

Take the Lowest Place, Part 1

Luke 14:7-11

Let's turn our attention now to Luke Chapter 14. We started into the first 24 verses, at which we said is a single unit of thought, as a single theme governing that whole section where Jesus is in the home of a Pharisee, he's exposing and confronting pride, but he's doing so in an indirect way by teaching about humility.

So let's start just by reading verses 1 to 6, "One Sabbath when [Jesus] went to dine at [a] house of a ruler of the Pharisees. They were watching him carefully. Behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy, and Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' But they remained silent. And then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, 'Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?'"

They cannot reply to these things. So as the narrative goes, as Luke has written it, we can see that the Pharisees

invited Jesus into the home of this ruler of the Pharisees, intending to entrap him. They wanted to lure him into an ambush on the Sabbath to do what before them, what their traditions had judged as work on the Sabbath, thereby discrediting him. And he walked straight into the ambush, spotting it from the very beginning, and he walked right through it. He turned their weapons against them and silenced the opposition.

It's amazing, I always find it amazing as Jesus does that as he enters into what he knows to be a hostile situation. He's in a very unfriendly environment and he turns it into an opportunity to glorify God. Here by healing a very needy man. So, as the scene continues, Jesus is observing, this is in the entrance into the, into the mealtime, they go toward the, the dining area and as he observes, the guests make their way into the dining area to take their seats around the table, he's seeing on display the pride that characterizes the occasion. The pride of the lawyers and the Pharisees. The pride that really saturates the whole environment and frankly spoils the meal, but as he watches them, as he observes, the observes them, he formulates a plan and approach of how he's going to love them by teaching them.

So look at the next section, verses 7 to 14. "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, "Give your place to this person.'" Then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you were invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend move up higher," and then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and humbles himself will be exalted.'

"He said also to the man who had invited him, 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.'"

So in verses 7 to 11, Jesus addresses the guests and then in verses 12 to 14 he addresses the host. And those two addresses, first of the guests then to the host, are parallel to one another. As they flow, there's a symmetry of expression. Same message, but it's applied to two different people, the beneficiaries first and then the benefactor second. Two different stations in life, but the same message.

Look at verse 8 "When you were invited by someone" when you're someone's guest, and then verse 12, "When you give a dinner or banquet", when you invite someone to be a guest in your home. So parallel expressions there. In verse 8, Jesus is warning the guests how not to select a seat lest they face an unanticipated experience of shame. In verse 12, he also warns the host about invitations lest he experience an unanticipated loss of reward. In verse 10, Jesus advises a humble approach to being a guest. In verse 13, he advises a humble approach to being a host. He promises honor to humbled guests at the end of verse 10, and then in all of verse 14 there's blessedness to the humble host.

So the main message is right there in the center. In verse 11, you see it there, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and [corollary] he who humbles himself will be exalted." It's the same message we hear summarized in James and Peter, in their epistles, James 4:6, and also in 1 Peter 5:5. "God opposes the proud but gives Grace to the humble."

So Jesus intends to convey this singular message. The main message, which is there in Luke 14:11, the main message of this section, both to the guests who are beneficiaries of the host invitation and hospitality, and also to the host, the one who acts as a benefactor to all the rest the one who does the inviting. For everyone, everyone, guests and hosts alike, rich and poor alike, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Everyone, that's a universal word which includes you and it includes me as well.

It was on June 1st, 2021 that President Biden released a statement from the White House entitled Quote "A proclamation on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Pride Month," dubbing June as Pride Month from now on. From a biblical perspective, which word in that title of the statement from the

White House is the most offensive to God? Perhaps it's the one sin that's at the root of all the others. The one sin that drives all sin. The one sin that unites all sinners in rebellion against God, making the highest religious Pharisee on par with the lowest sexually immoral person.

Before God, it's the voice of wisdom, Proverbs 8:13 that says, "The fear of the Lord is the hatred of evil. So pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." That's the Word of the Lord. "God opposes the proud, but he gives Grace to the humble." When we are a nation that takes pride in its pride. Whether it's for immoral reasons or for wholesome reasons, taking pride before God is an abomination to him. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, and I can think of really nothing more frightening for a Christian then the disfavor of God.

None of us wants God to oppose us. We want his grace, we want his favor. We want to please him in all things because of his inherent goodness, because he is the ultimate benefactor of benefactors. Because of his kindness his many kindnesses to us in Jesus Christ our Savior. So we hate pride. In any form. And

we need to hate it first and foremost when we see it in ourselves. Because it's really, as someone has said, "It's not a matter of if you have pride, but it's where is the pride and how much is there?" We need to hate pride, embrace humility as a lifestyle as a way of thinking, as something that comes from the heart, we need to mortify pride and nurture a spirit of humility within us.

