

Luke 14:7-17 -- When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Hebrews 13:1-8 & 15-16 -- Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. 3 Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. 4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you ;never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" 7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. --- 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

I GREW UP IN NEW JERSEY, WHICH DOES NOT PERMIT PEOPLE TO PUMP THEIR OWN GASOLINE. CONSEQUENTLY, IT IS COMMON TO SEE SIGNS THAT SAY "NO SELF SERVICE".

THESE SIGNS OR OTHERS LIKE THEM ARE NECESSARY FOR THOSE WHO ARE VISITING OR PASSING THROUGH THE STATE.

IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL TO SEE THE ANNOYANCE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHEN THEY HAD TO WAIT FOR AN ATTENDANT WHO WAS BUSY WITH ANOTHER CAR.

TODAY MOST STATES HAVE SELF SERVICE FOR CARS, AND IN SOME STORES, SELF CHECKOUTS.

AND, WHETHER WE LIKE THIS KIND OF SELF SERVICE OR NOT, THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH IT.

HOWEVER, THERE IS ANOTHER TYPE OF SELF SERVICE THAT THE BIBLE CALLS PEOPLE TO REFRAIN FROM, BECAUSE IT CAN HARM OTHERS.

THIS BRINGS US TO LUKE 14, WHICH OPENS WITH JESUS EATING A MEAL AT THE HOME OF A PHARISEE ON THE SABBATH.

WE ARE TOLD HE WAS BEING WATCHED BY MANY OF THOSE PRESENT TO SEE IF HE WOULD BREAK ANY SABBATH RULES, WHICH IN FACT HE DID BY HEALING A MAN.

AFTER THE HEALING WE LEARN JESUS WAS WATCHING PEOPLE AS WELL, AND HE OBSERVED MANY OF HIS FELLOW GUESTS PLACED THEMSELVES IN SEATS OF HONOR.

THESE SEATS WOULD BE ONES LOCATED CLOSEST TO THE HOST.

THIS OFFERED THE SAVIOR A TEACHING OPPORTUNITY, AND SO HE TOLD A PARABLE ABOUT A WEDDING FEAST.

IN IT, JESUS SAID GUESTS SHOULD ENTER AND TAKE LOWER PLACES, ASSUMING OTHER'S PRESENT ARE MORE WORTHY OF THE HIGHER PLACES.

HE SAID, DOING THAT IS MUCH BETTER THAN BEING ASKED TO MOVE TO A LOWER SEAT, IF THE HOST WISHES TO HONOR SOMEONE ELSE WITH THE SEAT YOU TOOK.

THE SAVIOR'S PURPOSE HOWEVER WAS NOT TO OFFER COMMENTS ON SOCIAL ETIQUETTE, NOR TO QUOTE BIBLICAL WISDOM LIKE THAT FOUND IN PROVERBS.

INSTEAD, IT WAS NOT SO MUCH THE ACTION HE WAS CONCERNED WITH, BUT THE MINDSET THAT INSPIRED THE ACTION OF SEEKING THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE.

THE FACT THE MEAL TOOK PLACE ON THE SABBATH OFFERED JESUS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE HIS POINT.

THE SABBATH IS A DAY TO HONOR GOD AND REMEMBER GOD'S GIFT OF THE DAY TO THOSE HE CREATED.

THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING, JESUS WAS WARNING AGAINST THOSE WHO SOUGHT SPECIAL STATUS IN GOD'S EYES.

THOSE WHO DO SO, AND THOSE WHO ACT SELF-RIGHTEOUSLY REVEAL THEIR OWN FAILURE TO KNOW AND LOVE THE LORD.

THE MESSAGE JESUS DELIVERED CONCERNED HOW TO ACT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AS ONE WHOM GOD HAS INVITED.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE PROBLEM JESUS ADDRESSED CONCERNED THE DANGER OF PRIDE. IT CAUSES MANY MORE PROBLEMS IN THE WORLD THAN PEOPLE MAY REALIZE.

