



Luke 14:7-14

The God Who Gives Grace to the Humble

7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:

8 "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;

9 "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.

10 "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.

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

12 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.

13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.

14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Humility has been rightly called *the Queen of Christian virtues*. Without humility, you cannot truly even enter into the Christian faith, for when you become a Christian, you are acknowledging before the entire world that you are a sinner, that you cannot save yourself, and that your only hope of salvation lies in the unmerited mercy of God given in His Son Jesus Christ. Do you remember the first question in the vows people take when they become members of this church? It is "***Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?***" Rightly understood, that vow is a declaration that *He is everything, and I am less than Nothing*. Or perhaps better understood it is ***I am less than nothing, but I thank God that Jesus is everything I need.***

It has universally been my experience that the most spiritually mature Christians are inevitably also the most humble of Christians. There is also a link between humility and self-knowledge, the better a Christian knows himself, the more humble they are and the greater their love to Christ.

Take the apostle Paul for instance, now if there ever was a Christian who had a right to boast of himself and his accomplishments, or to toot his own horn and demand the respect of others, it was Paul. And yet how does he speak of himself?:

"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15)

As he progressed in the faith, Paul's estimation of himself decreased, even as his love for Christ and desire to make him known grew. John the Baptist summed up that phenomenon which should be present in the heart of every true disciple very simply: ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."***

That divine formula actually should give you a pretty good standard for judging your own spiritual progress: Is your estimation of yourself ***decreasing***? Is your estimation of Jesus ***increasing***?

The Pharisees stood on the opposite extreme, their estimation of themselves was wildly high and their estimation of Christ couldn't have been lower. Jesus had already pointed out the lack of humility on the part of the Pharisees saying ***"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."*** Now at this dinner at which He is a guest, Jesus is watching an unseemly illustration of exactly the kind of sinful pride that He had mentioned.

Here they are scrambling to get the "best seats." Now in the present day church, the "best seats" are of course the ones in the very back the farthest away from the Pastor, but back then at a banquet and in the synagogue the best seats were the ones closest to the ruler of the synagogue. These were the seats of honor.

So the most highly exalted position at a banquet would be reclining on a couch immediately to his right. You see in ancient Israel they ate while reclining on a large couch that would have seated 3 people called a *triclinium*, and these couches were arranged into a U shape with the ruler sitting at the base of the U and the least honored guest at the farthest point from him to his left.

Funny isn't it, we read in verse that the Pharisees were watching ***HIM*** closely, but we know as well that Jesus was watching them. The difference of course was that they were watching with evil intent looking for something that they could use against Him, while Jesus is looking for an opportunity to do them good. That is what a good pastor or shepherd does. He watches his flock, becomes familiar with the besetting sins of their heart, and then when he has a diagnosis he does the work of a physician of the soul, preaching and teaching in a way that will best minister to their souls.

So when Jesus sees that they are filled with pride and trying to exalt themselves, he tells them a parable designed to convict them of their sin and teach them the way to be truly blessed. Jesus who had just cured a case of dropsy of the body, where the limbs are swollen, is going to treat a case of dropsy of the soul, where the heart is swollen with pride.

A parable as you know is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, and it is designed to use earthly imagery to convey a spiritual truth. There is a Chinese proverb that says ***when a man points to the moon, the idiot looks at the finger***, so too when we look at parables, we need to look at the truth ***they point to***. Jesus is not merely talking then in the two examples he gives about banquet etiquette. As with all His parables, think about it, the sower, the pearl of great price – there is a truth about salvation.

What truth is Jesus conveying to them then? Well these were men who truly believed themselves to be righteous, who in fact were always exalting themselves and lording it over the people. One of the great reasons would not listen to Jesus was because He came to seek and to save the lost and they didn't think that was what they were. They who were dead in their sins thought they were well. That is why

you had that exchange in Luke 5:30 *And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

32 "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

They didn't know themselves at all and the only standard they were willing to judge themselves by was a) how familiar they were with the traditions of the Rabbis and b) how much better than the obvious sinners they were.

Calvin put it this way:

it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also - He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced. For, since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy, any empty semblance of righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

So what advice does Jesus give them? Don't exalt yourselves – *abase yourselves, humble yourselves*. He uses the example of the wedding feast again. Christ uses the example of the wedding feast in both Matthew and Luke as an example of the great supper that will occur when the Messiah returns for his people, and so the people would have understood it. This is the feast that will occur when the kingdom of heaven is present in its fullness. When salvation is fully consummated.

And Jesus is warning these Pharisees, "you have always assumed that you deserved salvation because of who you were *"We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone"* and you proclaim proudly of the Commandments of God, *"All these things I have kept from my youth."* So you are assuming you will have the best seats at the wedding supper, when in fact you will be told to give the place you think is yours to another. Be assured that you will have the worst seat possible. In fact Jesus assures them elsewhere that if they will not humble themselves and repent and believe their seat will be far lower than heaven. But rather it will be the *"outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Do not exalt yourselves, humble yourselves, admitting that you are unworthy to be exalted to heaven. Lifting up only that cry "God have mercy on me a Sinner!" As Peter will later write to the 1 Peter 5:5-6 "Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"

If they will be exalted it will only be through acknowledging they are nothing and trusting only in the mercy of God through Faith in Jesus. Pride will be their destruction, he who exalts himself will be humbled but he who humbles himself will be exalted

Have you ever thought of the great re-ordering that will happen in heaven, how different heaven will look from the way things are here? In heaven, faithful beggars will be exalted above the richest of

businessmen, boastful kings will take second place to little children who loved and served the Lord with meekness throughout their short lives, simple preachers from tiny churches, will be made rulers over many things, while great bishops will have their work exposed as wood hay and stubble. The ordering there will not be based on social status or pride but rather how much one died to self and lived for Christ.

