

**Luke 14: 7-14; “Thankful to take the Lowest Place”, A Sermon for
Thanksgiving preached on November 21st, 2010, by Pastor Paul Rendall
In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Jesus had been invited to the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, it says in verse 1. There were a number of Pharisees there that day and they were watching Jesus closely to see what He would do while He was there, so that they might find something to accuse Him of. Since it was the Sabbath day and Jesus knew that these men had added many things to the true observance of the Sabbath; things which so burdened men down that they could not find real rest or healing for either soul or body; He asked them a question. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” They believed that it was not lawful; that it was a form of work, which ought not to be done on that holy day. But instead of trying to answer Jesus’ question, they kept silent so that Jesus would be forced to answer the question for them. Jesus didn’t hesitate one iota of time. Verse 4 says that He “took him and healed him, and let him go.” And then he gave them the rebuke which they so richly deserved. “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” It was no doubt true that all those who were there that day would have immediately pulled their donkey or their ox out of the pit. They could not answer him a word. So he went on to tell them a parable; those who were invited to this feast; when He “noted how they chose the best places” for themselves. They had come there to make observations on the Lord of Glory, thinking that He was a mere man, but they found themselves being righteously evaluated by the One who will someday be their eternal judge.

You and I need to understand from this that we are given this time, in living our lives, to learn to be humble and to receive the teaching and observations of our Lord Jesus, not only the upon Pharisees of that day, but upon ourselves as well. We see the mistakes and sins of the Pharisees here; don’t we? But do we see our own mistakes and sins? The reality for the disciple of Christ today is that our Lord is most certainly risen from the dead and has been given all power and authority in heaven and earth. His eyes are a flame of fire to discern the truth concerning your heart, and your attitudes, and your actions. And yet; I believe and trust that there is a difference between many of you here today and the Pharisees. Many of you here have come to know Christ’s love and grace to your sinful heart. You have been forgiven of all your sins and you are His willing learners. The truth that Jesus is teaching in this passage is that a true disciple of His; one who knows Him and who would do Him service, is the person who is humble. This is something which Christ would have each of us to learn. I want to tie this truth in with the theme of Thanksgiving Day in this way. I believe that the person who is thankful, will; being taught by the grace of God; become humble. But in becoming humble,

he will not turn in on himself and become an island to himself. He will look out from himself to see how he might serve Christ. This begins when a person comes to see how their attitudes in relation to themselves and others need to change to become more like the person who Jesus describes in this parable, so that God will be glorified in their life. So let us ask ourselves 3 questions in relation to this parable to determine whether we are making progress in becoming the humble, and holy, and loving people that Jesus would have us to be? 1st – Are you thankful to have received the invitation to this wedding feast that Jesus is talking about? (Verses 7-9) 2^{ndly} – Are you willing to show forth your thankfulness in taking the lowest position at the table? (Verses 10 and 11) And 3^{rdly}- Will you continue to have a thankful spirit, looking to do the Lord's bidding, as you wait to go up higher at the table to which you have been called? (Verses 12-14)

1st- Are you thankful to have received the invitation to this wedding feast that Jesus is talking about? (Verses 7-9)

