

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Fallen men loved to be honored. It stokes our pride. It inflates our self-esteem. These are things the world values. And these are things the world rewards. Movie stars and famous entertainers and multi-million dollar athletes are the examples our society holds up to our children. Humble men of modest means and strong faith are ridiculed by our society.

It is no surprise that the Pharisees were like that too. Entering a wedding feast, they would have expected to sit at the best seat, a seat that visibly demonstrated their superior position in society and in the church. So our Lord addresses that very sin. He speaks to their pride. He condemns them in the very thing they had to admit they had done.

The Scripture, the very Word of God, teaches that "...godliness with contentment is great gain." Faith learns to be thankful for what God provides. It is not that material possessions are sinful. It is not that a good reputation is sinful. These are God given and good. Faith thanks God for daily bread. Faith works to maintain a good reputation, and to protect the reputations of others.

But seeking the highest seat, the best place, is different. It is based in arrogance and conceit, which betray an empty soul. Men who seek fame and admiration, men who demand respect, men who desire to be seen as superior to others, do so from sinful motive. It is contrary to the humility of faith.

But if you're honest, you'll confess that you have done the same. Just like the Pharisees, you have desired the highest place. You too have imagined what it would be like to win the big jackpot lottery. You too have enjoyed picturing yourself as a multimillionaire. You too have imagined yourself to finally be discovered, and to be made the next American Idol, to suddenly come into the fame and wealth you secretly think you have always deserved.

You too have coveted that bigger home, that newer car, that higher classification, that prominent station in life. At the same time you have complained, if not outwardly then inwardly, about what you have, the things God has graciously provided. You too have coveted the highest seat.

Repent. Our reward, our joy, is not in this fallen world or in the things of it. Enjoying God's gifts is good. Seeking the greatest joy in material things turns your heart away from God. Pride quickly becomes self-worship. And haughtiness usually involves disparaging others, ruining the reputation of others. Consider the Words of our Lord: "...whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." That which is high shall be brought low.

The Kingdom of God is not like the kingdom of men. Christ, God Himself, God who rightly receives all glory and honor and praise, God who alone is worthy of worship, came in humility and meekness. He did not come down from heaven in glory and majesty. He came to this fallen world in the lowliest of circumstances. Being the Only-begotten Son, He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, rather He was born of a poor Virgin in a stable and submitted to an earthly man who was not His father.

And as humble as that was, it was only the beginning of His humiliation. He was reviled and blasphemed. All the while He spoke Words of peace and love. He blessed and healed. He

forgave and restored. He was falsely accused. He being truly innocent was declared guilty. And He who blessed died as one cursed, for cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

But in His humiliation, in that accursed death, there is blessing for you. For all your sinful desires, all your trespasses, your pride and arrogance and sins against others, your dissatisfaction with what you have, all your transgressions are forgiven in His death. He was cursed that you be blessed. His life was poured out that you receive true life. And His Word was fulfilled, for He who humbled Himself has been exalted.

He sought no glory in worldly things, in possessions, in the adoration of others. But now He is exalted, raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, where He rightly receives the glory and honor and praise and worship that was always truly His and His alone.

So for you, you who believe in Him, you who trust in His shed Blood, you baptized into His Name, for you there is comfort and hope. In this life the world rejects and despises us. It can be no different in this world for the Christian than it was for the Christ. You will be humbled. You probably won't be rich or famous. You will know disappointment and hardship and loss. As you publicly confess your faith, others will speak sharp words about you. This sinful world will not offer you the highest seat, and if it does, beware.

But you will be beloved of God. You will enjoy His protection and His Gifts. Your sins are forgiven. You will have faith, faith to look through what is seen to what is unseen, faith that trusts in Christ. So the things of the world you can endure, for you do not seek your reward in earthly things. And in faith, when reviled you bless, in disappointment you thank God for what you have, in hardship you trust in the God Who Provides, the God who gave His life for you.

Here, in this life, it is Christ who sustains you through His Spirit and Gifts. In the face of the world's condemnation, you receive God's Absolution, God's blessing. In love, in mercy, today God Himself bids you take the highest place on this earth, a place at His Table, the place where the Highest comes to you. And soon to all you who believe in Him, the Exalted Lord will say "Friend, go up higher", as He opens heaven to you.

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