

**One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:<sup>8</sup> “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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

**<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.<sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (NIV84)**

Theme: How a Christian Behaves in this World.

1. He is Humble
2. He is Unselfish

Growing up my brothers and I always played in the classic game of “shotgun.” I’m sure many of you know what I’m talking about—when you come into sight of the vehicle you are going to be riding in, the first person who yells, “shotgun” gets to sit in the front seat—the best seat in the house, while everyone else besides the driver is regulated to the back seat. Of course, if both of my parents were along, then we didn’t even bother playing the game because my Dad always drove and my Mom always got to sit in the front seat.

At home we played a similar game. We’d fight to get the best seat in the house—the one directly in front of the T.V. If you got up and forgot to save your spot, it would be immediately taken. And if my Dad came in to watch T.V. and we were in his spot we got up

immediately and laid on the floor because as the man of the house he got to sit in whatever seat he wanted!

These are two common example of trying to get the best seat available at the expense of everyone else. And to some extent they may be harmless games but they really do highlight a lack of humility and a selfishness that is all too common.

Jesus saw the same thing when he was invited to a Pharisees house to eat. This was toward the end his ministry and by this time the Pharisees hated Jesus; they only invited him so that they could try to catch him in something and attack him. But it was actually Jesus was attacked them for their sins. As it came time for a meal, he watched as the guests all fought over the most important seats just like kids do in a car or in front of a T.V.

So Jesus spoke up. He told them that it’s better to take a lower seat and asked to be moved up by the host than to take the most important seat and then be humiliated when asked to move. It would be like being invited to a wedding reception and when taking your seat, you decide to sit at the head table because it’s fancier and has bottles of champagne. If you’re not part of the wedding party, you would be asked to move, and you’d be humiliated.

But Jesus wasn’t just giving sound, earthly advice about how to conduct yourself at parties. Luke tells us that Jesus was using a parable; although this one is a bit different than the parables that Jesus often told, which were stories. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Here Jesus is using an example from everyday life to teach us about how the Lord wants us to live.

Verse 11 is key to understanding this portion of Scripture; there Jesus says, **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.** This is true enough when it comes to earthly matters. Many people love to see the downfall of those who are rich and powerful—especially if they didn’t do anything themselves to gain their wealth. And everyone loves a good “rags to riches” story. And the self-made man is the American dream. It is true that the proud and arrogant are often made low and humiliated while at times someone is praised for their humility and given a higher position or place.

But once again, Jesus has more in mind; he is teaching us about true Christian humility. It's about how we look at ourselves and how we look at others. We Americans are a proud people. We live in the best country in the world and we have more money and more possessions than people at any other time in history. And for many years schools, coaches, parents, and so on have done nothing but tell us how great we are, then are so smart and talented, beautiful, athletic, or whatever have you—that if we work hard and put our minds to it, we can accomplish everything. While that may sound good it turns out that since everyone is always praised and lifted up as special, we have raised generations of people who think that they are actually better than everyone else—they don't know what humility is.

But truth be told, humility doesn't come natural for any of us. We think that we should have gotten chosen for that position than that other woman, that we should have received the raise, or gotten into that college. We might get a little jealous when we see someone driving a new car or living in a nice house and we think to ourselves, "What did he do to get that—he doesn't deserve that, I do!" It's hard for us to be truly happy for others when we see them succeed or to take a back seat so that someone else may benefit or receive glory. How, then does a Christian remain humble? It start by looking at himself in the way that God does. Sure God has given us each a unique amount of gifts and abilities and he wants us to recognize those gifts and use them to his glory; yet at the same time that doesn't make anyone of us any better in the eyes of God. Rather when God sees us he sees sinners—sinners who constantly fail to obey his commands. He sees the perfect crown of his creation ruined. He sees us who constantly fail in mind and body. And he knows that we can't save ourselves. In the eyes of God we are all sinners who need a Savior. In Philippians 2 Paul says that our **attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus**. He then goes on to explain how Christ, even though he is God, humbled himself and became a man—being born of the Virgin. He made himself so low, that the eternal God died on a cross. Even though Jesus is God, he didn't put himself above anyone. Rather he put us first so that he could die in our place. And as a result he not only was lifted up and exalted but so are we. Because of Christ our sins have been removed and a glorious life in heaven awaits. It is the Lord who lifts up the humble. Those who are proud and arrogant, thinking that they can save themselves are made low and condemned

by the Lord. But those who humbly see themselves as nothing but helpless sinners who need Christ, will be brought up to heaven to share in God's glory.

