

## Cautionary Tale: *Pride & Incredulous*

*Luke 14:1-14*

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

**Introduction:** There is a somewhat laughable debate that goes on in the sports world around this time each year: which NBA basketball team is the greatest ever (this is followed closely by *greatest player ever*). The conversation goes something like this: so and so is good today (Steph Curry), but would never make it in the bygone era (Showtime Lakers?). *That* era was tougher, more physical, and did not play this weak kind of basketball that goes on today. Its interesting to listen to different players of different eras, or fans of different eras, as they weigh in and pronounce their team, era, or culture as the best. Each person views the debate through their own personal lens (this happens today when we compare generations, business models, or even churches). Each person is prone to see their personal experience as the best, with that becoming the lens by which everything else is defined.

Now none of this should be surprising. We all tend to see the world through "Me" colored glasses, with ourselves in the center and everyone else on the peripheral. At the core of our being, at the central focus of our soul, at the command center of our lives is the sin of **pride**. Pride is as deceptive as it is destructive, and operates in the overt (I believe I am the best, can do it all, need no one) to the lowly (No one understands me, I'm the worst, no one would want me). Pride disguises itself as selflessness, outwardly looking humble, but inwardly exalting. Pride burrows in and hides its intentions and motives to the point that we cannot decipher it from the magnanimous and altruistic reasons we wish we possessed. Pride keeps us stubborn, holding on to self when dying to self is called for. Pride is common to all of us, and will be deadly if left unchecked, unrepented of, and left to grow.

God speaks with clarity concerning pride: He is **opposed** to the proud, but gives **grace** to the humble (James 4:6; Prov. 16:5; Isa. 2:11, 17; Dan. 4:37); God **exalts** the humble (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5-6). In other words, God calls us to humble ourselves, thinking properly about who we are in light of God and others so that we do not think less of ourselves, but think of ourselves less. If we are going to walk in grace with God's blessing, we must resist and fight our pride and humble ourselves before His mighty hand. The alternative to our humbling of self is God humbling us, which usually comes at great personal cost. We will look at three aspects of pride, seen once again in the life of religious leaders who knew the truth, in order to avoid the sin of pride and all its many reverberations in our lives. We come to a scene we have seen before in Luke: **Jesus healing on the Sabbath** (Luke 4:31-41; 6:6-11; and 13:10-17), but now we see a different emphasis. Jesus not only shows His Messianic power, He clarifies the nature of His Kingdom and those who will be a part of it.

### Caution #1 – **Beware of what Pride Engenders** (1-6)

**Luke 14:1-6** *One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, **they were watching him carefully.** <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" <sup>4</sup> **But they remained silent.** Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" <sup>6</sup> **And they could not reply to these things.***

After evading the Pharisee's of Jerusalem (John 10), Jesus now sets up shop in Perea, East of the Jordan River, out of the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin. It seems odd at first that Luke records that He is back at the house of a Pharisee after those encounters, but examining the text we see right away what was

going on at this dinner party. Jesus was invited by a ruler of the Pharisee's, most likely in a city of Perea, of whom the motives become abundantly clear. Notice the text says **"they were watching Him carefully"**, with the intention of catching Him doing or saying something blasphemous. Though He had equated Himself as One with the Father (John 10:30), they still needed more ammunition to indict. It was not a coincidence there was a **"man with dropsy"** at the dinner. Dropsy was a type of edema, where fluid pools in tissue, causing swelling. It is a symptom of disease in the lung, heart, kidneys, or liver. On top of this, Rabbinic teaching of the day equated the condition as God's judgment for immorality, or as uncleanness based on the body's inability to eliminate (Lev. 15:1-3). So Jesus was set up to fail, and He knew it. But He was still willing to go, to engage, and to speak truth one again. Instead of waiting for the attack to come, Jesus instead preempted the sure attack. He asked the Pharisee's and Lawyers at the dinner two questions, each of which left them stumped and silent to answer:

