

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "Eating to Be Like God"

Text: 1 Peter 1:24-2:3

RGGJR/FBCCS/ 7-17-22 UNEDITED

- As we begin this morning let's review and put a few ideas together. The first idea is in **Genesis 3:4-6**. Don't worry, this review of ideas will take a big leap forward from there.
- ***4The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise (seemingly LIKE GOD is wise), she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.***
- *Can we say that the lying Serpent deceived Eve, ultimately, because it sounded good to her to be "like God?"*
- God created humans for a purpose. That purpose was to "be like God"—to be "God's image. The drive to fulfill that created purpose is a drive planted deep within us. It is as real and as strong as any physical drive we possess. We just don't sense it the same way we sense physical drives through our flesh.
- The created drive that is in us to be like God can actually be fulfilled by faith in God—with God's power. **Or**, we can **attempt** to fulfill the need that drive raises deep within us on our own—in our own power—with the willing help of the world the flesh and the devil.
- When we are fulfilling that created drive to be like God by reliance on God, we are becoming Holy. That is we are becoming shaped more and more like the unique perfectly sinless shape of God.
- When we are fulfilling that drive by our own power and designs we are becoming more and more corrupt being shaped by the mold of this broken world to be like it, in its sinfulness, instead of being like God in His holiness.

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- We have seen where the Apostle Peter, in his letter we call *1 Peter* has attempted to motivate his readers to be like God, God's way, rather than their own way. He said it like this:
- ***¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."***
- Peter said these words in a continuing--connected argument—a sort of sermon on paper (or actually likely on sheepskin).
- His argument offered the motivation of living in a way that would bring **salvation**. This was not salvation from eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire. His readers already had that and were eternally secure in everlasting life because they had believed in Jesus Christ for that eternal deliverance. They were irrevocably born again to a new life—a new hope—a renewed-purpose—etc. We have looked at all of those "new" and renewed or reawakened realities.
- Peter is talking about them **saving their lives** now as believers who are alive in a world that is not their home rather than wasting their lives. He has talked about what really matters. He has made it clear that the stuff of this earth—both literal gold and metaphorical gold doesn't matter in light of the invaluable life they can now live looking like God—that is if they choose not to waste it.
- As I said, Peter has written that the place to begin in this life that looks like God is the place where we treat one another in the church of Jesus with love. He doesn't mean the *appearance* of love but love God's way. This is loving each other in the way that Jesus—God—showed us rather than in some *theatrical* way that looks like love by the world's definition.

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- I used the idea of a **stage** last week. Our world has become rather expert at acting as if they love when this is not true love but only an appearance of love according to their definition.
- The metaphorical **stage** of which I spoke is the *venue*, the *avenue*, the *context* they have chosen to act out their false definition of love in a way they can be seen. It is an attempt to gain a feeling of *significance*. It is an attempt to be honored—to be glorified. It is an attempt, in the end, *to be like God* who truly deserves to be glorified.
- They don't know it and would likely never admit it but it is the way they are trying to fulfill the created purpose, that drive within them, to be like God. It is not a way of Holiness relying on God but a way of corruption relying on self.
- None of you, who heard me talk about this "stage" last week, likely were confused or maybe disagreed with the "stage" picture until I made the point that we have allowed and even promoted this "stage" way of gaining significance inside the church of Jesus.
- It has become, for many, not just acceptable but the "**NORMAL**" way the church should be. It has often become part of a false definition of loving one another in the church.
- It works like this... *As a Christian, I choose my "churchy" stage upon which to perform my "churchy acts." This stage could be just attending the church on Sunday or participating in some other segment of the church or being part of some other mission of the church or doing some good work the church in our particular context counts as good and valuable. Then in my power and by my chosen designs I act my chosen ways in front of you to be affirmed by you.*
- *If you will not affirm my good churchiness the way I present it, you are not loving me as a Christian should. If a church does not affirm me, as I have chosen to be affirmed, it is not a loving church.*

