

Luke 14:1-14 “Humble and Exalted”

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It's been suggested that there are seven deadly sins, things like sloth, not just laziness, but an all-consuming preoccupation with entertainment at the expense of everything else in your life. Fun has become your god. There is gluttony, not just overeating, but again an all-consuming addiction to finding peace of mind in things. It might be food, it might be shopping. Your own comfort and satisfaction has become your god. That's not to suggest that other sins are less serious, but it does call to mind the truth that when we let even small sins get a toehold in our lives, they can start an avalanche that leads to death. It calls to mind King David who ignored his kingly duties and stayed home from the battle front. With time on his hands, he fell for the pretty girl next door. He got her pregnant and got her husband killed. He convinced himself that he had gotten away with it. It seemed like a small thing at first but it grew into a monster.

That's what happens with sin. When we cease the daily struggle against it, it soon carries us off. Today's sin is the sin of pride, hope in fame. It fills Luke 14. It started back in Luke 13 and it will carry on into Luke 15. In the previous chapter, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, to the cross. He does this willingly. He has set aside His glory and humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant. Again and again He is met with opposition and rejection ... pride. Sadness wells up inside him and he starts to cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" To understand pride, you need to think about what its opposite is. The opposite of pride is not humility as much as it is humiliation. It is to know yourself as you really are and for sinners like us, that is a brutal and unhappy sight.

Humiliation - to have all your defects revealed, to have your character flaws revealed to the world. To have a hidden camera record and broadcast to the world everything you did yesterday. To have a microphone connected to your mind to reveal all your hidden thoughts and unspoken words. Pride in your accomplishments would pretty much disappear. Pride in how good you are would go right out the window.

Here in the middle chapters of Luke there is an underlying theme, pride and humility. It will reach a climax of sorts in Luke 15, that lost chapter of the Bible - the lost sheep -the lost coin -the lost son. It starts, as our text does, with grumbling Pharisees (did they ever smile?) complaining that Jesus gathered and ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus uses it as a teaching moment. How He longs for these Pharisees to come down from their pride and join the ranks of sinners, saved by grace.

But how does that happen? How do you teach humility? How do you excise pride from the human heart? Humility cannot be grown on purpose. To try to do so is to be proud and it defeats the effort from the start. Think about it. I'm going to change my ways. I'm going to be so humble that people won't recognise me anymore. You cannot make yourself humble. So is there no antidote for pride? Is it inescapable? The antidote to pride is grace. The treatment plan for pride is the application of God's law to reveal sin and brokenness. To expose the wounds and infection that has taken over our hearts, then to treat those wounds with the sweet medicine of the gospel. And that's what Jesus does here in the middle of Luke as He ministers to hearts controlled by pride. And He does it with us too. Every time we start to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to, He knocks us off our high horse and we land in the mud. But He doesn't leave us there. He picks us up, cleans us up, and calls us to follow Him.

Do you sometimes have the idea that the Bible readings are very disjointed and un-connected. At first glance today's gospel is about the Sabbath. Then it changes gear and is all about healing, only to change gear again to the topic of pride and humility. They appear to be very separate topics. So which one should I preach on? In reality

they all connect as Jesus tries to reach out to those caught up in the sin of pride. It is a deadly sin because for those afflicted by it, it would leave them out of the heavenly banquet and the kingdom of God. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and He wept over the spiritual toll that pride was taking. How often I wanted to gather you - but you would not!

Chapter 14 starts with a case by case study of where your pride will get you. There is a miraculous healing and the subject comes up of what you could and could not do on the Sabbath. Do you know why the Pharisees were so preoccupied with Sabbath rules? It was pride. Just look at how good I am. Look how good I can be! It was thinking of themselves more highly than they should. They could get by very well on their own. The day would come when their pride would keep them out of the kingdom of God. It was going to leave them in the lowest place. It would be the death of them. At its very root, pride gets in the way of grace. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Pride is hope in self. Humility despairs of self and finds its hope in God.

Have you started to notice that getting old is a very humbling experience? For so many years you used to be able to do everything for yourself but as the aches and pains grow in frequency and intensity, so does the need for help with even the simplest things. Hospital gowns are designed the way they are with full back-side air conditioning to cure you of any pride you might still have. You wake up one morning and your back hurts so much that you can't get out of bed. You sit there on the edge of the bed. It hurts too much to stand up. It hurts too much to lie back down again. You are stuck in between. You try to get dressed but give up when it takes a half an hour to put on one sock. It's 6:30 in the morning and your wife is away for a few days. One thought runs through your mind ... who can I call? Who would come over at this time of the morning, break into my house and help me get dressed? You run through a mental list of all your friends. You thank God that your phone is beside the bed as you contemplate swallowing your pride and phoning a friend. Maybe I'll just call 911. Then my friends won't have to know. But then all the neighbours will hear the siren and see the fire truck and want to know what happened. The 911 operator will ask me, "What is the nature of your emergency? Do you need police, fire or ambulance?" Um ... I need someone to help me put on my other sock.

Like it or not, you are going to have to abandon your pride. The day will come when you will need some serious help. Now here in Luke 13, Jesus seeks to bring the Pharisees to that painful acknowledgement. Twice we read, "They had nothing to say." So Jesus told them a parable. What place will you take at the banquet? Will you think more highly of yourself and pick a spot close to the food? Will you be honest about who you are and find a low spot?

When we were in Saskatchewan years ago we were invited to a lot of wedding receptions. Most of them were buffet dinners and we learned to play the game of which table will go first. We'd look over the room and try and guess which end of the room would be first for the buffet line. We'd pick a probable table at the end of the room nearest the food and sit down, only to be disappointed and find that our table would be last. Next time we would pick a table at the other end of the room only to be disappointed and find that our table would be last again. The next time, not to be outdone, we picked a table in the middle of the room. That day the buffet line started at both ends and the middle table was last. In the end we stopped trying so hard. We were just happy to attend. We would sit in some low corner content to just be there at all. And if we were anything but last, we considered ourselves to be especially honoured.

You see, we need to understand how the kingdom of God works. It's not like the world. It's not based on merit or net worth. It is built on grace. It rests on the undeserved gifts of God. We are all among the last minute invites who are brought to the table just as we are, sinners saved by grace. Redeemed by the blood of Jesus on the cross, rescued from sin and death.

Now, that takes us to part three of our text. When you give a banquet, who do you invite? The world says invite important people. Invite people who will invite you back. Invite people who will help bring you closer to the top, you know, people of influence and power. Jesus says that's not how the kingdom of God works. That's not God's attitude and it shouldn't be ours either. Scripture says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Who does God invite? Who does the shepherd search for with reckless abandon? Who does the host bring in to the banquet when all those who were invited don't show up because they had better things to do? Jesus says, "Bring in the poor, the crippled, the unclean, the outcast so that my wedding feast may be filled."

Pride will be your downfall but grace, God's grace in Christ will be your salvation. Admit and receive God's gift in the full knowledge that you and I don't deserve it - that is reason to celebrate!