

The Trap of Self Glory **Luke 14:7-11**

One of the things I've grown to really enjoy is making habitat improvements on our deer hunting property. Over the past couple years, I've enjoyed planting food plots and improving bedding areas because it allows us to see more deer and get in a better position for hunting them. Deer are creatures of habit. Under normal circumstances they bed down during the day in good cover and then come out right before dark to eat in the fields. In the morning, they head back to their bedding areas where there's cover and safety. That's why you see so many deer when you're driving around before dark or early in the morning.

Because of this pattern you can hunt in locations where you catch deer walking by on their way to food or bedding. (Picture) If everything works right, you can get really close to them and they won't even know it. I've had times where I could step off my deer stand and land right on top of a deer's back and they have no idea I'm there. By following their natural patterns, they end up in a trap, unknowingly putting themselves in danger when there's a hunter in the woods.

This morning I want to look at a natural pattern of behavior among people that's like a trap. By doing what we naturally do, we end up in a dangerous situation that most of us aren't aware of it. It's something I was caught in for many years, and I couldn't see it. It's an area of sin that's deeply rooted in the human race and when we come to Christ and enter God's kingdom it's something he wants us to become aware of so we can repent and go a different way.

Jesus saw this behavior one Sabbath at a special gathering held for him in a town in Perea. (Picture) Over the past several weeks we've been looking at his ministry in Judea, but hostility had grown to a point where he was nearly killed by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, so he left the area and went to Perea, which was east of the Jordan River. This is the last area he and his disciples did ministry before he headed back to Jerusalem to die on the cross. So this is about 5 months before his death and is covered in Luke chapters 14-17.

When he got to Perea, he was new to the people there, although they had already heard a lot about him. According to Kenneth Bailey, one of the customs at that time was when a traveling rabbi or preacher came into a village, the religious

leaders would invite them to a meal during which they would investigate his political and theological views. So that's where Jesus was. It says at the beginning of Luke 14 that the first thing he did at the meal was heal a man with dropsy, which was controversial since it happened on a Sabbath. He then told two parables – one for the guests and one for the hosts who invited them. This morning I want to look at the first of these parables.

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, ⁸ "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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So as Jesus was watching the guests, he noticed a common pattern of behavior. They were scrambling to get the positions of honor at the meal. According to Leon Morris, at special meals like that, guests would recline in couches called 'triclinia' that were positioned in a U shape around the banquet table. Certain positions were known to be for the most honored guests and that's where everyone wanted to be. They wanted to be seen as important and honored.

It's a pattern of behavior that's common today as well. We see it in all segments of society as people of all ages clamor to be popular, praised, and applauded. There's this insatiable desire for notoriety. It starts as early as grade school as classmates begin to notice there's a popular group that everyone wants to be part of. And that's where self-exaltation and self-promotion gets its start.

This trajectory can continue through high school and college and into adulthood. As we celebrate our nation's independence, we can see that one of the qualities that's most desirable in our land is to be seen and praised by others. The messages in our media and marketing appeal to self-exaltation. Social media is hugely successful because of it. Countless people have become experts at taking

pictures of themselves and posting them online for others to see and hopefully admire. I'm not saying that everyone who uses them is doing it for these reasons, but I do believe that's why they're so successful.

As I look at my own life, I can see I was the poster child for self-exaltation for many years. Throughout high school and college I was largely driven by the desire to be exalted and for people to notice and admire me.

Well Jesus saw it at the meal he was at, and he was compelled to say something. And the way he did that was to tell a parable of what could happen at a wedding feast. Let's say you tried to take that most popular and revered spot and you were feeling pretty special, but then the host walks up and gives you the boot because someone more important shows up. That would be humiliating. So Jesus told them, "Don't sit in the place of honor, take the lowest seat. That way if the host sees you there, he will move you higher up and you'll be honored."

That's good practical advice, but that's not his main point. His main point is in verse 11: *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* He wasn't talking about a wedding feast anymore, that was just an illustration. He was talking about the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled. Those who live for their own praise and glory and to be seen and admired by others, will eventually be humbled by God. We follow a very natural pattern of behavior and put ourselves in danger of judgment without even knowing it. It's like a trap.