And we have every reason to hear from Christ and so we're going to look first, at the first address, verses 7 to 11 as Jesus teaches the guest and next we'll see what he has to say to the host will cover his address to the guests in three points. The problem, the parable and the point. What is the problem that Jesus sees in the guests, of whom he is one? In a word, the problem he sees around him among the guests is pride and self-promotion. That's what Jesus has observed in their behavior. So point one the problem, the problem is a scene of self-promotion. That's the problem.

Look again at verse 7, "And he told a parable to those who were invited when he noticed how they chose the places of honor. Saying to them." He spoke to those who were invited saying to

them because he was observing how they chose places of honor. Several things to observe in the verse here. First, there are two verbal phrases about Jesus speaking and he's speaking targeted words. He's aiming the words at particular people beginning the verse he told a parable "to those who were invited" and at the end of the verse saying "to them". Emphatic in the Greek.

So who's he targeting? He's targeting the guests of the ruler of the Pharisees, who are, verse 3 tells us, they're lawyers and their other Pharisees. But as we read, and if you look down at verse 12, you can see that that when Jesus addresses the host, he warns the host against inviting friends, brothers, relatives and rich neighbors to his banquets.

So if this meal is taking place in Jerusalem at the house of this ruler, which we have a good reason to suppose, and if it happens after the synagogue service, which is the clear inference of verse 1, then it is very likely that the reference to friends brothers, relatives and rich neighbors. That's not hypothetical. That's not for the sake of the story. This is real. This is Jesus looking around. He's sitting among this



ruler of the Pharisees, his friends, brothers, relatives and rich neighbors. He's getting to see them in action on this occasion.

Jesus is speaking to those who were invited, the, and they are the upper crust of Jerusalem society, Jerusalem, the major cosmopolitan city in the world at that time. These are the movers and the shakers. These are the wealthy elites. These are the legal minds, political influencers, powerful businessmen, and he's speaking directly to them, looking them in the eyes. Luke as, as I said, he's emphasized that fact in the original.

So why is he targeting them with this parable? Because secondly, he noticed how they chose the places of honor. The word that Luke uses there, he noticed, sounds a little bit mild. Refers to, on Jesus' part, a kind of watching of the crowd of watching of all the guests, and involves thinking, it involves a mental process. He's taking note of what he sees.

So you can imagine Jesus kind of stepping back from the scene a little bit as he watches everybody move about and he

fixes his attention on what's happening in front of him. And then he's processing that and he's assessing their behavior. Remember, ironically, these are the same guest, verse one, who came to watch him and now he is watching them. They become the objects of his observation, and his scrutiny, and his judgment.

What's he seeing? He's sees a scramble for the best seats. He sees kind of a, a sophisticated musical chairs as everybody moves around and finds the most prominent and most honored seats. These are the most esteemed men of the city. The lawyers, the Pharisees, the elite, all of whom are friends, brothers, relatives and rich neighbors of this ruler of the Pharisees, and there they are at an after synagogue meal.

The host has set the guest list, but the seating arrangements are not necessarily set at this, at this occasion pecking order set it's based on perceived levels of honor, esteem, regard in the community, wealth that's reflected. Usually reflected in the seating arrangements. On this case, it's kind of open seating. Since the seating positions aren't set, the situation is a bit more fluid, and it allows the guests to kind of jockey for position. So Jesus watching all this go on

in front of him, as they posture and prepare and, and move into the best seats, best seats, literally first couch, is how it translates literally. But it's the preeminent place on that couch, which is typically a three-person couch. They're arranged around the dining table in a U-shape.

So at the base of the U down here was a place for the very highest honor. That's where, that's where, the, the place of the highest honor. That's where that person can be seen by everybody in the U. The middle of that position on that Couch was a place at the very highest honor reserved for the host, but on either side of the host two places, a very high honor, highest honors on the couch is next to the Hostess couch and then extending along the base of the U and then descending and rank and honor as you go, and then as you follow that you shape arrangement, moving from the base to the prongs of the U to the place of the lowest rank and honor at the far ends.

So once the purification rituals were completed, Jesus is watching these otherwise dignified men lining up to get pole position so they can make the mad scramble for the highest ranking seat that they can grab. It's worth pointing out how

Jesus' approach to tackling the very difficult problem of human pride is to speak to it, not directly, but indirectly. Why is that?

Pride by its very nature is a blinding sin. Someone full of pride, unable to see clearly. Un, unable to see the self clearly how they are, how they come across, how other people see them, and they're offended at the thought that you would think otherwise, that you wouldn't share their most humble estimate of themselves, which is to be a humble man. They're unable to see the scales of pride that cover their eyes because scales of pride cover their eyes.

So rather than taking a direct approach, Jesus, wisely, takes an indirect approach and he does that in two ways, one of them, is just the whole approach to teach positive lessons on the virtue of humility in an environment that is saturated with pride. That, those lessons on humility sting the proud. It exposes the proud. It gives a, a counter, a contrast, to how they're acting. But the other way to approach this, which we see Jesus doing is to address the matter indirectly by use of an analogy. Illustrating the problem by means of a parable.

So without further ado, let's look at the parable itself, which takes us into the second point. We've talked about the problem. Here's the, the second point. The parable, the parable, and this is the shame of self-promotion. The parable is about the shame of self-promotion. We've seen the problem. The scene of self-promotion. And now Jesus wants to point out the shame that's in it, which he does by means of the parable verses 8 to 10. And it takes the form as we said, of counsel sound, wise, sagely advice. So Jesus advises them how to be wise guests, take a wise approach when they are invited to a wedding feast and first he gives them negative counsel advising him about what not to do, and then he gives positive counsel advising him on what they should do.

So first, let's look at what not to do when you're invited to a wedding feast. It says there, verse 8, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, less someone more distinguished than you be invited by him the, the host. And he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place."

So Jesus sets the scene of the parable he's telling at a wedding feast. And he wants these guests who are sitting with him at this less formal after synagogue meal to imagine themselves as guests at a more formal setting, at a wedding, they're invited to participate to be there to see the ceremony itself, but also the festivities that follow. As we've said before in other contexts, those wedding festivities can take up to a week, but there would be a formal large meal. That's what he's talking about.

It's that setting. Most often we we've come to understand that Jesus' parables always have a little twist in them, something, something that's out of the ordinary. He wants to grab people's attention by throwing in a curveball. So he always adds an element his listeners would, would notice as something that's kinda, kinda odd, something that doesn't sit quite right with them, something that that provokes them intellectually.

This parable is no different. The occasion of a wedding feast it's, it's far more formal than what they are sitting at

now. This after synagogue meal where they're listening to Jesus speak at a wedding feast and especially the wedding feast of the kind that this crowd would be familiar with. A wedding feast would have a, a predetermined guest list obviously, but also would have a predetermined seating arrangement. That means an invited guest doesn't intend a wedding feast and then just go simply and go and sit down in a place of honor. That's not done. As an invited guest, your seat has already been chosen for you, so you know your place. You sit in your assigned seat. You don't sit in somebody else's seat, especially in a place of honor that hasn't been assigned to you. So Jesus is here giving a, a subtle poke to the men around him who've done exactly that in this less formal meal.

He's saying, imagine yourselves acting like you did today, but at a wedding feast. Try to picture yourselves doing the same thing there that you've done here. Jockeying for positions, scrambling for the best seats, taking the highest place of honor for yourself. Jesus' audience hear that, have a very hard time imagining themselves as doing what Jesus is described, that is invited by someone to a wedding feast having no sense of propriety, having the audacity to sit down in a place of honor

and take that for themselves, they couldn't imagine that for themselves. They're much higher than that. They wouldn't do such a thing. Ah, but haven't they just done such a thing?

What they would imagine as upper class urbane, sophisticated religious men, legal minds. It imagine that they themselves may be the ones sitting in the places of honor. Already assigned in this shame, honor culture here in the ancient Near East. Among the lawyers, the Pharisees of Jerusalem, their social fantasies, and they have them. Consists of outranking all the other guests. With everyone else beneath them, with themselves, honored and esteemed by all, everybody looking at them in awe of them.

So again, verse 8 Jesus says, don't do that. Don't sit down in a place of honor to which they think and response wouldn't happen. Not with me. But then Jesus asked him to entertain the thought anyway, saying don't, don't do that "lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him".



The word lest there it's more, like lest, per chance or in the off chance that this should happen, that this would come upon you in the remote possibility, it's almost a little humorous in the real possibility that there may be somebody there of more stature than you of higher social standing than you are. Probably not, but just, just go with it for a second, Jesus says. Here's where their little social fantasy they've been imagining starts to take a dark turn. And becomes a total nightmare.

