

# Up Means Down

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and the dangers of pride, highlighting the law of spiritual gravity that whatever goes up, God will bring down, and whatever goes down, God will lift up.*

**Duration:** 23:16

**Scripture:** Proverbs 16:18, Micah 6:8, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 23:12, Luke 18:11-12, James 4:8, 1 Peter 5:5

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of a spiritual law of gravity, comparing it to the physical law of gravity. He uses the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector from Luke 18 to illustrate his point. The speaker emphasizes the importance of humility and warns against pride, which he believes is the cause of agitation and unrest in our lives. He encourages listeners to take on the yoke of Jesus and find rest in him, rather than seeking self-exaltation.

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## Transcript

You can't grow in God unless you understand the spiritual law of gravity as it compares to the physical law of gravity, because it's slightly different, really dramatically different. The law of gravity, which is one of the first things you learn and you gotta understand and you teach your children, don't go near the edge of that precipice, that rooftop. Why? Because if you fall, you will not float, you will go down.

You won't fly like Superman, you won't be Spider-Man and be able to hang on to the thing or Iron Man or how many mans they have now. If you fall, you will go down at 32 feet per second per second and it'll be bad. Spiritually, there is a law of gravity also and as I said, a twist to it.

So let's look at this parable of Jesus from Luke 18. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray.

One a Pharisee, that's the strictest of the religious sect, that's the strictest, most orthodox Jewish believer, Jewish practitioner in the time of Christ. They were the ultra, ultra conservatives. And the other, a tax collector or a publican and tax collectors were notorious to be called sinners and looked down upon, why? Because tax collectors were Jewish people who were working for the Romans and collecting taxes from their own people which the Jews did not like.

They did not like paying taxes to the Roman Empire but they had to or they would be crushed. But the Jews would do it and make, gouge them and make some money on the side, made tax collectors like the lowest, lowest, lowest, lowest dregs of society to them. So these two men went up, a Pharisee and a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector, this low-life tax collector. I fast twice a week and I give a 10th of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance.

It seemed like the Pharisee went in to more of the inner court and stood there praying but the tax collector, he would not go in there. He didn't feel worthy. He stood in the outer court.

You couldn't go past that because that's only where the priests went. Pharisees weren't priests. Now he stood away and the tax collector stood at a distance.

He would not even look up to heaven but he beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. Now Jesus is speaking. I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God and here's the reverse law of gravity.

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled without exception and those who humble themselves will be exalted. In other words, both of these people, the Pharisee and the tax collectors, they ran into a law that it seems like neither one was aware of. They ran into God's law of gravity reversed.

Whatever goes up and this is the physical part that's true for us, God says, I will bring down but whatever goes down, here's the reverse law. Whatever goes down, I, God, I will exalt and lift that person up. The Pharisee is rejected because he exalted himself.

He's full of pride. The humble publican who just beat his breast and wouldn't even look up at heaven, I'm not even worthy to look that way, just beat his breast. No, he'll be justified.

He goes home forgiven and blessed by God because here's the law. Whatever goes up, whoever exalts himself, ministers, choir members, deacons, people down, up, young, old, every race, whatever goes up, God says, I swear to you, I will bring you down. Whatever goes down, God says, I promise you, I will lift you up.

I will lift you up. Can we all say amen to that? Now, in the Old and the New Testament, we see this law touched upon over and over again. We see warnings in the Old Testament in Proverbs.

Pride cometh before a fall and a haughty spirit before destruction. We see it in Micah where the prophet says, what does God require of you? But to be just with people and act right, treat people with justice, and to walk humbly before your God. Then in the New Testament, way beyond what we read here from Jesus in Matthew 18, we see it over and over again.

James says, remember, God, draw near to God, he'll draw near to you. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Peter says it even stronger beside all the references Jesus has.

Peter says it this, just remember this, congregation of believers back then, God resists. He uses a word that's only used about five times in the New Testament. God resists the proud.

