

Go down to go up.

“Go down to go up.” That sounds like some sort of Wisconsin or Upper phrase such as, “Go ahead, back up.” Or, “Whatcha know?” Or, “Dis, dat and the other thing.” Or, my favorite, “Yeah. No.” “Go down to go up,” however, is the advice that Jesus gives us here in Luke 14. He is urging us to go down, to live a humble life of faith, that we might eventually, go up to heaven.

Jesus saw the opposite of humility on display when he was having dinner at the house of a prominent Pharisee. The Pharisees took great pride in obeying all the laws that the Lord gave to the Old Testament Israelites. They were all about trying to impress their fellow Jews and God with how good they were. They even thought they were good enough to get into heaven on their own. So when Jesus, a carpenter’s kid from Nazareth, told them that they were sinners and they need him in order to get into heaven, they hated him. “How dare he?” One day a prominent Pharisee invited Jesus to his house. It seemed like a cordial invitation, but Luke tells us that Jesus (:1) “**was being carefully watched.**” If they could catch Jesus doing something wrong, then they could discredit his ministry by telling people that he was not as good as they were.

What’s neat, almost comical, is that while the Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus doing something wrong, Jesus caught them doing something wrong. What happens at a child’s birthday party when mom announces, “Time for cake and ice cream!”? All the children rush and push to be the first one to get cake and ice cream. That’s what it looked like at the Pharisee’s house. They made a big deal about who sat where. Sitting closest to the host was a more honorable position than sitting way down at the end of the table. So when it was time for the Pharisees to take their places to eat, there was something of a scramble.

Imagine going to a wedding reception and sitting at the table right next to the bridal party, eager to be one of the first people to get your food. But then the father of the bride points out to you that your name is not on the name tag in front of you. In front of everyone you would have to get up and walk to the table at the back of the dining hall. How embarrassing. Jesus told the Pharisees that they should not fight for the most honored seat at a meal. Instead they should be humble and take the seat farthest away. Then they would be honored when the host invited them to the front.

Jesus, however, did not come to earth to teach proper etiquette. He came to be our Savior. Scrambling for a good seat and doing nice things for others so they would do nice things for them was just a symptom of a deeper disease. Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees that they were selfish. They were sinful and needed a Savior. He also let his host know that he was just as sinful because he followed the tradition of the Pharisees and only invited people to his banquet who would invite him to their banquets. That’s what Jesus is referring to in verses 12 and 13 when he says that you should not invite friends or relatives to your house. Understand the context. Jesus is saying that you should not be like the Pharisees who only invited people to dinner who would then invite them to dinner. That’s just greedy. Christian love will invite the poor and needy to dinner even if they can’t invite you to dinner. Jesus pointed to the selfish greed of the Pharisees to teach them, and us, an important spiritual truth. Don’t be selfish and proud. Be humble or you’ll stumble. Jesus said (11), “**All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**” In other words, go down to go up.

We see selfishness as children argue and fight over toys, or where they get to sit in the car or at the table, or who controls the TV remote control. We see dishonest adults trying to take advantage of others. Selfishness and greed are the reasons why wars start and marriages fail. We get jealous of those who were given a better life than yours. We get jealous of those with more money than we have. We treat our money as if it was ours to do anything we want with it, forgetting that “our money” are gifts that God has entrusted to us so that we can take care of ourselves and help others. When others ask us for help we often sigh with disappointment because we don’t want to be bothered. But when we are in need we expect others to help us. We get upset when we do nice things for others, but they do

not do nice things for us. "It's not fair," we whine. And we realize that we are just as selfish as the Pharisees. Instead of striving to be kind and loving toward others all the time, as Jesus wants us to, we focus on ourselves.

A friend of mine put it this way, "We are addicted to being liked." Certainly, it's not wrong for people to like you. It's not wrong to have friends. Friends are great. But our sinful nature tries to ruin everything good. And suddenly, being liked by others becomes an idol in our hearts that becomes more important to us than anything else. We love it when people think good things about us. We get thrilled when lots of people "like" something we post on Facebook. We like attention. We love it when people compliment us. Our self-esteem soars high. But what happens when people do NOT say nice things about us? What if we do NOT get the attention we would like? What if others do NOT show loving kindness to us? What if people criticize us and complain about us? Then we are crushed. Either way, the devil gets us to be hyper-focused on ourselves and how we feel! We are addicted to being liked and we can't help ourselves.

