

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval.

WORKING FOR FOOD

I was working as a janitor during my senior year of high school. The church had held a chicken barbecue & several of the trash bags, full of dirty plates & chicken scraps, ended up left in the furnace room by mistake. By the time I found them, & hauled them to the dumpster, the stench was rising to high heaven, & maggots were crawling everywhere.

“Do not work for food that spoils...” That is so common sense. Most of us are quite aware of how nasty food becomes when it rots. It’s said that one rotten apple spoils the barrel, but with this sermon text is Jesus trying to give advice on how to take care of the leftovers?

Sometimes people read the Bible from such a literal standpoint they fail to understand what Jesus is saying. Take, for example, the phrase ‘kick the bucket.’ It’s commonly used as a reference to death. It can also be a game that children play. The three words in it are almost never used literally to refer to an actual bucket being kicked.

How many times have you seen that in your lifetime? I’ll guess not more than three. It’s important to hear the entire conversation, & take into account the context in which the phrase is used. After you do that, then you determine which of the 3 meanings ‘kicked the bucket’ is meant to convey, & you interpret what the speaker is saying.

The same rules apply when we’re reading the Word of God. We should remember that the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to use all the different types of speech that we normally use. Figures of speech like metaphor, hyperbole & even sarcasm are just a few. Interpreting the Bible isn’t as simple as merely reading the words. It also involves knowing how people speak.

When Jesus says, “Do not work for food that spoils,” He directly contrasts it with, “but for food that endures to eternal life...” ‘Food that spoils’ is a figure of speech which, in this context, means everything from this world that isn’t going to make it to heaven. **PAUSE**

We could also understand that Jesus is speaking with hyperbole. He’s exaggerating His claim in order to clearly make a point, “Don’t work for food that spoils.” Hyperbole is a way of emphasizing an idea that people might not otherwise hear. It’s not that Jesus is ignorant of the text which says, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

It’s not that Jesus is ignorant of Genesis 3 where God said, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food...” No! Jesus means to say, ‘keep the main thing – the main thing!’ Working for food that spoils is not the main thing, though many people confuse it as such, & live their lives accordingly. Don’t get sidetracked like the man in the Gospel of Luke:

“‘I’ll say to myself, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink & be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This very night your soul is required of you.’” If you add up the # of hours you spend in a week, how many of them are working for food that spoils, & how many for food that endures to eternal life? **PAUSE**

Maybe we need to look at some examples, which qualify as food that spoils. I’m going to pick on television 1st because those statistics come easily. One study reported that American children & adolescents spend 22 to 28 hours per week watching television. It’s not exactly food, but it’s an activity that satisfies an appetite, & it’s not for eternal life.

Television in itself satisfies an appetite, but it’s also useful in creating appetite in other ways. Advertising & marketing came of age with the advent of television. Commercials have created a desire to be fed with all kinds of foods that spoil. As fast as things become obsolete today, the latest greatest gadget, car, home, music & clothing all can be upgraded within a year.

All of them are, figuratively speaking, food that spoils. Even spouses are things that spoil now, in the wandering eyes of their uncommitted ‘lovers.’ The book of Ephesians covers that:

“They’ve given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” Sexual pleasure outside of marriage is always food that spoils. “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” **PAUSE**

In the final analysis our sinful nature just doesn’t want what the Son of Man gives. Jesus commands us not to work for food that spoils, but we do it all the time. We can’t stop. The OT reading made it clear. The Israelites have been rescued from slavery in Egypt, yet even that isn’t good enough:

“If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat & ate all the food we wanted,” but it was food that spoils. We work around our homes, & we work at our jobs, yet so often we’re discouraged & disappointed because things don’t turn out as we plan. Our homes & jobs are food that spoil. Work “for food that endures to eternal life...”

God’s children know the fleeting nature of earthly blessings, even life itself, but throughout our time on earth we’ll struggle daily to stop ‘chasing’ earthly food. In the Gospel reading they asked Him, “‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.’”

