

Come to the Pharisee's Table

One day Jesus was invited to eat at a prominent Pharisee's table and it was probably a special meal as it was on the Sabbath. While He was there He told some stories, we call them parables because as always His stories teach us some important truths.

What is a **Pharisee**? The Jewish nation had two major religious sects, the largest of which was the Pharisees and this fellow was a leader in the largest religious sect.

In this day and age it seems like political parties and politicians like to attack each other. They try to find something in what the other person said that they can **ridicule**. When I see the way they try to attack something that Obama said, or Palin said it makes me trust politicians less and less.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were **always trying to trap** Jesus, always trying to get Him to say something they could pounce on and say, "See, see, *I told you He was a fraud.*"

And this was happening in Mark the 12th chapter when one of the teachers of law who was listening to them question Jesus noticed that Jesus was giving really good answers.

(28) *"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"* ²⁹ *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: `Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* ³¹ *The second is this: `Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

He says it all comes down to this, Love God and love people. Not terribly complicated but if you are going to receive Jesus as your Savior you need to understand what He considers the most important thing for us to do. Jesus says, **"You can forget a whole lot of stuff but don't forget this, Love God, love people."**

Jesus has to make this clear because, unfortunately, it is common for religious people to start measuring their religiosity or their spiritual maturity in trivial non-essential ways. (I grew up in a church where your spirituality was measured by believing the "right" doctrine. **But which is more important**, the "right" doctrine or the right relationship?)

Having the right doctrine is important and we should strive to have a good understanding of the Bible but **having the right heart condition is more important**. If we have the right heart condition we will be quick to do whatever the Bible says.

So we must keep coming back to **what's essential** and what's essential is this: *"Do I love God, and do I love people?"*

When Jesus gives us principles to live by and examples of what He means He does this because He is after transformation, He wants to transform you into someone like Him.

One of the things that Jesus often does is to teach against popular assumptions; things that people assume are true but really are not.

For instance in Matt 5:43-44 Jesus clarifies what is meant by the command to love your neighbor. *"**You have heard that it was said**, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

Now, that certainly is counter intuitive. Jesus is telling us how false some popular wisdom of the world is compared to the kingdom of God. Jesus is saying this is how we live in the Kingdom. This is what Kingdom living looks like.

There was another time when Jesus pointed out how some popular way of doing things was not the way we live in the kingdom. It was a time when He was invited to eat the Sabbath meal at the Pharisee's table. This wasn't just any Pharisee this was a **leader** of the Pharisee's.

Luke 14:1, *"One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched."* **I know what that feels like**. The first time I went to India it was to an area where they get very few tourists and it was before they had television in that area. So they couldn't get a view of foreigners and what they were like. So people were very curious about this American walking about.

I was there almost a month and I was the only Caucasian I saw in an area of 100's of thousands of people. I was taller than most and being from Alaska I didn't even have a tan. I stood out like a sore thumb. I got the sniffles while I was there but I had brought those little packages of **Kleenex** with me and I carried one in my pocket.

A local minister took me out to a remote church and we went as far as a 4 wheel drive would take us. And then Ephraim and I walked over a long swinging rope bridge over a river that was three times as wide as the Kenai.

We then walked on a trail a couple of miles to a small church. There were a couple of guys and some children there. There were no phones or anything so they didn't know we were coming.

Having the sniffles, I got out my **Kleenex** to blow my nose and looked down and there was a little kid, who I guess had never seen a Kleenex before looking straight up at me, fascinated with the whole process.

I wrote Barb and told her I now know what it must be like to be a beautiful woman and be the center of attention everywhere you go.

Okay, anyway, Jesus has been to a banquet at one of the leaders of Pharisee's house and when He gets there **He sees everyone scrambling for the best seats**. Jesus took this opportunity to teach a lesson and it begins with verse 7 of Luke 14.

“When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 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. 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. 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.”

I guess it's human nature for us to want to sit in the best seat in the house. At sporting events it's the seat on the 50-yard line or the seat directly behind home plate, or a ringside seat at a boxing match.

Those are the places that have the best view and carry the highest price. They also carry the greatest bragging potential. It impresses people when we tell them we have those seats.

The **best seat in a church** must be in the back because those are the seats that fill up first.

Now Jesus sees what is going on, people jockeying for position. Who is the most important? Who gets to sit at the head table?

So He says, evidently with some humor. If your goal is to look important, here is what you do. "Don't sit at the head table or you might have to move and you might get embarrassed. Go sit in the kitchen at a card table. And your host will be looking for you and will find you in the kitchen and he will pull you up and bring you to the head of table. And everyone will look at you and say, "WOW." That's an important guy.

So, what is Jesus doing here? Is Jesus giving us a strategy for shining in social situations? No, He is not giving a principle on how to act at parties. He is sizing up the situation. The conventional wisdom says, "**Scramble for status.**"

And Jesus is teaching about the bad affects of being preoccupied with how important you are. And He says in verse 11, "*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" What is He talking about?

Pride.

He is saying, every time you find yourself in a place where people are scrambling for status, here is your chance to live in the kingdom.

