

## “The Best Seat In The House”–Dirty Jobs (2 of 4)

Last week we began a series called, “*Dirty Jobs*” where we’re trying to get to the bottom of why we have so much pride. We naturally want everything to revolve around us and we want others to serve our needs. As humans we’re naturally selfish. But into our world Jesus came in and said, “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Mark 10:45 (NLT) Jesus turned everything upside down and when we commit to becoming a follower of Jesus Christ—that mean’s that we follow his example.

God’s great desire for each of us is become like Jesus Christ. And one of Jesus’ great statements about himself is that he came for others. Is this your statement? Are you a “slave” to Christ?

Do you ever people watch? I do this all the time. This week I was sitting at the MINI dealer getting new tires for my car and I was working on this message. But it was hard to focus because of the variety of people who were coming and going. There were those who were focused on selling cars and those who were focused on fixing cars. And the variety of customers was amazing. Some were quiet and others were loud. People were watching the news on TV and a few were reading the newspapers. Some were dressed very nicely and others were pretty casual.

But one thing I saw with consistency was that everyone who came in was treated like royalty. Customer service was excellent. They treated you to coffee or a soft drink—and I even got a cookie! They even had a place where you could sit above the crowd and work at a desk. It was nice to be treated with honor—even though I knew that I was paying for it!

I’m sure I’m not alone when I say that it’s nice to be treated nicely. It feels good to have people make you feel important. There’s something inside of us that likes to be treated like royalty!

Today we’re going to look at **Luke 14:1-14 (p. 797)** and read about the time that Jesus attended a dinner that was held at the home of a very important religious leader called a Pharisee.

We’re going to see that throughout the evening Jesus was being very carefully watched. But what was really happening was that Jesus watching deeper into the attitudes of every heart.

Jesus was people watching. And what he saw was a group of self-absorbed, self-obsessed people all trying to make it to the next step in the religious and social ladder.

In his book *Descending into Greatness*, Bill Hybels describes the phenomenon of the pecking order in a chicken coop. “*If you take any ten chickens and put them in a pen with just a little bit of chicken feed, they will quickly form a hierarchy. Instinctively, they will determine, through a series of skirmishes, who the number one chicken will be, the number two chicken—all the way down to the unlucky number ten chicken.*”

“*A group of people cannot be together for a long time until our own pecking order is clearly established. This sort of thing begins in preschool and continues all the way up until we’re in a retirement home.*”

“*We see the pecking order lived out in where people sit, how they greet one another, how we label one another, location of offices and who gets invited to social gatherings. We have a terrible tendency to think of others as either more significant or less significant than we are.*” – Bill Hybels, *Descending into Greatness*

The pecking order gives us an odd kind of comfort knowing where we fit in. We can choose who we will honor with our time and attention and who we will just casually dismiss.

A perfect example of a pecking order is a commercial airlines flight (**ILLUS: AUS/NZ**).

Today we’re going to explore what Jesus had to say about the danger of pride and the virtue of humility—and the interesting thing we’re going to discover is that pride isn’t always easy to spot. It actually takes on several, subtle forms. ***The first form of pride we see is revealed in...***

### **1. The Pharisees’ Motive: Power**

Here’s the story: “*One Sabbath day Jesus was in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. The people were watching him closely, because there was a man there whose arms and legs were swollen. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in religious law, ‘Well, is it permitted in the law to heal people on the Sabbath day, or not?’ When they refused to answer, Jesus touched the sick man and healed him and sent him away. Then he turned to them and asked, ‘Which of you doesn’t work on the*”

*Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don't you proceed at once to get him out? Again they had no answer."*

Jesus had been invited to eat on the Sabbath at the house of a prominent Pharisee where there was also a man who was suffering from a physical sickness. It's called, "Dropsy" and it is a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body. Now, even though it was the Sabbath, Jesus went ahead and healed the man. After all, you would help your son or cow out of distress if it was the Sabbath, so why not this man in pain? **GOD'S HEART/GOSPEL**

Now why was this an issue? The Pharisees had worked their way up the religious system and held all of the power cards. They flaunted this power and abused this power—all at the expense of *"the weak, the weary, and the wounded."* These guys were using this sick person to trap Jesus.

