

## Luke 14:1-14 – Pentecost 12 – Exaltation and Humiliation – August 31, 2025

+In Nomine Iesu+

Years ago, there was a funeral for a prominent pastor—James Boice—in Philadelphia. I have some of the books he wrote in my office. For this service, the church was going to be full beyond capacity. But the congregation decided to seat people as best they could—on a first-come, first-serve basis. Family was seated first, of course. But then, they just let everyone in as they arrived—and there was overflow with screens downstairs.

A few days later, the church received an angry letter from one family that came too late to sit in the sanctuary. They said in no uncertain terms that they deserved better treatment. They would never worship at this church again. It is telling— isn't it?—how we react when we think our importance isn't appreciated.

In our Gospel reading, it is the Sabbath. And Jesus sits down at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees for dinner. This was a cultural expectation. Synagogue officials invited visiting Rabbis into their homes. And Jesus accepts the invitation. He is willing to eat with tax collectors and sinners—even the professional clergy. Some of His most important encounters took place over a meal. They still do.

As usual, the Pharisees are watching Jesus carefully. They love to criticize. They love to complain. They want Jesus to mess up. It makes them feel better about themselves. But they also want to find Him unfaithful to the Mosaic Law. They want to trap Him—so they don't have to take Him seriously—and so they can think more highly about their own spirituality.

And as Jesus arrives at the Pharisee's home, there is another man there—a man who is sick. And the whole situation starts to feel like a setup. The Pharisees are aware of Jesus' miracles—at this point. They consider healing on the Sabbath to be a violation of the Sabbath. And they have gone round and round with Jesus on this point already. They were wrong, of course. But here, they invited this man—perhaps—to tempt Jesus to break with their tradition.

And although they were attempting to trap Jesus—He traps them. He asks the question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” They don't dare answer. And really, when you think about it—this is the whole point of the Sabbath—forgiveness, healing, and restoration.

How heartless it would be to withhold help simply because it is the Sabbath. They have everything backwards. He is Lord—even over the Sabbath. And so, Jesus heals him. And with this miracle right there in front of them—something they cannot duplicate—they don't know what to say.

And of course, their problem with a Sabbath miracle is just the beginning. And so, Jesus digs in deeper. Jesus now comments on the seats that they choose. And He does so with a parable—*The Parable of the Wedding Feast*.

Up to this point, Jesus had been speaking primarily to the Pharisees. But now, as the guests were taking their places, He addressed the entire dinner party. Jesus notices the way people desired places of honor. They want attention and affirmation and appreciation. They want to feel important—to appear important.

Jesus is deeply aware of the spiritual dynamics of such social situations. And He calls us to think to our own analysis of such things. He is keenly aware of how selfish people can be in the crowd. Remember what Jesus says to the Pharisees a few chapters earlier in Luke 11, “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.”

This is major social event. Jesus is the talk of the town. And He is invited to a dinner party by a wealthy and popular Pharisee. People want to sit as close as possible to the host. Maybe they want to be near Jesus—which is better—but also for the wrong reasons. It is a social maneuver. They grasp for public recognition. They all want the best seats. And they compete with one another with selfish intention.

People who are full of their own self-importance insist on the best seats in the house. And they feel slighted when they don’t get their way. It happens in the home when brothers and sisters complain that their siblings are getting a special advantage. It happens in the church, where people want their service to receive the attention they think it deserves. It happens any time there is a chance to get something better than somebody else—at the yard sale, on the freeway, on social media—sometimes even at a funeral.

And Jesus responds with a word of wisdom. He says, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

And it is reflected in our Old Testament reading today too. Jesus even picks up on this idea in His parable today. “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.”

The idea is pretty simple. Do not have too high an opinion of yourself. Do not claim your own honor. And this can come from a place of arrogance—or neediness. People who demand more recognition will never find enough to satisfy. They will never manifest the honor they crave. Instead—to their shame—they will be humbled. And neither place—exaltation or humiliation—will be a place of contentment.

