

**Luke 14: 1-15; “Thankful in the Lowest Place”, A Sermon for Thanksgiving
preached on November 19th, 2023, by Pastor Paul Rendall
In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The truth that Jesus is teaching in this passage is that a true disciple of His; one who knows Him and who would serve Him, is the person who is humble. This is something which Christ would have each of us to learn. I want to tie this truth in with the theme of Thanksgiving Day, in this way. I believe that if you are thankful, if you are being taught by the grace of God, you will become a humble person. But I believe that in your becoming humble, you will not turn in on yourself and become an island to yourself. Rather, you will look outside of yourself to see how you might serve our Lord.

So let us ask ourselves some questions in relation to this parable, to determine whether we are making progress in becoming the humble, and holy, and loving people that Jesus would have us to be. 1st – Are you thankful to have received the invitation to this wedding feast that Jesus is talking about? (verses 7-9) 2nd – Are you willing to show forth your thankfulness in taking the lowest position at the table? (verses 10 & 11) And 3rd – Will you continue to have a thankful spirit, looking to do the Lord’s bidding, as you wait to go up higher at the table to which you have been called? (verses 12-14)

1st – Are you thankful to have received the invitation to this wedding feast that Jesus is talking about? (verses 1-9)

Jesus had been invited to the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, it says in verse 1. There were a number of Pharisees there that day, and they were watching Jesus closely, to see what He would do while He was there. They were so self-righteous, that they were hoping that they might find something to accuse Him of. Since Jesus knew that these men had added many things to the true observance of the Sabbath, He asked them a question. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” They believed that it was not lawful. They believed that it was a form of work, which ought not to be done on that holy day.

But instead of trying to answer Jesus’ question, they kept silent so that Jesus would be forced to answer the question for them. And Jesus didn’t hesitate for a moment. In verse 4 it says that He took him and healed him, and let him go. And then he gave them this rebuke which they so richly deserved. “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” It was no doubt true that all those who were there that day would have immediately pulled their donkey or their ox out of the pit. And so they could not answer him a word.

Since he knew that they needed wise instruction, He went on to tell them a parable. It was a parable about those who were invited to a wedding feast. When they came to this feast, they chose the best places for themselves. Those lawyers and Pharisees who had come there to evaluate the righteousness of the Lord Jesus found themselves being righteously evaluated. They did not want to receive His teaching because they were not humble. They wanted the best positions at the spiritual table of Israel. They thought that they were worthy of them. You and I need to understand from this that we are given this time, in living our lives, to learn to be humble and to receive the teaching of our Lord Jesus upon our view of ourselves.

The reality for us, as disciples of Christ today, is that our Lord Jesus is most certainly risen from the dead. He is alive, forevermore, and seated at the right hand of God. And He has been given all power and authority in heaven and earth. His eyes are a flame of fire to discern the truth concerning our hearts, and our attitudes, and our actions. And yet; I trust that you know, that there is a difference between those who know the Lord, and these Pharisees. Many of you here today have come to know Christ’s love and grace to your own sinful heart. You have been forgiven of all your sins, and you are His willing learners.

Remember now; this is a parable that Jesus was telling them. It was an earthly story with a heavenly, or spiritual meaning. Jesus is not simply trying to make the Pharisees change their views of

etiquette. This parable was meant to show them their pride and their sense of self-importance. Jesus says in verse 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; 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.”

So this actual feast to which Jesus and the others were invited, was not a wedding feast, but rather it was a Sabbath feast. Weddings did not take place on the Sabbath day. And yet the parable says, “a wedding feast”. Why? I think that it is because in His parable the Lord Jesus is actually directing them to a greater feast than the one that these Pharisees were presently attending. He is directing their attention to the wedding feast which all Jews were invited to, in that time, and to which all and everyone is invited to in our day also. It is the gospel wedding feast, of seeing your need to partake of the grace of Christ, and be spiritually married to Him.

He is saying that to be a partaker of Himself and His salvation, and to follow him, it is not good to trust in your own evaluation of yourself. Rather, you must think of God’s evaluation of you. God would have you to see yourself as a sinner needing grace and salvation, for the forgiveness of your sins. And further, you will need grace in order to live the Christian life in a manner pleasing to God. The Pharisees did not like the thought that they needed grace from Christ. The Pharisees were those who, because they thought that they were spiritual by their own keeping of God’s law, that they were entitled to the best seats in the house of worship or feasts.

I am saying this in a literal as well as a spiritual fashion. This is just what they did. They thought themselves to be wise and righteous in their own eyes, and in the eyes of others, whom they believed they were better than. Jesus condemns them for this over in Matthew 23, in verses 1-4, and in verse 5 He says to the multitudes and to His disciples: “But all of their works they do to be seen by men.” “They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.” “They love the best places at the feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’.”

And then, down in verse 12, he repeats the same words that he uses in this parable that we are studying: “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” So I believe that there is more here to this parable than meets the eye. The invitation which is being given, is being given by God Himself. It is the instruction that each man or woman is not to think more highly of themselves than they should. There are other people in the world who are more honorable than we are. They are people whom God knows should have the highest places at the table.

The “highest place at the table” in the eyes of these Pharisees was the place which seemed most desirable to themselves, in terms of the way that other men would see them. That is, those men who were also trying to be outwardly religious, and who trusted in their own righteousness. They would choose for themselves that best position, to be seen by other religious men, as great. They saw themselves as worthy of this position because of their many supposedly good works, and their following the traditions of other religious Jewish men.

Actually, the highest place in the Lord’s eyes, was and is, the place and position which is bestowed by God upon those who He knows are worthy of that position. They are people who are striving by His grace to be faithful to Him and to His word. It is accepting the invitation to see yourself as unworthy of the best place; unworthy to come to the table at all! And yet God and Christ invite sinners to the greatest of all feasts, in the gospel. The proof of this is in the continuation of the parable in verses 15 and following. “Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’” “Then Jesus said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many.’”

