

The title for today's message is: **The Way of Grace Is Clearly Different**

Luke began chapter 14 by saying: *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched....*

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Dear Friends in Christ: Jesus often taught using parables. In fact, Mark tells us in chapter 4 of his Gospel that Jesus ***“did not say anything to the people without using a parable”***

Once, Matthew writes, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Whoever has, will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ***“You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.***

So Jesus not only expected, but in some cases intended, that the Pharisees and all the people that opposed him and his message would not understand what he meant when he used a parable.

Certain things that Jesus had to say were only for the ears and hearts of believers, they would have been wasted on His enemies.

But this time, at this prominent Pharisee's Sabbath dinner, Jesus spoke in parables that even the most self-righteous and hostile Pharisee would understand.

There may not have been any believers in the house that day, but anyone there who heard would have understood.

Which means that I probably don't have to work very hard to explain the meaning of the two parables Jesus spoke in our Gospel today.

And since the meaning of what Jesus had to say at this Sabbath dinner was quite clear and vividly illustrated, the point Jesus was making was also clear.

Jesus was not really that concerned about telling dinner guests where to sit or hosts whom to invite.

What Jesus really wanted to get through everyone's heads, and hearts, was that the way they believed, thought, and acted was not God's way.

It wasn't, and isn't, the way truly righteous people behave, because believers are not concerned with self-promotion and self-glorification.

Christ's way is clearly different, and Jesus wanted these Pharisees, and everyone, really to look to God's grace instead of their own interests.

Now, to many people, “grace” isn’t much more than just a word. They’re aware that it has some kind of religious meaning, but they’re not exactly sure what.

They just know that Christians think grace is amazing, from the song. The better informed in our society will recognize that grace has something to do with salvation.

And with how or why people get to heaven but that’s often about the extent of their knowledge of grace.

So let’s review. What is grace? Grace is God’s undeserved love for undeserving sinners.

But what does grace have to do with how we think and live? That’s a good question. Jesus probably would have been happy if one of the Pharisees had asked him that.

They didn’t, but Jesus showed them anyway, He showed them the connection between the love of God and Christian humility.

You see, a believer in Christ has a completely different idea of self-worth. Most of the world finds self-worth in what one does or has done.

But the Christian knows God’s law, and realizes that what he has done and keeps on doing is sin breaking every one of Christ’s commands in one way or another, and keeps on doing it.

Because his sinful nature always wants to go the opposite way from what God wants.

And the believer knows that what he or she is, a sinner just like every other human being on the planet. Knowing full well that they desperately need is forgiveness.

And anyone who follows the way of grace understands that we do not deserve any honor from God, because our sin and rebellion merit us only death and hell.

But that's really not what makes it possible for a believer to think and act the way Jesus encourages us here.

What makes the difference is God's grace, we realize that despite our natural unworthiness God loves us.

We instead had the ultimate worth to Him, the Lord of the Universe in fact, we meant so much to Him that He sacrificed His own Son, to die on the cross to take away our sins.

Look, If we matter that much to God, and we do, all people do, then human ideas of status and honor fade into insignificance.

I mean, who cares about the best seat at a wedding reception when you're already a guest of honor at Christ's glorious feast in heaven?

Grace also teaches believers, who have been given Christ's perfection, to put others first, the same way Jesus did.

We are not only recipients of God's love by faith, we are also its distributors, and so we love our neighbors without regard for who or what they are or aren't.

And I suppose I should also add that we love our fellow believers, spouses, and siblings the same way because that's how God loves you.

You see now how radical a change God's grace makes in the way a believer thinks and behaves.

This is not at all the way the world does things, although there are other

28 years or so ago, Mac Davis had a tongue-in-cheek song on the charts whose refrain began, “Oh Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.”

Actually, for the Christian, it’s completely the opposite: it’s easy, not hard to be humble, because we’re perfect in every way.

Now, yeah, if we tried being as humble as Jesus calls for here in our own strength, we’d be easily tripped up, it wouldn’t last very long.

But we haven’t only been forgiven our sins, we’ve also been given Christ’s perfection, and no one has ever been more humble than the Son of God made flesh. Perfection does not mean pride, it means humility.

The other day when I drove by a School there were some students out by the road with a sign that said, “Free Car Wash!”

I didn’t stop because I had just washed the car. But I was pretty sure of one thing I would have found if I had: the car wash wasn’t really free.

The whole idea is that they’ll wash your car and you’ll feel so appreciative or simply obligated that you’ll make a donation to whatever cause they’re promoting.

Most likely even paying more than you would have paid for a professional car wash.

Although I’m finding no fault with the students or whoever they were, that’s a good illustration of what Jesus was speaking against in his second parable here.

Doing something good for someone with the expectation of getting something good in return.

The way of grace is different and Jesus encourages us to do good for those who cannot repay us in kind.

Whether it's feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, or helping the handicapped.

This is not easy, by the way. Our world has us pretty well conditioned to not do anything for nothing.

And our sinful nature doesn't like "wasted effort" of helping people who can't help us. But once again, God's grace makes the difference in our hearts.

Because that's exactly the way God's love works, isn't it? Think of all the things He has given, gives, and will give not only to you, but to everyone on the earth.

Physically we have sun and rain and food and shelter and clothing and countless things besides; spiritually we have the forgiveness of sins.

Has the Lord given us any of those things expecting to be repaid in kind? Of course not, and that again is God's grace at work.

But you will get something back. Jesus says we will be blessed for the love we show and give to others.

Yes, we "will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Remember our reward and our treasure is in heaven.

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.