- 1) *Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*
- 2) *Which of you, if you had a son or ox that fell into a hole on the Sabbath, would not immediately pull him out?*

Jesus was a master of using the power of the question. The first question stumped them by leaving them unable to answer without incriminating themselves. If they said it was lawful to heal this man, it would have raised questions about their tradition and view of the law. If they said no, they would be standing against doing good and showing compassion on the Sabbath, as well as raising questions about why they would have invited this man to the party. The answer to the second question was just as problematic since the answer was so clear. Even the Pharisees would let their oxen drink and eat on the Sabbath (Luke 13:15), let alone someone drowning in a well. If they would save their ox or a son from a well, why would Jesus not heal a man drowning in his own fluids? So Jesus healed the man, and left the Pharisee's silenced, seething, and incredulous. In this interaction, we see what pride produces, particularly pride that is mixed with Biblical truth:

### **Trumping God *over* Trusting God**

One of the main issues the Pharisee's had in their life, teaching, and pursuit of God was the fact that by adding regulations ON TOP of what God had commanded, they actually added to Scripture and became a god unto themselves. Each of us needs to prayerfully consider how to walk by faith and obedience to the commands of God, from how we exercise spiritual disciplines, what movies we watch, and how to educate our children. The Bible does not inform us directly if rated PG movies are ok and PG-13 are not, nor does it define whether public, home, or private school is the way to go. When we make our decisions, choices, and preferences into absolutes, judging others by our outcomes, we trump God's Word instead of trusting it. The Pharisee's were trying to hold Jesus to THEIR OWN STANDARD, judging Him when He walked outside of it, and He obliterated their pride with His silencing questions.

### **Proving Yourself Right *over* Acting Right**

Notice how pride can cause us to treat people. The Pharisee's were so bent on proving that their view of the law was right, they were willing to use a diseased, hurting, broken man as a pawn in their scheme against Jesus. Proving to be right was more important than having compassion on real people, proving their doctrine more important than providing help for those in need. This is where pride loves to play. Right thinking is essential to right living, but right thinking, when left alone or as an end in itself, makes us arrogant. **"This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up** (1 Cor. 8:1). Knowledge of the truth that does not lead to acting on the truth leads us to fight to be right, but that is all that we are left with: us. Jesus was willing to ACT on what was right, even when it put Him at odds with those who seemingly

knew the truth. We do not stop fighting for the truth, but we must never think that the truth and loving people are at odds.

### **Proving Others Wrong *over* Admitting Wrong**

The Pharisee's silence should not be misconstrued as admission of guilt. This was a perfect opportunity for repentance, a realization that their system was foolish, and the only reasonable alternative was to turn to Jesus. But instead of admitting they were wrong, they stayed silent. This is one time where silence did not equal wisdom. True humility is willing to admit when our actions or beliefs, no matter how long we have held them, are either wrong or short-sighted. All of us have deep, emotionally charged practices that we have put in the category of "right", meaning all others are wrong. When we are faced with another brother or sister who thinks or practices a bit differently, are we tempted to prove them wrong, or simply enjoy the diversity of Christ's body? Humility helps us differentiate between absolutes, preferences, and non-essentials so that we can maintain unity in the Body. The Pharisee's had no ability to do this. One was either in or out, for them or against them, and being against them, as Jesus was, meant that person had to be silenced.

### **Caution #2 – Beware of what Pride Exalts (7-11)**

**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, <sup>8</sup> "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, <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

Jesus did not let the silence linger and instead used this one sided dialogue to morph into a teaching moment. **NOTICE** how Jesus engaged with the room. He first asked questions, to which the room was stumped. Then He **made observations** of the room. Jesus did not come with a pre-packaged script but was willing to interact with real people in everyday surroundings. He noticed that as people sat down at this dinner party, they scurried to the best seats. So He presented a **parable**, or story intended to teach a specific truth, in order to *contextualize* the timeless truth to their setting.

