



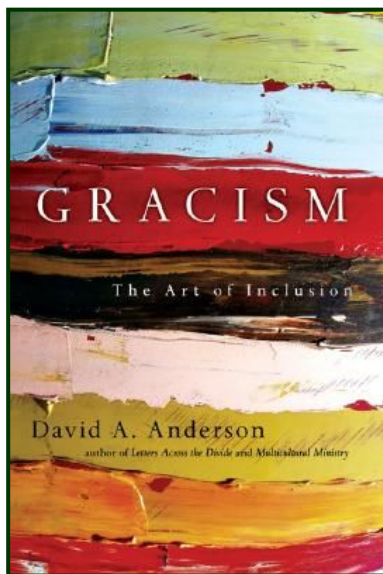
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

AUGUST 9, 2009

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



BANQUETS & BUMS...

("GREATER HONOR")

For thirteen years Esther Kim had one dream—the Summer Olympics. She wanted to represent the United States on the Olympic tae kwon do squad. From the age of eight, she spent every available hour in training. In fact, it was in training that she met and made her best friend, Kay Poe. The two worked so hard for so long that no one was surprised when they both qualified for the 2000 Olympic trials in Colorado Springs. Everyone, however, was surprised when they were placed in the same division. They'd never competed against each other, but when the number of divisions was reduced, they found their names on the same bracket. It would be just a matter of events before they found themselves on the same mat. One would win and one would lose. Only one could go to Australia.

As if the moment needed more drama, two facts put Esther Kim in a heartrending position. First, her friend Kay injured her leg in the match prior to theirs. Kay could scarcely walk, much less compete. Because of the injury Esther could defeat her friend with hardly any effort. But then there was a second truth. Esther knew that Kay was the better fighter. If she took advantage of her crippled friend, the better athlete would stay home. So what did she do? Esther stepped onto the floor and bowed to her friend and opponent. Both knew the meaning of the gesture. Esther forfeited her place. She considered the cause more important than the credit. **Do you consider others more important than yourself?**

Today we continue in our Bible study from David Anderson's book, *Gracism*, and are looking at how God gives greater honor to those members of the body that lack it. Turn to **1 CORINTHIANS 12:24B (NIV)** and follow along as I read the second half of verse 24: *But God has combined the members of the body and has given **GREATER HONOR** to the parts that lacked it...* As we discussed last week, although these verses really deal with spiritual gifts, David Anderson interprets them to also

include a concept he calls "*gracism*"—that is, as Christians we all should extend God's grace to others without regard to race, culture or class! We are to go out of our way to show *gracism* to them. In this particular verse, 24b, Anderson says that God gives greater honor to those who lack it—and the "they" means those in a minority, or those in a different class, or a different culture.

Looking at verse 24b, what does it mean when Paul says that God has "*given greater honor to the parts that lacked it?*" The most vital ministries in a church always include some that are not so obvious. **Can you name a few of these ministries in the church?** [NURSERY, PRAYER WARRIOR, CHILDREN'S CHURCH, BEREAVEMENT COMMITTEE, HOSTESS COMMITTEE] The faithful prayers and services of a few dedicated saints who hold no office frequently are the most reliable and productive channels of spiritual power in a congregation. As we've learned from this 1 Corinthians 12 passage, those with the most noticeable and attractive gifts really have no need of encouragement and protection. **What are some examples of these gifts?** John MacArthur in his *New Testament Commentary* says, "*Honor comes to them almost as a matter of course, and that honor they should share with members whose gifts and temperaments are less attractive and more likely to be ignored. They should give more abundant honor to that member which lacked.*" [MacArthur, p. 321]

As we've discussed over the past few weeks, although David Anderson's principles are absolutely correct, we're going to use some other scripture passages to support them. However, I think this is a good time for a few poignant questions. **What's more important to you—that the work be done or that you be seen? When another person you know is honored, are you joyful or jealous? Do you have the attitude of Jesus?**

Let's look at our focal passage in **LUKE 14: 1, 7-14 (NCV)** about how we are to live in today's culture with respect to others: *¹On a Sabbath day, when Jesus went to eat at the home of a leading Pharisee, the people were watching Jesus very closely. ... ⁷When*

*Jesus noticed that some of the guests were choosing the best places to sit, he told this story: ⁸“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, don't take the most important seat, because someone more important than you may have been invited. ⁹The host, who invited both of you, will come to you and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed and will have to move to the last place. ¹⁰So when you are invited, go sit in a seat that is not important. When the host comes to you, he may say, ‘Friend, move up here to a more important place.’ Then all the other guests will respect you. ¹¹**All who make themselves great will be made humble, but those who make themselves humble will be made great.**” ¹²Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite only your friends, your family, your other relatives, and your rich neighbors. At another time they will invite you to eat with them, and you will be repaid. ¹³Instead, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴Then you will be blessed, because they have nothing and cannot pay you back. But you will be repaid when the good people rise from the dead.”*

It's only human nature for us to want to sit in the best seat in the house. At sporting events, it's the skybox seat or the seat on the 50-yard line or the seat directly behind home plate, or a ringside seat at a boxing match. Those are the places that have the best view and carry the highest price. They also carry the greatest bragging potential. It impresses people when we tell them we have those seats. Beverly and I went on vacation a few years ago to Phoenix and got those kind of seats. We sat on the floor under the goal at an NBA game and literally had the players jumping over us throughout the game. The next day we went to a major league baseball exhibition game and sat in box seats behind home plate while watching the Giants play the Cardinals. WOW! I thought I had arrived! **Why are we like this?**

This desire for the best seat in the house shows up in other places as well. Watch people in the mall parking lot sometime. The best parking places are the ones closest to the entrance

doors. I've seen people nearly collide, competing for that one open spot near the door! Nobody wants the parking spaces out on the far end of the lot.