The second part of Christ's parable, is addressed to the Ruler himself. Jesus looks about the room and sees that the ruler has invited many of the party of the Pharisees, his friends and allies, but few who could not repay him with a similar invitation. Jesus uses this example to make a point about good works and final rewards. Most people want their "good things, here and now" – they reason, consciously or subconsciously I will do nice things for others, and will be rewarded when they do good things for me. *I will scratch their backs, they will scratch mine.* So there isn't much point in scratching the back of the man with no arms.

But when we do this, we are not laying up treasure in heaven, these works, done with expectation of reward may be fine and civil, but they aren't the kind of selfless deeds by which the children of God lay up treasure in heaven. Those are done without expecting or looking forward to a reward in this world. Not even that pat-yourself-on-the-back for being a good boy or girl kind.

No, the deeds done selflessly and humbly for the destitute are done without expecting a reward. There will be a reward some day, not the reward of salvation, we are not being called to do good deeds in order to work our way into heaven – in fact that would be precisely the prideful attempt that Jesus has just condemned. Rather, the reward will be rendered in heaven as the Father crowns His own works done through His children – "10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

But brothers and sisters, no truly good deed is forgotten or wasted, each one will be a jewel in the crowns given to the redeemed of Jesus Christ on the day of resurrection. No doubt on that day, the truly humble will be amazed to see the number of jewels in their crown, "When did I do this? They will ask," that is their nature. On the other hand, the proud Christian will be ashamed at how few jewels there are in theirs and in that day would probably give anything to go back and serve the Lord more faithfully.

Let me give you two closing applications, both of them obvious,

- 1) ***Flee pride, seek humility***, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. If we truly know ourselves we will know how unworthy we are of salvation. How wretched we truly are. I have been amazed and somewhat disgusted to see how men are gradually denuding the Christian message of humility and a true impression of our low estate and instead...

"One of the more troublesome situations the liturgical editors have given us is in our gray hymnal. The popular Christian hymn "Amazing Grace" is the only place that I know of in our contemporary liturgy in which the editors abdicated their responsibility to discern which words ought to be stricken. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." The word "wretch" is troublesome for most of us, and for some very good reasons. In a world which seems more adept at repressing and controlling us than it is at liberating and nurturing, the last thing we need in a spiritual hymn are words telling us what awful persons we are. Many of us come from religious or social backgrounds which routinely pounded home the message that we are all worthless. And that simply doesn't square

with what we know to be true about the world -- what we know to be true when we see the hope and promise in a young child's eyes, what we know to be true when our own spirit finds us and keeps us in times of need. Perhaps most importantly, it doesn't square with our mind's understanding of the world -- that this world is a benevolent, or at least indifferent, place, and we humans are a part of this benevolence." - First Parish in Milton, Unitarian Universalist

Serve others, true service rendered to others as an act of obedience to Christ encourages selflessness and mortifies pride! Serve without expecting a reward, in particular – serve the body of Christ.

2) *Know yourself, know whether you are proud*

Well, then, art thou a man of worth in thy own eyes? Art thou delighted when thou hearest of thy esteem with men, and much dejected when thou hearest that they slight thee? Dost thou love those best that honor thee, and think meanly of them that do not, though they be otherwise men of godliness and honesty? Must thou have thy humors fulfilled, and thy judgment be a rule, and thy word a law to all about thee? Are thy passions kindled if thy word or will be crossed? Art thou ready to judge humility to be sordid baseness, and knowest not how to submit to humble confession, when thou has sinned against God or injured thy brother? Art thou one that lookest strange at the godly poor, and art most ashamed to be their companion? Canst thou not serve God in a low place as well as a high? Are thy boastings restrained more by prudence or artifice than humility? Dost thou desire to have all mens eyes upon thee, and to hear them say, This is he? Art thou unacquainted with the deceitfulness and wickedness of thy heart? Art thou more ready to defend thy innocence, than accuse thyself, or confess thy fault? Canst thou hardly bear a close reproof, or digest plain dealing? If these symptoms be undeniably in thy heart, thou art a proud person. There is too much of hell abiding in thee, to have any acquaintance with heaven; thy soul is too like the devil, to have any familiarity with God. A proud man makes himself his god, and sets up himself as his idol; how, then, can his affections be set on God? how can he possibly have his heart in heaven? Invention and memory may possibly furnish his tongue with humble and heavenly expressions, but in his spirit there is no more heaven than there is humility. I speak the more of it, because it is the most common and dangerous sin in morality, and most promotes the great sin of infidelity.

O Christian! if thou wouldst live continually in the presence of thy Lord, lie in the dust, and he will thence take thee up. Learn of him to be meek and lowly; and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Otherwise thy soul will be like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; and instead of these sweet delights in God, thy pride will fill thee with perpetual disquiet. As he that humbleth himself as a little child shall hereafter be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, so shall he now be greatest in the foretastes of that kingdom. God dwells with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Therefore, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. And when others are cast down, then thou shalt say, there is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person. – RICHARD BAXTER