

**Milk and Meat Sermon**  
**John Monday**

**January 25, 2017**

How many of you remember Admiral James Stockdale? Admiral Stockdale ran for Vice President in 1992 as Ross Perot's running mate, and during his VP debate, he famously stood up with a confused expression and asked, "Who am I and why am I here?" I thought that would be a good place for us to start.

In Andy's office there's a white board, and across the top of the white board are all the dates for the coming Sabbaths. It usually stretches out about 7 or 8 months. So, if a staff member knows they won't be here on a given week, especially one of our speakers, they write their name under that date and place a line through it. I took some pictures of the whiteboard to help you understand how we got here today.

Here's the white board about six months ago:

(Show slide #1)

Four months ago

(Show slide #2)

Three months ago

(Show slide #3)

Two months ago

(Show slide #4)

One month ago

(Show slide #5)

Three weeks ago

(Show slide #6)

As you can see, we've dug deep in the bench today. The good news is, it's just us, so let's see if we can get in trouble!

Last week Andy started talking to us about the milk and the meat. He introduced us to Margo Morris and explained to us the value of milk in her world. But he quickly helped us realize that the nutritional goals of Margo were not to spend a life drinking milk. In fact, looked at in one way, the goal of milk is to prepare her to be able to receive more mature food one day, meat.

I'm going to pause here because I realize who we are. I know that some of you are already a bit curious and wondering how this is going to tie into the vegetarianism vs veganism vs meat eating. So let me just kill the suspense now . . . It's not. When we talk about meat we are simply going to be trying to understand spiritual food for the spiritually mature vs spiritual food for the immature.

Andy then began to turn what is a common understanding of spiritual milk and meat on its head. He helped us understand that, while many view a deep understanding of things like the law, the prophecies, and eschatology as spiritual meat, they are really spiritual milk. These are the things that we start with before we are able to understand the deeper, meatier matters like the principles for the law. He left us with a great provoking thought: “The law has a purpose, but it isn’t to make us right with God.”

This resonates with me:

There is a church that I really look up to. That church is overseen by a pastor that I admire. The church is the Willow Creek Church just north of Chicago, and the senior pastor is Bill Hybels. If I ever want a spiritually meaty meal, I seek out one of his sermons or lectures. In fact, not to throw anyone else under the bus, but I’d say most of our staff has a similar view of Willow Creek and its pastor. I know Andy does.

When I first started work here, Andy told me that our church was a member of the Willow Creek Association and, with perhaps a small amount of . . . we’ll call it joy rather than pride, he told me that our membership number was #199.

That didn’t really mean that much to me then, but now I understand that there are more than 11,000 member churches. Being #199 was really just a demonstration of how prescient our church had been to join that association early. He did make it clear to me that the Willow Creek Association invoice was to always be paid on time or early. He did not want to find out that we had been reassigned #11,001.

Willow Creek does amazing work. I won’t go into all of it here, but suffice it to say that it feeds me. So, one year on our family’s annual trip to Michigan I got it in my head that I’d like to go to Willow Creek and experience one of their worship services. I was just absent-mindedly talking about it with a Christian friend when he seemed stunned that I’d want to go to church there. His confusion was based in the view that it was just a “bubble gum” church. There was no spiritual depth. In his view, they didn’t preach the full measure of the law, didn’t understand the prophecies. They just preached a cheap, easy grace. Milk.

It took me a while to process it, but I always felt like he might be confused about what was the milk and what was the meat.

So, let’s spend a little time thinking about what isn’t the meat. One place where it’s easy for us to go is to the thought that the meat are the things that make us different. I think this is a natural human place to go. But we must be so careful. As Daryl Tol told us two weeks ago, identifying and accentuating differences is exactly what causes tribalism and fragmentation, and fragmentation is clearly not what God intends for his people.

A good friend of mine in high school was the son of a pastor, but not in the kind of church that I’d ever attended. It was a Holiness Church of God. It was right across the street from the school, and he invited me to attend one evening, an invitation that I was happy to accept.

The pastor, his dad, was about half way through his sermon when an elderly lady at the other end of the pew I was on stood up and went off. It scared the crud out of me, and while I don't know if I'd identify what I heard as sounding heavenly, it certainly sounded other worldly. It wasn't English or, as it turns out, any other known language; she was speaking in tongues. The pastor just stepped to the side and let her speak. In short course, she finished and the pastor continued with a sermon that could have been heard in my church on any given weekend.

I really liked that friend, and I believe him to be a sincere follower of Christ. In fact, today he pastors his own church. But I wonder, for that tribe, do they consider speaking in tongues a meaty matter?