It is the parable of the gospel feast. These Pharisees were choosing the best seats for themselves in the synagogues. But the Lord Jesus was inviting them, not to the kingdom of self-righteous religious men, but to the kingdom of God. He was telling them that when the One who had invited them, Himself comes to the feast, and He sees that you have put yourself in the place of honor, that

you will be forced to “give place” to another who is more worthy of the honor of having the best seat at the table.

In other words, we must all ask ourselves whether we have a wrong view of ourselves. Let me ask you if you are thankful for the gospel? Are you thankful for the invitation which God has extended to you to come and sit at the table in the eternal kingdom of God? Are you thankful that your pride has been humbled and that you see yourself as an undeserving sinner. If you do not see yourself this way you have deceived yourself to think that you can choose the high position at the table of having eternal life, but in the end, you will be forced to give place someday to the people whom you now think yourself to be better than; people who have come to see their need of Christ and His grace.

Your pride led you to think that you really deserved that higher place, when all the while the Lord did not intend it. You didn't understand His ways and you spurned your need to come to the feast on His terms. His principles of promotion are far different from yours. I would urge you to repent and re-think this presumptuous course that you have taken. Come to the feast and seat yourself at the lowest position. This brings us to our second question.

2nd – Are you willing to show forth your thankfulness in taking the lowest position at the table? (verses 10 and 11)

“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.” Jesus is now speaking about promotion in the kingdom of God. The feast is the invitation to come through the gospel and feed upon the grace and truth which comes to you through our Lord Jesus Christ. You see yourself as a sinner. The issue of honor and position are still there, set before you; even after you accept the invitation and come to Christ. You will still have to ask yourself; am I thankful enough with what grace and gifts and talents that I have been given by God; to take the lowest position at the table.

You see, the person who is thankful for the great salvation which has been given to them in Christ, should be willing to humble themselves to be taught and take the lowest position. And yet, many Christians both young and old, are not. Learning this principle of truth and consciously choosing to take the lowest place do not come automatically in the Christian life. Let me give you a Biblical example of this. Turn with me to Matthew 20, verse 20. “Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” “And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ “She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left in Your kingdom.’”

“But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask.’ “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’” “They said to Him, ‘We are able.’” “So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’” “And when the ten heard it they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.”

Now notice how Jesus does not say that there is no high and privileged position such as sitting at His right hand or His left in His kingdom. He simply says first that it takes being able to take the lowest place at the table and to suffer for His name's sake. The brothers, James and John, are willing to do both. But then Jesus spells it out when they tell him that they are willing to suffer for Him. He says, “It is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” That is, God the Father has plans and purposes formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness. And what God has purposed, it shall stand. No purpose of His shall be thwarted, and especially in relation to what position men have in His Son's kingdom.

Let me ask you whether you understand this? God has certain people in mind to honor with high positions in Christ's kingdom, both in this life and in the next, and yet you and I do not know who they are. We may think that we might know who they are; but chances are, we will be wrong. Why?

Because God's evaluation of them will take vastly more into consideration than present gifts, and talents, and how popular a person is presently in this life. We cannot see the picture of a man's whole life like God does. We do not know how God uses various things that are done by that person to fulfill God's purposes.

The one thing that we do know is that in the final analysis, that God's giving these privileged positions in the coming eternal kingdom, are according to the faithfulness of the person considered. Luke 19: 16 says, "Then came the first, saying 'Master, you mina has earned ten minas.'" "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'" You see how faithfulness to small things brings about a bestowal of a position at the "head of the table".

What about attaining to positions in this life in the Church and the work of the kingdom here and now? Is it not God who raises men up to these important positions? Yes, it is. But it is not position that should be striven for as much as usefulness to the Master. Usefulness to the Master does not require position, but it may lead to it. And the requisite for great usefulness is great humility. It is found in taking the lowest position and being faithful in little things that you might, over time, become faithful in much. It is in working closely together with the elders of the church so that they can see the grace of God at work in your life. They are looking at your commitment to the people of God and to the work of Christ's Church here.

If the Lord would have you to be in a position of elder or deacon, He will be looking at your faithfulness in pursuing all the details of the tasks and work of service that He has called you to do. And He will make it plain to everyone that you are worthy of the honor of serving Christ in one of these positions. But you should remember, that it is to the work of serving that you are called to. It is not for the attention and the recognition which the office might bring to you. All the glory for what you do should go to Christ.

It is only God who can call you to "go up higher" so that you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. You never need to exalt yourself in Christ's work. God will know how to promote you. Psalm 75: 6 & 7 – Promotion (exaltation) comes neither from the east, nor from the west, but God is Judge: He puts down one and exalts another."

3rd – Will you continue to have a thankful spirit, looking to do the Lord's bidding, as you wait to go up higher at the table to which you have been called? (verses 12-14)

"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.'" "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." The problem here with the Pharisees was that they were all too prone to inviting their friends, their brothers, their relatives, and their rich neighbors to their feasts.

They would probably very seldom, if ever, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Let us consider whether we are thankful for what knowledge and gifts and resources the Lord has given to us by asking whether we are being hosts for the Lord's gospel feast? Do we ever invite people to dinner who really have great physical needs? Do we attempt to share the gospel with those who may have great difficulties in understanding all the major doctrines of the Bible? Do we humble ourselves to come down to the level of the poor and needy so that we can truly minister to them. Let me ask this, as I close this message – Will you continue to have a thankful spirit; showing forth your thankfulness by doing the Lord's bidding in this regard? As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let each of us ask ourselves whether we are truly thankful. If you are, then be thankful, even in the lowest place.