

Crave Meat!

A sermon based on Hebrews 5:11-6:3 – ***“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹² In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.***

6 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And God permitting, we will do so.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have a fun little challenge/exercise for all of you here this morning. You know when you go to the eye doctor, and you need a new contact lens or glasses prescription, so the doctor puts this huge instrument with different powered lenses over your eyes? And, through a process of switching between two different powers and asking, “1 or 2,” “3 or 4,” and so on, the doctor is able to determine the best prescription for you and your eyes.

Well, instead of the eye doctor, I want you to imagine you’re at a fancy restaurant. You sit down. Your waitress comes over. She hands you a menu. It’s full of pictures of all your options. You take a gander.

Where are your eyes going? What would you like better? What makes you salivate? (1) Filet mignon in a brown butter sauce with garlic and herb smashed potatoes (2) or a cold glass of milk?

(1) Rack of lamb covered in a demi glaze with roasted veggies or (2) a cold glass of frothy milk?

(1) Parmesan and potato encrusted halibut or (2) a big, cold glass of frothy milk?

(1) Avocado toast or (2) a heaping glass of almond milk (I honestly don’t know what would be appealing to the vegetarian, sorry!)?

Why always the first option? Why wouldn’t milk be your first choice? I mean, milk tastes good. Milk is chock full of vitamins and nutrients. And, it’s the base for two of the best foods ever – cheese and ice cream! So, milk is important, right? It has a place.

Especially as an infant. Babies need milk, whether it’s formula or breast milk. But sooner or later, you grow up. Your body matures. You decide – or your body instinctively understands – you need more than milk. You need something of substance. You need meat...or fish...or tofu. You need the protein. Your body needs that protein.

You need something more than just milk. And, as we see in our verses from Hebrews this morning, we need more than just “milk” when it comes to our faith in Jesus, too.

What do you think that milk is? The writer uses the phrase “*elementary truths of God’s Word.*” What would those be? The beginning of chapter 6 gives us a good foundation, “*repentance...faith in God...baptism...the laying on of hands (likely pointing to commissioning others to go out and be witnesses for Jesus)...the resurrection of the dead...eternal judgment.*” All of those seem to be more of the fundamental teachings of God’s Word. All of those are basic, biblical truths even some of our youngest children already know...and know well.

And that’s where the audience in the book of Hebrews was stuck...at the basics. Was that a good thing? What did the writer have to say? “*You are slow to learn,*” which was a nice way of saying, “You’ve become spiritually sluggish and mentally lazy.” In the Greek, the phrase “slow to learn” means “numbed” or “dulled.” Ears that once had been eager to hear were now dulled and unable to receive deep truths.

They were stuck at the elementary truths, which was important for them to have nailed down, yes, but they weren’t maturing in their faith in Jesus. They weren’t progressing in their spiritual lives. They were not becoming Christians of sound judgment and discernment. They were not, it says, “*acquainted with the teaching about righteousness,*” which is another way of saying they weren’t able to distinguish good from evil.

They were spiritual infants. Right, because discerning between right and wrong, think about it, that’s something neither physical nor spiritual infants can do.

And as much as the writer wanted to get to the meat...to the meatier and more mature teachings of God’s Word, he couldn’t. He had to keep leading these Christians to the fundamental teachings of God’s Word like the baby who is stuck with the bottle...where they really should have weaned off.

Where are you at? When it comes to you and your faith in Jesus and your relationship with God’s Word, would you consider yourself to still be at the infant stage or are you more mature? Are you still attached to the bottle, or are you craving meat?

Well, what does spiritual infancy look like here, today? What do you think? I’ll tell you what it’s not. It’s not based on age or how long you’ve been a member here. So, then, what is it?

I think the best gauge of where you’re at is this (look at the screen). Do you know what this is? Yeah, it’s our mission statement, and it’s not just the fabric of our church family here; it ought to be the very fabric of all of us as Christians. A spiritually mature Christian is one who continually gathering, growing, going, and glowing, while an infant is one who’s not.

And, while the going and glowing are both important aspects of our faith lives, they’re more of the response to spiritual maturity. So, I really want to focus on the “gather” and “grow” aspects this morning. Because they refer to two of the most important ways you grow and mature as a believer...through gathering (ie, worship) and growing (ie, Bible class). That’s there the meat is. That’s where you get to be taken from the basics of “yeah, I know about sin, grace, faith, and good works” to the real substance of God’s Word.

Do you crave it?

Breast crawl – have you ever heard of it? It’s the instinct of newborns to move towards the nipple and attach to it for breastfeeding all by themselves. Every newborn, when placed on their mother's

abdomen, soon after birth, has the ability to find their mother's breast all on their own and to decide when to take the first breastfeed.

In humans, when that happens, the movements start, on average, 12 to 44 minutes after birth, followed by spontaneous nursing at 27 to 71 minutes after birth. It's incredible. It's their instinct. They crave milk.

And, I know we're talking about the meat of God's Word, so maybe the better picture would be like in the cartoons, the smell of bacon on the griddle or a huge steak on the grill makes you flutter up into the sky and it draws you in.

