

## Week 12 – Humility or Humiliation – Luke 14:7-11

### Scripture Reading: Mark 10:35-45

#### Introduction

It's been said that one of the greatest human motivators is **the desire for significance**

We all instinctively want to know that we matter in some way; that we count for something; that we make a difference

And we can long for those things so deeply that we can even begin to engage in self-promotion; both in our own minds and in the public arena – to the point that we can become a “legend in our own mind” even if we aren't in anyone else's

Mac Davis [**MacDavis.jpg**] wrote a song almost 40 years ago that humorously points out just what extremes self-love can reach called: *It's Hard to be Humble*

The song begins:

Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way.

I can't wait to look in the mirror; I get better looking each day...

The song depicts self-aggrandizement in the extreme

Now, the desire for our lives to have meaning isn't wrong – in fact, I believe it's instilled in us by God as a means of motivating us – but we have confused significance with fame

So that it's not enough to simply **be** significant we need for others to **recognize** just how significant we are

How else can we explain the sense of diminished worth that arises on social media when we don't get enough people to approve of the picture of whatever we had for dinner last night?

Again, it's not the desire for significance that is wrong but how we measure significance and how we go about attaining significance that gets us into trouble

Even the disciples weren't immune from self-promotion in their search for significance as we saw in our Scripture reading from Mark 10

Not only did James and John ask for the best seats but the others obviously believed their own significance would be diminished by the exaltation of someone else and that made them angry with the two brothers

And in their quest to be seen as more significant James and John actually diminished their worth in the eyes of the other disciples

Our parable this morning deals with the issue of self-promotion and the dangers it contains

Like the last two parables we have considered this one was also told to a group of religious leaders in order to show them the error of their ways – I believe in the sincere desire to see them change

The parable is found in **Luke 14:7-11**

*Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, “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. 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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

For those of you taking notes, we will begin by looking at the **analysis** of the parable; then we will look at the **application** of the parable and, lastly, we will look at our **model** for humility

# **I. The Analysis of the Parable**

As we analyze the parable we first want to consider the situation that prompted Jesus to tell the parable and then the lesson that the parable teaches

## **A. The Situation**

We find **the setting** for the parable in **Luke 14:1** where we read that Jesus was invited to the home of “*a ruler of the Pharisees*”

And although the text doesn’t detail the guest list it’s obvious that the guest list included other religious leaders also as we see Luke record the fact that “*they were watching [Jesus] carefully*”

Then **verse 3** identifies those present as “*the lawyers and Pharisees*”

In this description we get the picture that Jesus was included in a gathering that was predominantly made up of people who were at least somewhat hostile toward him and watching him with at least some measure of ill intent

And in the first verse of our passage, **verse 7**, we see that those same scribes and Pharisees were the audience to whom Jesus told the parable

And the catalyst or the reason for the parable was the behavior of those religious leaders as they jockeyed and jostled one another in an attempt to procure the best seats – our text describes them as the “*places of honor*”

I find a bit of humor in the fact that while the religious leaders were carefully keeping a watchful eye on Jesus, presumably to find something to hold against him, Jesus was watching them

### ***Places of honor***

At a meal of this sort the places of honor would be those places that were closest to the host

Today we would liken it to being seated at the head table

Believe it or not but serious studies have been done concerning where people choose to sit in a meeting room and all of the seats have names and ranks and meanings attached to them

And watching where people sit can tell a great deal about them

It was no different in Jesus’ day and the best seats were those nearest the host or the acknowledged leader

Because of our culture we tend to envision people in Jesus’s day sitting at a table like we do [**LastSupper.jpg**] but, it seems Da Vinci was also influenced by his culture since he painted the scene as if it had occurred during the Renaissance

This other image of the Last Supper [**LastSupper2.jpg**] gets a bit closer to what we expect was the norm in Jesus’ day but even it isn’t quite right

In reality, the arrangement at the event in our parable was probably more like the “**triclinium**” or “Grecian table” [**Triclinium.jpg**] where the guests all reclined on couches resting on their left elbows and eating with their right hand

Typically, there would have been three or sometimes four people on each couch and couches and tables were added if the group was larger

There is some scholarly disagreement as to which space the host would have occupied and therefore which would have been the places of highest honor but suffice it to say that the attendees knew and they wanted to sit in those places

The mental image I have of this scene is pretty humorous

I imagine Jesus watching this group of illustrious, distinguished, self-important grown men with a little smile on his face as they tried to maneuver into position to flop down into the prime spot when dinner was served

As silly as we might find the whole affair, the seating arrangement at such a dinner definitely represented a person’s social rank – where one sat was a status symbol that openly demonstrated importance

And our intrinsic hunger to be assured of our own significance often demands recognition even in petty matters like this

The religious leaders had been watching Jesus very closely in order to see if they could trap him in some breach or another in order to discredit him and they completely missed the fact that he was also watching them

