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## EATING MORE FRUIT & VEGETABLES

One afternoon a lawyer was riding in his limousine when he saw two men along the roadside eating grass. Disturbed, he ordered his driver to stop so he could get out to investigate. He asked the men, ‘Why are you eating grass?’ ‘We don’t have money for food,’ the poor man replied, ‘We have nothing to eat but the grass.’

‘Well, then, come with me to my house & I’ll feed you,’ said the lawyer. ‘But sir, I have a wife & two children with me. They’re over there, under that tree.’ ‘Bring them along,’ the lawyer replied. Then turning to the other poor man he stated, ‘You come with us, too.’ The 2<sup>nd</sup> man, in a pitiful voice, said, ‘But sir, I also have a wife & six children with me!’

‘Bring them, as well,’ the lawyer answered. So they all climbed in the car, which was no easy task, even as large as the limousine was. On their way, one of the poor fellows turned to the lawyer & said, ‘Sir, you’re too kind. Thank you for taking all of us with you.’ The lawyer replied, ‘Glad to do it. You’ll love my place. The grass is almost a foot high.’ **PAUSE**

Eating more fruit & vegetables, I don’t know grass qualifies as either one, but at least it’s not that evil red meat. We hear a lot of advice today regarding what to eat, what’s healthy, what’s not. You can cut your risk of heart disease, or having a stroke. You can lower your blood pressure, or look like you’re 25 again. Your diet can even cure cancer.

This summer, Jan & I encountered a man selling tea made from bamboo leaves. He claimed it cured arthritis & diabetes, along with any # of other maladies. Did you know that bamboo is a member of the grass family? The lawyer replied, ‘You’ll love my place. The grass

is almost a foot high.’ Now, there’s good advice out there about what’s healthy to eat & what isn’t. There’s also a lot of quackery going around that’s passed off as the latest secret to be discovered that’ll keep you young & healthy forever. No doubt some people believe that if we can just find a cure for death God won’t be needed anymore.

In the reading from the book of Numbers, the Israelites are complaining that their diet isn’t healthy. They aren’t getting enough fruit & vegetables. Their strength is dried up, & there’s, “nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

The Israelites have been at Mt. Sinai for quite some time & they’re finally leaving for the Promised Land. Yet all that Moses & the Lord are hearing is grumbling & complaining. Yahweh is doing miraculous things for them yet all the people can do is weep & cry out, “Oh that we had meat to eat!” ***PAUSE***

The same thing happened after their astonishing rescue from slavery in the land of Egypt. They escape Pharaoh’s army by crossing the Red Sea safe & sound, through no effort of their own, but instead of thanking God for rescuing them their 1<sup>st</sup> recorded words are grumbling against Moses, “What shall we drink?”

It’s kind of like, “Lord, you rescued us from a couple hundred years of slavery, but that was three days ago. What have you done for us lately?” It’s not hard to sit back & smugly laugh at the impatience of the Israelites until God decides it’s our turn to wait. Then, what we thought was our ‘superior’ faith disappears like dust in the wind.

Waiting for the test results from the doctor, waiting to hear if the employer decided to hire you, or not, waiting for the letter that you’ve been accepted at your 1<sup>st</sup> choice of a college, even waiting to find out if the surgery went well, or if it didn’t, circumstances like those, & many others, tend to reveal the hypocrisy in us. It’s just so much easier to preach being patient

than it is to live it out when the course of our own life takes a turn we'd rather avoid. Patience is one of the fruits of God's Spirit living within us. The problem we have with it is – it doesn't really show itself except during the trials & testing of life in a sinfully broken world, & under those circumstances it's not exactly fun to be patient.

That usually involves some kind of pain & struggle. Think of Job, & the suffering of his life. Moses finds it difficult to be patient, & shares his disappointment with God, "I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

Moses realizes that his ability to live out the virtue of patience is wretchedly poor. And keep in mind that at this point, the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness hasn't even begun. Moses found the task Yahweh had given him to be oppressive.

If you're not a big fan of fruit & vegetables you may find today's diet suggestions to be oppressive, yet that's a trivial struggle compared to the entire scope of suffering that sin causes in this world. Submarine life had me eating powdered food, two, three & four months at a time when we were deployed. I learned not to get bored with eating the same thing day after day.