Since I've never once heard anyone in an Adventist church speak in tongues, I think it would be easy for us to answer that question. In fact, I found a great passage to indicate that at a minimum speaking in tongues is not of the highest value.

1 Corinthians 13:1

"If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal"

So maybe we can feel okay about not speaking in tongues. Unfortunately, Paul didn't stop writing.

1 Corinthians 13:2 is a little harder to take

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

Prophecy, understanding mysteries, having all knowledge. In the same category as speaking in tongues. Not sure how long we want to dwell here. Those are three things we value pretty highly, aren't they?

Prophecy - That's kind of big for our tribe.

Fathoming mysteries - We do whole seminars on these.

Knowledge - Don't we love to feel like we have knowledge? Do we sometimes even feel a little superior, a little meatier, if we have knowledge that others lack?

Not even faith is of the highest value.

And of course, we begin to see hints of where the real meat is, and we'll get there.

Jesus was less than a week away from his execution when he pronounced the famous woes on the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. You can read them all in Matthew 23. Let's just look at one.

In Matthew 23:23 Jesus says:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters

of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

We see embedded here some of the meatier issues of being a Christ follower. Justice! Mercy! Faithfulness! He didn't say that tithing on the small things wasn't good; he simply gave us a hierarchy, and it hearkens back to what Andy said last week. Tithing of mint and dill—that's good, but its baby food. Yes, you should do it, but there's meatier stuff: justice, mercy, faithfulness. Make no mistake, Jesus' time on earth was drawing to an end, and he was in the Pharisee's face. He was saying to them, “You don't get it.”

While Jesus tone grew sharper as his ministry progressed, his message was consistent. In the sermon on the mount he called us to go deeper.

Matthew 5:21

You've heard it said not to murder. I say if you've hated your brother or sister you're subject to judgement.

Matthew 5:27-28

You've heard it said you shall not commit adultery. But I say if you've lusted you've committed adultery.

Matthew 5:43-44

You've heard it said to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you love your enemy, and pray for those who oppose you.

You see, from start to finish, Jesus was pushing us to a deeper, meatier understanding of God and his impossible standards. Don't be satisfied with the milk of the law; dig deeper, and you'll find something more beautiful and more humbling.

We want to understand these principles better, don't we? I believe we do. We don't want to be like the Pharisees, unweaned from the milk of the law, do we? I don't think so.

We take those words seriously! We have an entire group of funds and ministries devoted to justice, and we should. We have committees whose only purpose is to seek ways for our church to show the love of God to the disenfranchised. We take a day a year when we forgo the holy endeavor of worship in order to go into the community and serve.

We hold these values so high that we hired a full-time staff person just to coordinate justice ministries. And we're at risk!

If . . .

If we don't understand that even the doing of these things is not yet partaking of the real meat.

When Christ pronounced his woes on the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and when he spoke in love to his disciples in Matthew 5, he was at once telling them and us the same thing.

You can't even live up to the milkiest version of the law, let alone a slightly meatier version. And just in case you think you can, let me clarify it for you.

- Do you love your enemy?
- Are you free of lust, greed, and envy?
- Do you seek justice for the oppressed? The same way you do for yourself? The same way you would for your kids? Really?
- Do you dispense mercy the way you would have it dispensed to you?
- Are you faithful?

You see, the milk—the law—has a purpose, and its purpose is to reveal to us the reality of our hopelessness. We cannot fulfill the requirements of the law. We cannot live up to the standards laid before us.

We can't live up to the one:

- Love the lord your God with all your heart all your soul and all your mind.

We can't live up to the second:

- Love your neighbor as yourself

We can't live up to the 10

We can't live up to the 28

We can't live up to the 600 of the Pharisees

We can't live up to the letter and

We can't live up to the spirit.

We are hopeless.

Are you glad you came?

But we're only hopeless because we haven't really talked about the meat of the word yet.

Jesus had just fed the 5000, and it's safe to say that nobody seemed to understand what had really happened, not even his own disciples. But everyone did understand one thing. This man, Jesus, had a seemingly endless supply of free food, so they followed. Jesus became so inundated that he withdrew to a private place and later under cover of darkness he crossed the lake, catching up to his disciples in Capernaum. But those who have found free food are not easily dissuaded. They quickly realized what had happened and followed him.

The next day when they approached Jesus, they came with vain flattery. Jesus called them out. He said, You didn't follow me because of some great signs. You followed me for free food! He went on to tell them that he had better food. Let's pick up the story in

John 6:27

**But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."**

**28** They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?"

**29** Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”

**30** They answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do?**31** After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’<sup>9</sup>”

**32** Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. **33**The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

**34** “Sir,” they said, “give us that bread every day.”

**35** Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus turned it all on its head. The real meat is not in anything we do, or anything we know. The real meat is Jesus himself!

