisee did not . . . and he must've viewed that fact as terribly unjust.

Luke 18 verse 14 (ESV), Jesus says,

I tell you this [tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Now that statement is so absurd, that if you chew on it for more than a second or two, your mind will immediately begin to make qualifications. Yet, Jesus makes other statements just like it:

" . . . whoever (not some, but whoever) would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Luke 9: 24

*"So the last" (not some last) "**the** last will be first, and the first last."*
Matthew 12: 16

*"Everyone" (not some) "**Everyone** who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."* Luke 18: 14

This is seriously, so radical. I honestly don't know of any person walking the face of the earth that lives as if they really believe that these words of Jesus are true.

The situation of all humanity is just like this:

Clip from *Dumb and Dumber*

[It is nighttime; a road sign reads "Colorado State Line 3 miles" Two men are on a road trip. One of them addresses the other.]

Harry: *Hey, look! We're almost in Colorado!*

Harry: (Sniff) *What do you say we change seats? I've been driving for nine straight hours! I don't have the energy to start a new state* (sigh.)

[The scene changes. Jim Carey, playing Lloyd, returns to the van from making a purchase at a gas station. He walks happily with some snacks in hand.]

Lloyd: *Hey Harry, I got some beef jerky . . .*

[He gets inside and turns to see Harry asleep in the passenger seat and stops midsentence. He puts some soda, candy and beef jerky on the floor in between the seats with an effort to be quiet. Then looking at Harry, he shakes his head back and forth and turns to start the van and continue driving.]

Lloyd: *Some people just weren't cut out for life on the road.*

[Lloyd backs the van out of the lot and heads out to the highway. The van approaches a sign with arrows pointed towards Aspen Ski Resorts West, which is to the left, and Lincoln Nebraska East, to the right. As they approach the sign, the scene shifts to inside the van. Harry is still sound asleep with his head back and mouth open slightly. Lloyd looks over at him and then reaches over and pinches Harry's nose closed. Simultaneously, the van slides to the right of the fork in the road and unknowingly the men head towards Lincoln Nebraska.]

[The scene changes to daylight with the van passing vast flat fields. Lloyd is still driving and Harry is still sleeping. Lloyd drinks the last of a cup of coffee, shakes the empty cup in front of him and looks over at Harry. He glances at him as he holds his empty cup in one hand and continues driving. Then he, suddenly, whips the cup at the side of Harry's head. Harry's eyes groggily open.]

Lloyd: *He- ey -ey-ey! I was wonderin' when you were gonna get up!*

Harry: *Hey, how long, . . .* (struggling to form words) *how long have I been out?*

Lloyd: (Yawning a great big yawn, looking over at Harry while speaking.)
I'd say a good five hours.

[Harry and Lloyd both yawn, shaking their heads after their mouths close in unison.]

[The scene shifts to the view from the back of the van. Harry and Lloyd are looking out the windshield at sunshine lit, empty plains.]

Lloyd: *Huh! I expected the Rocky Mountains to be a little rockier than this.*

Harry: *I was thinkin' the same thing.*

Lloyd: *That John Denver's full of sh@#!!*

That John Denver is full of Sh-poop, - I'm sure that's what he said.

Harry and Lloyd are trying to get to Aspen, “Where the beer flows like wine” as Harry says. They take the right road, but going the wrong direction. We may follow the way, do all the works of the law, but all for the wrong reason. So we judge God, and judge the way and say, “This doesn’t look like the kingdom of God. That Bible is full of sh-poop.” “I’ve worked my butt off to make myself a better person according to the principles in Scripture, to elevate myself, and it’s like I just get humiliated over and over again!”

Well, what part of “*Pick up your cross and come follow*” did we not understand? Maybe all of it.

Why do you go to work?
Why do you do good deeds?
Why are you kind to your neighbor?
Is it because you want to be a better person? You want to elevate yourself?
Why do you come to church?
Why do you trust Jesus? - To get into Heaven?
To elevate yourself? - All the way up to Heaven?
Why do you want to be humble? So you can be a better person?

