

Take the Lowest Place, part 2

Luke 14:7-11

Luke Chapter 14 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.

So imagine yourself verse 8, as an invited guest to the wedding, and you have been so bold, so audacious as to take a

seat of honor for yourself. And that imagination turns nightmarish, when, behold, someone more distinguished than you, someone of a higher class outranking you in honor and respect, higher status, that person. He also was invited by the host he was on the guest list before you knew there was a guest list. You're sitting in his seat. What would happen then? Look at verse 9. "He who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person.'"

In 1st Century Jerusalem, this walk of shame that Jesus wants them to imagine this is as bad as it gets, socially. The ESV translation, I'm reading out of it, inserts the possessive pronoun into the sentence. It's not there in the original, so instead of "Give your place to this person," it's "Give to this man the place." It was never your seat to begin with is the idea.

The sentence here, this word from the host is short direct curt. It's even a bit sharp. The host is, everybody's seated, everybody is there in the coast is coming. He's trying to show discretion. He wants to avoid embarrassment in front of the other guests, not for the offender, the one who took the place,

but for the more honored guest, he wants no shame and embarrassment for him, none for himself. He's irritated at the offender. So his command to this presumptuous self-promoting guest. Get out of this honorable man seat.

So imagine that for yourself. You're there, settled in laying down at the couch. You're settled in comfortable, enjoying refreshing drinks, tasty appetizers, polite conversation. Guests around you. Getting to know them, catching up. I think everything is fine as you've taken this seat, which you think, kind of deserve it anyway. Your host approaches. A very distinguished looking person in tow and he utters this short imperative to you. In front of everybody, your face goes flush. You turn beet red all of a sudden it's very warm in the room, and you, end of verse 9. "You will begin with shame to take the lowest place."

The language in the original draws this out. It makes it uncomfortable for the reader. Be uncomfortable for Jesus' listeners. It portrays this abject shame that someone is feeling at that moment. In this situation, it's a vivid picture, and the emphasis is very strong, so Jesus wants everyone here to feel

what it would be like to experience, public shame of having to stand up while everybody else is reclining. To stand up while they watch you as you, your shame of self-promotion, is exposed before all. You step away from the place on the couch that you usurped. Make your way from that man's place to the lowest place.

Why the lowest place? Why not just another place? Because Jesus is causing everyone to imagine that by this time all the other places are now occupied. All that's left is the lowest place that's the only place to go. So the fall from social grace couldn't be farther in the walk of shame couldn't be longer. The disgraced guests might rather walk past that lowest place and find the closest rock to hide himself underneath.

So now that Jesus has everybody's attention. Maybe they're ready to listen to some council, ready to take a closer look at themselves, think about their behavior. Verse 10, Jesus says, "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. Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you." It's a happy ending to the parable. He gives him the

uncomfortable part at the very start, but then he gives him a very happy ending.

Several features to point out here. First, notice the host is the one who comes and looks for you or his assigned master of ceremonies who does the host bidding. He comes looking for you and then when he finds you he calls you friend. He acknowledges a relationship with you. It implies even a touch of intimacy as opposed to a casual acquaintance. Here he could have just called you by your name, but instead he calls you friend. Most importantly, it's the host who says friend move up higher that legitimizes in front of everyone there, that the move you make from the lowest place up to this seat of honor that has the affirmation of the host himself.

Everybody there trusts the host judgment. All who sit at the table with you, they're inclined to share his view so they're gonna esteem you because it's the host who has put his imprimatur upon you. He holds you in high regard. What's the prerequisite for this happy ending? What does Jesus want all these people to see? "When you're invited," verse 8, "don't go sit down in a place of honor, but instead," verse 10, here's the

prerequisite, "go and sit in the lowest place." That's the prerequisite. The prerequisite to attain honor is this. Don't seek honor for yourself. Don't be a self-promoter. Take the lowest place.

Just a quick note of clarification here. We're going to see this shortly. Jesus is not encouraging this motivation for going to the lowest place is motivated or driven by a desire to get to the highest place. That would be another case of pride masquerading as humility. Which is the same mask that was worn by the scribes and the Pharisees.

Religious people do this all the time. They, they fake this humble image in public. Really, there are snakes in their hearts. We see that all the time, political leaders, religious leaders, there's even some professing Christian leaders they put on an oh so humble face, speak softly, watching their tone. Always saying what's socially appropriate. Never saying anything that's, might come across as harsh or unkind. They mimic all the the, the popular gestures. They give the same, the, the right amount of pathos in their speech. Card carrying members of the tongue police, always measuring their words. Making sure to

offend, no one, never coming across as harsh or unkind. That's the chiefest of all sins.

True humility is not just a matter of words, tone. Humility is a matter of the heart. It's the thoughts and intentions of the heart, the motivations of the heart that only God can see, and only God can know. True humility is a matter of humble actions and submissive to God in his word, which God interprets and neither approves of or disapprove, disapproves.

So moving to the lowest place and seeing that as a ploy to climb to the top. That is not what Jesus trying to teach these Pharisees at all. Again, moving to the lowest place is a means of getting the highest place. That's nothing more than pride masquerading as humility, and that is not what Jesus' teaching here.

So what is he's saying? What is the point? That's our Third Point is the point. The point is the honor of humble estimation. It's not unlikely that Jesus adapted this parable, he told from Proverbs 25:6 and 7, which says this, "Do not put yourself

forward in the King's presence or stand in the place of the great. For it is better to be told come up here than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.”

As lawyers and Pharisees, we might think that they would be familiar with all the wisdom literature, but since wisdom is attainable only to the humble, to those who live in the fear of the Lord, they can stare at those texts all they want to, but because of their pride, they will never get the lessons that the wisdom literature are teaching. So Jesus saw fit to remind them of the principles of wisdom and humility, and the fear of the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the holy one is understanding.”

If you don't fear the Lord, you don't have wisdom. All the knowledge in the world will not help you overcome your folly. The Pharisees root problem is their folly. It's the presumptive pride of self-promotion, thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Rather than thinking with sober estimation and sound judgment.



Paul asked the Corinthians who were sinning this same kind of pharisaical sin of pride. "What do you have that you have not received?" You weren't born into this world. Like everybody recognizing your greatness. You're born in this world and things were given to you. Opportunities were given to you. You're born into a certain station in life and out of that station, you were able to advance, and you had all your limbs, and your mind, and your eyes, and everything that God is granted to you. You had air to breath. You were able to use that for a benefit.

"So if you've received it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?" It's the sin of pride. It's blinding to. So how do you spot the problem? How do you detect the pride of self-promotion? Look at verse 11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. And he who humbles himself will be exalted." There's an active component there, isn't there? You have to be active, know it, trusting that what Jesus says is true, that you are proud by your sinful nature. You're proud, it's there. So if you trust that, then you have to actively humble yourself.

You have to make decisions in your life in what you say, what you don't say and what you do, what you don't do, how you behave, and how you will not behave. You have to make decisions actively against your pride; as it said, it's not whether we have pride, it's where is it and how much is there?

So the question we need to ask ourselves is, am I seeking to exalt myself or am I seeking to humble myself? Is this an active component that humble myself in my life? The honest answer to that question. That's what we're after here. And it really is the grace of God to reveal it to us. What we're prone to ignore, to be oblivious to, because pride is such a blinding sin.

We need to leave it to somebody else to help us to see it, and thankfully God has said in his grace he will expose our pride to us if we ask. The lesson here in Jesus' parable, the point, kind of threading its way through the parable, is that we need to leave it to somebody else to exalt, honor and esteem us. It's not our prerogative to seek it for ourselves.

We especially need to be wary of that scene in our hearts, in our thinking. So whenever you think, hey, I don't deserve, then fill in the blank, or when you think, wait a minute I deserve, and then you fill in the blank. That's a danger sign. When you start thinking you deserve something other than death in hell for offending God, when you cease to be grateful, when you cease to be content with your station, when you cease to be content with your pay, your possessions, your relations, when you stop remembering and being conscious of the fact that on your own merits, what you truly deserve is death in hell because of the sins that you've committed against a holy, righteous God, who is your judge.

When you forget that all that you have, you have by God's grace that you breathe the air by God's mercy, when you forget any of that and you think otherwise, you're in danger. So, actively cultivate humility as Jesus says in, verse 11 by actively humbling yourself, you let somebody else exalt you, your job, humble yourself. Same principle as Proverbs 27:2, "Let another praise you and not your own mouth, a stranger, not your own lips." In fact, verse 11, is the key to interpreting Jesus' parable and knowing the point.

The possible source material of verse 11, is Proverbs 25, Proverbs 25:6 and 7. And there it says, "do not put yourself forward in the King's presence, or stand in the place of the great, where it's better to be told. Come up here than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."

