

You remember that Jesus has been teaching the disciples and the people that are following him about kingdom living. He has taught about generosity and compassion and today Jesus teaches about the ego and how to behave when it come to hospitality. It is interesting that when we set out to trap others, it is usually us that show our true colors and have to be corrected. That is what happened in our scripture. Jesus has accepted an invitation to dinner at the home of a leading Pharisees in the community. He was invited on the Sabbath Day, the day for rest and no work, to see if Jesus would do something to break the Sabbath Laws. Well, you know Jesus – he was clear that compassion was more important than rules, so he did exactly what they knew he would – he healed the man on the Sabbath. But Jesus reminded them that they gave themselves permission to give emergency help and assist their animals on the Sabbath, surely God wanted them to help our fellow humans.

In the same way Jesus did not put off helping those suffering from ailments – he also corrected errors in living and thinking when he saw them. Just before the meal he had observed the behavior of the guests. Each attempted to pick a seat that made him appear more honored and important than others at the meal. So the scripture says looking around, Jesus noticed how the guests picked the places of honor. Apparently there were no names tents on the table to tell a person where the host wanted them to sit, nor was a servant given the assignment of sitting a guest at a specific place. The host usually entered the dinner last and took his seat at the second seat between the two guests of honor. In New Testament times, the closer one sat to the host, the higher one's standing on the social ladder and the more attention (and invitations) you would receive from others. Naturally, many people

rushed to the “head table” when the doors were opened because they wanted to be important. As people entered the room in the Pharisee’s house where the table was spread, they must have scrambled for seats at the head of the table. The parable Jesus then told was designed to get them to think about spiritual realities in relation to the kingdom message He had been preaching. This advice is called a parable because it interprets the present situation metaphorically.

Verse 11 records the point of Jesus’ parable: Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. This recalls Jesus’ statement that those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last. The Pharisees, assuming they would have important positions in the kingdom, would be humiliated if they were pushed aside for someone else. However, if they would humble themselves, then they would perhaps be honored.

Experts in management tell us that most people wear an invisible sign that reads, “Please make me feel important”; if we obey that sign, we can succeed in human relations. On the other hand, if we say or do things that make others feel insignificant, we will fail. Then people will respond by becoming angry and resentful, because everybody wants to be noticed and made to feel important.

In Jesus’ day, as today, there were “status symbols” that helped people enhance and protect their high standing in society. If you were invited to the “right homes” and if you were seated in the “right places,” then people would know how important you really were. The emphasis was on reputation, not character. It was more important to sit in the right places than to live the right kind of life.

This kind of attitude betrays a false view of success. Albert Einstein said, “Try not to become a man of success, but try to become a man of value.” While there may be some exceptions, it is usually true that valuable people are eventually recognized and appropriately honored. Success that comes only from self-promotion is temporary, and you may be embarrassed as you are asked to move down.

When Jesus advised the guests to take the lowest places, He was not giving them a “gimmick” that guaranteed promotion. The false humility that takes the lowest place is just as hateful to God as the pride that takes the highest place. God is not impressed by our status in society or in the church. God is not influenced by what people say or think about us, because God sees the thoughts and motives of the heart. God still humbles the proud and exalts the humble.

British essayist Francis Bacon compared fame to a river that easily carried “things light and swollen” but that drowned “things weighty and solid.” It is interesting to scan old editions of encyclopedias and see how many “famous people” are “forgotten people” today.

Humility has always been one of the characteristics of great men. When Thomas Hardy was so famous that any newspaper would gladly have paid enormous sums for his work, he used sometimes to submit a poem, and always with it a stamped and addressed envelope for the return of his manuscript should it be rejected. Even in his greatness he was humble enough to think that his work might be turned down.

There are many stories and legends of the humility of Principal Cairns. He would never enter a room first. He always said, “You first, I follow.” Once, as he came on to a platform, there was a great burst of applause in welcome. He stood aside and let the man after him come first and began

himself to applaud. He never dreamed that the applause could possibly be for him; he thought it must be for the other man. It is only the little man who is self-important.