The Jews had "best seats" in the synagogues. Jesus made mention of it when he said of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:6, *"They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues."* It was an honor to have the opportunity to sit in one of the seats up on the platform. They were the best seats. We also have a "best seat" in our church. It's the seats in the back. I know that's the best seats because those are the ones that fill up first.

In Jesus time, people were seated according to their prominence or importance. Those who were considered most important would be seated closest to the host of the dinner party, while those considered least important would be seated furthest from the host. Since most people thought highly of themselves, they sought the best seats. Here, Jesus uses the parable of a wedding feast to illustrate how foolish such pride is. He uses this imagery because a wedding feast or supper was often associated with God's kingdom. He is telling us how to behave as members of God's kingdom. Jesus is not giving us some advice on wise and good table manners. He is revealing the prideful tendency to promote and exalt ourselves, and what the results will be. He is telling us how we should act as people of the kingdom of God. We should seek the lowest seat; that is we should be humble in every aspect of our lives. **Why?**

Jesus is really saying, "Your vitality, importance, and greatness is not in what you have, wear, and drive or where you live and work. Your greatness is inside of you. It's deep inside of you, and I want you to know it doesn't have anything to do with whether or not you sit at the head table. I want to show you how to find the deep part of you and to face up to the real important part of you. Then you can become what God intended you to be." We are to humble ourselves and seek His Face, according to **2 CHRONICLES 7: 14 (NIV)**, which as you remember, says: *"If*

my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Once again, notice the brilliant way Jesus taught. He told a simple little parable and then He applied the spiritual principle. Look again at the spiritual principle in **verse 11**: *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* This is one of the wonderful paradoxes of Jesus that is totally contrary to the way the world thinks. **The world says if you want to climb higher and be somebody you must do what?** Push, fight, claw, and work your way to the top of the heap. The world says the way up is up! Tongue-in-cheek we say that it's a "dog-eat-dog" world. But Jesus says just the opposite. He says the way up is what? **DOWN**. In other words, if you try to promote your prideful self, you'll end up humbled. And He also says the way down is up. The Bible says specifically in **JAMES 4:10**, *"Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up."* So, contrary to what the world is teaching you, THE WAY UP IS DOWN AND THE WAY DOWN IS UP.

Chan Gailey, offensive coordinator of the Kansas City Chiefs, told how he learned a lesson in humility. Gailey was then head coach of Alabama's Troy State and they were playing for a National Championship. The week before the big game, he was headed to the practice field when a secretary called him back to take a phone call. Somewhat irritated, Gailey told her to take a message because he was on his way to practice. She responded, "But it's Sports Illustrated." "I'll be right there," he said. As he made his way to the building, he began to think about the upcoming article. It would be great publicity for a small school like Troy State to be in Sports Illustrated. As he got closer, he realized that a three-page article would not be sufficient to tell the whole story. Coming even closer to his office, he started thinking that he might be on the cover. "Should I pose or go with an action shot," he wondered. His head was spinning with all of the possibilities. When he picked up the phone and said hello, the

person asked, "Is this Chan Gailey?" "Yes, it is," he replied confidently. "This is Sports Illustrated, and we're calling to let you know that your subscription is running out. Are you interested in renewing?" Coach Gailey concluded the story by saying, "You are either humble or you will be humbled."

There is an enormous difference between the way the world honors you and the way God does, isn't there? Jesus, in **MATTHEW 19:30**, said that *many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first*. Then, in **MATTHEW 20:27**, it says that *spiritual greatness is determined by the spirit of servanthood not by high position or impressive achievements*. As a former trial lawyer, I've noticed many times in our courthouses that we find the powerful words from **MICAH 6:8 (NIV)** quoted on the wall. Listen: *"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk HUMBLY with your God."* Humility is the secret of eternal living. It is the secret of peace with God and God wants to honor those that possess this character trait. And He does.

Martin Luther once said, "We need GOAT sense." He tells of seeing two goats meeting on a path on a mountain ledge. Instead of butting one another, one of them laid down and allowed the other one to pass over him. **Is this the way you treat others—no matter what their race, culture or class?**

Let me ask you how do we measure greatness in our culture today? What are the outward signs of success?