He has this thing about pride. He resists, and that word means, if you look it up, like an army general would gather all his forces to attack a certain person. That's the strong word that's used.

God opposes the proud, the spiritually proud, the white proud, the black proud, the Baptist proud, the charismatic proud, the proud proud, the wealthy proud, the poor proud, because you can be poor as a mouse and be proud, and you can be wealthy and be a proud, you can be proud of your island, of your country, you can be proud of your talent, proud of your looks, proud of your education, proud of your preaching ability, proud of your accolades, proud of whatever. Pride feeds on anything and everything. It's a rare sin, but the worst of all, because it seems like that's the sin that turned Lucifer into Satan.

His heart was lifted up with pride, with nobody to tempt him. So think how natural pride is. But it'll feed on anything, because you can sing a solo and be proud how you sang.

You can preach a sermon and not be looking for God's favor and pointing people to God. You're gonna want reinforcement from people so that you can feed your pride. In other words, you could do anything in the world, even in religious realm, and pride will get into it.

In fact, you can be proud of your humility. Pride sticks to us very easily. So this man didn't know, and neither did the publican, what they had run into.

They had run into this law of spiritual gravity. Notice the Pharisee. Just two things stand out about this pride.

Even when he prayed, he talked about himself. Dear God, I thank you that I'm not like other people. I thank you that I don't do this and I don't do that.

Other lowlifes do that, but not me. Imagine how he talked to regular people if he talked like this to God. I fast twice a week.

That was never a requirement of any Jewish person. There was only one day a year that they had to fast, and that was on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. But he's saying I fast twice a week.

Tuesdays and Thursdays were the day that a lot of the Pharisees fasted. And I give tithes of everything I have. Back in the Old Testament, you gave a tithe of what your crops were, and so on and so forth, and you didn't have to tithe on the herbs in your garden.

You know, you had a little cucumber or a little something, a little garlic, a little sofrito, whatever you were making back down there. You didn't have to tithe that, but the Pharisees tithed that. He said he was proud.

I'm not like this other guy either. So pride gets to us and can be easily seen when we're always talking about ourselves. We're not really interested in other people.

We don't have time for what they're going through because we're so not full of the devil, something worse, we're full of ourselves. The devil can be cast out. How many say amen? In the name of Jesus, we have that.

But casting out self, now that's a whole other ballgame. Always talking about what I feel, my opinion, what I think. This is the way I look.

This is how I feel today. This is how my knee is bothering me or my shoulder. I, I, I. Even to God, he couldn't stop saying I. He mentions God like twice, and he mentions himself about six times.

In prayer. Not worthy art thou, O Lord, you are great. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

His mercies are new, never come to an end. No, no, himself, himself. The other thing that pride always reveals itself is you condemn other people.

Because pride feeds on putting other people down. Pride feeds on that. God, remember, I'm not like this low life.

Not like those adulterers and evildoers, and like this publican. I mean, this guy is like, how can people be like that? How could you collect from your own people, right? Pride always is talking about other people to put them down and judge them. You find somebody who's always judging and talking people, that's someone reeks of pride.

They don't even know it. They think they're being righteous. But talking about other people, comparing yourself to other people, look, see what he did? God, I just thank you I'm not like this low life.

Never saw his own need. Ah, but the publican, he just beat his breast. He had no time to compare himself with anyone.

It's just like God. I don't even deserve to look at you. Just have mercy.

He went down. God said, you went down? Good, I'm bringing you up. You're gonna go home justified.

You see, the Pharisee thought that by standing in the main place in the inner court, he had a main line to God. He had a fast track to God. But no position has power with God.

If you come to the altar, means nothing in itself. You come to church, means nothing. No physical presence in any physical place means anything.

What God is looking at in me is not where my body is, but where my heart is. And if my heart is low, he will bring it up. Can we put our hands together and say amen? If my heart is high, if my heart is high, then it doesn't matter where I am.

That was the Pharisee, and this was the man who just beat his breast. Let me just say one other thing before I draw this to a conclusion. Do you notice how quickly God answered? Jesus said, that man, the humble man, had all his sins forgiven.