So again, who is it that's telling you? Come up here. Whose voice is that? It's the King's voice speaking either through the king or through one of his, envoys, one of his servants. Someone representing the king, someone expressing the King's wishes. The King is the only one in the Kingdom with the right to demote and promote his subjects. So that's why it's inappropriate in his Kingdom to put yourself forward. It's not your place. As soon as you've done that, you've stepped out of your lane.

Host exalts the guests and any guests who tries to usurp a position and take honor for himself. That one will be debased. That's the parable, and in verse 11, Jesus gives the greater principle. That's the key to unlock the meaning of the parable to interpret and apply it correctly. "Everyone who exalts

himself will be humbled.” Future tense passive voice, and “He who humbles himself will be exalted,” future tense, passive voice, will be humbled will be exalted. The passive voice there hides the subject. In this case, the subject is clearly God.

God is the one who will in the future. He'll right all wrongs. He's the God of all justice. There's a lot of injustice in this world we're hearing cries for social justice, racial justice. All kinds of concern about justice, but no one understands justice.

There's a longing in the heart. God put it there longing in the heart for justice. And there is an absolute standard, the righteousness of God based on his holy character that does not change. He is the lawgiver. He is the judge. He will bring justice to pass. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, abased, humiliated, demoted. Everybody who humbles himself will be exalted subject is God. God is the one who in the future. Rights all wrongs he humbles he debases he humiliates all those who try to exalt themselves in this life, and then, conversely. It's God who is the one who will also in the future exalt those

who humble themselves before him. Those who walk meekly before others.

What Jesus teaches these lawyers and Pharisees. It draws on a lesson that is replete in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. So many places to see that theme of God's opposition to the proud, but his gracious dealings with the humble. And it's a good summary in Proverbs 3:33 to 35, "The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Toward the scorers he is scornful. but to the humble, he gives grace. The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace."

It's John Calvin who says this, "Humility must not only be an unfeigned abasement, but a real annihilation of ourselves." Love that language. But it's shocking to the modern sensibilities, the modern era. Annihilation of the self? Today it's all about self-esteem, identity, identity, politics. Humility is about a real annihilation of ourselves, proceeding from a thorough knowledge of our own weakness. The entire absence of lofty pretensions and a conviction that whatever excellence we possess comes from the grace of God alone.

That is sound pastoral wisdom from John Calvin from the 16th century. And it bas, it's based entirely on what it means to be a Christian. Knowing our own weakness, before God. Knowing all in weakness and pleasing him. We need his grace. It all comes from God. Even the ability to believe comes from him regenerating us, causing us to be born again that we might be having new nature. That out of that new nature we are even enabled to believe and repent of our sins. Has nothing to do with us. Everything to do with him. Humility from the start.

That's what Christianity is. What it means to be a Christian is about mortifying every lofty pretension. Every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God. We tear down first in ourselves. It's about killing every selfish ambition. It's about knowing that whatever we have we have by God's grace, that's what Christianity is. That's how it's lived.

It's about the end of you. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20. "I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life that I now live in, the

flesh I live by faith in the son of God. [It's about him, not about me.] The one who loved me, the one who gave himself up for me.”

Look if the author of our salvation. If he considered that his life was nothing more than a living sacrifice, pleasing the will of God, saving and serving us by saving us, by dying for us, that he humbled himself to the point of death. Yes, even the death of a cross, should we not follow? He's not only the author of our faith, he is the perfecter of our faith. We walk after his pattern by his grace.

Jesus here advises telling this parable advises humility. Not to gain honor for self. And it's really not even about wedding feasts and banquets and meals or anything like that. It's about an attitude of the heart. Honor does come through humility. But Jesus advises humility for humility sake, because it is such a blessed precious virtue, it's a, it's what Gurnall, William Gurnall, the Puritan writer calls “A self-emptying virtue.” The virtue that it doesn't promote anything about itself, it empties itself.



It's about being content with your station. It's about leaving the results to those above you. Those who are in a position to either honor you or not honor you. Being content with that. And ultimately, it's about leaving the results to God because God is the one who works in the authorities and the people around you either honor or not to honor you. So be content with God's decision.

It's very wise counsel from Jesus. As Godet says, by following Jesus' counsel by taking the lowest place, he says quote, "We run no other risk than that of being exalted. Because from the lowest place there's nowhere to go but up." We leave it to God and his will to place us in the station of his choosing. And we give thanks for all things in Christ.