QUESTION: What makes you feel important?

Would you be willing to really lean into that question? I’m asking you to think about the most memorable experience you can recall of genuinely feeling important—what just happened that contributed to you feeling that way? Did someone of importance say something to you or, did they say something meaningful about to you to others? Did that sense of importance come after an accomplishment that you put all of yourself into? Perhaps that sense of importance came when a group of people included you, affirming that they wanted you involved or that they needed you to be involved with them.

If you’re wondering why I’d start off asking that question, if you’re wondering why this question is worthwhile—it’s because you are worthwhile. Another way to ask this question is, “What is it that makes you aware of and confident in your own value?” Is there anyone who doesn’t want to feel valuable? Aren’t we all drawn in by people and things that give us the sense that we matter, we count?

Teenagers, listen up and lean in. The reason your parents are so interested in the friendships you make is that they know how powerful this draw to feel valuable is. They know, from their own experiences, how vulnerable we are to being manipulated by it. People go against their better judgement all the time, if it means that others will judge them as valuable. How many of us could say, “The story of my life is full of chapters in which I did something I didn’t want to do, but I did it because I wanted to ensure that others saw me as important or valuable”?

And I’m not just talking about morally embarrassing stuff. Some of us in this room could tell stories of doing truly admirable things that were driven by the desire to be seen as valuable. Some of us in this room could tell stories of pursuing a career that was driven by the desire to be seen as valuable. Some of us in this room could tell stories of making major and minor purchases all throughout our lives, that was driven by a desire to be seen as validated. In the story you tell yourself about yourself, what makes you important? What makes you valuable?

In this series we’ve talked about two kingdoms. A kingdom is the system that you believe best describes how life really works. It’s what you believe is the authority. Everybody has given their allegiance to a kingdom. It doesn’t matter what our spiritual backgrounds and beliefs are, we all have a framework for describing how life works, and we all have an answer to the question, “Who is in charge?” We’ve used the term ‘old kingdom’ to describe any approach to life that is not under Jesus’ authority. We’ve used the term ‘new kingdom’ to describe transitioning our allegiance to Jesus and his authority. Whatever kingdom you live for, that kingdom comes with a set of values.

OLD KINGDOM VALUES VS. NEW KINGDOM VALUES

• Power vs. Service
• Comfort vs. Sacrifice
• Success vs. Generosity
• Recognition vs. Humility

Following Jesus doesn’t mean that we reject power, comfort, success, and recognition as bad things. They are not bad things. They are bad values. They are not worth our allegiance. And if we pursue those things in an attempt find our sense of importance and value—they will leave us bankrupt every time. Maybe not at first, but always in the end.

We are going to read through the events of a dinner party Jesus attended one weekend. As we do, I want us to watch for how these values play out in the attitudes and behaviors of people who were there that night.

LUKE 14:1-2 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.

Luke was a careful historian who wrote this account after conducting interviews with people who were there. He’s making sure we know what was going on. Jesus wasn’t invited to dinner because he was an honored guest. Jesus was invited to dinner as the target of a trap. Anyone ever been in a position where you felt set up? That was being done to Jesus on purpose. They were carefully watching him because they wanted him to do something they could use against him.

To understand the trap they set, we must understand their religious culture and mindset. Pharisees were men who had achieved influence in Israel because of their religious zeal. They truly believed they could get God to bless their country, maybe even get God to kick out the Roman occupiers, if they got enough of the people to join them in religious devotion. They were men who thought power was the way to make that happen. So, they imposed all kinds of rules in an attempt to control people.

One set of extra rules they made up related to the Sabbath. Sabbath was important for two reasons. The Sabbath was a way to express trust in God. “We are not going to trust most in our efforts. God, we trust your way and your provision.” Secondly, Sabbath was a way to receive the gift of rest from God. Sadly, these men polluted it. In their religious zeal, they made even acts of compassion illegal because those acts would be considered work.

So, one of the most prominent leaders of the Pharisees strategically placed a suffering man in front of Jesus at this Sabbath dinner, hoping Jesus would heal him. And if Jesus did, they could rebuke him. They could shame him. They could make a case against him. That sick man was not their friend. That sick man was not a guest. He was a pawn in their sick and twisted scheme.

You want to know what is tragically ironic? On that Sabbath day, this prominent Pharisee was actively working a plan to trap and shame Jesus, who is the Lord of the Sabbath. He was actively working against the only one who could give him true and abiding rest.

LUKE 14:3-6 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” And they had nothing to say.
Jesus was the master at asking questions. He didn’t just ask challenging questions. Jesus asked the kind of questions that forced people to seriously look at their deep-down beliefs and commitments. Jesus asked questions that confronted people in an approach that philosophers call presuppositionalism. A presupposition is a bedrock-level conviction we have that shapes and frames all other beliefs and aspects of our lives and worldview.