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- *I will then choose to go elsewhere to find my stage in order to find the affirmation I deserve and am owed by my definition of love.*
- As I have said now, I conclude that this "stage-affirmation," designed by me to make me feel valuable—meant to make me feel like I am *like God*, has often infected the thinking of the church in our culture.
- If the church today cannot be honest about this, then the church today will end up *wasting our lives rather than saving them*.
- The *stage-performance* for significance which does not produce loving one another "*sincerely and deeply from the heart*" as Peter put it will waste your life, my life and the life of FBC.
- It can feel like it is the way to fulfill our purpose to be like God but that is as big a deception as the one used by a serpent in **Genesis 3**.
- So, still tying ideas together this morning, Peter has reminded the readers, and us, that the stuff of this world, including all our different fleshly stages we create for feeling significant—all of it is temporary. It is like grass burned by sunshine—here and gone.
- However, what God says to do and how to do it in His **Word** is the opposite—something that lasts eternally. It truly fulfills our created purpose and gives our lives significance—eternal significance.
- So, what does the **Word** of God tell us about the first step Peter mentions in true holiness *together*—that is, about how to love truly and not rather using the church as a stage for applause?
- This is where we pick up today in **1 Peter 1:24** and following. Where are we headed? We are ultimately headed to Peter's picture of the one, true "*holy stage*" and the only one who ought to be treading upon it alone in the spotlight.
- Please look at 1 Peter 1:24-2:3. **READ 1 Peter 1:24-2:3**

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- If I am going to save my life rather than waste it even while feeling like I am saving its significance, Peter says, I must let God define reality. He emphasizes, "***This is the word that was preached to you.***"
- I must assume Peter believes that the men preaching this Word of God have been faithful and honest with it. He believes *he* has been faithful.
- One way for him to validate this was to consider the life of the one who was preaching God's Word checking for consistency and honesty.
- Of course, you sort of have to be able to know that person, at least a little bit, or you can't do this. If you don't know them, you can only check their image and they may be performing on their own stage.
- Another way, that shows up near the end in Peter's second letter is to correlate this with other preaching of the Word. He makes the point that what he is writing there agrees with what the Apostle Paul has always written.
- Then, in a line that gives me great relief, he points out this is true even if some of what Paul preaches as the Word of God is difficult to understand for some.
- Another way, I suppose Peter might say today, is that we could read the Word of God ourselves and think about what it is actually saying.
- The point is the truth of God will be found in the Word of God. Often that Word will be "preached." This was especially true back then since some of the Bible was just being written to read. Even at that, many people still couldn't read so they had to have someone preach it for them to hear it.
- ***For us***, please be diligent to make sure as you can that you are hearing the Word of God preached and not just something appealing

and or significance providing made up by someone else who may be on their own unbiblical *stage* seeking significance the wrong way.

- When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, he noted many ways that men and women in the church were creating their own stages to find significance by meaningless approval in the church.
- God's Word says loving one another is a basic place to start in saving our lives. As we heard a bit ago, this love is not a show love but a sincere and deep love from the heart.
- If we are going to love that way the Word of God says that, first, in our relationships, we must put aside "**malice**" toward each other. The Greek word sounds a bit like *kaka*. Maybe that will help some of you remember malice is bad.
- *Malice* is all about our feelings. It is about our *hateful* feelings. It is about *hateful* feelings that are so strong they make us want to see harm come to someone in the body.
- Maybe they have hurt us and it feels like they deserve bad things happening to them. Maybe they have hurt us and so they deserve being treated with a spirit of hatefulness. However, maybe they just haven't affirmed us in the way we want to be affirmed on our stage so that makes them evil people who have done evil unloving things to us.
- *Malice* is a feeling and Peter says get rid of **all** of it if you want to be on this life-saving journey together in Jesus' church.
- Next, **deceit** here is pretty much our same idea of deceit. It is being deceptive or false in a relationship. If you have to deceive and tell lies in a church relationship, that is likely part of a stage you are on and an act you are performing for significance rather than love.

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- Of course, **hypocrisy**, wearing a mask and pretending to be something you are not is a common form of deceit. We get so angry with people of the world today in their hypocrisy.
- On their stage they push their virtue signaling to the extreme but in private their hypocrisy shows. Think of how angry it made people feel when a politician demanded everyone wear masks at all times and social distance at all times and then were photographed not following their own virtuous proclamations. A Prime Minister was just booted out mainly because of the uproar over this sort of hypocrisy.
- Living life, acting on a stage to gain significance is fertile ground for fomenting a life of *hypocrisy*. It is a big part of the script to maintain the illusion. And then, one can never really come down from the stage and be something real so one fakes it all the time unless they think they are not seen.
- This fakeness will not work in loving one another in God's Word's way of loving that saves rather than wastes our lives.
- Then, sometimes, on our stages we can't hide it. If someone else is getting the affirmation on their stage, we want it instead of them. We **envy** what they are getting. **Please love me not them!** This is one of the most frequent issues that divides churches and creates divisions that compete for affirmation and unreal love rather than being the body of Christ together.
- And, when the other person is winning the praise and the glory—the affirmation and the love, what better way to turn the tide of the battle for affirmation so that we get it, than to **slander** the other person from our own stage of affirmation and significance.
- This happens to all of us. We all can be targets for slander in Jesus' church. However, God's Word emphasizes how often this is the

tactic used against leaders. *Leaders seem to have the stage I want to have to get affirmed in my god-like-ness. How can I get the attention off of them and on to me?*