Violin virtuoso Joshua Bell is that rare prodigy who has matured into a world-class musician and an acclaimed interpreter of Mozart, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. The 29-year-old Bell has always been driven, even while growing up in Bloomington, Ind. Whether it was chess, computers, video games or the violin, Bell had a need to master his environment. In some quarters, he's already arrived at his pinnacle. Years ago back home in Bloomington, a twelve-year-old boy approached him and announced, "You're Joshua Bell. You're famous." "Well, ummm,

not really," Bell replied. "Yes, really," the kid insisted. "Your name is on every video game in the arcade as the highest scorer."

Greatness is measured in different ways by different people. The kingdom of heaven, too, has its own standard of greatness: namely, humility and servanthood. In **ISAIAH 57:15** God says that he will be with him who is *"contrite and lowly in spirit."* And, listen to these words from the last part of **1 PETER 5:5 (NIV)**: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

In our focal passage from Luke 14, Jesus used the seating at a wedding feast to express the main point: Let the host of the feast, who represents God, do the exalting rather than engaging in self-promotion. Pride goes before the fall, according to God's Word in Proverbs. Each of us needs to look at our own life. We need to ask ourselves, **"Do I have an exalted image of my own self-importance?"** If you have a pride problem, it will be revealed by your attitude, thinking, and actions. For instance, if you become angry or hurt when you are overlooked for recognition, it is because of pride. If you're thinking in your mind how much better a job you could do than another person, it is because of pride. If you were unwilling to admit your faults because they make you look bad, it is because of pride. If you are hurt or offended when others disagree with you, it is because of pride. If you desire to display your talents, your appearance, or the sacrifices you make, it is because of pride. If your desires and your agenda are first and foremost, it is because of pride.

In **ROMANS 12:10**, Paul writes, *"Give each other more honor than you want for yourselves."* That's why when it comes to spiritual gifts, especially those that are less prominent, that God gives greater honor to them. **What is HUMILITY?** According to the *Life Application Commentary*, *"humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or the other at all."*

Our culture, however, says, "Go for first!" Our Lord says, "Go for last." Both of them are telling us how to get to the top, but the difference is the means by which we get there. *During the American Revolution, the story is told of a group of new recruits busy repairing a break in a rampart. The work was really too heavy for the size of group working on it. Their commander was shouting instructions, but was making no attempt to help them. An officer in civilian clothes rode past and he asked why the leader of the group wasn't helping the others. He replied with great dignity, "Sir, I am a Corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers himself. When the job was finished, he turned to the corporal and said "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this, and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." The officer in plain clothes was General Washington.*

Most people think like that corporal. They don't want to humble themselves. They don't want to get their hands dirty doing that kind of work. Like the guests at the wedding feast Jesus is describing, they would rather emphasize their rank over others and be noticed for it. They want to push themselves as high as they can, even if it means stepping on others to do it. It's the law of the jungle. It's survival of the fittest. It's eat or be eaten. But it's not what Jesus is teaching here.

Turn to **PHILIPPIANS 2: 3-4 (NIV)** and listen to these words by Paul: *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."* The great Christian writer, A.W. Tozer, wrote about humility: *"A humble man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time he is in the sight of God of more importance than the angels. In himself, nothing, in God, everything."*



I heard about a Christian organization that always asks newly hired people to clean the toilets for two weeks. It doesn't matter what their qualifications are or what they're hired to do. That's the first job they get. And if they won't do it, then they don't get a position. *Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's Restaurant, illustrates the value of humility in his book, Well Done: The Common Guy's Guide To Everyday Success. He writes, "I got my MBA long before my G.E.D." (Dave, of course, never graduated from high school.) He continues, "I even have a photograph of me in my MBA graduation outfit—a snazzy knee-length work apron. I guarantee you that I'm the only founder among America's big companies whose picture in the corporate annual report shows him wielding a mop and a plastic bucket. That wasn't a gag. It was a case of leading by example. At Wendy's, MBA does not mean Master of Business Administration. It means Mop Bucket Attitude."*

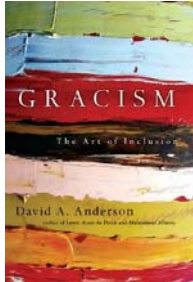
Oh, if we could find more of that MBA attitude in the body of Christ—the church! And you don't necessarily have to wield a physical mop to show that you have it. There are plenty of other things that will get you your MBA. Just look around the church and you can get overwhelmed by what needs to be done. What about helping in the children's ministry with AWANA. What about teaching a children's Sunday School class this fall? Why not extend God's grace to those in the body that don't have the opportunities or resources you do?

In closing, some of you recall John Brodie, former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers. He was once asked why a million-dollar player like him should have to hold the ball for field goals and extra points after the touchdown. I loved his response: "Well," said Brodie, "if I didn't, it would fall over." Brodie wouldn't take the bait. He wouldn't exalt himself, though the opportunity was obvious. I think that humility has something to do with his greatness.

I don't care which image you leave here with this morning that makes a bigger impression: The C.E.O. with a mop and bucket in

his hand, the quarterback on his hands and knees holding the ball for the kicker, some other humble servant that comes to your mind, or our LORD submitting himself to cruel and vulgar men to be put to death for our redemption. Just don't be among those who fight for the first seat. Head for the last seat in the house. Then, let God move you up!

Let's Pray!



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