

## Luke 14:7-11

Trinity 17, September 22, 2024  
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**Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup> "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, <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> But when you are 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. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

Do you care where you sit? Of course you do! I knew exactly where each of you would be sitting in church this morning, you've all got your spots! You probably also have a certain place you like to sit at the dinner table. There's probably a certain chair or couch cushion that is "your spot" when you're watching tv. If you go out to eat at a restaurant, there's maybe a certain type of spot that you're looking for—I usually want the spot that has the fullest view of everything going on around us. Now, there isn't a problem with having a regular spot, but there *could* be a problem with us if we care *too much* about where sit.

In our text this morning, Jesus was sitting at a feast—well, He wasn't really sitting at a feast, since in those days they reclined on their sides at the dinner table. So, Jesus was reclining on His side at a feast, and He was watching the room around Him. And He noticed that everyone seemed to care very much about where they sat. He watched as people entered the room and surveyed the tables and started looking for the best seats and then would rush to get there before someone else took it.

Does that sound familiar? Does that sound like something *you* would do? Maybe not that, *exactly*, but there are *other* ways in which we do this. Maybe you're driving around a parking lot looking for a good parking spot, and when you see one close to the front of the lot you get pretty anxious about getting to that aisle and pulling in before someone else sees it. Or maybe you try to get to various events early so that you can have a good seat with a good view. I'd say that type of thing is pretty normal for us. But the point that Jesus is making in our text is that if we're always thinking about getting the best spots, that can be disastrous. **"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,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place."**

These people were trying to take the places of honor, seating themselves in the best spots, thinking they *deserved* them, and opening themselves up to shame. It would be like if you went to a Cardinals game, and even though you have a ticket way up in the nosebleeds, you go down right behind home plate and sit in the nice, cushy chairs there. If you did that, an usher is probably going to come and ask to see your ticket and either kick you out of the section or ask you to leave the game. And that would be pretty embarrassing.

Or, here's a more realistic example of this. I remember in high school, when I played basketball, we all had roles to play on the team, but many of us thought that our role should be the "shot taker," the

“points scorer.” My role, in retrospect, was very *clearly* to play defense and to pass the ball, but there were a lot of times when I thought *I* should be the one trying to score, and I’d take some ill-advised shots, and then my coach would pull me from the game and put me on the bench. And it was always embarrassing.

This is what we do. We care very much about “where we sit.” In other words, we think we are important. We think we are better than others. We think we should get the best spots. We think our opinions are better, we think we’re smarter, we think what we say is most important, we think we deserve all kinds of things. And we get upset when others think they’re better than us or more deserving than us and take what we want, and the reason we get upset at that is because we really think that about ourselves—that *we* are better, that we are *more* deserving.

But the truth is that we aren’t better, and we aren’t more deserving—than anyone. So, Jesus teaches us in our text that it’s much better to be last. To take the *lowest* place, to humble yourself, to take the worst spot, to consider others as better than yourself—and to *really* believe that. Why? Because he **“who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Now, Jesus isn’t just giving us some common sense advice here. He’s not telling you what types of seats you should be sitting in or where you should park. Rather, He’s opening our eyes to this prideful attitude that we all have that can only lead to shame. And it’s one thing to be shamed by getting kicked out of a ballpark or getting benched during a basketball game. It’s another thing to be turned away by God on Judgment Day. And that’s really the great humbling that He’s referring to here. He’s talking about Judgment Day, and the last things, and the banquet feast of heaven. He’s telling you that this is how you can come before God on that day: not with boasts, but bent low; not with pride, but humility; not as first, but as last. Because, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:6) Because God **“has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.”** (Luke 1:52)

Humility. That’s what Jesus is directing our hearts towards. *Humility* rather than pride. And to have humility is nothing else than to have faith. You see, to have faith is to be a beggar; to see how small we are, how weak, how sinful, how *nothing* we are. Faith doesn’t care about where we’re sitting at the banquet feast of heaven, it just wants to be there! Faith doesn’t think that “I am anything,” because it’s too busy thinking that *Christ* is everything. Faith doesn’t care about comparing with other people, because it’s too fixed and focused on Christ alone. It doesn’t care about honor and where people are seated, it just wants to have a seat—anywhere with Jesus. So, faith *is* humility.

And faith and pride, then, are opposites. There’s a passage which is well-known, that Paul writes in the book of Romans, **“The just shall live by faith.”** (Romans 1:17) And when he writes that, he’s talking about how we’re saved by faith and not by works. We can’t stand before God and live because we know the Law backwards and forwards and have lived by it, we can only stand before God and live through faith in Jesus. But what’s really interesting about that passage, **“The just shall live by faith,”** is that Paul is quoting that from the Prophet Habakkuk. And in *that* book, there’s some really interesting context behind that quotation, and some of you might remember some of that context from when we studied Habakkuk a couple years ago.

