



Empowering People to Change the World

Eat the Book Part II

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Ps 119 reading it this week...

Revelation 10:8-10

*Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he *said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."* 10 I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.*

- Last week, we looked at this metaphor of “eating the book.”
- The Greek in our passage for “book” is *biblion*, the Bible.
- We have this interesting break in the Great Tribulation Action, a kind of parenthesis, with this Apocalyptic Strong Angel, taking the cosmos for his pulpit, one foot planted in the ocean and the other on land, holding the Bible in his hand.
- This angel tells him to eat the book, and not look at it, study it, or even read it, but rather to eat it.
- What an interesting metaphor—eat this book! Eat the Bible!
- “Eat this book.” God’s saying:
 - Get this book into your gut, into your intestines.
 - Get this book into your spiritual bloodstream.
 - Get this book into the sinews of your spiritual body.
 - Chew on it.
 - Swallow it.
 - Chew it, swallow it so that it metabolizes into your life.
- This just might be the most powerful metaphor in all of Scripture as to how we get the Book, the Scriptures into our life.

- Ezekiel and Jeremiah, both in pressure packed, difficult situations, are told to eat the Book also.
- So HOW do we eat the Book—that’s my topic today—HOW do we get the Book into our system, into our body, into our heart?

Ex. A marathon runner has to maintain a certain diet to run the long distances required. The diet of a marathon runner, especially just before running the 26 mile race.

- Every training manual will tell that a marathon runner’s diet is just as important as the training.
- Proteins, fats and carbohydrates are all very important, but for the distance runner, carbs should be the emphasis and the body’s preferred source of energy.

Hebrews 12 *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

- The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon and we must be consuming God’s Word in order to have the spiritual proteins, vitamins, and carbs that we need to finish the race of life.
- We need a steady, consistent, robust diet of God’s Word being consumed into our eyes and ears and metabolized into our thinking, our speaking, our faith, legs and arms.

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

- The word for active is “energeo” and so God’s Word gives us energy and life.
- That’s the very nature of God’s Word to metabolize energy into our life for faith, hope, and love.

How do we Eat God's Word?

I want to teach today on the “forbidding discipline” as our ancestors called it in the most demanding of schools, the school of the Holy Spirit, established by Jesus when he told the disciples, *“When the Holy Spirit comes, he will guide you into all the truth...He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”* (John 16:13-15)

- The Latin phrase is “lectio divina.” Developed by a 12th century monk, Guigo.
- He writes, almost like he just read Revelation 10, in explaining it: “Reading, as it were, puts the food into our mouths, meditation chews it and breaks it down, prayer obtains the flavor of it, and contemplation is the very sweetness which makes us glad and refreshes us.”
- The Lectio Divina is a way, an ancient but powerful method for the Word becoming flesh within us:
 - John said of Jesus, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” But, in a true sense, this is what The Word does in our life too.
 - We become the incarnation of God's Word, as we eat the Word, it becomes us. The Word of God becomes our flesh. We begin to embody the Word.
 - The Word becomes flesh in us. We are not just reading the Word. We are metabolizing the Word into us and we are becoming the word to the world.

Lectio Divina comprises 4 elements:

1. Lectio—we read the text
2. Meditatio—we meditate the text
3. Oratio—we pray the text
4. Contemplatio—we live the text

Lectio

- Reading the text. Reading in order to hear.
- Jesus’s lead-off parable in each of the first three gospels emphasize that the centrality of the Word of God in our lives is not about reading but about listening.
- “Let everyone who has ears to hear listen!”
- John, in the first three chapters of Revelation: “Let anyone who has an ear to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”
- Listening is what we do when someone is speaking to us. Reading is listening to the author.
 - We are not just reading words on a page but listening for God’s voice as we read.
 - When we read the Bible, we are being drawn into a context, a drama, and dilemma and so we must have “ears to hear.”
 - Jesus said that the Word of God is like a seed, if you recall, it was four kinds of seed:

Luke 8:11-15

“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. 12 Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”