Throughout history, human beings, because of their sinful nature, have grown tired of eating the same spiritual diet every day. When adults first come to faith in Jesus Christ, the fire is evident, but eventually it smolders down to ashes & we lose the passionate nature of our love for Christ, & for what He's done to rescue us from our sins.

In young children, we often see a genuine & implicit trust in Jesus' love for them. By the time they grow into teenagers, & then young adults, that love for Jesus frequently gets lost in the transition. Bible study, personal devotions, group devotions, listening to the Scripture readings, even good sermons, in the end, they're always the same. They're always about Jesus.

Don't you have to admit that sometimes it just gets a little bit old? It's like trying to eat the same thing, for every meal, every day. "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, & the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, & there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

Do you realize what the manna represents? Yeah, Jesus! And the Israelites are sick & tired of Him. That's a frightening thought, isn't it, because you probably know by now where I'm going with this? Listen to these words from Matthew 7:

Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, & cast out demons in your name, & do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

The inditement is chilling. Can we stand eating the same monotonous spiritual food, day in & day out? Almost 2000 years ago, as the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy, he speaks of our time, as well as theirs, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions."

Then, focusing on that last word 'passions' we should remember last Sunday's sermon text, "What causes quarrels & what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Do you see how quickly sin spreads, & the precipitous end to which sin always leads?

We don't use the fruits of the Spirit we've been given. We don't practice self control & patience. Then our passions drive us to seek more interesting teaching. Our ears itch now & then. All this 'Jesus' talk gets a little old after awhile. Pretty soon we can no longer endure sound teaching, & then one day we hear Jesus saying, "I never knew you; depart from me..."

And our sinful nature thinks, "My struggles are the result of those other people who take

so much time to mature in their faith.” Can we stand to eat the same monotonous spiritual food, day in & day out? We can almost hear the devil saying, “Aren’t you tired of eating of that same tree of life all the time. Why not try the tree of the knowledge of good & evil just this once?”

The people of Israel were tired of the same old food, & Moses was tired of carrying God’s people all by himself, & it had been less than a year since they left Egypt. They had another 40 to go. The point of this text is that Moses could not bear the load by himself, so Yahweh empowers an additional 70 men of the elders of Israel to help him.

Like the Israelites in the OT reading, we at times desire what the Lord has not given us, so murmur against Him & His servants. And many of our sins are far more horrendous than simple grumbling & complaining.

God knows we cannot bear the load of our sins, by ourselves, so He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In the book of Numbers, the daily manna pictures Christ as the Bread of Life come down from heaven.

We too struggle with being tired of the same Jesus, the same old promises. Our ears also, are itching for a new teaching, because we do not appreciate the depth of our sins, or the punishment we deserve. As impatience whispers into our ears, so the Holy Spirit is moving in our heart to counter Satan’s latest move.

Speaking of patience, Isaiah wrote, “...but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run & not be weary; they shall walk & not faint.” The patience to wait for the Lord does not come from within us. It comes from without as the Holy Spirit works through God’s Word, & Baptism & Holy Communion.

Through those means of God’s mercy & grace He restores us day by day. He never abandons us, & is always yearning that we might see the danger & horror of our sins for the sole

purpose that upon doing so we turn back to Him. Only in Jesus do we find true comfort & safety. Everything & everyone else will fail. Martin Luther spoke regarding the book of Numbers: “Indeed this is the way it always goes, laws are quickly given, yet they meet nothing but hindrance; nothing goes as the Law demands.”

In other words, only Jesus saves. Nothing that we can do will ever stand the test of time. When we get tired of hearing the Word of God, when our ears begin to itch for some new teaching, Jesus will be there, ready & waiting for us when we fail & when we fall. The world, exciting as it may appear, will certainly abandon us in those times, even laugh at us.

But not our Savior, He waits for those times, patiently knowing that through our suffering & trials, He is the only answer. He is the only Savior. He knows all of our sins. He knows the pain & misery they cause. He died specifically for the purpose of rescuing us from them. When we fall, He gladly will pick us up & carry us home. Amen.

I come, O Savior to Thy table, for weak & weary is my soul; Thou Bread of Life, alone art able to satisfy & make me whole: Thy heart is filled with fervent yearning that sinners may salvation see who, Lord, to Thee in faith are turning; so I, a sinner, come to Thee. Lord, may Thy body & Thy blood be for my soul the highest good! Amen.