

## “Church and Chicken”

Luke 14:1-14

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Fried chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, sweet tea and chocolate pie. Do you remember Sunday lunches like that? I do. When I was growing up, I could count on two things happening every Sunday. First, I would go to church and then come home and enjoy a delicious meal of garden vegetables and roast beef or chicken. It was not uncommon to have a guest or two around the table, also, someone my parents invited after church to join us.

Luke 14:1-14 describes a similar setting. After attending the morning service at the temple on the Sabbath, Jesus was invited to lunch at a Pharisee’s home. I don’t know if Jesus was served fried chicken and green beans, but whatever he ate was served on a platter of suspicion and jealousy. For you see, he wasn’t invited by a host with honorable motives but evil intent. It appears that the goal of the host was to embarrass Jesus and trick him into breaking sacred Sabbath rules.

Of course, you have to ask why Jesus would even accept an invitation under those circumstances. Did he not realize his enemies would be waiting to set a trap for him? Probably, however, Jesus never passed up an opportunity to influence others. He went into this hostile atmosphere hoping to open their eyes so they could understand his identity and mission.

As he ate, he taught. That was not unusual. Meal time was a good time for teachers to impart wisdom. It was one reason they were invited to people’s homes.

What did Jesus teach that day while surrounded by his enemies? I think he shared with them three of the most important characteristics a person can possess, **compassion, humility and generosity**. Let’s examine Luke’s version of the table talk.

Luke begins by telling us of something that happened while the guests were gathering prior to the meal. Jesus healed a sick man.

There is something you need to know about this incident. In all likelihood, this sick man was used by the Pharisees to trick Jesus. He was not there to eat, but give Jesus indigestion.

It was abnormal for this man to be at this Pharisee’s home. He had a disease that made him a social outcast, for his illness was associated with sexual immorality. No doubt, the Pharisees planted him in front of Jesus to see if the Lord would break Jewish law and heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus did. He touched the man that others avoided and broke religious rules to do it.

His actions spoke volumes. With the gentle touch of his hand, Jesus taught them that **people are more important than rules**. Compassion puts the needs of people above man’s inhibitions and regulations. Touching the unlovely when they are hurting is a virtue that honors God and makes the world a better place.

I have never forgotten a story told by Daniel Sanchez, a minister in Dallas, Texas in 1963. On a dark and dreary December day, he conducted a funeral for a church member in a cemetery in Dallas. Upon leaving, he noticed a weeping lady standing over a freshly filled grave. He approached her and asked if he could do anything to help. She looked so shocked and asked again what he said. Then she responded by saying, “My

name is Mrs. Oswald. I am the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald. I know the country is mourning the loss of President Kennedy, but I, too, lost a son. My heart is also broken and no one has asked what they could do to help me.” That day, Daniel Sanchez said, “I put my arms around the most unlovable outcast in America and hugged her. I cried with her.”

That’s the kind of **compassion** Jesus exhibited that day at the Pharisee’s home. That’s the kind of **compassion** he wants us to have for others.

As the guests made their way to the dining room, Jesus observed what was happening and took advantage of the opportunity to teach them about **humility**. He noticed how the guests fed their egos before feeding their bodies. Each tried to secure a place of prominence and honor at the dining table.

That led Jesus to share a parable about where to sit at a wedding feast. He encouraged his listeners to choose seats in the back of the room and move toward the front at the insistence of the host. He concluded the parable with those memorable words, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted” Luke 14:11.

The Bible has a lot to say about the value of humility. **What is humility, anyway?** It is safe to say that it is the opposite of arrogance. Beyond that, as Austin O’Malley said, “It is pride in God.” It is the attitude of a person who says that he is a servant of God created for the purpose of serving Him and making His world a better place. A humble person realizes that God’s will and work are more important than his own feelings, desires, rights, privileges and ego and he lives one day at a time faithful to do the Lord’s work. An humble person strives to focus all the attention upon God, never upon himself. He has his ego under control.

Such an attitude is not easy to adopt or maintain in our society, but it is healthy. It will go a long way in enhancing our relationship with God and others.

It is also productive, for Jesus said that God will exalt an humble person far higher than he could have lifted himself.

Perhaps after everyone was seated, Jesus looked around and saw who was invited to this Sabbath lunch. That led him to teach them about **generosity**. For you see, he noticed no one there who was poor, lame, crippled or blind. The people gathered around the table were people who had done their host a favor or would do him one.

This led Jesus to teach them about the highest form of charity. **True generosity** is directed toward those who can do absolutely nothing for you in return. It is giving with no selfish interests or ulterior motives. It is giving with no hint of receiving anything in return. It is this kind of charity that God will richly reward in heaven.

Sunday lunch. Has a good ring to it, doesn’t it? As you go from this place in a few moments to feed your bodies, recall the words of Jesus in this passage and feed your spirits and minds, too. That would truly be a “full meal deal.”