- Lectio is reading to hear—having ears to hear!
- So, first we read the text

Meditatio

- We meditate the text.
- As I shared last week, meditation in the Hebrew, *Hagah*, has the meaning of devouring, gnawing on, consuming, more than the more tame word we have in English that implies sitting in a park or a study thinking on a phrase.
- Meditation is spiritual reading that is taking in the context of the author—the situation, the struggle, the purpose for what he wrote.
- The Scriptures are the revelation of a personal, relational, incarnational God to actual communities of men and women with names in history. Real writers who were addressing real problems.
- The problem with the numbering of chapters and verses in the Bible is that we've made the Bible into ... little oracles that we just pick and choose from. Kind of like Christian fortune cookies.
- But meditation means letting the images, the characters, and the revelation penetrate our understanding.
- We read about Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and Paul, and we dwell on it, think about it by understanding why they said that, what was the context. Sanctified imagination. Inspired imagination.
- I like Warren Wiersbe's distinction between fancy and imagination: "Fancy wrote 'Mary had a little lamb' but inspired imagination wrote, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' Fancy creates a new world for you; imagination gives you insight into the old world."
- We meditate to become empathetic with the text. We are not just studying the text in a cold detached way, but entering in and with imagination, curiosity, and a teachable spirit.
- G.K. Chesterton's fictional Father Brown shows us how it's done. Father Brown is a detective in a Priest's clothing. Posing as a priest he solves complex criminal cases. One night he's talking with a group

of friends around a late-night fireplace in the mountains of Spain. A friend asks him the secret to his many successes in solving crimes. He says, "You see, it was I who killed all those people." Everyone gasps. Then he continues, "I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer himself, of course, I knew who he was."

So eating the book involves

1. Reading the text, Lectio.
2. Secondly, we think about it, meditate upon it, Meditatio.
3. And now, thirdly ...

Oratio

- There is prayer. As P.T. Forsyth wrote, "Bible searching and searching prayer go hand in hand. What we receive from God in the Book's message we return to Him with prayer."
- This is where many of us miss it. We read the text, we study it, we meditate on it, but then, we don't pray it into our life.
- Prayer ranges from "sighs to deep for words" to Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- This is where we lay out before the Lord what we've meditated upon and cry out to God to change us, transform us, asking Him to change our speech, change our thinking, change our habits.
- The Word becoming flesh!
- We are most ourselves when we pray, but how do we know how to pray?
- Eugene Peterson writes, "The Scriptures, read and prayed, are our primary and normative access to God as he reveals himself to us."

The Scriptures are our listening post for learning the language of the soul, the ways God speaks to us; they also provide the vocabulary that is appropriate for us as we in our turn speak to God.”

- God’s prayer book are the Psalms. Athanasius said it best, “Most Scriptures speak to us; the Psalms speak for us.”
 - They don’t just say, “Yes, God I agree.” “Thank you, Lord.”
 - No, they accuse, lament, praise, weep, and worship God.
 - Real heart felt agony are found in the Psalms.
- Prayer is engaging God. Prayer is contending. It’s not nice and tidy.
- Prayer is contending with agony over something. Praying the Bible is not all platitudes and praise. Psalms shows us the language of praying the Scriptures.
- Martin Luther said of the Psalms, “If you want to see the holy Christian church painted in glowing colors and in a form which is really alive, and if you want this to be done in a miniature, you must get hold of the Psalms, and there you will have in your possession a fine, clear, pure mirror which will show you what Christianity really is—you will find yourself in it and the true *gnothi seauton* (know thyself), and God himself and all his creatures too.”
- It’s important to understand that Jesus is praying for you right now. Prayer is a dialogue with Him—sharing your heart but also listening for His voice to you. It’s a conversation.
- We pray what we read, working it into our heart, into our arms and legs. We pray the Word into our love, our heart, our faith muscles, our hope, our ligaments.

Fourthly, Contemplatio

- It’s not enough to read it, meditate upon it, and pray it, now we must live it.
- Contemplatio means living the read/meditated/prayed text in our everyday life.

- For 1500 years of Christian history, we have assigned the word “contemplation” to the monks and nuns who have chosen poverty and simplicity and live in convents, secluded from the world.
- I have learned much from these great saints: like Teresa of Avila, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, and even modern monks like Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen.
- But the definition of the word from the Oxford English Dictionary for contemplation is different from our view.
 - o *Templum*, temple, a place for observation, marked out by and observing the context.
 - o Reflecting on our human atmosphere, a divine presence.
 - o Contemplations means submitting to the biblical revelation.
 - o Taking it in and living it out.
 - o It has nothing to do with seclusion or being withdrawn.
 - o It’s living out Christ as a mother, mechanic, or IT programmer.
- Contemplation means living what we read, nothing more of less than that.
- Listen: Lectio Divina is the organic union between what we read (Lectio) and how we live (contemplation).
- It is what we read earlier in Luke 8:
But the seed [of the Word] in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Eating God’s Word:

1. We Lectio. We read it.
2. We Meditatio. We meditate on it.
3. We Oratio. We pray it.
4. Finally, we Contemplatio. We live it.

It's all about living the text of Jesus in our lives. It's all about the Word becoming flesh in us!