

Luke 14:7-11
January 12, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What are examples of “status symbols” in our society? [Let people engage]

Transition: Luke uses last week’s text in which Jesus was invited to a Pharisee’s home for a meal. Luke takes this context and introduces two unique sets of ethical teachings illustrating certain Christian attitudes and behavior that Jesus wants to see from us. The first set of teachings will be in verses 7–11, which was directed to the partakers of a meal. The second teaching is directed toward the hosts in verses 12-14. Let’s discover what the ethical teachings are that we need to incorporate in our Christian walk. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Concerning Inflated People

7 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 man 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 your fellow guests. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

God is not impressed by our status in society or in the church. He is not influenced by what people say or think about us, because He sees the thoughts and motives of the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Meekness and humility are basic to the proper attitude believers should display in their relationship toward God, and service to the needy is characteristic of the proper attitude one should have toward others.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 229). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Guests: False Popularity (Luke 14:7–11)

Experts in management tell us that most people wear an invisible sign that reads, “Please make me feel important”; if we heed that sign, we can succeed in human relations. On the other hand, if we say or do things that make others feel insignificant, we will fail. Then people will respond by becoming angry and resentful, because everybody wants to be noticed and made to feel important.

In Jesus’ day, as today, there were “status symbols” that helped people enhance and protect their high standing in society. If you were invited to the “right homes” and if you were seated in the “right places,” then people would know how important you really were. The emphasis was on reputation, not character. It was more important to sit in the right places than to live the right kind of life.

In New Testament times, the closer you sat to the host, the higher you stood on the social ladder and the more attention (and invitations) you would receive from others. Naturally, many people rushed to the “head table” when the doors were opened because they wanted to be important.

This kind of attitude betrays a false view of success. “Try not to become a man of success,” said Albert Einstein, “but try to become a man of value.” While there may be some exceptions, it is usually true that valuable people are eventually recognized and appropriately honored. Success that comes only from self-promotion is temporary, and you may be embarrassed as you are asked to move down (Prov. 25:6–7).

When Jesus advised the guests to take the lowest places, He was not giving them a “gimmick” that guaranteed promotion. The false humility that takes the lowest place is just as hateful to God as the pride that takes the highest place. God is not impressed by our status in society or in the church. He is not influenced by what people say or think about us, because He sees the thoughts and motives of the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God still humbles the proud and exalts the humble (James 4:6).

British essayist Francis Bacon compared fame to a river that easily carried “things light and swollen” but that drowned “things weighty and solid.” It is interesting to scan old editions of encyclopedias and see how many “famous people” are “forgotten people” today.

Humility is a fundamental grace in the Christian life, and yet it is elusive; if you know you have it, you have lost it! It has well been said that humility is not thinking meanly of ourselves; it is simply not thinking of ourselves at all. Jesus is the greatest example of humility, and we would do well to ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to imitate Him (Phil. 2:1–16).

Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 242)

14:7–11. Looking around, Jesus **noticed how the guests picked the places of honor**. The closer a person was to the host, the greater was that guest’s position of honor. As people entered the room in the Pharisee’s house where the table was spread, they must have scrambled for seats at the head of the table. The parable Jesus then told was designed to get them to think about spiritual realities in relation to the kingdom message He had been preaching.

Verse 11 records the point of Jesus' parable: **Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.** This recalls Jesus' earlier statement that those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last (13:30). The Pharisees, assuming they would have important positions in the kingdom, would be **humiliated** if they were pushed aside for someone else (14:9). However, if they would humble themselves, then they would perhaps be **honored** (v. 10).

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Lk 14:7-11). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

14:7 the places of honor The prominent seats where attendees were highly visible and likely close to the host or other distinguished guests.

14:10 Then it will be an honor to you In contrast to the shame of having to move from the place of honor to a lower place, a guest who chooses a less distinguished seat will be honored when the host elevates him or her to a better position.

14:11 will be exalted Implies being exalted by God. Jesus consistently teaches a reversal of expectations (compare 9:48; 13:30; 18:14).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 388-391). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

In the context of Jesus' dining with a Pharisee (14:1-6), **Luke introduced two unique sets of ethical teachings illustrating Christian attitudes and behavior. The first set (14:7-11) was directed to partakers of a meal and the second (14:12-14) toward the hosts.** The first set of teachings is called a "parable" (14:7), which is somewhat surprising, for what follows does not appear to be what is traditionally thought of as a parable. Luke intended for his readers to understand that the following ethical teachings involved more than just instructions about how to behave at a meal. That the instructions should be taken literally is, of course, true. However, they were also metaphorical and teach a general attitude toward self and others appropriate to members of God's kingdom (cf. 14:15). Meekness and humility are basic to the proper attitude believers should display in their relationship toward God, and service to the needy is characteristic of the proper attitude one should have toward others. It is in this manner that these sayings function as a parable. How one should behave among others at a banquet, whether as a guest or as the host, is how one should behave before God.

