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Perhaps there is no more dynamic and practical time of relational bonding and building than around a dinner table. Across America each evening families gather around a spread of food and enjoy each other's company. The enjoyment of food stimulates good conversation where each one at the table takes their turn speaking their thoughts with passion and personality. Even Jesus Christ used the casualness of dining to enjoy profitable conversation. His first public miracle was in the private setting of a home around a marriage feast. Later, He shared a little boy's lunch with 5,000 at a hillside picnic. And then there was the time when He was ministered to by Mary at the dinner table while Martha scurried around the kitchen...later to be anointed by Mary at the same table before His death. And who could forget His last supper? Even now, the Bible says that He is preparing a marriage feast for us to enjoy with Him! Here in Luke 14 we find Him taking advantage of the up-close and personal setting of a dinner table to reinforce the crucial understanding that He is Lord and Savior.

Priority Seating Luke 14:1-14 NKJV

Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. ² And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" ⁴ But they kept silent. And He took *him* and healed him, and let him go. ⁵ Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not answer Him regarding these things. ⁷ So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ⁸ "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.* ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

By this time in the life of Christ, we can reasonably assume that the Pharisees were staging certain interactions with Christ in order to trap Him into their devious web. Christ was invited to a dinner, and near the dining room there appeared a man who was sick with "dropsy"—a form of *edema* which causes the victim's body to swell, and is often indicative of critical kidney, liver, blood or heart problems. To top it off, according to the previously mentioned teaching of the Pharisees, this man's disease was the fruit of some grievous sin.

It was Sabbath. Just a short time before, Christ had healed a woman at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Christ had actually healed six other times previous to this occasion. His healings on this day of "rest" were deeply confronting to the Pharisees. They knew there was no law of God against such things, but these Divine acts of mercy were not "Kosher" with their controlling legalistic mind-set. In their religion, "rest" only came from work and performance. To them, rest was to be *earned*, not freely given—especially for the soul!

Finally, this man had "rest." His disease would trouble him no more because of the grace-filled, healing touch of the Messiah. Christ threw down the gauntlet. Who among these experts on the law and religion would step forward and challenge Him defending the law? Shuffling of sandals and nervous coughs hung in the air as no one dared to defend something that did not exist. So Christ took the opportunity around the table to share one more conversation about what God's kingdom looks like.

In those days dining tables were shaped like a "U." (insert resemblance of the OSU "Shoe.") The most prestigious person would sit at the bottom center of the "U," and extending out to his right and left hand would be his guests in descending order of their importance. When dinner was served at this house in Christ's presence, elbowing and scurrying to get the best seat in the house preceded their meal on this day. Jesus took note. It was like a grown-up version of musical chairs! The wisdom of Solomon had apparently been long forgotten:

“Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of the great;
For *it is better that he say to you, "Come up here,"*
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the
prince, Whom your eyes have seen.”
~ Proverbs 25:6,7

The pompous host who gathered the “cream of society” together at his table did not impress God. These distinguished guests, haughty in their demeanor, could scarcely stomach the sight of the diseased man. And, with deriding glares at Christ, they barely found an appetite to join with him at the table. Their system of beliefs was becoming uncomfortably undone like a fish filleted by a master chef.

You won’t find this sort of teaching in the world of motivational seminars and success-driven training. The way to the top is by starting at the bottom! Realizing that his audience needed to have something more palatable delivered to them in order to understand the grace of God, He explained truths of God’s gracious ways in a parable about none-other than...a dinner! (We will study this parable next time.)

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- 1. What type of wrong thinking is associated with deeming one’s self better than another simply because of life circumstances?**
- 2. When you enter into a room and “size it up,” what does that say about your pride?**
- 3. Did Christ refuse to eat with the Pharisees on that day? Why not?**
- 4. What important truths is Christ emphasizing by performing another miracle on the Sabbath?**
- 5. Is the Kingdom of God about “positioning”? What problems flow out of a “positioning” type mindset amidst the followers of Christ?**
- 6. How does pride rob us of compassion?**

- 7. How does the gracious gift of God in salvation remind us of our unlikely dinner invitation at the table of God?**
- 8. Since salvation is so freely given through Christ, why then do we so often compare ourselves among ourselves?**