Do you want to be humble so you can be proud?
How do you humble your proud self – with your self?

Well, let's wrestle the Word.

Luke 18: verse 9 - 11

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, “justified themselves,” and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God I thank you that I am not like other men . . .’”

He thanks God that he's not like other men.
Is he like other men? Is he better than other men? Is he special?

I went to Elementary School in the 1960's, and everything at school and in society seemed to be about "the survival of the fittest." People thought that "the survival of the fittest" explained life. Darwin didn't say, "The survival of the fittest explains life." "Survival of the fittest" is just a tautology. The fit are defined as those who survive, and those who survive are defined as the fit. But as South Elementary, we believed: competition was life. So life was all about exalting yourself, and you exalted yourself by beating your neighbor. So, the teacher usually graded on a curve and when she'd hand back tests, she'd read the scores out loud. (I usually did well and her approval was like a drug.)

In gym class, we'd always pick teams and I was often picked last. I hated P.E. We probably couldn't articulate the idea that life advanced through violent competition, but we sure learned the lesson.

I remember standing on the dust in the playground, while a mob of boys kicked and beat my friends Matt and Duncan, who used to pretend they were superheroes at recess. As they lay there weeping in the dust, part of me felt exhilarated that maybe I wasn't the "last and the least," but one of the boys. We were united, because we were not like Matt and Duncan.

Sociologists call that "scape-goating."

Some Anthropologists argue that it explains religion and all society. In other words, the magic pill that makes people unite and feel alike is finding a person, or group, that they judge as different, upon which they lay blame: a scape-goat. So, to unite America, it helps to have a Soviet Union, or an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. And to unite a denomination, you need the liberals, if you're a conservative church, or the conservatives if you're a liberal church. To unite all Christians – wouldn't you need non-Christians? And to stay united, wouldn't you always need non-Christians? Preferably, languishing forever in darkness, or burning endlessly in hell?

So, is that what it means to be "a Christian?" The ability to say, "We are not like those people." Those people that freely choose unrighteousness and so will be endless horrors, forever tormented. Or those people that God chose to be endless horrors forever tormented. WE are the eternally blessed and THEY – eternally cursed. Dang! It's impossible for me to think of two groups of men more "not like" each other – than that. We're united with our group by fear and so not united at all . . . because we're only united for the sake of exalting the self.

I watched Matt and Duncan weep in the dust and something in me was utterly terrified and horrified. And something else in me took pleasure even as the pleasure died, and love died.

Something in me still takes pleasure in watching a fellow pastor fail, for something in me whispers, "Peter look." "You're better than him. You're not like him." "You have just been exalted." It hits me like a drug and then fills me with despair, for I am then even more alone and it feels like hell, almost as if "*the measure I give*" is "*the measure I get*."

Luke 18: verse 11.

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector . . .'"

"Thank you that I'm not an extortioner-harpax." The Greek word, *harpax*, is also translated, "*rapacious*." It means someone that takes, someone that reaches out and grasps something that is not rightfully theirs—like forbidden fruit.

If you're biblical, you realize that all men, all humanity is comprised of "*extortioners*," that is "*takers*." As soon as you call your life "my life," you confess to having taken God's life, for Christ Jesus is "*The Life*." He is also the presence of "*the Good*" and only God is good.

We took knowledge of "*the Good*" from the tree in the middle of the garden. It was forbidden fruit.

And we took God's life on the tree in the garden where Christ was crucified. We all take the life of "*The Good*," to make ourselves good, and everything dies. We are all "*rapacious*."

"*The day you eat of it you will die*," said the Lord. That could mean several things:

For one, it could mean that you're already dead. Scripture is clear: apart from Christ, we are all "*dead in our trespasses and sins*." Dead people are humble people, unless they don't know they're dead.

It could mean that you're dead and it certainly means that you will die. If you read my book, or take the Bible literally, you realize the sixth day is also this day—the day that God makes Adam (which means humanity) in His own image.