I know, but what'd he do? How long did he pray? No, he humbled himself. That's how God looks at humility. This is a law we have to understand.

Whatever goes down, God will lift up. Whatever goes up, in whatever way you do it, no matter how you cover it with false humility and all of that, God says, no, you're coming down. He has this aversion to pride that is unlike anything else that I can find in the Bible.

He's against thievery. He's against adultery, uncleanness. He's against lying.

He's against all kinds of things, but there's something about pride. Some people have said because when he smells it, he smells what ruined heaven. It was pride that ruined heaven, not someone smoking weed,

not somebody stealing anything.

Let me just say this in closing on the positive side. Amazing thing about humility is what it brings which we don't think about. Many times we talk about seeking God, drawing near to God, but the best way, the only way that I can see to draw near to God is to begin with by letting your heart go down, by humbling yourself, by acknowledging how lost we all are without God.

Not just to get saved. How does someone get saved? They have to humble themselves. Why are some people so adverse to salvation? Because they know they have to come off their high horse.

They gotta humble themselves and say, I am wrong, God is right, and for a lot of people, they're never gonna admit they're wrong about anything. Who are you to judge me? I don't even believe the Bible can judge me. God can't judge me.

The whole thing is just a bunch of hocus pocus, but at the root of that is the inability to go down and say, God have mercy on me. But it continues as a Christian. We talk about seeking God.

Look what Isaiah had revealed to him from God in Isaiah 57. For this is what the high and the exalted one says, he who lives forever, whose name is holy. Listen, I live, I dwell, my habitation is in a high and holy place called heaven, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

God says I live in two places, basically. My presence is centered and made very real in heaven, in heaven, the high and holy place, but also I just search right now in the choir. I search among all the ministers in New York.

I search in the congregation. Who has a lowly, broken, contrite spirit, sees how needy they are of me, isn't self-dependent. I can handle this on my own.

Whenever I find someone broken and lowly, I will dwell. I will live there. I will live there.

In fact, as some great writer has said, God's main job every day because he loves us is to humble us. He wants to bless us, but the law of gravity forbids in his own character for him to bless pride. So his role every day with Jim Simba is how can I bring that high horse down? How can I bring him down? How can I speak to him, remind him how, just brothers and sisters, just think how impotent we are.

Do you know that you're gonna live tomorrow? No. Who holds your life in his hand? But we boast and we act like we got this thing together. And every day we have to depend on our next breath from him, right? And then just think how we're sinners and we've sinned.

And people might think good of us, but we know who we really are and yet God didn't destroy us. He just showed mercy to us, right? He loved us so much he sent his son and we're gonna walk in front of him like we're somebody? What if he would reveal who we are to the whole world? We'd all be running out of here. Forget the evacuation in Florida.

We'd evacuate New York City, right? Just evacuate. Am I right? So pride is a kind of spiritual madness. The angels must look at it and say, how? How could they do that? Because they're perfect and never sin and all they do is bow and worship 24-7.

But we are frail and faulty and walking around like I am somebody. No, God is great and we are small. He deserves all the glory.

Come on, and all the honor and all the praise. So God dwells with the humble. You don't have to seek him, just get down.

He'll come and live there, he'll move in. Don't you want God living with you every day, blessing you, helping you? Just two other things very quickly. The inability to have faith in God many times is because of our stinking pride.

Humility, a humble person, is capable of having the greatest faith. Why? Because when I'm full of Jim Cymbala, how can I be trusting God when I'm trusting Jim Cymbala? It's when we're broken and have nothing. Have you ever got in a situation where you knew, no way, Jose, I cannot do this, I cannot get out.

I only have God and your eyes went totally to God. How many have ever had a situation like that? In other words, when God brings us low, then we're able to just look up. What, are you gonna look to yourself? This is what happened with the centurion, remember? He came to Jesus, the Roman officer, and said, my servant is sick.