Both sets of teachings are structurally quite similar. They are tied together by the common theme of an invitation to a meal. The key term "invite" is repeated five times (14:8, 9, 10, 12, 13). Both accounts also have "When[ever] you ..." followed by "do not ..." and a "lest ..." (14:8, 12, RSV). They are then concluded by "but when[ever] you ..." (14:10, 13) and a less exact "so that when ..." (14:10) and a "you will be ..." (14:14). The parallelism between these two sets of teachings is quite strong.

The teaching in these verses was inspired by Jesus' observation of how various guests maneuvered themselves at a dinner (cf. 14:1) in order to sit in the positions of greatest honor. Pragmatically, Jesus pointed out the risks of so doing. It was not worth the disgrace and loss of

face that would result from having to give up a place to one more worthy in front of all the guests. Similarly, believers were not to seek status from others but should wait in humility before God, whose praise alone is important. The first set of teachings ends with a proverb (14:11) that appears again in 18:14. Similar teachings are found elsewhere (see “Comments” on 14:11).

The second set of sayings turns to the case of a host who was self-seeking in his selection of guests. Hosts were challenged not to invite guests who were able to reciprocate. Four groups were mentioned: friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors (cf. 6:32–35). One should, instead, use the banquet as an opportunity to help those who cannot reciprocate. Again, four groups were mentioned: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. The one who did this would be rewarded not by the recipients (cf. 16:3–7, where a steward acted with this purpose in mind) but by God at the day of judgment.

Comments

14:7 When he noticed. Jesus was observant and perceptive about human nature.

The guests. “Guests” are literally those invited. This refers to the Pharisees and experts of the law mentioned in 14:3.

Picked the places of honor at the table. “Places of honor” are literally first-seats, which would be the equivalent today of the “speaker’s table.” The same term is used in 14:8; Matt 23:6; Mark 12:39 (cf. also Luke 11:43; 20:46). Precedence in seating was usually based on rank, reputation, or age.

Parable. See comments on 5:36. Compare 18:1, 9; 19:11, where Luke, when introducing a parable, also gave Jesus’ purpose in telling it.

14:8 Wedding feast. Compare 12:36. This may be an idiomatic term for a “banquet.”

Do not take the place of honor. “Do not take” is literally do not recline in the place of honor. See comments on 7:36; cf. also 9:14–15; 24:30. In the picture part of this parable, the advice is not so much ethical as prudent, but the reality taught by the parable, i.e., humility, is ethical.

Invited. This key term helps tie these sections together (cf. 14:8–10, 12–13, 16–17, 24).

14:9 Humiliated. Humiliation is not the same as humility. The former frequently results from the lack of the latter.

14:10 So that. “So that” (hina) probably denotes the result more than the purpose of such behavior, although it is difficult to decide whether a clear distinction should be made in this instance (cf. 16:9).

Move up to a better place. Compare Prov 25:6–7; Sir 3:17–20.

You will be honored. In the parable the honor came from the host who publicly acknowledged the humble guest. In the reality part of the parable the honor came from God, for the passive “will be honored” is a divine passive.

14:11 This proverb is also found in Luke 18:14 and Matt 23:12 (cf. also Matt 18:4). For Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees for not acting in this way, cf. Luke 11:43; 20:45–47. The proverb is an example of antithetical parallelism.

Will be humbled ... exalted. These divine passives mean God will humble (or exalt) you at *the final judgment*.

The Lukan Message

These two sets of sayings serve a primarily hortatory function. The first, summarized in 14:11, emphasizes the need for humility both before others and especially before God. The theme is repeated in 16:15 and again word for word in 18:14. This goes along with the exaltation of the lowly in 1:48–50, 52–53; 13:30. Pride and arrogance are abominations before God. The great reversal should be understood as a rejection of the proud, who exalt themselves, in favor of those who humble themselves. To know God is to understand both his infinite greatness and our own impotence and sinfulness. Pride is not possible under such circumstances. Along with the teaching on humility comes concern for the unfortunate. Love of one's neighbor (10:27) is expressed as love for those who are in need (14:13, 21). Elsewhere it is demonstrated in Jesus' acceptance of tax collectors and sinners (5:30; 15:1–2) and his teaching on loving one's enemies (6:27–32) and the needy (11:41; 12:33; Acts 2:44–45; 4:35).

The ethical behavior enjoined here, however, stands in sharp contrast to the arrogance of the Pharisees (Luke 11:43–44; 14:7, 11; 20:46), who neglect justice and mercy (11:42; 13:15–16; 20:47). As a result, this section also helped Theophilus and Luke's other readers understand why the Pharisees' lack of repentance led both to their exclusion from the people of God and to the events of a.d. 70 (13:5, 9, 25, 28–30, 34–35).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 14:7-11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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