

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

At more elaborate banquets in Jesus's day, there were always certain "seats of honor," just as there are often head tables at modern banquets. At this particular meal attended by lawyers and Pharisees, the "men of God" were vying to sit in the places of honor. Because of Christianity's influence on Western culture, most of us know that it looks bad to exalt ourselves so obviously. Still, we find more subtle ways to elevate ourselves in the eyes of others. We "casually" mention our job titles or important people we know, make sure those letters that reveal our education are always after our names, or talk about how God has used us so gloriously. The goal is the same---we want people to respect us. Jesus's lesson is still true: If we exalt ourselves, we will be humbled. If we humble ourselves, we will be exalted.

Did you notice that twice in today's reading Jesus mentioned caring for the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind? He told the banquet host not to invite friends, family, or rich neighbors to his luncheons and dinners because they would reciprocate. (Isn't it true that "wining and dining" is often done for the express purpose of getting something in return? It is a selfish kindness.) Rather, he should invite those who could not repay him, the disadvantaged, and God would repay him in the next life. Imagine God's perspective as He looks down from heaven and sees people "generously" giving their food to their rich friends, at the same time that He sees the poor going hungry.

Jesus also mentioned the same marginalized people in His parable of the wedding feast (14:21), subtly revealing a secret to successful evangelism. That secret is this: People who have money are often not receptive to God's heavenly invitation because they are so devoted to their wealth, whereas the poor and handicapped are much more likely to open their hearts to the good news of the gospel. Notice that two of three excuses that were given by the wealthy for not attending the dinner related to their devotion to their possessions (14:18-20).

Most of the people reading this daily devotional live in countries where there are many government and private social services for the poor and the handicapped. But there are actually quite a few reading this in developing countries where handicapped people must beg on the streets to survive. God cares about them, and through them, He tests the rest of us. Forgive me for putting in a little advertisement here for the ministry of Heaven's Family, but everything we do is for the sake of the poor around the world. I hope you are involved with us!

Jesus had a mega-church (14:25), but He wasn't thrilled with big crowds! He wanted disciples, that is, committed followers willing to pay a price, and not just tag-alongs. He still wants disciples (Matt. 28:19). What is a disciple? Jesus listed three requirements. We must love Him supremely, more than our family members (14:26). We must deny ourselves and be willing to suffer hardship for His sake (14:27). And, we must love Him more than possessions, and thus obey His commandments regarding stewardship (14:33).

A careful and honest examination of the New Testament makes it very clear that it is only disciples of Christ who are actually believers in Him and true Christians. All others are pseudo-Christians who are "following" someone other than "Bible Jesus." If a person does not meet Jesus's requirements for discipleship he is not really saved. Rather than pressing for quick "decisions for Christ," we ought to instruct people, as did Jesus, to first count the cost of becoming His true follower (14:28-32).

Considering the context, it would seem logical to conclude that Jesus' unsalty salt analogy has something to do with discipleship. True salt is salty. True disciples are committed to Christ. If salt became tasteless (an actual impossibility), it would be good for nothing and be discarded. Similarly, professing disciples who are uncommitted are good for nothing and will be discarded. There is no such thing, really, as an uncommitted Christian.