Does it? Do you crave it? Before you answer that for yourself, consider these numbers. Our average worship attendance is about mid to low 50's, which, when we're talking a membership of about 75, that's pretty good. When you factor in children and worship guests, we're hovering about 50% of our church family in worship...still not too bad, although plenty of room for improvement. But then you look at numbers like low 40's for average worship this summer and at our last Elders meeting, it was noted about a third of our membership would fall under the category of delinquents. That's a little more alarming. Is that craving God's Word?

Or, for Bible class, where I would contend is where you're really going to get into the meat of God's Word...for Bible class, average attendance last year – across our different Bible class offerings – was less than 15.

What do all those numbers say? Craving meat, having that desire and then acting on that desire to get deeper into God's Word and to do it regularly...by and large, that's not our instinct.

Today, I started introducing these "Branches Groups." And, as much as I encourage and challenge you to join one of these Branches Groups, I'm not going to get 100% buy-in and attendance. I'm not even going to get 100% attendance at these informational presentations, where I can at least have the chance to explain why this will be such a blessings and why you need this.

And can I be honest? I look at all that, and it stinks. It just does.

To, in a sense say, "God, I already know the basics of sin and grace. I'm good for life. I'll tell everyone I have a strong faith in you when I'm not regularly feeding it, or when I don't care to grow and mature in my faith," it stinks. It stinks for you.

Because there is no such thing as standing still in Christianity. Whether you're moving forward, maturing, growing stronger or falling away depends on your connection with God's Word. God's deep truths are not revealed to casual, careless readers but to the careful, constant one.

And not just that, but here's the real danger...not only of staying away from God's Word but even with being content to remain in spiritual infancy. Spiritually immature believers can only handle the simplest spiritual truths. Again, such believers are **"not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness,"** knowing little about Christian truth and, as a result, having a hard time distinguishing between right and wrong. Paul writes about that very real and serious risk in Ephesians 4:14 as he warns about **"infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."**

So, without meat, you're running the risk of falling prey to the enticing deceptions of this sinful world. Without meat, you're running the risk of falling away.

I hope you take this for what it is...I don't want to belittle those who are infants in their faith or disparage the fundamental truths of God's Word. There will always be babies and adults in the faith, and God's Word contains both milk for the babies and meat for the adults.

But, at the same time, babies are not to remain babies nor is adulthood to revert back to childhood. Growth is necessary for the believer (God even commands it, **"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18**).

So, how do we move forward? It starts with milk. I know, I told you to move on from milk, but the truth is, even though you might choose the steak over the glass of milk, you still need the milk. The same is true with God's Word. In fact, 1 Peter (2:2) says, **"Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk."** Crave that basic message of how Jesus lived and died and rose for you.

Why?

This is the only message that saves. It's the only message that saves. The gospel – the message of Christ crucified for you, is that sweet-sound that saved wretches like you and me. His disciples even admitted, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life" (John 6:68)**.

This is the only message that forgives. This is where we come and find true release from sin and the guilt and shame it piles on us. How beautiful it is when God's Word reminds us, **"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12)**.

This is the only message that motivates. **"Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14)**, the Bible shares with us. Why else would we go to church, crack open the Bible...live in a way that pleases God? Simply because the message of Jesus' love motivates us as it even shows us the God-pleasing way to live.

"It's the one thing needed" (Luke 10:42), Jesus once told Martha. It is. But still, growth as a believer is necessary, so that means we need more than just milk. We need more than just a cursory knowledge of sin and grace. Even the writer to the Hebrews here, his desire was not to abandon the ABCs about Christ but to build on them. And for that, we need meat.

So, what's the solution? Come back to the table.

Make worship – regular worship – a priority. Because, you still need milk, right. That's why I push worship. What you often hear every Sunday here is, at its heart, the basic message of law and gospel. It's more on the basic side because you have such a diverse audience, mature and not-as-mature Christians alike.

But you're selling yourself short if you think that's enough. I've said in the past I think of this like a heaping plate of God's grace here, which we need. Maybe it's better said as being a large glass of milk...delicious, needed, but it's not enough.

No, if you want real meat – mature teachings – you have to extend beyond that. And the meat is in Bible classes (like our new Branches Groups) and personal Bible study (not just reading). There you gain an even more intimate knowledge of what's on God's mind. There you gain an even greater ability to

discern – to truly discern – between the world’s lies and temptations and what God really wants for his children. The meat gives you the strength to say no to that ungodliness.

Regardless of how hectic our life is or how fast each day flies by, we need to find regular opportunity for serious Bible study. We want to, knowing that those who do will find milk giving way to meat and childhood to adulthood.

So this new school year, here’s my challenge to you.

1) Crave meat. If regular worship attendance is a struggle, work on a way to make it a greater priority. And then, whether that’s a struggle for you or not, take a chance on one of our different Bible classes, like Branches Group – our new small group Bible studies. Come hungry.

2) Pass along the bottle. You know the basics of God’s Word; why not gift that glass of milk to someone else – a friend, neighbor, relative, co-worker. Invite them to our Back to the Basics of the Bible Class. Invite them to worship. Invite them to the table...the feast of God’s Word. And, Lord-willing, watch that Word take root.

And, unlike earlier, this isn’t a 1 or 2. It’s 1 and 2. It’s time to get serious. It’s time to get serious about God’s Word. It’s time to get serious about growing and maturing in God’s Word. It’s time to get serious about passing along God’s Word. You can do it! God grant you the willingness, the ability, the confidence, and the joy to do it...to crave meat...and share. Amen!

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