Or, maybe you have a personality that does not like any attention. Maybe you are more of an introvert. (That's not a bad thing.) Maybe you gravitate away from the spotlight. Maybe you automatically sit at the table that's far in the back of the wedding reception. Maybe you never mention the many things that you do for others. But then, the devil tries to get into our hearts through the backdoor. We want people to see how we avoid the spotlight. We want people to see us and think, "Look how humble he is. What a good Christian he is." And then, in an odd way, we end up being proud of our humility. We are malfunctioning mammals and we can not fix ourselves. No matter how hard we try, we can not get "up there" spiritually. Just like the Pharisees, we need to see that we are sinners who need a Savior.

Humility does not mean having a gloomy attitude as in, "I can't do anything right. And even what I can do, others can do a lot better. I'm worthless." No. That's telling God that he made a mistake by making you the way you are with the gifts and opportunities that you have. True humility does not mean never accepting a compliment for a job well done. True humility does not mean having a low opinion of your own gifts or some of your positive traits. The humility that Jesus is talking about is a spiritual thing. It begins deep down in our hearts as we admit that we are sinful and need a Savior. True humility does not compare what we do with what others do as we think, "I have lived a better life and done better things than so-and-so." True humility does not try to impress God or anyone else. True humility is seen a few chapters later, Luke 18, as the tax collector said, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." No excuses. No rationalizations. No blaming others or circumstances. Simply admitting the God is perfect and holy and we are not. True humility is something that we can not do by ourselves. True humility can only happen in our hearts when the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to convict us of our selfish sinfulness. The Pharisees thought that they were "up there" spiritually speaking, but they weren't. Neither are we. The only way that the Pharisees or we can get "up there" spiritually, is to have someone lift us up.

Jesus is the only person who was "up there" spiritually speaking and so, he is the only one who can lift us up. Jesus set aside his godly glory and became fully human so that he could be our substitute. He was tempted in every way, just as we are, but was without sin. He was never selfish. Even as he proclaimed the essential truth that we was God in the flesh, he did not do it in bragidose or pompous way. He always thought about others first. He even washed his disciples dusty, dirty, sweaty, smelly feet when they were arguing about which of them was more important than the others. Jesus was so humble that he did not even take credit for what he could. He lived a perfect life, but he did not take credit for that. He gave you credit for his perfect life. His perfect holiness was credited to your account. From God's perspective, you are just as perfect and holy as Jesus. What a thought!

Especially at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus was focused on what we needed. He let the soldiers arrest him, abuse him and falsely accuse him. He let Pilate sentence him to death and he let the soldiers pound the nails through his hands and feet as he was hoisted up on the cross and offered as the sacrifice for all of our sins. As he explained

(Mt 20:28), “**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” Jesus paid the price for your freedom from sin. Your sins are forgiven.

The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ is the only thing that can free us from our addiction to being liked. Jesus measured up for us so that we would not have to live under the enslaving pressures of measuring up for others – including ourselves. Because of what Jesus did, you already have the approval, acceptance, security, freedom, affection, cleansing, new beginning, righteousness, and rescue that we long for. With Jesus as our Savior, there is nothing left to prove or protect, no one to impress or appease. We can be okay with the fact that we are who we are – sinners, yes, but also saints cleansed by the perfect and pure blood of Jesus.

Being spiritually humble is not something that we do as if it was a daily or weekly chore. Remember, by ourselves we can not be truly humble. Just like we look in a mirror to see if our hair looks OK before we go somewhere, we need to keep looking at God's Word and noticing that by ourselves, we are sinful and that we need a Savior. As soon as we are aware of our selfish sinfulness (we go down), we also rejoice to know that Jesus already saved us (we go up). Being humble, going down, is simply faith working in your heart. It is a way of life. Even though we know that we do not even deserve to sit at the table of the heavenly wedding banquet, let alone be in a seat of honor, because of Jesus, God not only invites you, but he also tells you that he is preparing a place for you by his side. Even though we are sinners through and through, Jesus moves you spiritually “up there” with him.

When Jesus said (:14), “**you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**” he is certainly not saying that if you help the poor and needy that you will earn your way into heaven. He is saying that, through faith, the Lord will give spiritual blessings in your heart that will finally result in you getting into heaven. You know that you are the apple of his eye, his cherished child, his honored people. Being blessed is to know that God's love rests upon you and embraces you as his dear child. Stay focused on Jesus as your Savior as you go down to go up. Amen.