We have some wonderful musicians here in the church, but have you ever thought of this, "***What is absolutely the most difficult instrument to play?***" (Second fiddle without a doubt.)

Paul wrote about this in Philippians 2:3-4, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*"

None are so empty as those who are full of themselves. Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it, and the truth is this - pride must die in you or nothing of heaven can live in you.

On my drive back and forth to Seward I listened to audio version of the book "**Good to Great.**" It is a book about research on why some good companies make the leap from good to great, and become great companies, not just good companies.

The book listed leaders as being level 1 leaders, level 2 and so on. A level 4 leader was someone who was considered a very, very good leader. But there was one level higher, a level very few leaders ever reached and that was....a level 5 leader.

And while the level 4 leaders were very, very good there were differences between them. One difference that was really noticeable between them was this. All the level 5 leaders were, to a man, modest about their accomplishments. They were humble people.

Let's be clear about this, Pride is sin: Proverbs 6:16-18 makes this clear, "*Haughty eyes and a proud heart...are sin.*"

Proverbs 16:5 "*The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.*"

Have you been eating at the Pharisee's table? Are you proud? How do you know if you are guilty of pride? **Here is a test to see if you are proud of heart:**

1. When is the last time you said these words to a family member, a friend, or a co-worker, "*I was wrong, will you please forgive me?*" Has it been more than a month? Have you ever, in your life, said that to anyone?

Why is it so hard for us to say those words? Why? Because we're proud.

2. Do you look down on those who are less educated, less affluent, less refined or less successful than yourself?

3. Do you think of yourself as more spiritual than other believers you know?

4. Are you quick to find fault with people and to talk about those faults with others? Do you have a sharp, critical tongue? I knew a couple like that; they said they had the "gift" of discernment. You may call it discernment. God calls it sin.

Spiritual pride causes us to speak of other people's sins while humility causes us either to be silent about them or to speak about them with grief. There have been times when someone came and confessed to me what they had done and I cried.

When you are spiritually proud it shows that you are low in grace and how cold and dead you are. Christian humility, on the other hand, causes you to take notice of everything that is **good** in others and to diminish their failings.

A **truly humble Christian** has so much to do in himself and sees so much sin in his own heart that he's not apt to be finding fault with other people's hearts.

5. Do you frequently correct or criticize your mate or your boss or other people in leadership to them or to others?

6. Do you generally think that your way is the right way, the only way or the best way? **Are you easily offended?** Do you get your feelings hurt easily? If you take offense easily it is a sign of spiritual pride.

It is natural for us to become defensive when we are criticized or corrected. We get angry, why? Why do we get angry when somebody criticizes us? We may not express it outwardly but inwardly because our pride gets hurt.

Do you have an ungrateful spirit? Do you neglect to express gratitude for the little things, to God, to your mate, or to others? That's pride. Are you uncomfortable inviting people to your home because you don't think it's nice enough? Or you can't afford lavish entertaining?

7. Let me just throw in this last question. Are you sitting there thinking how many of these **questions apply to someone else you know?** Could that be an evidence of pride? Obadiah 1:3, *"The pride of your heart has deceived you."*

There are some real advantages to overcoming pride and cultivating humility. Perhaps we can best understand humility by attempting to see ourselves through God's eyes rather than our own.

If we were to **define humility** we could say it is **"a correct estimate of one's self."** Humility is not denying the power or gifting you have, but admitting that the gifting is from God and the power comes through you and not from you.

If you are really smart, who gave the intelligence to you? You didn't give it to yourself. If you are beautiful, who gave your good looks to you? You didn't give it to yourself. It is all from God and part of humility is recognizing that fact. Someone who is wrapped up in themselves makes a very small package.

How can you build humility in your life? As you will see, this is basic to our Christian Faith.

1. Routinely confess your sin to God. All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. However, too few of us routinely practice self-honesty and self-examination. Review your heart and behavior and then confess your sins to God, this is an **essential** practice of humility.

1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

2. Now here is a tough one: Receive wrongs patiently. This is hard isn't it? Our natural inclination is to **react** and rectify the wrong. However, patiently responding to others' unjust accusations and actions demonstrates strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.

1 Peter 3:8-17, *“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”*

3. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously. Proverbs 10:17, *“The road to life is a disciplined life; ignore correction and you're lost for good.”* (Msg)

4. Choose to serve others. Matthew 23:11-12, *“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

When we serve others, we also serve God's purposes in their lives. Such service reduces our focus on ourselves and builds the Kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of self. If you feel that you are really into servanthood let me ask you a question.

How do you react when someone treats you as a servant?

5. Be quick to forgive. Forgiveness is possibly one of the greatest acts of humility. When we forgive, we acknowledge that a wrong has been done to us and give up our right to get **revenge**. Forgiveness is self-denial; it's not insisting on getting even.

6. Cultivate a grateful heart. The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for God's gifts of salvation and eternal life, the truer our perspective of our self becomes. A grateful heart is a humble heart.

1 Thessalonians 5:18, *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

What does God expect of us? Have you ever wondered about that or prayed about that?

“... And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

As Christians we are all part of something bigger than ourselves.

“If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)