Everybody has presuppositions. What Jesus often did was ask questions that not only put a spotlight on those presuppositions, but also exposed how people lived in contradiction to those deep-down beliefs. *That’s why he was so much fun at parties.* When someone realizes that the structure of their life is in contradiction to their deep-down beliefs, they only have three options. There are just three options, and there are no others:

- Change your belief
- Change your behavior
- Embrace absurdity and despair

Tragically, these men were unwilling to change either their beliefs or their behavior. Let me ask you, should we do the same kind of thing Jesus did when we engage people? One of my heroes was Francis Schaeffer. Some people at Autumn Ridge got to meet him before he died, here in Rochester, in 1984. If you’re one of those people, I’m going to hold a grudge against you because I’m jealous. This is what Francis Schaeffer said.

*Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting. —Francis Schaeffer*

If he were here with us today, he would say something like this: “If we want people in our city to know Jesus and understand the gospel, we must use their language. We must climb into their way of thinking and engage with them from the inside out.” That’s been one of the goals of this message series. This is what I mean.

Either this life is all there is, or this life is not all there is. If you believe this (1), and you have structured your life as if human dignity and moral truth are real—you’re actually living like this (2). If you believe this (2), and you have structured your life around power, comfort, success, and recognition—you’re actually living like this (1). We only have three options:

- Change our belief
- Change our behavior
- Embrace absurdity and despair

Living in Jesus’ kingdom, under his authority, is the only coherent life possible. True and abiding rest is found by aligning our beliefs and our behavior with him because he is truth.

Now, what we just skipped over was that Jesus actually healed the guy!
LUKE 14:4b ...So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

Jesus grabbed him. Jesus took hold of him. He touched him. Those of you who are on the front line of giving care know all too well how important human touch is. You can’t do your job without touching people.

Some of you know my daughter recently started her freshman year of college. She is studying to be a nurse. Recently, I was talking with a nurse in our church. She asked me if Caroline is comfortable touching people because it’s an important part of the job. To which I said, “As the dad of a teenage daughter, I’ve been actively discouraging the touching of people.”

I’m not smart enough to understand why this is—there is something about human touch that communicates value. There is something about human touch that says, “I see you, and you are important to me.” In a culture that lacked medical clarity, it was natural and normal to withdraw from people with conditions like this man had. In a culture that mistakenly equated God’s judgment with sickness, it was natural and normal to withdraw from people with conditions like his. Who knows how long it had been since someone simply touched him in a way that communicated kindness, in way that affirmed his value. And in front of all those who saw him and used him as bait on a hook, Jesus reached out and embraced that man. Then he healed him.

Jesus SEES past every filter, façade, and false definition.

Jesus sees past every filter, façade, and false definition we put on ourselves. Jesus sees past every filter, façade, and false definition others put on us. He sees through it all and sees the unedited, the authentic us. He always and only sees the real you.

When this prominent pharisee and his fellow conspirators looked at this guy, they didn’t see him. Rather, they reduced him to a medical condition. They reduced him to something that was merely physical. They reduced him to nothing more than a function of their scheme. I wonder if there is anyone in here who can relate to that. Do you know what it’s like for someone else to reduce you to something that is incomplete, inaccurate, making you feel unimportant?

Anyone who has experienced a failure becoming public information knows exactly what I’m talking about. Anyone who has experienced being reduced to physical features knows what I’m talking about. Anyone who has ever experienced being reduced to their usability by others knows exactly what I’m talking about. Anyone who has ever experienced being reduced to a stereotype knows exactly what I’m talking about.

But when Jesus looked at him, he saw a man who reflected the image of God. When Jesus looked at him, he saw his own artwork on display. He saw an infinitely valuable person who was carrying a heavy burden.

Is it OK if I ask, do you ever wonder if Jesus really sees you? Do you ever wonder if you and the burden you carry goes unnoticed by him? Is there something that right now, you want Jesus to see and respond to? I’m going to sit quietly and give you a moment to just get honest with yourself and with him about whatever that is. Maybe you want to type a note to yourself on your phone. If you have pen and paper,
maybe you want to physically write it down. Is there a burden you carry you want Jesus to see, and you want Jesus to respond to with compassion?

I can’t help but wonder if this guy went along with their plan because being invited into something, by prominent people, gave him a hit from the drug of importance. It was counterfeit recognition, but it felt like recognition, nonetheless. Maybe he went along with it because the power dynamics made him feel like he couldn’t say ‘no.’ I don’t know the reason why, but this guy went along with the conspiracy to trap Jesus. This is my question:

QUESTION: Why was one conspirator given compassion and the others given condemnation?

One of the people at that dinner was a man named Peter. He was one of the disciples who was closest to Jesus. Some years later, he wrote a letter to Jesus-followers and told them this. And as he wrote these words, I wonder if he thought about that night.

