

## Movin' On Up

✠ to a better place (vv.1,7-11)

✠ to a brighter party (vv.11-14)

In the name of Jesus, our humble Lord and Savior, dearly redeemed guests in God's house:

Older Americans may recognize the theme of this sermon as the title of the theme song of the longest running sitcom in American television history. Would it help if I told you it ran from 1975-1985? It spun off from another sitcom called *All in the Family*. Archie and Edith Bunker had neighbors named George and Louise. This affluent black couple were **Movin' On Up** from a working class section of Queens to a luxury apartment in Manhattan. The CBS sitcom was called *The Jeffersons*.

Young eyes glaze over; sitcom humor is lost on younger generations. We shook our heads when our parents and grandparents just didn't "get it." Now my children smile when I nod off in movies they thought were "awesome!" What can you say? It's a generational thing.

But Jesus' stories stick. His parables are earthly stories that still teach heavenly lessons to all ages. Common people could understand right away, but the stuffed upper classes – rich, religious – were out of it. Whatever your race or ethnicity, status in church or neighborhood, Jesus is calling your heart to be humble today. His dear Holy Spirit turns on the lights for us to see we're **Movin' On Up**...

✠ to a better place (vv.1,7-11)

This summer my continuing education reading shed some light on the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. This was not just personalities or theology. In 400 years between Old and New Testament, the Pharisees grew into a major political force. Blood was shed between Pharisees and Sadducees. When they united against Jesus, it showed how deep and deadly their hatred really was. ***"One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched."***

There's great irony in the original Greek. One of our sweetest titles for the Holy Spirit is *Paraclete, Comforter, Counselor*. (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7) Jesus commissioned His followers to disciple all ethnic groups not only by baptizing in the Name of the Triune God, but also by teaching them to *guard and treasure* (τηρειν) His entire Word. Here the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to combine two good words (para+threw) into something dark and sinister. This Pharisee and his friends were getting up close and personal *beside* (para) Jesus to find fault. They *guarded* (threw) their own opinions instead of God's Word. In another place the Holy Spirit says: ***"Without faith it is impossible to please God."*** (Hebrews 11:6)

Jesus refuses to abide by the Pharisees' rules. First, He shows His divine power and love as God and Lord of the Sabbath by healing a man suffering with dropsy. Then, as Master Teacher, Jesus used the seat selections of proud Pharisees to teach us all a lesson in humility. Our self-righteous pride always opposes God along with the honor (vv.8-10) and needs (vv.12-14) of our neighbor. Someone once said that the hardest position to play in an orchestra is Second Fiddle. Everyone wants to be first, not with work and responsibility, but first in honor. Envy and jealousy get worse when folks are **Movin' On Up** in this world. Archie Bunker was not the only back-stabbing, self-loving American on TV. Everybody wants to be in first place, or at least to feel good about themselves. Is this so wrong?

Against God, the answer is, "Yes!" ***"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*** (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5) Jesus says here, ***"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** How proud were the engineers, crew and passengers on the "unsinkable" *Titanic* before she sank? How proud were Hitler and Stalin before their evil empires fell? How proud were economists and bankers in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center before enemies

brought them down with our own planes? But we common folk hear these questions and say, “Great! At least I’m not an proud engineer or a military guy or one of those evil Wall Street money tycoons!” Sinful human pride can’t see itself. So Jesus has to turn on the lights and give us eyes to see.

One seminary class in China had an underclassman named Mark. He saw an open seat at the head of the table and sat down. Classmates warned him, but he shrugged them off. You see, the guest teacher was placed at the head of the table with the Seminary President and translator on my right. The first seat on my left was for Sarah, the head of the Old Testament Department. Sarah came in, saw her seat was taken, smiled sweetly and sat down in back. No problem for her, but it was for the Seminary President. You didn’t need to understand Chinese when he chewed out Mark and told him to go sit in the lowest seat. Then he called Sarah to her place. Jesus says to let others honor you, not yourself.

The Holy Spirit explains through Paul: *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:1–11 NIV84) Jesus took the lowest place on the cross to wash away our pride. By faith in Him we’re **Movin’ On Up**...

### ✠ to a brighter party (vv.11-14)

Years ago a documentary featured the richest kids in America. Family jets whisked them to the Bahamas for exclusive parties with other wealthy wonder-kids. But there was no happiness on their faces. Only blank sadness in their eyes. *“All is vanity!”* (Ecclesiastes) without God.

Again, we’re tempted to think, “At least I’m not one of those rich kids!” But the Lord’s Apostle Paul warns: *“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* (1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV84) Today Jesus wants to cut our self-righteous hearts. He needs to surgically remove the tumor of our pride. Jesus loved even this Pharisee enough to teach him and then to die for his sins too. *Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

Human reason cries: “Jesus, you’re kidding, right? They’ll mess up my house! They’re not nice to me. Friends and relatives come first. Rich neighbors too. If they don’t share, we’ll snub them back! People we invite over should return the favor. That’s just common sense. That’s not wrong, is it?”

Friends, we are so different from God. And He so wants to bless us with His holiness. So Jesus exposes our Pharisaical pride with a simple story even children can understand. This is what Jesus did for us when we were *crippled* by sin, too *lame* to walk the way of life, too *blind* to find our own way to God. Since He loved us so much, He wants us to trust Him for payback time. God’s got a plan to give gracious rewards *“at the resurrection of the righteous.”* This can’t be our righteousness because we love ourselves too much. By faith Jesus gives us credit for His humility and His true love for the lost.

As the Jeffersons might put it, “God’s got a party goin’ on.” It’s already started. Heaven is cranking up the music by myriads of angels and glorious saints who trusted in Jesus for His righteousness. Don’t be afraid. You’re invited. Last Sunday my mother-in-law’s Pastor Eric Roecker, explained this so beautifully. God the Father looks at us. At first He’s angry because of our sin. He’s ready to turn us away, but Jesus the Son steps up. “Father, these are mine!” Smiling, arms open wide, the Father says, “Welcome! Come on in. You’re **Movin’ On Up**. Welcome home. Enjoy the party. This one never ends.” Dearly redeemed guests in God’s house, let your love and life say it all today with a glad: Amen!

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