This day—the sixth day you must die to reach the seventh day, when and where everyone lives.

Death is pretty humiliating. And so, we will all be humiliated.

"The day you eat of it you will die"—that could refer to the end of your physical life.

Lastly, it could refer to a day you probably can't remember. You were probably about two years old, and after this day, everything changed.

Deuteronomy 1: 39, one of the most fascinating verses in all of Scripture, Moses says to the Israelites, who had received the law on the mountain, but were afraid to follow:

"You will not enter the Promised Land, but your little ones will, who (quote) 'today have no knowledge of good or evil.'"

We could spend years unpacking that verse, but Scripture clearly teaches that little children have not yet tasted of "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*." So, of course, they're "*not ashamed*;" they'll run around the house buck naked without a thought. They're free!

Once, when my son, Coleman, was about four, my dad was helping him get dressed and my daughter, Elizabeth, came in the room. Coleman yelled, "Don't look at my privates!" To which, Elizabeth proudly exclaimed, "Well, Coleman, I've seen 'em hundreds of times before!" "Yeah," said Coleman, "but that was before I knew I had 'em!"

I love that! There was an age before you knew you had 'em.

I remember the kids at that age: their adorability was just off the charts. They never tried to be good. They just were good—absolutely adorable, and they loved being adored by me and I loved adoring them. And then this day came with each of them: it was like they gained “the knowledge of good,” and wondered if they were good, and then tried to make themselves good, which wasn’t good. They became self-conscious and began to justify themselves. They began to cover their shame and exalt themselves, and something died. And I wondered, “Who told you that you were naked?”

It’s not an accident that the next thing Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke is “*Let the children come. You must receive the Kingdom, the Promised Land, like a child.*”

Well, anyway, God said, “*the day you eat of it you will die.*” We have all taken, and have all become takers —rapacious (rapers of life).

The Pharisee prayed, “*Thank you that I’m not an extortioner . . .*”

But he was an extortioner – a blind extortioner.

And he prayed “*Thank you that I am not adikia—unrighteous.*”

He had the law. He memorized the Scripture. . .

But he obviously hadn’t comprehended Scripture:

Psalm 14, Psalm 53, and now Romans 3 (ESV):

“None is righteous, no, not one: no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

The Pharisee is an extortioner, unrighteous, and an adulterer—*moichos*. That means “faithless to God and His covenant.” “*Faithless*” like Jerusalem, the whoring bride, who murdered her groom because she thought he was unjust. The truth is that the Pharisee is just like all men: takers, unrighteous, faithless . . . now enslaved to the desire to exalt himself by taking the good, and thereby killing the life.

The Pharisee is “dead in his trespasses and sins,” just like all “other men,” . . . dead, not knowing he’s dead, but trying to resurrect himself from the dead.

And check this out:

Anything faithful in him, anything righteous in him is Love in him,

for only Love fulfills the Law.

And God is love.

As soon as he uses Love to exalt himself,

he takes the life of Love,

and thereby crucifies Love.

So, the BAD in him is his own doing.
Any GOOD in him is not of him.

The BAD in you is death in you
That YOU needs to die—needs the death of death.

And the GOOD in you is God in you, creating you.
You don't make Love, Love makes you, and Love is FREE.
You don't possess FREE WILL, but FREE WILL possesses you.

So, look around, and listen closely, "You are not better than anyone."
Now, something inside you is going, "Well, ah yeah, I get the point, but I do work very hard, and I know I'll try when others quit, and I've chosen this and I've chosen that, and I've earned what I've received . . . I've earned.!! "

Shut up! And listen closely, "You are not better than anyone."
Offended? Humiliated?
You should be!

I could quote a bunch of shocking psychological studies that clearly indicate that the vast majority of people rank themselves consistently above average, which reveals that a vast majority of people are consistently insane, in denial, or lousy at math.