Would you please come to my house? Because I know you could heal him. And then he replied, Jesus said to him, shall I come and heal him? And the centurion replied, Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof, please. But just say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one go, and he goes. I tell that one come, and he comes.

I say to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. Why did he have such great faith? Because he had such humility that he said, you don't even have to go to my house, please.

You can't come to my house. I'm not even worthy to have you. Some of us would be saying, no, come over.

You gotta see my new furniture. I got a new chandelier. I got a whole thing going on here.

No, no, not him, no, I'm not worthy. But just speak the word, I know you. Just say it, it's done.

And Jesus said, I haven't found faith like that, but notice the humility that always accompanies great faith. You can't be proud and have great faith. It's impossible.

Jesus said in Matthew this, and I leave you with this. Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. How do you get rest? Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

What do we learn, Jesus? For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. You can get prayed for by 100 people, but the secret to rest is to be like Christ in his humility. Imagine, he was the son of God and the most humble person who ever walked on the earth.

I don't find him condemning anyone, and he was perfect. I hear people always around me putting this one down, that one down, we're all guilty of that one. This one, this, I see this and that one.

We're going on and on with that. I don't see him saying that about one person. He was perfect.

He was humble. He took a beating when it was God's will. Never even opened his mouth.

When our pride gets injured just the way someone looks at you, you know? I saw like a riot break out one time at Dallas BBQ because two tables, whatever was going on, and someone yelled across, must have been looking and said, what are you looking at? And the other one said, I ain't looking at nothing. Said, what'd you just say? And a whole riot broke out in the thing. We all ran out with our ribs.

We're going out there with our cornbread. It's like, yeah, that's great. I don't have to pay the bill.

I'm out of here now. It's a crime scene. I don't have to pay anything.

But Jesus not had bad looks. Jesus had people hating him. He never said a word.

That's why he had such perfect rest. You know what agitates us every day? You know why we're a bundle of nerves? Because of our pride. Doesn't go the way we want.

People don't act the way we want. How could you possibly displease me? Don't you know I'm king of the universe? How could you displease me? We get all agitated. But Jesus said, you want to find rest? Take my yoke upon you.

Be like me. This sermon here is even counter, not just to the world's values. I know that if you're here today and you're secular, non-Christian, you're like, this is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life.

This is a joke. The whole thing of society is put yourself forward and tell everyone you are somebody. And Jesus said, no, if you do that, I'll show you that you are nobody.

And how many know he can do that quickly? But even among Christians now, this is an odd message. Because a lot of preaching and a lot of stuff is just self-exaltation. It's hard to watch sometimes Christian television because the egos are the size of Montana.

It's just like, give it a rest. Who cares about you? I'm interested in Jesus. You know, there used to be a sign in the old days in wooden pulpits.

You could only see it if you were the choir or you were sitting on the bench where before they invited you to preach and it says, it's from the book, from the gospels, sirs, we would see Jesus. It's a reminder to the preacher, they're interested in Jesus, not you, so give it a rest already, would you please? We want Jesus. How many want him today? Every eye closed if you're here today and never have put your faith in Christ, never humbled yourself, confessed your sins, put your faith in Christ as your Lord and Savior.

You can do that right now. Then you can go up to the mezzanine lobby and sign up and we'll baptize you. On one day in the early church history, 3,000 were saved on one day and they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.

Father God, I pray that if there's anyone here who has not received you, that they can pray this prayer with me and the congregation and today will be the first day of their new life in you. Everybody pray after me. Dear God, forgive me of my sins.

I humble myself. I need you as my Savior and my Lord. I give my life to you.

I believe in my heart and I confess with my mouth. You are the Son of God. You died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day.

Jesus, I crown you King of my life. I pray this in Christ's name. And everyone said.

Amen. Praise the Lord. Remember now, go to that mezzanine lobby.

We wanna sign you up and help you and be baptized. If any of you have questions, we have leaders here in the front to help you. Turn around and hug somebody, handshake somebody.

God bless you.

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