



Central Peninsula Church

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Table Talk

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Isn't Thanksgiving a great holiday? I love Thanksgiving. I love it because it lacks all the commercialism and panicked frenzy that Christmas has become in our culture. I know there are people who try to spoil it by calling it 'Turkey Day' or focusing more on football and shopping than on giving thanks, but I still love it. And I have to admit, I love the moment when everyone sits down at the table and all the dishes are out and the big brown bird is sitting there ready to be carved.

I remember when Lynn and I lived in Denver. We just had one child and she was only four years old. We had some friends visiting us with their newborn baby, so there were a total of six of us, really just five around the table. Our daughter was just starting to get the whole Thanksgiving thing and she was so excited for it to come. But the turkey took about three more hours to cook than we expected because Denver is the "mile high city," right? So we kept waiting and waiting for this turkey to cook and Anne-Marie kept asking, 'When is it going to be Thanksgiving?' Finally, when we sat down at about 10:00 pm she said, 'Is this it? Is this Thanksgiving?' We said, 'Yes, this is it. Finally, this is it!'

There is something about that moment when you sit down with your loved ones and everything is prepared - that's Thanksgiving. I don't think it's a mistake that throughout the Bible heaven is pictured as a great feast; a great banquet; a time that you've been waiting for when you sit down at the table with those you love and enjoy all that has been prepared for you by God. Last week we saw how Jesus talked about a time when people 'will come from the east and the west and the north and the south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God' (13:29).

And then in the book of Revelation we hear these words, **'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb'** (Rev, 19:9). Isn't that a wonderful picture? Someone has said, 'The metaphor of feasting, as distinct from merely eating a meal, assures us that no true potential appetite, desire, or longing given to us by God will prove to have been a deception, but all will be granted their richest and most sublime fulfillment.'

Doesn't that just make you want to be there? But, let's face it, as long as we're on earth rather than in heaven, sometimes what happens around the table is not so

enjoyable. I suppose a lot of things can spoil a good meal, but one of the things that can spoil it the most is pride. Pride turns a joyful feast into cold, strained hour of pure agony followed by indigestion. People may smile and engage in small talk; the food may taste fine; but there is a layer of tension that covers the meal like cold gravy. Pride can spoil even the best of meals, but worst of all it can spoil your opportunity to one day sit at the feast in which Jesus is the host.

I. Pride places man-made religious rules above helping people in need.

That was the case when Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee for dinner. Look at Luke 14, v. 1.

"It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely."

You can see right off the bat that something is wrong here. It may look like a kind invitation to a nice dinner party on the Sabbath, but beneath it all was a sinister plot to catch Jesus doing something he wasn't supposed to do. Luke says 'they were watching him closely,' like undercover cops. In their pride they were the self appointed religious police looking to make a bust.

Look what happens next.

"And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy" (v. 2).

It's no mistake that this man is there. He was likely planted by the Pharisees. They had already seen Jesus ignore their Sabbath regulations and they were hoping to bust him again. This man suffered from 'dropsy.' I thought that was something only the 49er wide receivers had, but I guess not! Actually, this is a serious condition where fluid builds up in your arms and legs.

No one said anything but Jesus seemed to know what they were all thinking. Look what happens next.

"And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away." (vv. 3-4).

Jesus asks a question that sort of puts them in a bind. 'Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?' If they say 'yes' then they might be accused of compromising their rigid

rules to protect the Sabbath as a day of rest. But if they said 'no' they could be accused of being heartless and cold. The fact is, the law of Moses said nothing about healing on the Sabbath. So, they were silent.

So Jesus takes hold of the man and heals him. Then he asks another question.

"And He said to them, 'Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?' And they could make no reply to this" (vv. 5-6).

Their own Sabbath rules allowed them to rescue their animals, so to forbid the rescue of people would mean they treated their animals better than humans. So once again, they're silent.

One of the things this reveals about these guys is just how darned hardhearted they are. Jesus has been through this before with them. They've seen him heal on the Sabbath before. This is nothing new, but they still don't get it. Pride keeps us locked into a tiny box of our own making and we can't see out. We can't see the needs of others. They're so wrapped up in their own religious system that they can't even see that something wonderful has just happened to this man.

