

“Seats of Honor” – Luke 14:7-14

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on July 16th, 2017



Luke 14:7-14 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."

Confrontation. Not exactly a popular word today is it? It seems that folks will go a mile out of their way to avoid it. We *fear* confronting others, loathe being confronted *by* others, and simply *reject* confronting ourselves. The Jesus we read of in scripture however was a 'confronter.' We never see Him slink out of a situation that called for Him to step up and *into* the fires of an uncomfortable conflict.

The issue on the table before us was the problem with pride and the absence of real humility. And since those present were seemingly unwilling to confront themselves about such matters, Jesus took upon himself the mantle of challenger in this scene. He 'called them out.' We need note herein that behind every sin we commit stands that sin of pride! Every sin fails to consider its affect upon others and its impact upon Christ, and every transgression is just a flat out rejection of what God wants, asked for, or even demanded in lieu of what WE want and feel is best. And that is the very definition of our pride!

Pride began all this mess in the garden, and pride is what has propelled it through the ages. Ultimately the millions of souls who will spend an empty life on earth and then eternity in hell will do so because of just one thing: *pride*. They refused to give up their sin, rejected intervention by a Creator, denied the need for a Savior, and certainly refused even the *concept* of a Lord! They wanted...*we all want*...to believe we have our lives and destiny under our own control. We lie to ourselves and avoid that self-confrontation, declaring that we are "masters of our own domains."

As a child growing up in the heart of Iowa, I would work the farm fields as a summer job. We would be hired by soybean farmers to rid their fields of the stray corn from the previous years crop and other weeds that would pop up. The stray corn and most other weeds could be simply cut at the base and you were 'good to go.' But not cocklebur. Those had to be **pulled**. Because if you didn't pull those puppies, they would just grow back and go to seed and then you have an infestation. Pride is a cocklebur. If you don't pull it out, *root and all*, it will only return later, and return bigger and 'bad'er.' And if we are unwilling to confront ourselves on this matter, or at least allow ourselves to be so confronted by the community around us, then we are doomed to be broken by the Lord Himself. And that is not pretty.

The years of my ministry, having now begun to accumulate in decades, has provided a unique and often profound view into not only the hearts and minds of men, but even into the corporate dynamic of humanity. I have been so blessed to have witnessed the incredible redemption of those once tragically lost. Yet I have also beheld the casualty of personal meltdown in those who have “*been once enlightened, ...having tasted the heavenly gift, ... partakers of the Holy Spirit, ...having tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come*” only to then “*fall away.*” (Heb 6:4-6) And the greatest travesty in all of this is they didn’t *fall* (as understood in our modern vernacular). Such language conjures up images of an accident or a mishap! In reality they *walked* away...and some have even *run*, but they all did so *on purpose*. It was no “accident.”

And all those have one thing in common; *none survived their exodus*. Oh, some are yet breathing and some even attend a church somewhere. But their lives betray their best attempts at a happy façade, and their tongues evidence only bitterness, anger, and jealousy. Like an accident scene we find it hard to not slow and gawk at the languish of their lives...the flailing of the drowning victim, the gasping for spiritual breath, just out of the reach of our personal intervention. Sadly, their state is not a *homicide* but rather a *suicide*. Pride took them to that place. Their pride will be their demise and their destruction.

The ministry style of Jesus seemed to always incorporate a consistent pattern or “style.” Jesus would first teach openly, giving opportunity for “those who had ears to hear.” (Mark 4:23) We do that. It’s called “Sunday Service.” In this case, having previously taught truth and love, Jesus moved on to heal the man and then turned to verbally confront His critics. This was “step two” in the ‘ministry stylings’ of Jesus. And if that wasn’t enough for one day, Jesus went on to rebuke the dinner guests who sought out the places of honor at the table. Then, while everyone was no doubt slack-jawed at that slap, He goes on to rebuke the host for inviting the wrong guests to his dinner party. *Then*, when one of the guests tried to ease the tension by exclaiming, “*What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God,*” Jesus would then tell a story showing how many of the Jews would be shut out of the coming kingdom and that many Gentiles would be excluded along with them (14:15-24) despite their religious practices.