No matter how often things go wrong, how little you accomplish of your plan, no matter if the car breaks, the roof leaks & the children are fighting, I’m talking if it weren’t for bad results there’d be no results at all, nothing tangible to show for it. Can you be satisfied with that struggle simply because you believe the promises of God?

Under those circumstances is it possible for you to be content just because you believe

in the One whom God has sent? **PAUSE**

The OT reading was about Israel's journey in the wilderness, 40 years of traveling in circles, all the time carried along by Christ. The manna they were given to eat pointed to the coming of Jesus, the Bread of Life. So at the end of today's Gospel reading Jesus declares:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, & he who believes in me will never be thirsty." In the wilderness struggles of your broken, sinful lives, can you then believe in Jesus? Can you believe enough so that you will actually engage the struggle, every day, to stop 'chasing' earthly food? **PAUSE**

The manna in the wilderness was given to living people to keep them alive. The genuine Bread of Life gives life to people who are dead so that they may live. That is the food God's children are to work for, remaining in the faith that God 1st created in us. That's why we sing of the Gospel reading:

"Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..." Our heavenly Creator has the food that endures to eternal life & we need it to survive. The main object of our lives ought to be earnest labor to remain believers. God's Spirit created the faith in us, but Satan, the world, & our own sinful nature, are constantly trying to starve it out.

In that struggle we get the physical earthly blessings confused with the spiritual heavenly ones. Jesus complained of the people, "You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." The miraculous feeding of the 5000 had occurred just a few verses before the Gospel reading of today, & food was not easy to come by in their lives.

It may sound like madness when Jesus calls us to take our mind off our worries, off of what we lack, off of what we've failed to achieve, & place our mind upon Christ. Martin Luther wrote, "To depend on God's Word, so that the heart is not terrified by sin & death, but

trusts & believes in God, is a more severe demand than any that humankind can dream up.” Many try believing in order to ‘get something’ out of Jesus. When they get nothing tangible, they give up, they drift off, they fade away.

That’s because even then, even believing in Christ, our sinful nature is still, always, working for food, working for things, working for this life. In that sense Christ never satisfies. Our sinful nature never gains enough. It must always have more. There are still large #'s of people who seek nothing more in Christianity than earthly well-being.

How’s your Christian walk been going lately? Has it been a bed of roses? If it hasn’t, are you weary, or disappointed, or discouraged? Have you been hard at work just trying to stay even, or get a little ahead of the game? Even if you’re trying to work for the food that endures to eternal life, it is weary & exhausting work. Our sinful nature is so strong.

The Gospel of John teaches that we need not feel guilty for leaning upon Christ. He knows our dilemma. He knows our failures. He knows our sins. Jesus knows how we are naturally preoccupied with the things of this world, with the food that spoils. So He came, not just to die, but to live in our place.

Already at the age of 12, He remained in the Temple after His parents left because He was to be about His Father’s business. However, He was doing that business in the place of each & every one of us. He kept the law perfectly. He did our Father’s will perfectly. He loved God & His neighbors perfectly.

He describes Himself as the Bread of life; another figure of speech meant to convey how basic Christ is to our very existence. The manna of the Wilderness pointed ahead to Jesus, & He not only worked for the food that endures to eternal life, He is that food. He creates the faith in us to believe, & He sustains that faith through His Word, & through Baptism & through Holy

Communion. He endured unto death on the cross in order that we don't have to. We suffer in this world, as did Christ, but our suffering is limited due to the price Jesus paid to bring us back into His family. Our sin has been washed away in His blood.

God is offering you the Bread of Life at this very moment. Take, & eat, & live. Being delivered from sin, & death & the devil is not a once & for all thing. It is a continuously ongoing one, & each of us needs strength for the journey. Amen.

Jesus, Your blood & righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Lord, I believe Your precious blood, which at the mercy seat of God pleads for the captives' liberty, was also shed in love for me. Amen.