- *Ah, I'll just tell people the leader is a bad person who doesn't love me. It's hard disprove this slander. It's nearly impossible to do that when many people around are also acting on their self-created stages and there is *malice, deceit, envy, hypocrisy* and *slander* instead of *God's Word-based love* as a context for truth flourish.*
- I suspect Peter already had an image in mind as he listed these life-wasting ways of relating in the church.
- In verse 2 he makes the image explicit. It is as if some people in Jesus' church are sustaining themselves in their relationships with one another by—feeding themselves—that is, by heartily sucking these things—*feelings of malice—deceptive actions—hypocrisy—envy—and slandering*. These non-loving things have become what nourishes their false life in the church. ***This meal makes it a wasted life!!***
- Rather, they ought to be nourished by what? Yes, there it is again—not by good feelings, not by feelings of personal affirmation, not by worldly defined love of acceptance no matter what—but rather they ought to be nourished by *God's Word*.
- Funny how that emphasis on *God's Word* keeps showing itself in this context of loving relationships. Why? I remind you again it is because we all like the affirming feeling of being loved in ways we want to be loved by each other.
- The problem is, we can be taught the wrong way to love by the world and the church. We can be loving and receiving in ways that are actually part of the self-created scripts we are acting out on our

chosen stages. This is not REAL love. We need God to define that for us. ***We need God's Word on love and we have it in the Scriptures.***

- There is a reason this world that is passing away most often confuses *love with a feeling*. True love is not a feeling. It may produce feelings but it is not those feelings. Feelings come and go ***but the Word of the Lord stands forever***. Where have I heard something like that before? Oh, up above in the last verses of chapter one.
- The picture for Peter is that of a ***newborn baby*** who is hungry most all the time and seems to think it will die of starvation that very moment if not instantly fed mother's milk.
- Doesn't it seem like every time a newborn senses hunger they immediately go from DECON 1 to DEFCON 5—the sirens blare "Red Alert! Red Alert!.
- The point is not that the readers are newborns but that they ought to *seek* the word of God just as desperately as a newborn cries out for milk.
- The metaphor continues. Why should they be this desperate for the Word of God? Because even if postmodern de-constructors of texts say all texts are bad and oppressive in their power and even if the Millennial and Gen Z generations in general have decided they will live by their experiences—even if all that freedom to define what is real and matters for ourselves, feels good, it will starve a person to death. It will kill life rather than grow life.
- I make no apologies in a day when fewer and fewer people think they need the authority of the Word of God for their lives to declare that: without feeding on the Word you will not grow. You will starve!
- You may be able to take bits of what you already know from the Word and validate that by what you *feel* about the Word and incorporate these into your stage act for affirmation in the church.

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However, ultimately, without continued and continuous feeding on the Word, you will starve to death no matter how much you act that you are fine.

- Peter agrees with me. He says here that it is God's Word that feeds us so we can grow up in our salvation. We are not growing up to earn eternal life. No! God's Word grows us up so we don't waste our life now but we save it by growing it through God's Word.
- It is hard for person to get much real eating done when they are fully occupied acting for significance by playing a self-written role on a stage. In this situation, it is much easier to find certainty in feelings.
- It is also hard for a church to get much real eating done if that is the focus of their ministry—that is, providing people with a feeling of affirmation and significance—making people feel loved in ways that don't actually align with the Word of God so that they aren't love.
- ***People and churches are starving to death today dancing away on their stages because they won't stop to eat the Word but rather just snack on feelings they have about the Word that fit their script.***
- Peter suggests that they have forgotten how good this spiritual life sustaining and growing Word of God actually tastes when you suck on it for sustenance.
- For the years I have left in my life and for as much influence as I might have left in FBC, I will keep trying to offer the Word of God as the real meal.
- If you are dancing on the stage for affirmation and haven't eaten a good meal lately may I suggest a favorite --the Word of God.
- All of this "stage" imagery will hopefully payoff next week, Lord willing, when we see who alone belongs on *stage* and how this connects with our deep, unquenchable longing to be there ourselves.