Habakkuk is only three chapters long, and in that book Habakkuk is complaining to God. But it's a good kind of complaint—it's a prayer of faith. And he voices three complaints about evil in the world, and God responds to Habakkuk with three answers. Now, Habakkuk's second complaint is about the Babylonians. He looks around at the world and the things that are going on in the world, and he sees this Babylonian empire with all of its strength and all of its merciless wrath going and devouring and destroying one nation after another. And he sees their pride, that they think, "No one can stop us! We are masters of all!"

And Habakkuk asks how long the Lord would allow this to go on. And God has an answer. His answer is this: "**Behold, his soul** [that is, the Babylonians] **is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.**" (Habakkuk 2:4) What God is doing is contrasting the pride of the Babylonian who thinks that his strength is in his arm and in his might and in his army—and God is contrasting that with the faith of a believer. And one of the things that is really fascinating about this is that Paul then takes this phrase and uses it to contrast works-righteousness with faith.

And he is teaching us that the same pride of the Babylonian, that thinks that "I am the greatest, I can destroy the whole world," is the same sinful pride that is in every one of our hearts. It's the pride that thinks that *we* deserve the best spots and gets upset when someone else has the "audacity" to take them from us. And that pride is exactly the same reason why we could possibly think that we can come before God on the basis of our works. Because "we are better." Or so we think.

Isn't that our attitude when we try to get to places first and try to get the best spots? Isn't it because we think we are better than other people? Isn't it because we think we are more deserving? If you didn't think that, why would we do it? If you didn't think that you mattered more, you *wouldn't* do it. It is pride that keeps us from living in love for other people! Because we're too focused on "me first." "I want the biggest piece." "I want the best spot." "I want the best view." "I want to be in the middle and not left out on the outside." "ME, ME, ME," which means there's no time for anyone else.

If you and I properly contemplated our own sins, that we very clearly love ourselves *much more* than we love neighbors, then we wouldn't think we deserved anything at all or that we were better than anyone else. You see, our problem is that if there is one thing that we are really good at, it's seeing *other* people's sins. And if there's one thing that we are really bad at, it's seeing our own. We need God switch that around for us! How much better to have that switched around, to be able to contemplate and see our *own* sinfulness exposed instead! To acknowledge that I am not better than anyone, but rather, I am the chief of sinners.

And then in the humility of faith, to confess those sins to God and to one another. To realize and admit that we don't deserve anything from Him, and that we aren't *good* enough for Him, and that we aren't better than anyone else. Humble yourself in this way, and God will exalt you.

But, even then, it's *not* because you humbled yourself! We don't want to get this mixed up. We don't want to think, "God, exalt me because I'm humble! I'm so good at being humble!" Because that's just pride all over again. That's like when I was in grade school, and we had a devotion on the first being last and the last being first, and that day when we lined up to go to lunch, our teacher reversed the line around and had the last go first and the person who raced to be first in line went last. The next

day we were all bending over backwards to be last in line, and our teacher saw right through us. We weren't lining up last to put others first, we were doing so because we thought it would mean that we would be moved to first in line. That clearly wasn't humility.

No, humility isn't thinking about what you can get for yourself. Humility is to be last because we realize how sinful we are. Humility is to be bent low before God because we know we come to Him empty-handed, there's nothing that we can give to Him. Humility is to recognize that we have made ourselves our own gods, preferring ourselves over both God and our neighbor. Humility is to see all this, and to repent of it, and to place our hope in *nothing* other than God's mercy. And it is those that Christ exalts, because ***"the Lord delights in His people, and He crowns the humble with salvation."*** (Psalm 149:4)

He does this for *you*. He does this because *Jesus* humbled Himself to the point of death. He made Himself the worst. He made Himself nothing. He who by rights holds heaven's highest throne, came, and was the lowest; making a manger His only bed and was lifted up upon a cross as upon a throne. He who deserves all glory and honor bore every shame and disgrace for you and for me, for all of our sins.

And now, He who died is risen! He who was last is first. He whose name was raked through the mud now has the name which is above every name and is exalted to the highest heavens, seated above all things. And there is a place for you there, with Him. For those who die with Him also live with Him. Those who are humbled and confess their sins, laying them on Jesus, are forgiven and raised up.

Paul writes in Ephesians (cf. 1:20-21) that God has highly exalted Christ and lifted Him above every authority and power and dominion, and then he says that God has ***"raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places."*** (Ephesians 2:6) Notice, it doesn't say He *will* seat you, it says He *has* seated you, by faith right now. There, in the kingdom of heaven, with Jesus. And He has done this, Paul says, ***"So that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*** (Ephesians 2:7)

I don't know about you, but that's what I want. It's not what I deserve—it's not what you deserve—but it is what God by grace in Christ through faith gives to you *freely*. So, reach out and take this by faith. Humble yourselves, despair of all that you are, give up all of your pride and all of your self-worth, and you will find in Jesus far more than you ever thought you had before. You will find honor and joy and life and strength.

So, you see, if you do care about where you sit, it actually does matter! The last place is the best place, because you'll find good company there. There, you find Jesus, who took that last place for you. And seated next to Him, you will be lifted up to life-eternal. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' saving name. Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.