

Declining the Emperor's Offer

One of the favorite stories of the great Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard concerns an emperor touring his domain and receiving the accolades of his people.

When the entourage reached the market square of one village, his carriage was surrounded by cheering villagers and peasants. To the amazement of his neighbors, one brash young farmer stepped out of the crowd and approached the emperor's carriage.

"Give me a boon, Sire," he pleaded. "Grant me a special blessing."

The villagers were even more amazed at the emperor's reply: "Of course, my good man," he said. "Get into my carriage. Come with me. Live in my palace. Eat at my table. Marry my daughter. Be my son-in-law."

The young man exclaimed his delight. To be the emperor's son-in-law!

Then he thought about it. No more Saturday nights at the pub with his friends. No more dirty, comfortable peasant clothes. He'd have to get dressed up. He'd have to take a bath – maybe every week. He'd have to clean his fingernails. He'd have to learn the manners of the court.



The young man sadly shook his head and lowered his eyes. "No, Sire," he said. "I would be too uncomfortable. It would pull me out of my comfortable customs. It would be too hard to live up to. It would take too much of me."

After a pause, he added: "If you want to do something for me, give me a plot of ground, a farm, a house of my own. But to live in your palace, eat at your table, be your son-in-law – this is too much."

So he declined the emperor's offer.

You see, he wanted the emperor's blessing, but he wanted it on his own terms. He wanted to be blessed in doing what he wanted to do – not what the emperor wanted him to do.

He wanted to be blessed right where he was, under his own terms, not moved out of his comfortable customs, his own way of living.

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He wanted the blessing, but not the responsibility that went with it.

In Life Care and Century Park, we are called to be servant leaders – the kind Jesus talked about with His disciples. We cannot be successful in our mission if it's all about the money, all about the prestige of a position, all about a leisurely way of performing. The people we serve soon figure it out.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter