

If you have ever been out at the Great Minnesota Get-Together you probably saw it: the t-shirt that said, ♦ “It’s hard to be humble when you’re from Minnesota.” Maybe some of you have the same shirt or have seen something similar. But since we’re going to be talking about humbleness and true, Christian humility today, we should probably look to more than a t-shirt for guidance. ♦ Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King Solomon wants us to notice that this proverb not only speaks about humility, it shows us how to do it. ***Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men; ⁷ it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.*** ♦ Here it is: “***A ‘How To’ For Humility. I. Honestly look at yourself; II. Patiently await the King’s acknowledgment.*** (As we...)

Dear Christian Friends,

Imagine the ♦ elegant banquet table in Solomon’s dining room. The finest of meats, breads, fruits, vegetables, and garnishes are spread across a fine piece of solidly crafted cedar. Grape wine glistens in the golden goblets. The oil lamps light up the room giving a golden glow to the rich tapestries that adorn the walls. Yes, the perfect atmosphere for dining with royalty. You *are* the guest of the king. So, which spot will you pick? Should it be next to him in the seat of honor, or should you take your spot at one of the other empty places? I know, it’s all a bit foreign to our way of thinking - it’s hard to imagine the situation.

Jesus spoke of attending a similar banquet in our gospel lesson. In fact, he may have had the very words of our text in mind when he saw the dinner guests taking the prominent seats for themselves. Jesus’ “how to” directions for the dinner guests with him was, ♦ ***“Do not take the place of honor...For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”*** (8,11).

In the immediate sense, both Solomon and Jesus were referencing worldly situations. But don’t miss the spiritual application here. In the gospel reading, when Jesus tells his hearers this lesson, he is telling them a parable - those earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Here’s the meaning: True Christian humility means you don’t exalt yourself in the King’s presence. You don’t adorn yourself in the presence of the Ruler of all. You don’t glorify yourself in the presence of the Host of the eternal wedding feast of Heaven. ♦ No, the “how to” directions for humility read, “Honestly look at yourself.” Mac Davis may have crooned, “Oh, Lord, It’s Hard to Be Humble”, but the Apostle Paul encouraged honest, accountable self-examination in view of God’s holy law and the death that our sin deserves. Paul said - of himself - in his letter to the Romans (7:24), ♦ ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”***

I know, it’s difficult to examine yourself. ♦ What Paul writes sounds like just running yourself down. But if you look closely, that isn’t what is saying. Rather, he is calling on us to take an honest, truly humble, accountable view of ourselves. Our society has lost touch with what it means to truly humble oneself. Even if people have *some* idea of what it must have been like in Bible times when there were kings and subjects, masters and servants; even if people have *some* inkling of what it feels like to bow, kneel, or lay oneself flat on one’s face on a cold stone floor in front of a king; we Americans are taught entitlement and educated to demand our rights. This doesn’t lead to humility. It leads to the elevation, adoration and glorification of ... ME. And with no one but ME to look to, I am lost.

No, the “how to” guide for humility says, “Take an honest look at yourself compared to your holy God, who demands perfection and will settle for nothing less.” When we do that, how do we dare to think that God owes us *anything*? It’s because you and I forget to

take an honest look at ourselves. We can look at so many *others* and see what a rotten life *they've* led. But you will never find as much sin in another person as you will find in *yourself*. When you look at yourself, you see your whole life, especially those blemishes that nobody else knows about...oh, but the King of Creation knows about them, too, doesn't he? And because of these and all our sins, he could have us not only removed from his royal banquet, he could have us thrown from his kingdom for eternity.

No, an honest self-evaluator will seat oneself not in the seat of honor next to the king, not even at the King's table, but humbly among the dogs begging for the scraps that might fall from the king's plate, not in disingenuous self-deprecation, but accountable self-evaluation...bringing us to the second step in the "how to" for Christian humility: ♦ Patiently awaiting the King's acknowledgment.

Jump back again to Solomon's dinner party. We've honestly seen where to seat ourselves, now listen to your Lord through Solomon again, "***...it is better for him to say to you, 'Come up here,' than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman***" (7). Solomon said, "Await the king's acknowledgement. Wait until he calls you up to the seat of honor."

In our "how to" for humility we patiently await the King's acknowledgement. And it begins as he acknowledges us with his forgiveness. Those who have humbly thirsted are quenched with the refreshing stream of Jesus' life-changing water of baptism. Recognizing our own faults and failures we are compelled to say, "I'm glad I'm weak, Lord, so that your strength can fill me. I'm glad I'm foolish, so that you can fill me with your wisdom. I'm glad that I know that I'm not right on my own, so that you can make me right with you." This, then, is the King's acknowledgement: "Come, my child. You are to be seated next to me at my banquet. I've dressed you in perfection and made you the guest of honor in my heaven through

my son Jesus Christ. Come and share my happiness and my table for eternity."

Earlier this summer, in an effort to keep the bathrooms a little cleaner, an attempt was made to install electric hand dryers, rather than paper towels. It only lasted about a week. Knowing that I was preaching on Sunday, ♦ someone had attached a note to one of the hand dryers. It read, "Please press this button for a short recorded message from Pastor Gawrisch."

Now that was just a joke, it didn't actually happen. ♦ But in there is also the first of our steps to humility - taking an honest look at ourselves. Look at yourself in the mirror of God's holy law. Glaring back at you is a hideous sight that *no one* would want to see sitting at the King's banquet feast in heaven. But then, recognizing the ugly unworthiness, confidently wait on the King's acknowledgement, knowing that, in his grace, *you have been* invited into his presence. For he has changed you and empowered you to live for him, knowing that it is his acknowledgment, and his alone that truly matters.

The Christian apologist C.S. Lewis said, ♦ "Humility is not about thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." So go now into that "ME" world out there - leave selfishness, disappointment, frustration and irritation behind. Go now into that "entitlement society" - expect nothing for yourself, wonder at nothing done to you, feel nothing done against you. Go now among the peoples that know only self-gratification and self-glorification - be at rest when no one praises you, when they blame you, and when they despise you. Go now secure in your relationship with your King and your assured place of honor at his table. Go now, in all humility to serve others from the heart. ♦ For it is the work of the King's Spirit *in* you, and the fruit of the redemptive work of the King's Son *for* you that compels us to say: "Oh Lord, it's *easy* for me to humble, when *you're* perfect in every way." Print *that* on a T-shirt. Amen.