PRIDE CAN AND OFTEN DOES INHIBIT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE. IT CAN CAUSE SOME TO REFUSE TO APOLOGIZE.

CERTAIN PEOPLE FEEL MORE PRIVILEGED THAN OTHERS, AND THEY MAY THINK THE NORMAL RULES DO NOT APPLY TO THEM.

PRIDE WAS DESCRIBED IN A 1986 EDITION OF THE READERS DIGEST IN A STATEMENT THAT SAID SOMETHING LIKE: "PRIDE IS THE ONLY DISEASE THAT MAKES EVERYONE SICK, EXCEPT THE ONE WHO HAS IT."

BUT IN TRUTH, THE BIBLE AND OTHER KINDS OF WISDOM WARN THAT OUR PRIDE CAN BE HURT AND SOMETIMES SERIOUSLY DAMAGED.

PROVERBS 11:2 SAYS: "WHEN PRIDE COMES, THEN COMES DISGRACE, BUT WITH HUMILITY COMES WISDOM."

A GREAT METAPHOR FOR THIS IS THE BOARD GAME: "CHUTES AND LADDERS".

THE LADDERS LEAD A PLAYER ON TOWARDS VICTORY, BUT IF YOU LAND ON A CHUTE YOU ARE TAKEN DOWN TO WHERE YOU BEGAN.

THIS IS LIKE THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD WAS ABOUT PRIDE, SHAME, HUMILITY, AND HONOR AT A WEDDING FEAST. SHAME SENDS YOU BACK, HONOR MOVES YOU FORWARD.

THUS, THE FOCUS OF JESUS' WARNING IS THE DANGER OF PRIDE. ELSEWHERE SCRIPTURE POINTS TO THE PROBLEM IT CAUSES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

WHEN PRIDE LEADS TO SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, WE BEGIN TO THINK WE HAVE EARNED GOD'S LOVE, OR THAT WE DO NOT NEED GOD'S MERCY OR HELP.

PSALM 10:4 WARNS "IN THEIR PRIDE THE WICKED DO NOT SEEK HIM; IN ALL THEIR THOUGHTS THERE IS NO ROOM FOR GOD."

TRULY, PRIDE VERY OFTEN LEADS US TO SIN, IT INHIBITS OUR ABILITY TO NOT ONLY LOVE GOD, BUT PEOPLE AS WELL.

THUS, THE STORY ABOUT PEOPLE SEEKING PLACES OF HONOR SHOWS HOW PRIDE CAN LEAD US TO ASSUME WE ARE MORE DESERVING THAN OTHERS TO BE HONORED BY GOD.

DOING SO CAN ALSO CAUSE TENSION DURING THE EVENT IF OTHER GUESTS THINK THEY DESERVE THE SEATS WE TOOK.

SCRIPTURE WARNS US PRIDE LEADS TO VIOLENCE, JEALOUSY, MOCKERY, AND DAMAGES HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.

THIS WAS ALSO WHAT JESUS WAS CONCERNED ABOUT. AND REMEMBER, HE WAS SPEAKING FROM THE POSITION OF SOMEONE WHO HAD EVERY REASON TO BE PROUD.

THINK ABOUT THIS: AS GOD INCARNATE IN HUMAN FLESH, THE BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH OF JESUS WERE COMPLETELY FOCUSED ON SERVING OTHERS AND NOT SELF.

REMEMBER THE WORDS OF PHILIPPIANS 2, WHICH DESCRIBE JESUS CHRIST IN THIS WAY:

“WHO, BEING IN VERY NATURE OF GOD, DID NOT CONSIDER EQUALITY WITH GOD SOMETHING TO BE USED TO HIS OWN ADVANTAGE;

RATHER, HE MADE HIMSELF NOTHING BY TAKING THE VERY NATURE OF A SERVANT, BEING MADE IN HUMAN LIKENESS.

AND BEING FOUND IN APPEARANCE AS A MAN, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO DEATH EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS!”