Scripture is full of passages warning the proud and arrogant of upcoming judgment:

- Proverbs 16:5 says, "Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished."
- Isaiah 13:11 "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless."
- Job 40:11-12 "Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. ¹² Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand."
- Jeremiah 50:31-32 "Behold, I am against you, O proud one, declares the Lord God of hosts, for your day has come, the time when I will punish you."

³² The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up, and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all that is around him.”

Self-exaltation, pride, egotism, self-promotion, or whatever else you want to call it, is a sin. And from what I see in the Bible, it's one of the sins God hates the most. Some say it is the root of all other sins. It goes back to Satan, who wanted to elevate himself to the position of God. It goes back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who chose to disobey their Creator. It goes back to all inhabitants of the earth at the Tower of Babel when the people wanted to ascend to heaven. And it has continued throughout human history at the core of our fallen nature.

There is only One who is worthy of all glory and praise and honor and admiration and that is God – our Creator, our Savior, the Perfect One, the One from whom and through whom and to whom all things exist. And we are not! We were created in his image to bring glory to him forever, but we have all sinned and fallen short of his glory. So when we seek to draw attention to ourselves for our own exaltation and glory, we shine the spotlight on a fallen creature instead of the only one who gives life and saves – the only one who is worthy.

Therefore, the proud and arrogant who reject God and live for their own glory will be humbled. There will be judgment and condemnation. Even Christians who are caught up in their own self exaltation, though we will not face condemnation, will be humbled through our loving heavenly Father's discipline.

I've experienced God's discipline in this area in my own life. As I mentioned before, I was feasting on my own self-glory for many years but God was merciful and humbled me. He made it so that the praise and admiration of people didn't satisfy me anymore and since that was such a big part of my life it left me empty and lost. I floundered with disorientation and depression for about 9 months and it was very painful, but I needed it. My sin was so deeply rooted and so much a part of who I was that I couldn't even see it. But eventually God broke through and revealed it and allowed me to see how detestable it was so I could go a different direction.

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,” is what Jesus said. But I also want us to see what else he said: *“And he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* As much as God hates the sin of self-exaltation, he loves when we practice

humility. He rewards and honors those who are humble. And that's the posture he wants us to pursue in life.

What is humility? I think a lot of people think of it as self-abasement – having a low and negative view of yourself. Thinking of yourself as a wretch or a worm. Some people are really good at badmouthing themselves. But I don't think that's what God's after. Whether you think much of yourself or very little of yourself, your focus is still on self, and I think humility is something different. I think it's having a realistic view of yourself – not too high and not too low – that comes from what God thinks of us, but the focus is on others.

I like Tim Keller's explanation of humility. On the back of his book, The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness it says, "A truly gospel humble person is not a self-hating person or a self-loving person, but a self-forgetful person."

I think this comes from what Paul says in Philippians 2:3-8: *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

The direction we are to go as followers of Christ is not exalting ourselves, nor is it hating ourselves, it's focusing on other people and seeking to become like Christ. He lowered himself to serve us, even to the point of laying down his life. And in the verses that follow, Paul tells us what happened. Philippians 2:9-11: *"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Jesus humbled himself and God exalted him. And that's the pattern Jesus calls us to follow in our lives. "He who humbles himself will be exalted."

Perhaps you can see that you've been caught in the trap of self-glory and self-exaltation and this can be a turning point for you. There is only One who is worthy of all glory and praise and he has uniquely created you to bear his image and reflect his glory in your life. You are not a worm or a wretch, you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared for you to do – not to shine the light on you, but to glorify the One who made you, died for you, and gave you everything.

I encourage you to take time when you wake up every day to start your day by humbling yourself before the Lord. Give thanks for all he's done in your life, recognizing that everything good you have that people normally take credit for and use to elevate themselves, is actually an undeserved gift, freely given by God for you to glorify him, not yourself.