BUT, I'm not just saying, "You're NOT better than average."
I'm saying, "No one in this room is better than average." . . .

Well, something in you is *humiliated*
And something in you may be *exhilarated*.

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, said that one of the greatest blessings he had ever received was the gift of the tax collector—the discovery that he was a sinner, *just like everyone else*.

Thomas Merton wrote, "Thank God, thank God, that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others. It is a glorious destination to be a member of the human race."

So look around. You're not better than anyone.
And you're not worse than anyone.
You are different than everyone, but not better or worse.



This is a picture of my dad's school along about 1933. It hangs outside my office door at home. Dad is third from the left in the back row. I hated school, and my dad used to love school. I remember him saying to me,

"Peter, my school was so different than your school. We never even heard of a curve in my school. The point wasn't competition. You didn't compete with anyone. In fact, if you learned your lesson, you helped the person next to you learn their lesson. It wasn't about beating anyone. It was about educating *everyone*."

And this fact may explain that educational philosophy: Six of the twelve children in this school had the same father. They were my aunts and uncles.

My grandfather didn't want them to *beat* each other, he wanted them to *help* each other learn the lesson – Math, English, or whatever.

Ephesians 4: 4 – 6 (ESV)

There is one body, and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in all.

You know, I have four grown children, but they each still have a room at home. Sometimes, I'll go in their rooms, when they're gone, and just look at the trophies and posters, and photographs, and mementos and just ache.

I mean it scares me at times, because I want to tell them, and I don't always know how to tell them:

I love you, I love you, I love you. I know you from before that day you ate the fruit from the tree. I know you hide in shame. I know you want to justify yourself and can't justify yourself. I know you want to be good . . . but you just are good. You are worth the Life-blood of God. There is nothing more valuable than that. So, there is nothing more valuable than you."

Each of my kids is so incredibly different. Each one is better at some things and worse at other things. But, I would rather die than say, "one is better than the other." And I *love* it when they *love each other*.

(Richard McCullough You Are Not Special Commencement Speech)

A couple of years ago, at Wellesly High School, teacher, David McCullough gave a commencement speech titled, "You're Not Special." He ended with these words:

"When you too will discover the great and curious truth of human experience: that selflessness is the best thing you can do for yourself. The sweetest joys of life, then, come only with the recognition that *you're not special...because everyone is.*"

In the words of Richard Rohr, "Life is one big school of love."

And I would add, there will be a test, not to see if you're better than your neighbor, but to help you learn the lesson: Love your neighbor – that's the lesson!

Ecclesiastes 3: 17 (ESV), Solomon writes,

I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. I said in my heart, with regard to the children of man, that God is testing them..

Why?

that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.

You yourself are a butt-beast.

Offended?

Do you feel humiliated?

I hope so . . . because then, maybe the sermon is working!

Luke 18: 11-14 (ESV)

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners (takers), unjust (adikos), adulterers (unfaithful), or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (dikaioo), rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Now, I'm sure that speaks of Judgment Day . . .

And yet, *every day* is judgment day for the one who walks in Faith.

And, you know, there is something *exalting* about *humility*
and something *humiliating* about *self-exaltation*.

Anthony De Mello, the Jesuit priest, used to say something like this:

“Recall the kind of feeling you have when someone praises you, when you are approved, accepted, applauded. And contrast that with the kind of feeling that arises within you when you look at the sunset or the sunrise . . . or when you read a book or watch a movie that you thoroughly enjoy . . .”

Or try this:

“Recall the kind of feeling you have when you succeed . . . when you win a game or a bet or an argument, the feeling you get when the teacher reads your test score in front of the class and it’s an ‘A+.’ And contrast it with the kind of feeling you get when you really enjoy the job you are doing, (got??) when you forget yourself riding the wave or painting the picture . . . hiking the trail, . . .”

The first feeling comes from exalting yourself. It’s called pride. If you’re like me, it hits you like a drug, and then leaves you anxious, afraid and in desperate need of more. The second feeling is humility. You’re lost, but found. You’re last, but first. You’re humbled, but the whole world is exalted.