To make sure that we understood and that we would always be reminded, he incorporated it into one of the only two ordinances practiced by every Christian.

On the evening before his death, he joined his disciples for the celebration of the Passover feast. For millennia, the Passover had been celebrated, and tonight Jesus would change everything by replacing the symbolic lamb of sacrifice with his own body and blood.

Jesus broke the bread and offered the cup and told the disciples to eat. This is my body; drink, this is my blood. They must have remembered back to that day at Capernaum when Jesus ended the day’s teaching by saying conclusively:

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. **54** But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. **55** For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.**56** Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. **57** I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. **58** I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did ... but will live forever.” John 6:53-58

Jesus is the meat. Christ in us is the Hope of Glory! And every church, every preacher, every church member ... every hopeless sinner who proclaims Christ and Christ alone is both feasting on and proclaiming the meat of the word.

When we consume him, then he flows his love, and justice, and mercy, and faithfulness through us to us a lost and hurting world.

He is our only hope, and Christ in us the only hope for the world.

When I was about 9 or 10, I came to my first realization of an authority greater than my parents or my teachers.

My friend, David, had a minibike. He was very cool and the only person I knew with a mini-bike.

The story goes that he was riding his mini-bike illegally on the road in order to get to the woods where he would regularly ride. On this particular day, a Rockledge police officer happened by and turned on his lights to pull David over.

I'm guessing now that he had probably been warned, maybe even forbidden from doing this, so in the infinite wisdom of a 9-year-old brain, he decided he could outrun the police. And he did... For a while. He made it to the woods and took off down one of the trails. The problem was that the woods weren't that big and there weren't that many entrances and exits, and apparently, the officer was not amused. He called a couple other officers and they quickly caught David. They cuffed him, put him in the patrol car and hauled him to the station. It made the local papers and was a giant deal in third grade, but it got me thinking about the law.

I later saw a copy of the Florida Statutes . . . and was terrified. I learned that these were the laws that governed people living in our state, and there were far more laws than I could ever hope to know. As I tried to comprehend the enormity of the law, I discovered that was only the beginning.

The county and city where we lived had similar volumes, not to mention the laws dictated by the federal government. How could I ever do this? I couldn't possibly even know all these laws, let alone keep them!

Then things got even worse, I learned that literally thousands of legislators and lawmakers at every level create hundreds or even thousands of new laws every year. I reconciled myself to the fact that I would spend my adult years in prison, not because I was particularly bad, but because I'd never be able to satisfy the requirements of my city, county, state or country.

One day (I think Dad and I were fishing), I voiced my concerns and asked, "How can I do it? It's impossible!"

I really thought he would share with me the secret to civil obedience. After all, the world is filled with people who aren't in jail. There must be a catch, a trick.

But Dad said there was no catch, no trick, and that I had no hope of ever keeping all those laws. He told me I was, in fact, probably breaking some of those laws at that very moment (maybe he knew something about our fishing adventure that I didn't).

"So, what do I do?" I asked. That was when Dad gave me something a little meatier

He said, "Don't worry about the law; just do what you know is right (See Micah 6:8). If you do what's right, you don't have to worry that much about breaking the law (See Gal 5:16-23)."

I found comfort in those words, and I can honestly say that, since then, I've never worried too much about breaking the law. In fact, I'm probably breaking some right now. The greater comfort, however, was in the rest of his explanation. Dad said I didn't have to worry about the law because I was with him, and I was his son (See Romans 5:8-11: John 3:16).

That's where I found real relief, believing Dad would protect me from everything and everyone, even myself.

I was taught right from wrong, encouraged to do what's right, and I was given all the tools to be a productive part of society. It was my obligation to meet all those responsibilities, unless I was with Dad.

When I was with him, none of the weight of life's responsibility rested on me. Success or failure didn't matter. All that mattered was that I was his son, and he was my Dad. He would take the heat, and he would pay the bill. Until the day he died, being with Dad meant being free.

That's what it means to consume the meat of the word, and that's what it means to be free in Jesus.





2/25/17

- 1) What does it mean for us to “consume” Christ?
  
- 2) What difference does it make for the oppressed whether we are working for justice by our own power or through the power of Christ in us?
  
- 3) It seems that every time we take a step closer to grace we either turn back to the old law or create a new one. How do we remain in the “meat” of God’s grace rather than the “milk” of the law?
  
- 4) Is there value in learning the law even after we have received grace?



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