Remember now; this is a parable that Jesus told them. It is an earthly story with a heavenly, or spiritual meaning. Jesus is not simply trying to make the Pharisees change their views of etiquette. It is meant to refute their pride and sense of self-importance. Jesus says, "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place." This feast to which Jesus and the others were invited was not a wedding feast, but rather a Sabbath feast. Weddings did not take place on the Sabbath day. Yet the parable says, "a wedding feast". Why? I think that it is because in His parable the Lord Jesus is actually directing them to a greater feast than the one that these Pharisees were presently attending. He is directing their attention to the wedding feast which all Jews were invited to in that time, and to which all and everyone is invited to in our day. He is speaking of the feast of the gospel. It is not to trust in their own evaluation of themselves, but rather God's evaluation of them. It is to learn to see yourself as a sinner needing grace and salvation. And it is an invitation to which none without grace will respond to in a right way in the sense of their desiring to be saved. The Pharisees were those who thought that because of their great, affected spirituality in relation to their own outward keeping of God's moral and ceremonial law; that they were entitled to the best seats in the house of worship or feasts. I am saying this in a literal fashion. This is just what they did. They thought themselves to be wise and righteous in their own eyes and in the eyes of others whom they believed they were better than. Jesus condemns them for this over in Matthew 23, if you will turn with me there. We find here that Jesus is castigating the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in verses 1-4, and in verse 5 He says to the multitudes and to His disciples: "But all of their works they do to be seen by men." "They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments." "They love the best places at the feasts, the best seats in the

synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’.” And down in verse 12 he repeats the same words that he uses in this parable that we are studying: “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

I believe that there is more here in this parable than meets the eye. The invitation being given is being given by God Himself. It is the instruction that each man or woman is not to think more highly of themselves than they should. There are other people in the world who are more honorable than ourselves; people whom the One who gave the invitation knows should have the highest places at the table. The “highest place at the table” in the eyes of these Pharisees was the place which seemed most desirable to themselves in terms of the way that other men, who are trying to be religious without God, see things. They would choose for themselves that best position. They saw themselves as worthy of it because of their many supposedly good works and their following the traditions of other religious Jewish men. Actually, in the Lord’s eyes, it was (and is) the place and position which is bestowed by God upon those who are striving by His grace to be faithful to Him and to His Word. It is accepting the invitation to see yourself as unworthy of the best place; unworthy to come to the table at all. And yet God and Christ invite sinners to the greatest of all feasts in the gospel. The proof of this is in the continuation of the parable in verses 15 and following. “Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’” “Then Jesus said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many.’” It is the parable of the gospel feast. These Pharisees were choosing the best seats for themselves in the synagogues. But the Lord Jesus is inviting them, not to the kingdom of self-righteous religious men, but to the kingdom of God. He is telling them that when the One who invited you comes Himself to the feast and sees that you have put yourself in the place of honor, you will be forced to “give place” to another who is worthy of the honor of having the best seat at the table. There will be a sense of shame attendant upon this because you had a wrong view of yourself. Let me ask you if you are thankful for the gospel? Are you thankful for the invitation which God has extended to you to come and sit at the table in the eternal kingdom of God? Are you thankful that your pride has been humbled and that you see yourself as an undeserving sinner. If you do not see yourself this way you have deceived yourself to think that you can choose the high position at the table of having eternal life, but in the end, you will be forced to give place someday to the people whom you now think yourself to be better than; people who have come to see their need of Christ and His grace. Your pride led you to think that you really deserved that higher place when all the while the Lord did not intend it. You didn’t understand His ways and you spurned your need to come to the feast on His terms. His principles of promotion are far different from yours. I would urge you to repent and re-think this presumptuous

course that you have taken. Come to the feast and seat yourself at the lowest position. This brings us to our second question.

2ndly - Are you willing to show forth your thankfulness in taking the lowest position at the table? (Verses 10 and 11)

“But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’” “Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.” Jesus is now speaking about promotion in the kingdom of God. The feast is the invitation to come through the gospel and feed upon the grace and truth which comes to you through the Lord Jesus Christ; seeing yourself as a sinner. The issue of honor and position are still there, set before you; even after you accept the invitation and come to Christ. You will still have to ask yourself; am I thankful enough with what grace and gifts and talents that I have been given by God; to take the lowest position at the table. You see, the person who is thankful for the great salvation which has been given to them in Christ should be willing to humble themselves to be taught and to take the lowest position. And yet, many Christians both young and old, are not. Learning this principle of truth and consciously choosing to take the lowest place do not come automatically in the Christian life. Let me give you a Biblical example of this. Turn with me to Matthew 20, verse 20. “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” “And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ “She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left in Your kingdom.’” “But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask.’ “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’” “They said to Him, ‘We are able.’” “So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’” “And when the ten heard it they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.”