So how can we retain our humility?

We can retain it by realizing the facts. How ever much we know, we still know very little compared with the sum total of knowledge. However much we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. However important we may believe ourselves to be, when death removes us or when we retire from our position, life and work will go on just the same.

We can retain it by comparison with the perfect. It is when we see or hear the expert that we realize how poor our own performance is. Many a person has decided to burn their clubs after a day at golf's Masters. Many a person has decided never to appear in public again after hearing a master musician perform. Many a preacher has been humbled almost to despair when they heard a real saint of God speak. And if we set our lives beside the life of the Lord of all good life, if we see our unworthiness in comparison with the radiance of Jesus' stainless purity, pride will die and self-satisfaction will be shriveled up. Don't push for glory. Let God honor you. Jesus is the greatest example of humility, and we would do well to ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to imitate Him.

Then Jesus spoke to His host, telling him that if he would invite the outcasts of society: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind—people who could never repay him for his generosity—this would show that he was ministering to them for the Lord's sake and not his own. He would be laying up for himself treasures in heaven and would be becoming rich toward God. Inviting the outcasts would not make the man righteous; it would testify that he was in a righteous standing before God. This is shown by Jesus'

statement that the repayment would not come at the present time but at the resurrection of the righteous.¹

Jesus knew that the host had invited his guests for two reasons: (1) to pay them back because they had invited him to past feasts, or (2) to put them under his debt so that they would invite him to future feasts. Such hospitality was not an expression of love and grace but rather an evidence of pride and selfishness. He was “buying” recognition.

Jesus does not prohibit us from entertaining family and friends, but He warns us against entertaining only family and friends exclusively and habitually. That kind of “fellowship” quickly degenerates into a “mutual admiration society” in which each one tries to outdo the others and no one dares to break the cycle.

In our Lord’s time, it was not considered proper to ask poor people and handicapped people to public banquets. The women were not invited either! But Jesus commanded us to put these needy people at the top of our guest list because they cannot pay us back. If our hearts are right, God will see to it that we are properly rewarded, though getting a reward must not be the motive for our generosity. When we serve others from unselfish hearts, we are laying up treasures in heaven and becoming “rich toward God.”

Our modern world is very competitive, and it is easy for God’s people to become more concerned about profit and loss than we are about sacrifice and service. “What will I get out of it?” may become life’s most important

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:242

question. We must strive to maintain the unselfish attitude that Jesus had and share what we have with others.²

Jesus demands that we should examine the motives behind all our generosity. We may give to God and to others much in the same way as we pay our income tax—as the satisfaction of a duty which we cannot escape.

A person may give purely from motives of self-interest. Consciously or unconsciously they may regard their giving as an investment. They may regard each gift as an entry on the credit side of his account in the ledger of God. Such giving is not generosity but rationalized selfishness.

A person may give in order to feel superior. They may give the gift with a short and smug lecture. This is giving to gratify one's own vanity and one's own desire for power. The Rabbis had a saying that the best kind of giving was when the giver did not know to whom he was giving, and when the receiver did not know from whom he was receiving.

A person may give because they cannot help it. That is the only real way to give. The law of the kingdom is if a person gives to gain reward they will receive no reward; but if a person gives with no thought of reward their reward is certain. The only real giving is that which is the uncontrollable outflow of love. Remember God gave because he so loved the world—and so must we.³

Our motive for sharing must be the praise of God and not the applause of men, the eternal reward in heaven and not the temporary recognition on earth. On the Day of Judgment, many who today are first in the eyes of men

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 14:1

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 186

will be last in God's eyes, and many who are last in the eyes of men will be first in the eyes of God.

In our planning after worship this morning, we need to ask God for ways to honor God. We must plan ways to minister to the poor and powerless, who can never repay us in this life. God will honor us if we care for the helpless, rather than the powerful who can reward us here and now.⁴

⁴Richards, Larry: *The Bible Reader's Companion*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 665