But, there was Jesus, standing off to one side not missing a single tactic as the other guests plotted to secure their place  
And as he “noticed” their behavior he was able to use the situation to illustrate a biblical truth – without even being aware of it, they provided him with a real-life, real-time object lesson of great importance to their future

And the lesson he taught is easy to understand

## **B. The Lesson**

Jesus used the occasion of a wedding feast which would have been a familiar occurrence to all

As we saw last week, a wedding feast was probably the biggest, most important social event there was in those days

All of the people who were considered to be important to the two families involved would be invited and where each person was seated would indicate their standing within that group

If you’ve ever been to a fund-raising banquet you have witnessed the same kind of strategic seating arrangement where the big donors are seated in the center right up by the stage

And the status of the other guests diminishes as the tables radiate out and away from those prestigious seats

We also see the same basic principle at work at a modern wedding reception where the wedding party sits at a head table flanking the bride and groom in descending order away from the central seats where the bride and groom sit

And then the parents of the couple are seated nearest the head table with some of their closest associates and on down the line

These days, we use numbered tables or place cards to designate where a person should sit but that doesn’t seem to have been the case in Jesus’ day

Rather, it seems that everyone chose their own seat according to how important they thought they were within that social circle

But there was a catch – the host could rearrange the guests as he saw fit

Look with me at **verses 8-9** again –

*“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.”*

Talk about bursting the balloon of a person’s ego!

Just imagine the depth of embarrassment that would result from the host tapping you on the shoulder and asking you to give your seat to another

Of course, the best seat is the best seat because it’s visible to all and you would have to stand in front of everyone in order to yield the coveted seat

And then you would have to turn to face those whom you deemed less worthy than yourself and begin the long, public walk past all of them in search of another seat

And since all of the “god” seats would already be occupied, the walk of shame would be all the way back to the only unoccupied seat – the lowest seat in the house

But really, how could he possibly dare to take any seat but the very lowest and risk the danger of being asked to move again should someone else come in who the host would deem more important?

I doubt that any of us has escaped having some foolishness or another made public before others at some point in our lives

So when we read this parable we can empathize with this demoted guest and feel our own cheeks might even start to burn red a little bit as we recall what it felt like to stand before others in that state

Humiliation can come as a result of an accidental misstep and those situations are as unfortunate as they are difficult to completely avoid – but we can also set ourselves up to be brought low by raising ourselves too high before others

And self-promotion sets us up for humiliation

**Proverbs 16:18** teaches us, *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

And that's the principle that Jesus is pointing to with this parable

The self-promoting individual is setting himself up for humiliation because humiliation is the natural consequence of pride

### **Alternative**

But Jesus says there is a way to avoid being humiliated

Look again at **verse 10** which begins with the word "But" introducing the alternative –

*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.*

Instead of elevating oneself and risking being demoted, Jesus is suggesting that it is better to take a lesser position and give allowance for promotion by another

And in this teaching Jesus is stating a principle that we find in the book of Proverbs

**Proverbs 25:6-7** says,

*Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.*

Of course, Jesus isn't just teaching wedding feast etiquette with the telling of this parable

He is telling the scribes and Pharisees how people are going to be either humiliated or exalted in the kingdom of God

There is a day coming when Jesus will be the Master of the banquet and at that time the arrogant will be demoted while the humble are promoted

And with his explanation in **verse 11** he makes that warning explicit

*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

The way Jesus makes this statement gives it the weight of a divine promise

I have a little book of God's promises on my bookshelves at home and you know what? That promise isn't included!

Maybe that's because it isn't a very "happy" promise for people like us who are guilty of overestimating ourselves and who therefore seek to be exalted by others

Still, it's a fact that it's very hard to humiliate a humble person because a truly humble person doesn't expect to be raised up and therefore can't be brought low

That really is the crux of **Proverbs 29:23**

And that leads us to consider how we might apply this parable to our lives today

## **II. The Application of the Parable**

I see two ways of applying the parable – one positive and one negative

Let's look first at the negative

### **A. We must guard against self-promotion**

**James 4:6** loosely quotes Proverbs 3:34 when it says, *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”*

The word “pride” appears in 49 verses in our ESV Bible and the vast majority of those usages reveal God's negative view of pride and how he will bring the proud person or nation low

Take for instance **Proverbs 8:13** where God says - *The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.*

Or **Psalms 31:23** - *Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.*

Those are just two examples but Scripture is full of instances that show the same things

And we know the source of pride because it is actually listed among the attitudes and behaviors that come from within our own hearts and cause us to be defiled as we see in **Mark 7:21-23** –

*For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.*

How often do we really see self-promotion as being on the same level as murder or adultery?