I hope that you have noticed—though—that there is more here than social wisdom—as valuable as that is—especially when we are not terribly self-aware. Christ is actually not that concerned for His hearers to sit in the back of the room in order to avoid embarrassment. He is not that concerned about us getting the honor we deserve when we are moved from the back to the front. And He is not teaching the Pharisees to put on a fake—staged—humility. That is just as repulsive. Jesus hates the pride that pretends to be humble.

Instead, He wants you to hear something more. Jesus is imparting an eternal spiritual principle that will be evident in the end—when everything is made right. Humiliation and exaltation matter in God’s plan of redemption. And we will see this most clearly in the end. When Jesus gives this Parable of the Wedding Feast—He is preparing our hearts for the final judgment.

There is a day coming—a Day of the Lord—when all will be revealed. Books will be opened. Justice will be accomplished. The thoughts of our hearts will be disclosed. And we will give an account for everything we have done.

John says it this way in Revelation 20, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the

book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”

And then we hear from Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

Jesus would have us live in light of judgment day. Let’s stop pretending that such a day doesn’t await all of humanity. He wants us to be prepared for that day. Most importantly, He wants us to meet that day in faith. And not just some generic belief that God exists—but real trust in what He has done for us in His cross and resurrection—and faith in what He will do for us on the Last Day—the Day of the Lord.

And as much as humility is beneficial in this life—it is truly an uncommon trait for the reasons I have suggested already—it will be paramount on that day. It is as James says in his Epistle, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

People who exalt themselves—who think they are important—who think they are good enough to stand before God on their own merits—for them the final judgment will be a total humiliation. People like the Pharisees, who believed in some kind of salvation by popularity—or public recognition—or power—will not get what they think they deserve. Instead, they will get what God thinks they deserve.

It is as Jesus says in Matthew 5, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Just as seats of honor at the feast do not depend on a person’s self-assertive attitude—but on the discretion of the host—so places of honor in the kingdom of heaven do not depend on our opinions of ourselves—but on the righteous judgment of God. There is no entrance through the narrow door—as we talked about last week—for the one who is laden with a sense of status—or an appetite for his own importance.

I like the way Augustine says it, “There are humble religious, and there are proud religious. The proud ones should not promise themselves the kingdom of God.”

If there is a place for us at God’s table in eternity—it is only by the grace of God. It is only because He has made a way—because He has invited us. And that is both humbling—and comforting. The only people who will be exalted at the final judgment are those who humble themselves before God right now. We recognize we are unworthy sinners. And we put our total trust in the mercy of Jesus Christ—all on the basis of the Gospel. We submit willingly to Jesus Christ crucified and risen for sinners.

If we truly know the grace that God has for us in Jesus Christ—and the price that God had to pay for our mess—then we have no place for pride. And this makes us content to take the lowest place—now—and even at judgment day. Not out of false humility—or as a subtle strategy to get noticed—but out of real perspective—out of real appreciation for what Christ has done for us.

Anglican theologian J.C. Ryle said it well, “The man who really knows himself and his own heart—who knows God and His infinite majesty and holiness—who knows Christ, and the price at which he was redeemed—that man will never be a proud man.”

There may be times when God exalts the humble in this life. There may be times when He humbles the proud. And faith leaves the timing and the means of such things with Him. But He is certain to exalt His humble people in the life to come.

How great will be our joy when we are elevated by the worthiest of all men—the God-Man who humbled Himself for our eternal exaltation. How great will be our joy when—leaving our self-importance and pride behind—when Jesus invites us to sit down with Him in glory, saying, “Friend, move up higher.”

In the meantime, make humility your way of life. This is God’s will for you in Jesus Christ. It is quite freeing personally—and in our relationships. And as we look to Jesus, this is the pathway to eternal life in Him.

Paul says it best in Romans 12. And we will leave things right there today, “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.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

*+Soli Deo Gloria+*