Pride exalts self. And Humility exalts all things or sees everything exalted.

Pride is a lie embedded in our flesh that “life is violent competition.” It is a lie embedded in our stone-cold hearts that we must justify ourselves – that we must use our knowledge of the good, to make ourselves good, in the image of God.

Pride makes you want to beat your neighbor, rather than *love* your neighbor.
Pride creates a fortress that is a prison, in which you suffer alone in outer darkness.
Pride creates a false self.
Pride is sin.

Humility is the death of that self and freedom from sin.
If you’re humble, you cannot be offended, for there is no pride to offend.
You cannot be embarrassed, for there is no self to embarrass.

If you’re humble, you enjoy laughing at yourself, and you don’t mind criticism. You have an old false self that you’re happy to have exposed and destroyed. And a true and eternal self that cannot be destroyed. But you have no self that needs to be defended.

If you’re humble, everything is Grace. And you yourself are Grace.
So you are grateful to God. And therefore, have nothing to fear.

But just the thought of humility fills me with fear. I mean, I really wonder: “If I never tried to exalt myself, because I wasn’t afraid for myself, would myself ever *do* anything, or just sit there until I die?” I mean, humility feels like the death of my will (because my will is all about me). But maybe the death of my will is the birth of God’s will. And God’s will is free. God’s will is Love. Love is Free Will. I don’t possess free will – but Free Will possesses me.

Love doesn't do nothing. Love does everything! "*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.*" Fear exalts my self and Love exalts all things . . . including me. Love is Humble!

BUT HOW CAN I HUMBLE MYSELF?

If you condemn yourself, hate yourself, beat up on yourself, or kill yourself, you're not humbling yourself, you're wallowing in self, trying to rid yourself of self with more self.

And what happens if you think you succeed? You become proud of your self – just more deeply trapped in your self, like the world's *blindest, dumbest, saddest* Pharisee.

Nowhere does the Bible actually say, "*Humble yourselves,*" even if it's translated that way.

James 4: 10 literally reads, "*Ya'll be humbled in the presence of the Lord.*"

1 Peter 5:6, "*Y'all get humbled by the strong hand of God.*"

Mother Teresa wrote,

"We learn humility through accepting humiliations cheerfully. Do not let the chance pass you by."

If we really believed that the humble will be exalted, wouldn't we be grateful, and even cheerful over our won humiliations?

Eight years ago, I lay on my bed in absolute agony, having been slandered, defrocked, and kicked out of my church. I cried out to God, "God, there are like, three thousand people that are disappointed in me, don't understand, are angry at me, and even hate me."

Whether that was true or not, I can't tell, but that's how I felt. So I prayed, "God, there are three thousand people that hate me, and I can't do anything about it..." And this is what I heard in my heart: "Hey, that's pretty good therapy for a people pleaser, . . . don't you think?"

It's been eight years and every now and then, for a second or two, I accept my humiliation cheerfully and I see that God was saving me. . . from myself, and He still has more saving to do.

Failure is humiliating and there's no greater failure than sin.

I hope you don't want to sin, but I hope you're grateful that you have sinned. Sin is profoundly and wonderfully humiliating, and you've already sinned plenty. But seeing your sin is seeing that you can't do what you will to do. You can't create yourself in God's image. Seeing that kills you and creates space for a new you, created with Grace. *Ekdikesis* – that's the vengeance, justice, and righteousness of God.

Well, the tax collector is confessing his sin, and the Pharisee refuses to see his sin.

1. We learn humility through accepting humiliations . . .
2. We are utterly humiliated when we lose ourselves in something greater than ourselves:

Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon as the sun sets behind clouds of lightening and purple rain is utterly humiliating—though we usually call it “humbling”—for we enjoy the humiliation.

Watching your newborn son take his very first breath is wonderfully humiliating, as you realize: “I didn’t do that, God did that – created life.”