HUMILITY HOWEVER, FOR THE REST OF US IS OFTEN SEEN IN THE NEGATIVE LIGHT OF ALLOWING OTHERS TO PUSH US AROUND.

WE MISTAKENLY MAY VIEW HUMILITY AS HAVING LOW SELF ESTEEM, FEELING INFERIOR, AND ALWAYS BEING SUBSERVIENT TO OTHER PEOPLE.

JESUS, WE SHOULD NOTE WAS NONE OF THOSE THINGS. HE HAD A HEALTHY SELF ESTEEM; HE KNEW EXACTLY WHO HE WAS AND HIS PURPOSE IN LIFE.

AND THIS SELF KNOWLEDGE WAS WHAT ALLOWED HIM TO POWERFULLY SERVE GOD HIS FATHER. AS WELL AS SERVE HIS FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.

SO, WHEN IT COMES TO OUR LIVES, WE LIKE JESUS, NEED TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN PRIDE AND HUMILITY.

THIS INCLUDES RECOGNIZING BOTH OUR ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS, ALONG WITH GOD’S WILL AND CALL TO US.

AFTER ALL, IF WE BECOME PRIDEFUL, WE CAN THWART GOD’S WILL BECAUSE WE WILL NOT LISTEN TO THE LORD AS MUCH AS WE NEED TO.

WE MAY ALSO ASSUME WE ARE ALWAYS THE BEST PERSON FOR A PARTICULAR TASK, AND SO IT MUST BE GOD’S WILL FOR US AND US ALONE TO DO IT.

BUT SOMETIMES GOD WANTS ANOTHER TO DO IT INSTEAD, AND IF WE DO NOT STEP BACK HIS WILL IS NOT DONE, DUE TO OUR INTERFERENCE BORN OUT OF PRIDE.

HOWEVER, IF WE HAVE TOO LOW SELF ESTEEM, WE WILL HESITATE TO ANSWER GOD’S CALL, ASSUMING GOD CAN SURELY FIND SOMEONE BETTER THAN US.

REMEMBER JESUS CALLED IMPERFECT PEOPLE TO HELP HIM. HE ONLY DID HIMSELF THE THINGS HE ALONE HAD THE ABILITY AND AUTHORITY TO ACCOMPLISH.

BUT AGAIN, HIS FOCUS WAS NOT ON SELF SERVICE BUT SERVING GOD HIS FATHER AND OTHERS.

THE SECOND STORY JESUS TOLD IN THE GOSPEL READING TELLS HIS FOLLOWERS TO DO THE SAME.

IT TEACHES CHRISTIANS TO BE THE MOST GENEROUS NOT WITH THOSE WHO CAN, AND MOST LIKELY WILL, REPAY US IN KIND, BUT RATHER TO THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE THE MEANS TO DO SO.

HOWEVER, JESUS DID NOT FORBID GIVING A PARTY OR HAVING A MEAL ONLY WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS.

INSTEAD, THE POINT JESUS WAS MAKING WAS THAT WHEN WE DO SO IT IS NO CREDIT TO US, BUT AN ORDINARY ACT EVERYONE DOES.

HIS POINT WAS WE PLEASE GOD, AS A MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY AND CITIZEN OF HIS KINGDOM, BY BEING MORE GENEROUS TOWARDS THOSE WHO DO NOT EXPECT IT, AND CANNOT BE GENEROUS TOWARDS US IN A SIMILAR WAY.

BUT THE PROBLEM WITH GOD'S WILL IN THIS AND OTHER MATTERS IS- THAT WE CAN SO EASILY GO ASTRAY, EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT INTEND TO OR WISH TO.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS CAN BE FOUND WITH CATTLE WHO WANDER OUT OF WHERE THEY ARE SUPPOSE TO STAY.

WHEN I LIVED IN MISSOURI IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON TO OCCASIONALLY SEE A COW OUTSIDE OF THE FENCE, GRAZING OR WALKING ALONG THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

ONE TIME, ON A ROAD WITH TRUCK TRAFFIC SIMILAR TO ROUTE 11, I SAW A LONG-HORNED COW STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD.