1 PETER 5:5b ...In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

He was quoting the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

PROVERBS 3:34 He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.

Why was one conspirator given compassion but the others condemned? It’s because Jesus sees past every filter and façade.

God withholds grace, not because of our moral failures, but in response to our PRIDE. God gives grace, not because of our moral goodness, but in response to our HUMILITY.

On one hand, that is terrifying. And on the other hand, that is a source of tremendous comfort. If that doesn’t seem fair, you’re right. It’s not fair. And thank God for that. When they were little, I made a rule that my kids were not allowed to use the word fair. Because I knew they didn’t want what was fair. They wanted what was loving. Love and grace beat fair every time.

Humility doesn’t earn us compassion or favor from God. Rather, it’s a necessary precondition to receive his grace and compassion. Humility says, “I need it but don’t deserve it.” It’s not a way of earning. It’s an admission that grace and compassion could never be earned. Pride, on the other hand says, “I’m entitled to this. I deserve your favor.” God resists the proud, and he loves to generously give grace to the humble. The dinner that night was a festival of pride. It soaked through and stained everything. So, Jesus did this.

LUKE 14:8-11 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.
But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

What’s the immediate lesson?

The primary difference between HUMILITY and HUMILIATION is who chooses it.

When someone else chooses it for you, it’s only experienced as humiliation—it’s only viewed by others as humiliation. When you and I choose it, it’s humility. It’s actually admired by others. Humility trumps humiliation every time. Humility trumps pride every time.

If that’s the immediate lesson, here’s the eternal lesson. Everyone spends eternity somewhere. Everyone who approaches Jesus pridefully will be humiliated. Have you turned to Jesus, in humility, and asked him to give you grace?

LUKE 14:12-14 Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.”

Jesus did not play. Don’t trifle with him. He laid it out on the table. The reason you invited these guests is that you are looking for a payoff. This whole thing is structured to reinforce your addiction to the values of power, comfort, success, and recognition. One of my favorite Bible teachers was Warren Wiersbe. This is his commentary:

Jesus knew that the host had invited his guests for two reasons: (1) to pay them back because they had invited him to past feasts, or (2) to put them under his debt so that they would invite him to future feasts. Such hospitality was not an expression of love and grace but rather an evidence of pride and selfishness. He was “buying” recognition. –Warren Wiersbe

Jesus was not communicating that it’s wrong to invite friends for dinner. I’m having dinner with friends tonight. This was a forceful and idiomatic way to grab his attention. After grabbing his attention, Jesus pressed home something powerful.

“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.”

If you live your life like this life is all there is, these words will never make sense. If you live your life like this life is not all there is, this will fan the flames of generosity, hospitality, and compassion in you. As you consider that, I want to make a point that might feel like a bit of a left turn.

Go isn’t merely a DIRECTION; it’s a DISPOSITION.

People who follow Jesus live their lives defined by the word, “go.” Go into all the world. Go and make disciples. Go and make Jesus known. There are many here who have structured their lives around this word. It does mean that we actually, literally, pick up and move towards people. But it’s not just a
direction, it’s a disposition. It means that our hearts, our generosity, our compassion, our hospitality is turned toward those who could never pay us back. It means that our hearts are turned those who we would never want to pay us back. It includes going to great expense to invite in people so that we can be a blessing to them.

That’s the heartbeat behind this.

It’s going to take an all-church effort to blow the socks off this community with our generosity and hospitality. It’s our intent to be a blessing to the people of Rochester. Will you pull out your phone, go to Autumnridge.church, and sign up right now to participate in Ridgefest?

SERIES THESIS: Not all investments are EQUAL.

How are we investing our lives? How are we investing the time, resources and gifts that we have?

If we believe that this life is not all there is; if we structure our lives as though this life is not all there is, we are ready to discover the flood of joy that comes from joining Jesus on his campaign to give away kindness, compassion, grace, and blessing. That attracts people to him. The gospel message is seen as credible when people see the incredible kindness of Jesus’ followers.

BOTTOM LINE: Will you trade in what you cannot KEEP for what you cannot LOSE?

If that sounds familiar, it’s inspired by the words of a man who inspired me. Jim Elliot lost his life in his attempt to share the gospel message in Ecuador. He is remembered for saying, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

That is the kind of thinking that has framed and fueled this church’s compassion and generosity for decades. Why would doctors give up a lucrative practice to move around the globe, into obscure service, with no recognition? Why would people in this church quietly invest their time in serving others? Why would people gladly and faithfully give away their hard-earned money to fund this ministry? It’s a legacy of gospel-motivated generosity that drew Heather and me here.

On your journey of following Jesus, if it’s never been clear to you why people would take that step, it’s this (pointing to the screen). He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.