It's the ultimate in pride and arrogance to make up your own rules, isn't it? What God says isn't enough; we have to add to them. That's basically saying, 'Well, I know better than God. I need to help him out a little bit.' What arrogance! It reminds me of what J. Vernon McGee used to say with his thick southern drawl, 'This is God's universe and God does things his way. Now you may have a better way, but you don't have a universe.' But we think we do have a universe so we try to add to God's word. Take Jesus' words about divorce and remarriage. Jesus valued the sanctity of marriage and so he made it clear that there are only certain situations in which divorce is permitted. It's permitted if your spouse has committed adultery or if your spouse has left you. When a divorce takes place under those conditions, remarriage is allowed for the one who has been wronged. Now that's a high standard. But I know Christians who want to raise the bar even higher and say, you should never get divorced and if you do you're never allowed to get remarried. I guess they know better than Jesus so they add to his words. That's pride and arrogance at work. And, of course, hurting, wounded people get ground up in that system. It's cold-hearted. Now of course there are also those who subtract from God's word. They might say, 'Well, God really wants you to be happy and if you're

not happy in your marriage you should just go get divorced and find someone else.' That's arrogance, too. Either way, you think you know better than God.

II. Pride places self interest above the interests of others.

A. As seen in the guests:

Jesus then goes on and exposes even more pride. As they all began to take their seats at the table he noticed how they were all scrambling for the best seats. It reminds me of last weekend. My son and I were flying to Las Vegas to visit my daughter. We were flying Southwest and you know how they don't have assigned seating. You're put in either the A, B or C line according to when you checked in. The A's go first and then the B's and then the C's. Of course, we were at the end of the C line. Don't you hate people in the A line? I've never seen anyone in the A line move to the back of the plane. Everyone scrambles for the best seats at the front so they can be the first to get off when the plane lands. On the way home, I was smart and checked us in online the night before, and we got there early, so we were in the front of the A line. I love being in the A line! And where do you think we sat? In the front! But, you see, my behavior, said, 'I am the most important person on this plane. My needs come first.'

Listen to what Jesus says.

"And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted'" (vv. 7-11).

Back then, the basic item of furniture at banquets was a couch that sat three people. The couches were arranged in a U-shape around a low table. Guests reclined on their left elbows. The highest place of honor was on the couch at the base of the U. The second and third places were on the immediate left and right of the main man. Now, often the most honored guests arrived last. So Jesus says the last thing you want to happen is to be asked to move to a less honorable place when one of those guys show up. How humiliating! Chances are you might have to go all the way to the lowest spot since all the other seats are taken by

then. It's better to take the last place and get moved up in the sight of all.

Jesus is not just talking about table manners, he's talking about life. The fact that it's a parable tells us it's about more than seating etiquette. That's why Jesus concludes it with these words,

'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'

This isn't a self serving formula for how to get honored in the sight of others. He's not recommending a kind of staged humility so we can be socially exalted. This is a spiritual principle that has its fulfillment in eternity. God is the one who will humble the proud and exalt the humble, and he will do it in eternity. Do we believe that? Our politicians don't believe it. Listen to the campaign rhetoric. Pro athletes don't believe it. Listen to the interviews. Business execs don't believe it. Read the Wall Street ads. Kids don't believe it. Listen to teenage boys after a basketball game boast about their exploits. The sad thing is that the church doesn't always believe it. The high church has its fancy robes and velvet chairs. The low church has its shiny suits and superstar pastors with their own parking space.

A few years back I was in Romania with one of our elders, Frank Cutter. Let me tell you, they know how to treat their pastors! They always made sure I got the front seat in the van. I didn't even have to call 'shotgun.' Frank was back there sweating in the back seat. When dinner was served, they always saved the best piece of meat for me. Frank was eating the scraps! I tried to act humble and protest but I kind of liked it! As a matter of fact, I've applied for a job in Romania! You see, the real question is, do we believe it? It starts with an attitude towards God. Humble yourself before him. Don't compare yourself with other people. Come to grips with the wretchedness of your own selfishness and greed and pride before GOD. When you really do that, it will be much easier to take the lower seat; it will be much easier to serve others in anonymity. Remember what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3. Using Jesus as the model he said, 'Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.'

B. As seen in the host:

Pride is seen in the selfishness of the guests, but it's also seen in the selfishness of the host. That's what Jesus exposes next.

"And He also went on to say 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, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'"
(vv. 12-14).

So really it's the same issue here, only here the self interest is seen in the host. We offer hospitality to those who will somehow be able to repay us. Jesus isn't saying it's wrong to have your friends and relatives over for dinner; he's addressing our motives. Often times at the root of our hospitality is a desire to get something out of it for us. It may be a return dinner invitation. It may be your picture in the paper with an important person. It may just be getting to tell people that you hang out with so-and-so.