Weddings were hugely important social events in Jesus day, often spanning more than a week of celebration. The picture was of someone coming into the feast section of the celebration (think our modern day reception) noticing that there was an open seat at the Head Table. The person saunters in, plops himself in the chair, and revels in his most important status. However, when the bridal party enters, the Father of the Bride comes over and has to say the awkward words, "this is not your seat, this is reserved for \_\_\_\_\_." Then this person would have to do the walk of **shame**, moving to the only seats left, in the back with all the kids and crazy Uncle Lou.

Bringing in the principle of Proverbs 25:6-7, Jesus said the man would have been better served to start in the back on the room, been noticed by the master of the ceremony, and been moved to a place of higher honor. Now, please note, Jesus was not teaching the Pharisee's the proper procedure of being a more successful hypocrite. What Jesus was pointing out was the principle of His kingdom, where those clamoring for the best seat would be sent out, while those whom allowed God to exalt by His grace would be lifted up. This parable helps understand what **pride wrongly exalts**.

### **Public Notoriety *over* Personal integrity**

For the Pharisees, being known in public was more important than being a person of character, conviction, and integrity. This is why they did all their deeds to be **seen** by others (Matt. 23:5). They “outwardly appeared righteous to others, but within were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matt. 23:28). They longed to be seen by others, and the public’s view mattered. This is what pride promotes. We long to be seen as somebody important, or that we have it all together, or that we have figured out some part of life where others have not. We long to be known by others MORE than by our Father. That is why it is easier to find time to post on Instagram than to pray or seek God through His Word. When what the public thinks is more important than the hidden person before the Lord, discipline goes out the window and public persona is triumphed.

### **Public Acclaim over Divine Pleasure**

Pride not only meant the Pharisee’s wanted to be known, they wanted to be **honored**. In a culture of honor vs. shame, they wanted the honor of having the choicest seats, education, and association (Matt. 23:2). They longed for titles and badges of honor, and wanted to be known as men of esteem. In the parable, it was the *place* of honor that was important, not the focus on the bride and groom. The man in the parable thought about his own status instead of honoring the ones who invited him. Pride causes us to focus on our own worth and value that we can conjure up through our own effort. It causes us to long for the significance brought about by titles and roles, even in the church. Humility, on the other hand, seeks the exaltation of Christ, the glorification of God, under the influence of the Spirit. Jesus called us to **lose our life for His sake** (Matt. 10:39), which means that we may never receive honor in this life, and in fact may suffer loss and shame, but we are living for the words "Well Done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, 23). We seek after the pleasure of one, and His opinion is the only one that truly matters.

### **Self Promotion over Divine Fame**

We want God’s fame to be known, not our own. We are willing to be put to shame in this life if it means that Christ is put on display. This is the essence of Hebrews 11 and walking by faith, knowing that there is something better in store. The man in the parable was put to open shame because he had to move down the table line. Shame was terrible because it cut down the most important piece of value: self. Humility calls us to think about ourselves properly, but also think about ourselves less. We are called to promote the glory of God and magnify the name of Christ. Pride talks about self, promotes the merits of accomplishment, and focuses the conversation back to me. Humility understands that others have a surpassing value greater than ourselves, and we are here to make the name of Christ known. *Do you find yourself talking about yourself, your life, your accomplishments, and your qualifications more than you talk about Christ?* This often comes out of an insecurity of our standing with someone, God in particular. Humility realizes we have acceptance with God because of Christ alone, and we no longer have to promote ourselves to be accepted, we simply rest in the work of Christ.