Make no mistake, Jesus knew what it was to be confrontational! If you hang out with Him for very long, you’ll find that He will confront your sin too. It will be that day...at that moment or moments, you will truthfully expose your heart. You will reply in broken humility, or in prideful rejection and rebuttal. But you *will* reply. And that reply will be the catalyst for your life’s forward motion; *off the cliff or into the arms of Christ*.

A couple of decades ago, we suffered through the incredulous onslaught of the “self-esteem” movement. Today, those principles are no longer a movement but rather the status quo. Firmly established in a generation of millennials, they, along with the children who encompass “Generation Z” and “Generation Alpha,” know no other world than one with high-speed internet access, microwave cooking, and a society bent upon their immediate and instant gratifications. A world without sexual identity, without discipline and correction, without foundations and historical context, they live and *will live* in a world that wholly exists for the ME and ‘what me wants.’

Thus the blight of runaway pride will continue to grow like a cancer in our culture, and the sins that we will commit at its beckon will increase from lying and petty theft, to murder, abuse in every manner, and self-indulgent mayhem. Genocide will follow on its heels. All this because we would not say no to ourselves or confront such in the world around us. It all is moving quickly and such will not take generations to manifest. At a level never before seen we witness today a generation who does not know what true loving relationships even look like...not in family, in marriage, or in friendships. We do not know loyalty...faithfulness, or truthfulness, for all has been replaced with the singular motivation of self, or *pride*.

Perhaps you reject such a contentious and disillusioned position. Perhaps you are able to find and hold onto the morsels of humanity that rise on occasion. But while we might disagree on the magnitude of the problem, one would have to blind not to see the sin of pride is killing us, and has also come into the church with a vengeance. This is no longer a singular problem ‘out there in selfish individuals’ but is now a *world-wide* struggle against self and ego that threatens humanity to the core and will, as the Bible prophecies concerning the last days, shake the very foundations of society and certainly

faith, as “... *brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake...*” (Matt 10:21-22a)

For Jesus this day, it was not so apocalyptic, but rather at a point when men could still “see the forest through the trees.” For Jesus, it was the most basic of manifests; pride which caused a man to seek the more important seat instead of acquiescing to another; *instead of placing others before himself in a public gathering*. While such may seem small...even trite in view of the tragedy such a cancer as this would one day become, Jesus understood that sin...especially this one, starts so very small but quickly consumes us like a heroin addiction.

But rest assured, as sure as the sin and its bondage, is the humbling of the man or woman who walks in its shadow. Such is guaranteed by God. The questions are simply *when* and *how*. It may seem like a small thing going after the coveted seat at dinner, but not to Christ. For God sees the bigger picture! God sees the heart behind such. And to lift ourselves up, to exalt ourselves, has broader implications, and darker ramifications. Because as we have already stated, such pride is the root of sin.

We can’t help but notice throughout Jesus accepted dinner invitations from unbelievers. However He didn’t just go and socialize. He went with a mission. We too must note that if we socialize with unbelievers, we too must make sure that we go with that same sense of mission, prepared to stand for the Lord when that time arises...and it almost always does indeed arise. Otherwise, you will end up being pulled down by the very people that we are trying to pull up.

We can’t say for sure, but there is reason to believe that the Pharisees planted this man with dropsy there in front of Jesus to see whether He would violate their rules against healing on the Sabbath. Luke says, “*they were watching Him closely.*” The verb has in it the sense of lurking or lying in wait to catch someone in something. They were out to get Him, just as they are out to get you.

To lift up ourselves in such a way is an act of self-sufficiency, a foolish and silly concept to anyone who is living in the real world. Anyone who lives in such a manner lives in a constant state of insecurity, always trying to position himself higher, but it’s never high enough. In the Kingdom of God, the way “up” is the way *down*. We must be little in our own eyes before we can be large in His eyes.

Now Jesus did more than just give verbal instruction in this matter: *He lived the example*. Often, when we enter a room, we look for our friends and immediately gravitate to our clique. When Jesus entered a room He looked for the *need*, wherever it might be.

On the other hand, we have this Pharisee. Why did He even invite Jesus to dinner? What was his motive for being there? From the evidence we have, it doesn’t appear that he had learning in mind. It was not to grow in his knowledge or learn from Christ. It appears, as usual, he invited Jesus to dinner to try to set Him up and bring Him down, and by doing so lift themselves up. Certainly by this point the Pharisees were seeing the power behind the words of this “man” Jesus, and felt their own power and clout slipping in the polls.

