

THE FOLLY OF SELF-PROMOTION // Luke 14:7-11

Message from the series, The Gospel of Luke

You can learn a lot by having a meal with someone. In this passage, we are going to learn something about Jesus and something about the Pharisees, as well as something about ourselves.

Jesus uses a parable to make a point about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who exhibit a lack of humility. What is humility? It is not thinking less of oneself, but thinking of oneself less. It's self-effacing, not self-defacing. J.C. Ryle has called humility the "queen of Christian graces." Humility is recognizing our inadequacy and our need for Jesus.

Jesus teaches in parables so that only those with spiritual eyesight will understand his point. Parables are not meant to disclose truth but to conceal it (cf. Mark 4:11). However, someone in the room will have ears to hear and eyes to see and will be shaped by the teaching. We should recognize that we are never fully aware of the condition of those in the room.

Main Idea: How one behaves toward other people is a key indication of how one behaves toward God.

1. Jesus watched them (v. 7)

There is a connection between this verse and the first verse of the chapter. Verse 1 indicates that the Pharisees were watching Jesus. Verse 7 shows that he was watching them. They were looking only on the outside; Jesus sees on the inside. He knows why we do what we do, and it is God's good grace to hold us accountable, to drive us to holiness and obedience.

Here, Jesus sees that the Pharisees are engaged in competition for the best seats in the room, those closest to the host, indicating status and prestige. The very fact that they were invited guests should have stirred up humility—they should have felt honored to have even been invited; but, instead, they were more concerned with the "who's who" of public reputation than personal godliness. This was the source of their legalism—they could congratulate themselves on building up a public image based on their adherence to their own invented regulations.

2. Jesus taught them (v. 8-10)

Jesus is going to provide a lesson on the hypocritical spirit. At this meal, Jesus healed a man bloated by dropsy; but the Pharisees are bloated with spiritual dropsy, hypocrisy and pride. It is significant that he uses the example of a wedding feast, and points to the fact that our treatment of people reflects our treatment of God. Those who can contend for honored positions at an earthly banquet reveal they are not part of the family of God. There will be no squabbling for seats at the marriage supper of the Lamb—we will not be there by our own merit, but by the grace of God (Revelation 19:9).

Do not assume you are the most distinguished person in the room; don't claim your own honor. Let the Lord place you. Wait for Jesus to say, "Friend, move up" (v. 10). He is a friend committed to our spiritual progress. This parable is about entering the kingdom of God. Heaven is the best seat in the house, but it's not here yet—in the meantime, be humble.

3. Jesus warned them (v. 11)

Charles Spurgeon has said there are two kinds of Christians in the world—the humble and the humbled. The Holy Spirit wages war on our pride. What will God do in your life? He will make you humble. To be humble, just follow Jesus. He is the model of humility personified. We don't become humble by seeking humility; we become humble by seeking Christ.

We should have the attitude of John the Baptist—I must decrease and he (Jesus) must increase. We must die little deaths every day, considering what must be crucified in our lives. We need to glory in our weakness—the more our weaknesses come to our attention, the more we rely on Jesus and the more glory he receives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we ever subtly contend for a position of honor? In what context are we most apt to self-promote?
2. What examples of humility and godliness has God placed in your life? How can we learn from their example?
3. What is the difference between seeking humility and seeking Christ? Why will we find humility by seeking Christ but not the other way around?