But that's where God's Word places it

And just as we would flee from the other sins on that list we should also flee from pride

That's the negative side of application – the thing we should avoid doing

But there is also a positive thing we should do

### **B. We must practice true humility**

It would be easy for someone to read this parable with a cynical eye and to deduce that they could get promoted to their rightful place and be publicly exalted by feigning humility through taking the lowest seat

But that would simply be counterfeit humility that served to conceal their genuine pride

No, Jesus is teaching that one must truly be humble and actually consider that the lowest seat is where they belong

But being humble doesn't mean thinking ill of oneself – you don't have to consider yourself to be a piece of garbage or a lowly worm

And in order to be humble you don't have to devalue the gifts that God has given you

Humility is simply being free from pride and arrogance and it comes from having an accurate assessment of your own worth

That's what Paul was also trying to get across in **Romans 12:3** where he writes –

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Notice that Paul says to use “sober judgment” which means to make a realistic assessment

And he points out that no one need feel superior, or inferior for that matter, because what we have has been assigned to us by God

In the verses that follow, Paul goes on to speak of the different members of the body and their different gifts and even the difference in the proportion of those gifts and says everyone should serve to their fullest on the basis of those God-given gifts

And when we recognize those truths and follow those instructions we discover that there is no need for self-promotion or self-demotion – we are simply acknowledging what God has already done and acting accordingly

### **But that goes against what the world tells us**

Everywhere we turn we are told we must stand up for ourselves and our “rights” otherwise people will walk all over us

But really, that advice sounds right to our ears because we’re naturally attuned to that wavelength in the first place

We want to believe we’re superior and we want others to believe so too

It’s a rare individual who truly assesses himself or herself accurately

A number of surveys have revealed that a majority of people believe they are above average – a statistical impossibility

In one survey 65% declared they were above average in intelligence

In another, 93% of drivers rated themselves as being better than the average motorist

In still another, 94% of college professors thought they were above average when compared to their peers

We certainly are an egotistical bunch

Clearly we need a **model of humility** that we can look to as an example

### **III. Our Model for Humility**

Fortunately for us, Scripture provides us with the supreme example

Turn in your Bibles to Philippians 2 and look with me at verse 1-11

*(Philippians 2:1-11) –So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus, the Son of God, is the central figure in heaven and yet he humbled himself and took on the form of one of his creatures

In fact, he didn’t come as a king or a noble; he humbled himself to take on the form of a servant

Paul lists a number of attributes that a humble person will have and we see that Jesus perfectly exemplified them all

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit” – check

“Count others more significant than yourself” – check

“Let each look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others” – check

And Jesus did something that God doesn’t ask of us – he humbled himself to suffer the unjust death of a cross for our sake

If anyone had the right to demand to be treated as significant it was Jesus – but he never did

In fact, James gives us an antidote to pride in **James 4:10** where he says –

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

In other words, picture yourself as standing in the presence of Jesus

Do you still think you're the most superior person in the room?

If you're like everyone who is depicted in the Bible when they stood in the presence of the exalted Lord, you will truly be humbled – in fact you'll be so humble you'll be on your face in submission

And when you see yourself as you really are when compared to Christ pride will vanish and then, and only then, can he exalt you as he wants to do

## Conclusion

Pride and humility are tough concepts for us

It's been said that we should always pray for humility but never thank God that we have it because as soon as we think we have it we've lost it

We've seen clearly this morning that pride goes before the fall and, sadly, we've seen many examples of once proud people who have publicly fallen

And still we struggle with pride – partially, I think, because we don't really understand pride and we sometimes see pride where it isn't just as often as we fail to see it where it is

Pastor Ray Pritchard [[Pritchard.png](#)] puts it this way –

“Human pride is a tricky thing. Ambition is not wrong, competition is not wrong, winning is not wrong, celebrating your victories is not wrong, being the best is not wrong but it is never entirely innocent either. Sin always lurks in the neighborhood somewhere. And usually not too far away. [Why? Because] when you have *gotten money or power or prestige or fame or friends in high places, you think you do not need God.*”

Feeling good about what God has given you whether that takes the form of acknowledging and enjoying your successes or recognizing the abilities you have that lead to success is not pride as long as you truly understand that all you have comes from God and that you are only the conduit for what God is doing

Of course, that's not always easy either

I read an account about Harry Ironside [[Ironside.jpg](#)] who was the pastor of Moody Church from 1929 to 1948

He said that when he was a young man he was trying to beat down the pride that naturally lived within him. A friend suggested that he put on a sandwich board with Bible verses written on it and go up and down the streets quoting the verses at the top of his lungs. Ironside did as his friend suggested and when he got home he took the sandwich board off, set it aside and thought, “I doubt there's another man in this city that would humble himself like that.”

Pride is sneaky and it jumps up and grabs hold of us even when we're trying to beat it

But as we've seen this morning, the best way to defeat pride is to have an accurate picture of ourselves in relation to Christ – after all, we're all above average when compared to each other

Imagine how differently the men in our parable would have behaved if they had truly recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and he was standing right there waiting to take his place at the table

Only when we truly consider who Jesus is – almighty God, absolutely holy, all powerful – and continually and consciously compare ourselves to him will we have an accurate picture of just how foolish and dangerous our pride is

And then when we remember that Jesus washed the feet of those same disciples who were also fighting to gain a premier place we will see that humility is not the impossible task we think it is

Humility or humiliation – it's our choice

Let's pray