Now notice how Jesus does not say that there is no high and privileged position such as sitting at His right hand or His left in His kingdom. He simply says first that it takes being able to take the lowest place at the table and to suffer for His name’s sake. The brothers, James and John, are willing to do both. But then Jesus spells it out when they tell him that they are willing to suffer for Him. He says, “It is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” That is, God the Father has plans and purposes formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness. And what God has purposed, it shall stand. No purpose of His shall be thwarted, and especially in relation to what position men have in His Son’s kingdom. Let me ask you whether you understand this? God has certain people in mind to honor with high positions in Christ’s kingdom both in this life and in the next, and yet you and I do not know who they are. We may think that we might know who they are; but chances are, we will be wrong. Why? Because

God's evaluation of them will take vastly more into consideration than present gifts, and talents, and how popular a person is presently in this life. We cannot see the picture of a man's whole life like God does. We do not know how God uses various things that are done by that person to fulfill God's purposes. The one thing that we do know is that in the final analysis, that God's giving these privileged positions in the coming eternal kingdom, are according to the faithfulness of the person considered. Luke 19: 16 says, "Then came the first, saying 'Master, you mina has earned ten minas.'" "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'" You see how faithfulness to small things brings about a bestowal of a position at the "head of the table".

What about attaining to positions in this life in the Church and the work of the kingdom here and now? Is it not God who raises men up to these important positions? Yes, it is. But it is not position that should be striven for as much as usefulness to the Master. Usefulness to the Master does not require position, but it may lead to it. And the requisite for great usefulness is great humility. It is found in taking the lowest position and being faithful in little things that you might, over time, become faithful in much. It is in working closely together with the elders of the church that you attend so that they can see the grace of God at work in your life, your commitment to the people of God and to the work of Christ's Church. If the Lord would have you to be in a position of Elder or deacon, your faithfulness in pursuing all the details of the tasks and work of service that the Lord Himself has called you to, will make it plain to everyone that you are worthy of the honor of serving Christ in one of these positions. But remember, it is the work of service that you are called to; not the attention and the recognition which the office might bring. All the glory for what you do should go to Christ. It is only God who can call you to "go up higher" so that you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. You never need to exalt yourself in Christ's work; you will only be brought to shame. But God can give you favor in the eyes of His people and can exalt you in the proper way and proper time. All of this in connection with humility. Augustine once said, "The first thing is humility." "The second thing is humility." "And the third thing is also humility." Let me ask you if this is what you are striving for; to be humbling yourself and taking upon you the work of a bondservant? This is how you can show your thankfulness for all of the grace that God has given to you; and the privilege of serving Him.

Then finally and 3rdly- Will you continue to have a thankful spirit, looking to do the Lord's bidding, as you wait to go up higher at the table to which you have been called? (Verses 12-14)

"Then He also said to him who invited Him, 'When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.'" "But when you give a feast,

invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” The problem here with the Pharisees was that they were all too prone to inviting their friends, their brothers, their relatives, and their rich neighbors to their feasts. They would probably very seldom, if ever, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Let us consider whether we are thankful for what knowledge and gifts and resources the Lord has given to us by asking whether we are being hosts for the Lord’s gospel feast? Do we ever invite people to dinner who really have great physical needs? Do we attempt to share the gospel with those who may have great difficulties in understanding all the major doctrines of the Bible? Do we humble ourselves to come down to the level of the poor and needy so that we can truly minister to them. These are questions that we ought to ask ourselves as we come to the close of this sermon. Will you continue to have a thankful spirit; showing forth your thankfulness by doing the Lord’s bidding in this regard? As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let us ask ourselves whether we are truly thankful. I pray that it will be so with every one of us in this church.