It was cruel of the Pharisees to use this man as a tool to accomplish their evil schemes. But they knew that Jesus could not be in the presence of human suffering very long without doing something about it. But Jesus refused to be shut down by their power plays.

Power can corrupt so easily and the Pharisees used their power as a source of prideful living.

Jesus healed the man! But he didn't stop there. He turned the situation around to show that. . .

***The next form of pride we see is revealed in...***

## **2. The Guest's Motive: Position**

The story continues, *"When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: 'If you are invited to a wedding feast, don't always head for the best seat. What if someone more respected than you has also been invited? The host will say, 'Let this person sit here instead.' Then you will be embarrassed and will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table!'"*

*"Do this instead—sit at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place than this for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."*

It is human nature to want to sit in the best seat in the house.

At sporting events it's the sky box seat, or the seat on the fifty-yard line or the seat directly behind home plate. These places have the best view and come with the highest price. But they also carry the greatest bragging potential to your friends and coworkers the next day.

This desire for the best seat in the house shows up in many places. Watch people in a parking lot sometime. The best parking places are usually the ones closest to the front door.

Let's be honest, how many of you have fought to get a closer parking space? I know I have, and I've felt ripped off when someone took "my" spot!

This week my wife and I are going with some friends to a concert. The seats are general admission and we're going early to get the best seats possible. We want the best seats—and we're going to crush anyone that gets in our way!

When you have a guest to your house and invite them to sit down, don't you give them the best seat? If one of your kids is sitting there, you ask him or her to move.

What do you suppose is the best seat in the church building? (The back seat!) Why? Maybe because it's the farthest seat from the preacher. More distance, less conviction!

As the guests in Jesus' meal came in they all sought the best and the highest position.

Experts in management tell us that most people wear an invisible sign that reads, *"Please make me feel important."* 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. So 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.

But 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 our hearts.

But what's interesting about this dinner situation is that Jesus didn't stop at revealing the prideful motives of the Pharisees or the other guest. *No, Jesus, now turned to the host.*

*The final form of pride we see is revealed in...*

### 3. The Host's Motive: Prestige

Here's what happened, *"Then he turned to his host. 'When you put on a luncheon or a dinner,' he said, 'don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will repay you by inviting you back. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you.'" Luke 14:1-14 (NLT)* God is not at all impressed with a bunch of fakers and posers! He saw through the *Pharisees' bid for Power*, he saw through the *Guest's bid for Position*, and he saw through the *Host's bid for Prestige*.

Pride leads to pretending, humility leads to transparency. **(Olympics: Fireworks & Singer)**

Jesus knew that the host had invited his guests for two reasons: 1) to pay them back because they had invited him to past feasts, or 2) to put them under his debt so that they would invite him to future meals. Such hospitality was not an expression of love and grace but rather an evidence of pride and selfishness. The host was "buying" recognition and prestige!

By the way, what Jesus said was not new, nor was it unique. He was simply echoing the words of Proverbs 25:6-7 which says (in the Message), *"Don't work yourself into the spotlight; don't push your way into the place of prominence. It's better to be promoted to a place of honor than face humiliation by being demoted."* Proverbs 25:6-7 (Message)

Now, I'd love to be able to conclude the message at this point—and many of you would like that, too—if I could simply say, *"Go therefore, and become more humble."*

The problem is that humility is one of those virtues that is never found by seeking it. The more we pursue it, the more it evades us. The more obsessed with it we become, the more we focus on ourselves—which was the problem in the first place.

The vicious cycle of pursuing humility is described in one of C. S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters: "My dear Wormwood... Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is specially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble.' And almost immediately, pride—pride at his own humility—will appear.

"If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt—and so on, through as many stages as you please. But don't try this too long, for fear you awake his sense of humour and proportion, in which case he will merely laugh at you and go to bed." — C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

One of the devil's most effective schemes is to cause us to become so preoccupied with ourselves that we cannot focus on anything else. That's what we saw in our story today.

Humility is throwing yourself away in complete concentration on others. Do you want to work toward humility this week? Two thoughts: This week, *look upward* and *look outward*.

1) Discover how great God is and how insignificant you are in comparison to him. If you're proud you cannot know God. The second way to grow in humility is to...

2) Turn our attention outward to the needs of others. When we do acts of kindness for others a deep change occurs in our spirit—especially if we do in secret. **REVIEW & QUESTIONS/PRAYER**