A great story is humiliating, for you lose yourself and then find yourself in the story.

Communion in the sacrament of the covenant of marriage is utterly humiliating. I mean, good sex is humiliating in an ecstatic and wonderful way. You lose yourself and find yourself—no longer two, but one—no longer private, but wonderfully public and not ashamed, and this “refers to Christ and the Church,” says Scripture. It refers to *God and His Bride*.

We are humbled when we lose ourselves in something greater than ourselves.

The tax collector is beating his chest, in the Sanctuary, as the priest slaughters a lamb in front of the Ark of the Covenant, containing the Law, covered with Mercy.

Jesus said, “...*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.*” “*Everyone.*” That’s plural, right?

And don’t all men exalt themselves?

And so, proud of themselves, they can’t humble themselves.

Jesus said, “...*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.*” But He didn’t say, “Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.”

He said, “*The ONE who humbles himself will be exalted.*”

If there is One who can humble Himself, that One is one who has no pride
and therefore no sin.

And, well, that one would be NOT like other men.

All men exalt themselves, and that one man would humble Himself.

He would travel the road in the exact opposite direction of all other men.

“Though he was in the form of God, “writes Paul, “he (singular) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself—made himself nothing. . . And being found in human form, he (that’s the One) . . . he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” Philipians 2: 6-8

He, Jesus, is the revelation of God, the decision of God, the will of God, the righteousness of God, the judgment of God.

So, God Almighty is not proud. He is . . . humble.

And then Paul writes, “*Have this mind among yourselves.*”

Well, how do we get that mind?

Can you take it, and be proud of it? Because, then, it’s not it. Is it?

As the smell of incense and roast lamb fills the air...

The tax collector beats his chest, weeping.

He doesn’t make any promises.

He doesn’t make any covenant.

He doesn’t make any resolutions.

He doesn’t even humble himself.

He is *being* humbled by the One that does.

He is *being* humbled by the One Man that is different from all other men

but makes himself like all other men...

in order to make all other men like Himself – *the Son of God*.

The tax collector beats his chest and takes a big breath of wind, filled with the smell of incense and roast lamb and he cries out,

“*Ho Theos hilastheti moi, to hamartolo. . .*”

“*God be merciful . . .*”

But he doesn’t use the usual word for mercy. More literal translations read,

“*God be propitious to me*” or “*God be expiatory to me,*”

But no one really knows what “*propitiation*” or “*expiation*” actually are. . .

Just like no one really knows exactly what *hilaskomai*, the Greek verb, actually means.

Hilaskomai is used in only one other place in the New Testament – Hebrews 2: 17,

Therefore [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation (that’s the word, Hilaskomai) for the sins of the people.

Hilaskarion – “Mercy Seat”

Hilaskomai – “Have Mercy”

Hilamos – “Mercy”

On the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur, the high priest would take two goats, that could also be called “lambs” (*seh*), and he would confess the sins of the people over one called “the scapegoat,” which was then released into the wilderness. And he would sacrifice the other, taking the blood behind the veil and sprinkling the blood of that lamb, or goat, upon the throne; the judgment seat; the Mercy Seat (the *hilaskarion*), from the same root as *hilaskomai*. And in this way, he would make atonement (*exhilaskomai*).

The daily sacrifices were all about *exhilaskomoi*—atonement.

So the tax collector cried out, God, “I need you to make atonement for me!”

“I need you to sacrifice for me, forgive me, redeem me . . . the sinner.”

“Do the thing the High Priest does behind the curtain for me . . . the sinner.”

Hilaskarion – “Mercy Seat”
Hilaskomai – “Have Mercy”
Hilasmos – “Mercy”

And Jesus says, “*I tell you, he went home justified – dikaioo – made right.*”

In Romans 3: 22, Paul writes this. Listen closely,

*. . . there is no distinction (that means all men are alike, you’re not better or worse than anyone): for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified” (Did you catch that? All have sinned, and the same “all” are justified – dikaioo – made right.) by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation (hilaskarion) by his blood through faith. This was to show God’s righteousness . . . that **he** might be just and the justifier of the one who has the **faith of Jesus.***

John 2: 2

[Jesus] is the propitiation (“atoning sacrifice” – hilasmos) for our sins, and not ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Do you see what this means?