Sin and Christ's sacrifice make us all equal in the eyes of God. And that is how we look at each other. We may have different gifts and abilities; but that doesn't mean that any one of us here is better than the other. And so we are humble as we look at ourselves and as we deal with others. It's okay that someone gets a better spot to sit, a higher paying job, or lives in a nicer house. In the end, no one deserves it; they are gracious gifts of God.

Speaking of gifts—why do you give gifts to others? For many, it's because it's a special occasion, like Christmas and a birthday, and it's simply what you do. Perhaps they got you something last year, and so you feel obligated to give something in return. That is why many people do something nice for others. It's not simply to be nice, it's so that somewhere down the line, they might be willing to do something for you. So that some time you can call in a favor—I scratched your back, now you scratch mine! And if you fail to give someone a gift in return or to return a favor, then you just broke all sorts of social protocol, and your friend or family member may not talk to you for a while.

After chiding those who attended the meal for fighting for the best spots, he turns his attention to the Pharisee who invited him. He told him not to invite those close to you or those who are rich, because they will invite you in return. Rather he says invite those who can't pay you back, those who need helps—the poor, the blind, and so on. Again, Jesus isn't just giving some good advice about life and who you should invite to parties. He also isn't forbidding us from inviting friends and family over for meals. If he was, then our Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners are going to be quite a bit different this year! So what is Jesus' point? He is condemning the practice of doing something nice for others so that we could get something nice in return. Doing something nice for others or giving them something only so that they might give you something or do something for you in the future, is not really being nice at all. It's actually being selfish—you're not thinking about others, rather you are ultimately thinking about yourself. So Jesus uses this invitation to show us how to properly live our lives in service to him—to show love to others, to be

nice to them, or give things away, without expecting anything in return. It's doing those things simply to show love to them, to be nice to them—from the bottom of your heart. This is how children of God strive to live and behave in this world. Motivated by God's grace and love for us, we willingly and eagerly display that same love to others. And then Jesus says when we do this, **you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.** Jesus is not saying that our resurrection is based on how unselfish you are or not. The rest of the Bible is clear that it is by grace we have been saved, apart from anything we have done or can ever do. We don't contribute in any way, shape, or form to our salvation and we don't have to because Christ has taken care of everything already.

So then, what is Christ saying? Again, Jesus is talking about how we as Christians act and behave in this world. We have already been made righteous by Christ's death and resurrection. Out of love and thanks to all the gifts the Lord has given us we strive to show love to others. Those who are unselfish will be rewarded on the Last Day when Christ will give life to all the righteous not because they were unselfish, but those who are righteous already because of Christ through faith are also unselfish! When we give to others or do nice things for them without anticipating anything in return it's a fruit of faith—it is showing love to others just as Christ showed love to us. For Christ unselfishly gave up his life on the cross. He didn't care about himself but us when he took our sins upon himself and suffered the eternal damnation that we deserve. It is this selfless love that leads us to love others selflessly.

It's not hard to see just how ingrained selfishness is our sinful nature—just look at the seemingly innocent game of “shotgun.” On the surface it may seem as if Jesus is simply giving sound advice about how to conduct yourself in everyday life. But Jesus is never solely concerned about our earthly life; but about our spiritual and eternal life. No, this is about a Christian's behavior, which is always guided by Christ. So how do we as Christians behave while living in this world? It starts with how you look at yourself. Along with everyone else who has ever lived, you are a sinner, born as an enemy of God, and yet have been saved by the work of Christ who won salvation for you, which is yours by God's grace through faith in him alone. We are all equal in the eyes of God—no one is better or worse than the next.

It is Christ who humbled himself to the point of death. It is Christ who unselfishly gave up his life for us. His humbleness and his unselfishness is our model to follow as we live our lives. And it is our comfort when we fail. For when we do, we know that because of Christ's humility and unselfishness we are forgiven. Amen.