I remember when we had John Stott here at CPC. You may not know who he is but he's probably the most prominent evangelical statesman of this century. He's in his 80s now, but in his day he was a prolific pastor, author and bible teacher par excellence. And he came to CPC and he stood in this pulpit and I was so proud! As the evening began, before he was escorted to his seat, I got to welcome him to our church as people swarmed around him. It was a great moment for me. And I would probably do the same thing again. But what struck me about this is that in the church of Jesus Christ, shouldn't we be swarming around the people Jesus describes here: the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind? People who may not be able to repay us, but have so much to offer? When we do that, our reward is in heaven 'at the resurrection of the righteous.' Again, he's talking about eternity.

So pride is seen in the self interest of the guests as well as the hosts. Imagine the strain at that Pharisee's table! Jesus is spoiling everything! So someone decides to say something to cut the tension.

III. Pride mistakenly assumes a place at God's banquet table.

Look at v. 15.

"When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!'"

This is a classic comment, isn't it? It sounds like he's just trying to say something nice to cut the tension. You expect everyone to say, 'Amen, pass the mint jelly.' But this was a very revealing comment. Behind it is a lot of pride and arrogance. Behind it is the assumption that they would all be there; they would all sit at God's table in the resurrection because they were all Jews.

And, once again, Jesus cares too much for these guys to let such false assumption pass. So he tells another story.

'But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner'"

(vv. 16-24).

Here we have yet another story about a great feast. And the point of the story is, don't count your chickens before they're hatched. There will be a few surprises at God's banquet table.

There are some things that might help you understand what's going on here. First of all, there were always two invitations given to a big feast like this. The first invitation went out and you would RSVP. Then the second invitation went out when the feast was actually ready. That's what you see here. The first group RSVP'd that they would come but when the second invitation came they were all too busy. That's another thing to understand: the excuses were all pretty lame. No one would buy a piece of land without having seen it first. No one would buy oxen without first testing them first. And marriage was only an excuse in the OT for staying home from military service (Dt.24:5). So when they refuse to come in the host is justifiably angry. He doesn't say, 'Okay, let's postpone things until they're able to come.' He tells his servant to go into the streets and bring in the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. They all come, but when there is still room at the table, he had him go outside the city to the highways and the hedges. Man, this guy was determined to fill his table! The feast must go on and his table must be filled! There were Gentiles outside the city walls and

the hedges where derelicts found shelter. These people would not know the host so they would need to be compelled to come.

So what is Jesus saying? He's saying, 'Watch out! There will be a few surprises at God's banquet table. You don't get there just because you're a Jew and get invited in first. You have to accept God's second invitation in Christ. And the people who accept his invitation and come to the banquet will not be who we might expect. The people we would expect to be there seem to have better things to do when it comes right down to it. Despite what the guy said about how blessed it will be to eat bread in the kingdom of God, he didn't really want to be there. By the way, that's why people don't come to the feast - they really don't want to be there. In today's terms, if they were offered front row seats at the Final Four or a week's shopping in Paris, they would find someone else to tend the field and the oxen and even their home.

But the feast must go on. God's generosity is not thwarted by the rejection of the proud. He extends his invitation to the humble—the poor and the crippled and the lame and the blind—and they respond. One of the key things to understand about this second invitation is that it was being made, and is still being made, in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why proud people don't accept it. To receive Jesus requires that we let go of our pride and embrace the fact that we have nothing in ourselves to offer God. That's why the cross is such an offense to so many people. There is no room for pride at the cross. 'Nothing in my hands I bring, only to the cross I cling.'

We see here that in the end there is a terrible price to our pride. The price of pride is that it will cause you to reject the one who hung on the cross and there will be no seat for you at the feast. It won't be the proud, but the humble who respond to his invitation in Christ. Some of the people you would least expect to be there will be there.

CONCLUSION

But how do we know if we are proud? Pride is seen in our cold hearted legalism which adds to God's word. Pride is seen in our self-interest which seizes opportunities to promote ourselves and uses others to the same end. Pride is seen in the mistaken presumption that we will enter the kingdom by our own credentials, rather than by what was purchased for us on the cross. Pride is one of those things I find hard to talk about. It's hard because there is so much of it in me to begin with. But it's also hard because the people who are the most prideful and need to hear this the most are the ones who so often won't listen. C.S. Lewis said that pride is the 'one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty of themselves.'

If you have never done so before, would you be open to consider that you're proud, and your pride may be keeping you from accepting the most important invitation you will ever receive? You know it cost Jesus everything to prepare the feast. Are you too busy with your house and your cars and your family obligations to really come when it comes right down to it? There will be a few surprises at God's table. Do you really want to be there?

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