### **Caution #3 – Beware of what Pride Excludes (12-14)**

**Luke 14:12-14** *He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid."<sup>13</sup> But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

Next, Jesus turned to the man that invited Him to this event and gave Him warnings as well. The warning was against a *quid pro quo* type of relationship that the elite of the culture held, especially the "religious" elite. In a culture where the game of upward mobility and networking was played, getting

invited to the right gatherings was most important, and the expectation was an invitation to one elicited a payback invitation to the other. Unfortunately, this was a **zero sum game**, where everything washed out in the end and no impact was gained for the person, the culture, and the marginalized. Those who had kept it among themselves, whether that was influence, resource, or relationship. Not only was this not helpful, it was not lasting. It simply received its payment with no greater payoff of investment. This gives us a few more insights into pride and humility:

### **Giving Grace over Expected Return**

Grace is free, but never cheap. Grace is a gift God gave us that can never be paid back. In fact, we all struggle a bit with what is called the *debtor's ethic*, which means that when someone gives us something, we feel inclined to pay them back for it. We have a hard time receiving something for nothing. It puts us in a position of dependency, with the feeling that we are no longer in control. That is why God's grace must be received with humility, knowing that we are NOT in a position to pay God back for His grace, but to continue to walk in dependency ON His grace.

When Jesus sent out the 12 Apostles, He reminded them "*Your received without paying, give without pay*" (Matt. 10:8). We have received the ultimate gift of grace in Christ, and we offer that same gift to others without charge. It also means that when we deal with others, grace in humility tempers our expectations of return. Humility radically changes our view of what we are owed and deserve, and we are willing to give to others, be it monetary help or the resource of time and friendship, without expectation of a return.

### **God Taught Love over Self Love**

This principle of grace is so important because it has everything to do with who we spend time with, serve, and love. **1 Thessalonians 4:9** says that we have been "God-taught" to love. When we know the love of Christ, we immediately know how to love. This love is no longer self-seeking, be it position, comfort, or reputation. Jesus mentioned that the man should have invited the **poor, crippled, lame, and blind**. Not only were these the *marginalized* of the culture, not only did they have nothing to offer, but they were considered lowly, unclean, and beneath the social standing of this group. That is exactly who Jesus called them to love.

*Do we fall prey to the same subtle, or not so subtle, thinking?* Are we prone to spending time with people who offer us something in return? Perhaps its not monetary value, but the fact that they are easy to spend time with, have similar personalities, and the same hobbies? Humility and love calls us to invest in those who have no upside, those who cannot give back, and that do not improve our social standing. The upside of these relationships are not felt now, but echo into eternity.

### **Future Blessing over Temporal Payback**

Jesus said that this type of investment is no longer a zero sum game, but the payoff is **at the resurrection of the just**. In other words, there is a reward for the investment of our life into those who have nothing to give, and it's something that is lasting and cannot be taken away. It is giving the grace we have freely received. It is manifesting the love that was shown to us first. It is recognizing the intrinsic worth and value of every person made in the image of God.

In business today, there may be upside in networking, to build relationships that help our product move forward and open up venues for future deals. But in **Jesus' Kingdom**, that is not how relationships work. We see ourselves clearly: *our value and standing have NOTHING to do with our accomplishments, and everything to do with Christ. Our worth is not based on our gifts, but our gifts are given to build up those in Christ's family.*

So the question this morning: *Are we walking in pride or humility? How do we know?* What is being produced in your life? What are you exalting? Who are you excluding? God gives grace to the humble, and gives us opportunity to humble ourselves by thinking rightly about ourselves, God, and others.

**Questions to Discuss:**

Jesus gave an extremely clear and consequential command: Exalt yourself, you will be humbled; humble yourself, and you will be exalted. This is important for your life, your family, your job, and the health of this church and mission.

Based on understanding of what pride produces, exalts, and excludes, how do we evaluate our own lives and hearts? How are we measuring up?

What are we prone to when it comes to pride? What are the pitfalls in our thinking, home, and church? Why is pride so difficult to assess and identify in our own heart?

How do we walk in active humility? What is essential for us to stay humble?

What do you think would be different about your life if you walked consistently in humility rather than pride?