

OWNING, OR BEING OWNED?

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, February 18, 2006



“Therefore, as God’s
chosen people, holy
and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with
compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness
and patience.”

Colossians 3:12

Luke 14:7-14

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at 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 the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Our first quick reading of Scripture may have left some with the impression that Jesus was teaching his followers the rules governing socially acceptable behavior ~ something like a lecture in etiquette. After all, there are certain things that people need to know when they attend a wedding, or a luncheon or a dinner. In our times, for instance, Good etiquette would be to be polite and wait in the receiving line for ten minutes to kiss the bride! However, if you then kiss the bride for ten minutes, that would be real bad etiquette. If the guests' place their gifts by the sign reading "GIFT TABLE," that would be good etiquette. But, the groom placing the gifts by the sign reading "YARD SALE?" Well, bad etiquette! The bride and the groom thanking Uncle Steven for his check? Good etiquette. Them asking Uncle Steven for two forms of ID before accepting the check? Well, bad etiquette!

No, that was obviously not, what Jesus was teaching. A second reading will reveal that the parable had maybe more to do with teaching them the difference between arrogance and humility.

For instance in our times ~ there is a rumor that a certain United States Senator recently took a polygraph-test to find out what the lie-detector fuss is all about. However, he flunked the test when he started a sentence with, "In my humble opinion ..."

Could it be that Jesus intended to lecture some folks about how boring people with an air of superiority can get? For instance, in our times ~ a certain lady was boring everyone at the table with her nonstop recital of personal superiority. Hers was the town's most expensive house, most luxurious car, most successful business -- ad nauseam. "And, of course," she droned on, "my ancestors came over on the Mayflower." "How fortunate for you, that they

already came then," smiled one member of her captive audience. "Since then, the immigration laws have become much stricter!"

People enjoyed hearing Jesus. Sad-faced Christians who do not appreciate Jesus' humor miss a lot of the richness and fullness of his teachings. Can you imagine Jesus with a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye when he said some of the things he said? Our text for the day is a good example,. "When you are invited to a wedding feast," Jesus said, "do not sit down in a place of honor. Suppose a more prestigious person than you is invited? Then the host of the wedding feast will come to you and ask you to move down. That will be most embarrassing to you. Let me give you a better strategy. When you go to a wedding feast, sit down in the lowliest place in the room. Then when the host spots you, he will invite you to move up.

Then you can have a modest smile on your face as you say, 'Excuse me, excuse me,' and make your way toward the front. You will be honored in front of all your friends." Folks are sitting around grinning at the freshness of Jesus' insight. Then Jesus drives his point home. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

That is it! Now we understand what Jesus really had in mind. Greatness has nothing to do with etiquette or how much honor we receive, but it has everything to do with how we are on the inside. Pride is something we despise in others and fail to observe in ourselves. When Johnny Carson introduced Howard Cosell on the Tonight Show, he said, "Here's Howard Cosell, a legend in his own mind." There is a little Cosell in each of us.

If you have anything that is special, remember that all our talents are God-given, so be humble! God's gifts are not on shelves one above the other so that the taller you grow the easier you reach them. They are on shelves one below the other so that by bending lower you get God's best. Do not measure your greatness by what you have gained, but by what you give. "If you want to realize your own importance, put your finger into a bowl of water, take it out, and look at the hole."

One man who took Jesus seriously was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was not a Christian but claimed that the life of Christ touched him and that the Gospels had influenced him!

Gandhi did not lead the masses by standing like a monarch above them, but by identifying with them and sharing in their circumstances. A part of Gandhi's Greatness was that not even the untouchables of India were beneath him or ever felt uneasy in his presence. In that time most Indian leaders lived in mansions, far removed from the masses, going everywhere and doing everything first-class, but Gandhi, like Christ, set the opposite example.

The person who is constantly puffing himself or herself up--bragging about achievements, showing off trophies, buying bigger and better things to stay one-step ahead of the Jones, is at heart very insecure and fearful. Often, such a person is so very afraid that he or she really does not measure up. The greater the emptiness on the inside, the greater the need to surround ourselves with a show of success on the outside! The more unsure we are about our own self worth, the more we need the envy of others. The less sure we are of ourselves, the greater our need to lord it over others. Yet someday we realize it is all a sham. True stature is not measured by how much we puff ourselves up, but by how willing we are to humble ourselves.

From Jesus' point of view, what we think about others matters less than what God thinks of us. If we see ourselves as high and mighty, God sees us as shadowy and lowly. Can you imagine a truly humble person ever writing a book with the title, "Humility and how I obtained it?"

I do not think so! Humility is an elusive virtue, impossible to manufacture! HUMILITY emerges from the crucible of character. Humility is naively unaware! The moment the robe of humility becomes self-conscious, the sash loosens, revealing nothing but buck-naked pride.

Jesus was not really observing and commenting on etiquette and guest behavior while dining with the Pharisees! Jesus was revealing the mind of God to people of all ages! Jesus was talking about you and me! How interesting, how touching, how true! Those who are sincerely avoiding human glory and praise and consider themselves belonging in the humble seats, are those who are most deserving of honor, not by people – but by God!

Jesus was about to set the classic example that would crown him with Gods blessing and transform him, for people of all ages, the Prince of Glory! My friend, my sister, my brother if you and I really want to sit at the head table then we should follow the example of Jesus! Then do it as Jesus did! Do you know how he really did it?

“When I survey the wondrous cross -- on which the Prince of Glory died -- my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. Forbid it, Lord that I should boast save in the death of Christ my Lord ~ All the vain things that charm me most I sacrifice them to his blood.”

AMEN