Jesus is your scapegoat. You don’t need another scapegoat.

Jesus, who is first, has made Himself last, so you could be first.

We take His life, and that’s sin.

He gives His life, and that’s grace.

Life is not the “survival of the fittest.”

Life is literally “the sacrifice of the fittest.”

Life is many cells, many body parts, many people humbling themselves that all would be exalted.

Jesus is the Lamb that was slain.

Jesus is the High Priest.

Jesus is the Judgment of God, on the throne of God, over all humanity.

And God is humble!

God is endless Love. And Love is Life. The Life is in the Blood.

Communion

This is what it means:

On the night He was betrayed He took bread and broke it saying this is my body, which is for you. And He took the cup saying this is the covenant in my blood.

[Peter pulls up a big bucket labeled “Jesus”. It is filled with liquid representing Christ’s life. He approaches the other buckets that were used during the skit at the start of the service.]

God is saying something like this:
“Vince, ‘I forgive you my life; my Life is your life.’”

[Peter pours from the bucket labeled “Jesus” into Vince’s bucket.]

And now, this illustration isn’t perfect, because I don’t have an infinite bucket, but the Life of God is infinite, and the Grace is an endless river. And that means Vince can’t really be insulted or offended. If someone takes his life, he can forgive his life, for he has endless life.

Kim, I give you my righteousness. I justify you, with endless Grace, so you can give it away.

[Peter pours Christ’s life into Kim’s bucket.]

In Heaven, the giving never stops; people constantly humble themselves and are constantly exalted, as the River of Life flows from one bucket to another.

Susan, you have been humbled, and now I exalt you.
[He pours the life of Christ into Susan’s bucket.]

Peter . . . (Looking into his own bucket bucket.) You’re kinda’ full of your self.

But now, let me ask ya’ll, is the Pharisee unlike other men?
No, he’s just like other men, but at a different point on the journey.

Jesus said, *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.”*
And that’s great news!!! Because once you’re humbled, you will be exalted.

Do you remember how Paul taught that God would humble the Jews and make them jealous? (Romans 11) He would have mercy on the Gentiles, and so all Israel would be saved.

See, if you’ve exalted yourself, God’s mercy on the humble will burn you. It will humiliate you. Because God hates you? NO, because He’s bound and determined to exalt you, and make you in His own image.

And now, do you see it?
This river of Grace will flow between all the buckets, all the uniquely shaped earthen vessels, that are really blood vessels, for we are all actually one body.

So, now turn and look at your neighbor. Listen closely:

You are not better than them.

You are not worse than them.

You *are* them.

You are the “*Body of Christ*.”

Now come to the altar and let the river flow. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Benediction

James 4: 10 says this:

“Y’all be humbled in the presence of the Lord...” Good news: All will be humbled in the presence of the Lord. All will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“Y’all be humble in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

So because He is infinite love, He said, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.”

Is that bad news? Hell, no! That’s the very best news!

Everyone will be humbled.

Everyone will die.

We’re all going to have to die!

And then James says,

“Get yourself humbled in the presence of God, and He will exalt you.”

That means we’re all going to get humbled! And we’re all going to get exalted! And how do we get exalted? With the very life of Him, who humbled Himself for all, so that all might be exalted. And what happens after everybody is humbled, and everybody is exalted? Oh! A great party! Because what does a party need? A party needs people that love each other freely, and people that aren’t afraid to put lampshades on top of their heads! That’s what a great party needs. And you see, when you come to the presence of the Lord, when you surrender to the presence of the Lord (which I have to do, all the time) well then I think you can begin to party right now!

In Jesus’ name, believe the Gospel, and live.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don’t be shy about informing us of errors.