THERE WAS NO OTHER TRAFFIC, SO I STOPPED MY CAR IN ORDER TO "RESCUE" IT FROM DANGER.

I GENTLY SHOOED IT OUT OF THE HIGHWAY ONTO THE GRASS, AND THEN RETURNED TO MY CAR.

BUT BY THE TIME I SAT DOWN AGAIN THE ANIMAL WAS BACK IN THE CENTER OF THE ROAD WHERE I HAD FOUND IT.

SINCE ITS HORNS WERE ABOUT THE LENGTH OF MY ARMS I DECIDED NOT TO ARGUE WITH IT, AND SLOWLY DROVE PAST AND WENT ON MY WAY.

I ALWAYS WONDERED WHY CATTLE WOULD WANDER INTO POSSIBLE DANGER WHEN THEY HAD LUSH FIELDS OF GRASS TO EAT.

THEN I READ AN EXPLANATION BY A FARMER. HE SAID COWS DO NOT INTEND TO STRAY, BUT SOMETIMES THEY DO, AND CAN EVEN GET LOST.

THIS USUALLY HAPPENS BECAUSE THE ANIMAL SPOTS SOME GRASS OR A CLUMP OF CLOVER ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE WHERE IT CANNOT REACH.

IF THERE IS ANY BREAK OR WEAK PLACE IN THE FENCE A COW WILL GET THROUGH TO GET TO WHAT IT WANTS TO EAT, THEN LITTLE BY LITTLE IT MAY STRAY INTO DANGER.

THIS IS NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM PEOPLE, EVEN CHRISTIANS WHEN WE STRAY FROM GOD'S WILL.

WE DO NOT INTEND TO DO SO, BUT WE DO IT AND MAY EVEN LOSE OUR WAY, BY WANDERING FARTHER AND FARTHER FROM GOD AND HIS WILL.

IT ONLY TAKES ONE MISSTEP, A SLIP OF THE TONGUE, OR A BAD DECISION AND BEFORE WE KNOW IT, WE HAVE FALLEN INTO SIN, OR GOTTEN INTO OTHER KIND OF TROUBLE.

AND THE TRUTH IS NO MATTER HOW DEVOUT WE ARE OR FAITHFUL TO GOD WE TRY TO BE-WE CAN AND WILL SIN.

WHAT THEN CAN WE DO TO MINIMIZE OUR SIN AND PREVENT OURSELVES FROM OTHERWISE STRAYING TOO FAR FROM THE LORD?

FIRST, WE NEED TO ADMIT THIS CAN AND WILL HAPPEN. THEN WE NEED TO LOOK TO CHRIST WHO BRINGS US GOD'S MERCY.

HEBREWS 13: 8 SAYS- "JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER."

THIS VERSE REMINDS US, THAT FOR CHRISTIANS, JESUS IS THE ROCK UPON WHICH WE STAND, AND THE ANCHOR TO WHICH WE ARE TETHERED, SO THAT WE DO NOT GO TOO FAR WHEN WE FALL.

REMEMBERING AND BELIEVING THIS TAKES BEING HUMBLE ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE WE NEED JESUS AND THE FORGIVENESS HE PROVIDES.

WE ALSO NEED THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TO BOTH GUIDE OUR LIVES AND TO EMPOWER US BE CHRIST-SERVING RATHER THAN SELF-SERVING.

LET US PRAY: WE THANK YOU GOD FOR YOUR FAITHFULNESS AND LOVE. WE THANK YOU FOR THE PROMISE OF SCRIPTURE THAT JESUS OUR SAVIOR IS BOTH A ROCK AND AN ANCHOR FOR US. IN THIS EVER CHANGING AND UNCERTAIN WORLD, HELP US ALWAYS TO REMEMBER THIS, AND TO TRUST IN YOU. IN CHRIST'S NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: LUKE 14:7-14 AND HEBREW 13:1-8 & 15-16

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