Many of us attempt to live our religion in the same fashion. Our energies are exerted in attempt to pull others down and thereby theoretically lifting ourselves up higher. For many, this is the point of their church attendance. But in our generation we usually go to social media to do our criticizing and haranguing, because we don’t have the stomach for a frontal confrontation nor are we willing to have a *discussion*. We want rather to lob tomatoes from a dugout where we are safe. Usually, we change our name and use a made up pseudonym because God knows we don’t want anyone to know who we *really* are! These are the “arm chair pastors” of our generation.

Pride therein becomes a flame thrower. This guy was willing and ready to use this sick man as fodder for his “cause.” The proud care little about who they hurt. They are overwhelmed by the fleshly need to make their point and win the

argument, usually an argument that no one else is even having except themselves *with* themselves. And they therefore will sacrifice anything and anyone to “win,” even their own children. They will imagine conspiracies, and concoct theories that in their minds are therefore facts because such came from within them. But the Bible says that the “heart of man is desperately wicked” and tells us to “not depend on our own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5) But our pride has now blinded us and we are overwhelmed by our self-importance and our smug belief that we are always right.

Real evidence to the proud is no longer a consideration. Jesus healed this man on the spot, and still it seemed to not deter this man whatsoever. Why would he not wonder “*hey...maybe I’m wrong here and this Jesus is indeed the real thing?*” Lives changed and redeemed, people obviously healed and changed, and instead of acknowledging such as evidence of God’s hand, they regularly accused Jesus of rather having a demon in Him instead of the power of the Spirit of God. That’s a favorite weapon of the terminal proud. Such scenarios create therefore a “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” situation, and there is then no way to debate their position.

The point today is that “*Every one before God ought to feel that the lowest place is the proper place for him.*” (Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* [Charles Scribner’s Sons], p. 356). The more we grow in grace, the more we will grow in humility. Biblical humility is the recognition that everything good that we are and have comes as an undeserved gift from God. As Paul put it to the Corinthians, “And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Biblical humility is a recognition that apart from Christ, I can do nothing (John 15:5), and so I do not trust in myself, but in the Lord. Biblical humility is always accompanied by a growing awareness of the depths of my own sinfulness, along with a growing appreciation for the abundant grace of God shown to me in Christ. The psalmist put it, “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Ps. 130:3-4). As the pioneer missionary, William Carey, had inscribed on his tombstone, “A wretched, poor and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall.” (Pastor Steven Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship)

John Calvin, who wrote (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Westminster], 2:1:2):

Here, then, is what God’s truth requires us to seek in examining ourselves: it requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our own ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting, and lead us to submission.... I am quite aware how much more pleasing is that principle which invites us to weigh our good traits rather than to look upon our miserable want and dishonor, which ought to overwhelm us with shame. There is, indeed, nothing that man’s nature seeks more eagerly than to be flattered.... For since blind self-love is innate in all mortals, they are most freely persuaded that nothing inheres in themselves that deserves to be considered hateful. Thus even with no outside support the utterly vain opinion generally obtains credence that man is abundantly sufficient of himself to lead a good and blessed life. But if any take a more modest attitude and concede something to God, so as not to appear to claim everything for themselves, they so divide the credit that the chief basis for boasting and confidence remains in themselves. Nothing pleases man more than the sort of alluring talk that tickles the pride that itches in his very marrow. Therefore, in nearly every age, when anyone publicly extolled human nature in most favorable terms, he was listened to with applause.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “*My own experience is a daily struggle with the evil within. I wish I could find in myself something friendly to grace, but, hitherto, I have searched my nature through, and have found everything in rebellion against God*” (C. H. Spurgeon *Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:229).

Where does such a confrontation leave us today? Jesus isn’t just calling out the Pharisee, He is calling *us* out! Who is indeed Lord of your life? The true and righteous one, or the one...when we look back over our shoulder, we see that we are flawed, and evil and that without Him, we are nothing and will do nothing for kingdom or ultimately even for ourselves. Which road will be taken today? The low road or will we attempt, inexplicably, to take the high road for which we have no ticket and no status? Jesus says “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.” Such is not a onetime venture on the day of your salvation but is rather a daily occurrence, and a lifelong effort. Experientially we could receive that same passage as “*Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, or He will do it for you...*”