



THE ORCHARD

How to Eat a Sermon

Nehemiah 8:1-12

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Introduction

- The table is set. The food smells amazing.
- You've spent hours preparing an incredible meal for hungry guests.
- Everyone talks about how good the meal looks.
 - They take pictures of it and compliment the chef.
 - They tell each other how much they needed this meal.
- But before anyone takes a bite, one by one, the guests scrape all the food off their plates into the trash and leave.
- You yell after them, "Hey, You forgot to eat!"
 - You see the meal was enjoyed...in a sense, but never consumed.
 - Ridiculous, right?
- But I think many people unknowingly do the same thing every Sunday with the preached Word of God.
 - We can show up to church, listen to a sermon, and yet walk out unchanged and spiritually malnourished.
- Perhaps we were never taught what the purpose of a sermon was.
- Or perhaps we subtly began to believe we were exempt from needing the weekly preached Word.
 - Unless something piqued our interest, the sermon became background noise.

- Is that you?
 - Are you expecting little from the weekly sermon?
 - Are you sure you're experiencing the full effect of God's Word as He intended?
- The Bible often describes God's Word as food.
 - Matthew 4:4 Jesus declared: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
 - Psalm 19 says the law of the Lord revives the soul and is sweeter than honey.
 - Isaiah 55 says, "Come... buy and eat... listen diligently, that your soul may live."
- The Christian life is fueled by the diligent eating of God's Word.
- And consuming God's Word is not only important for Christians—it's how spiritually dead people come alive.
 - Romans 10 says faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ.
- So no matter who you are or where you are spiritually, God's Word is the ongoing food that gives life to our souls and to our community.
- But if we neglect to heed God's Word and let it shape us, we grow spiritually frail.
 - Thus, properly consuming the preached Word of God is vital to the health of a church.
- In Nehemiah 8, God's people are hearing a sermon for the first time in a long time.
 - After Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, the people were taken into captivity for around 70 years.
 - A remnant eventually returned under Persian rule to rebuild Jerusalem and restore worship.
- Chapter 8 shows us what happens when God's people become serious about hearing and obeying God's Word again.

- We see what it should look like when we gather each Sunday and respond to the preached Word.
- So what does it look like to truly eat a sermon?
- First it requires we...

1. Gather as One

- Before we even talk about listening well, we need to recognize something important: sermons were never designed to be consumed in isolation.
 - Verse 1 says, “And all the people gathered as one man...”
 - Verse 2 says, “So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly...”
- The people gathered, not to enact new laws, but to return to the old ones found in God’s Word.
 - They assembled “as one man.”
- The word “church” means “called-out assembly.”
 - The early church constantly gathered around the Word.
 - Acts 2:42 says they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.
- And they shared the nourishment of God’s Word together through public reading.
 - Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”
- Now some might ask, “Why do we need public reading today when everyone owns a Bible?”
- Though you absolutely should read your Bible personally throughout the week,
 - the public reading of God’s word ensures that we are all on the same page... literally!

- Reading the word publicly reminds us we are together subject under the same word of God.
 - And shared authority creates shared unity.
- Just like the Israelites in verse 5, here at The Orchard, we stand for the reading of Scripture because we want to honor God’s Word together.
- There is something powerful about a church family hearing the same truths together at the same time.
 - This develops unity, harmony, and shared identity just like a family sharing a meal together.
- On the flip side, there is danger in consuming only online sermon clips and podcast soundbites in isolation.
 - Eating alone diminishes discernment.
 - No one is asking you whether that teaching on TikTok is biblical.
 - No one is helping you go beyond your favorite verses to engage with more difficult passages.
- Eating alone can also dislocate us from God’s design for spiritual growth within the local church.
 - I can benefit from a sermon on my own, but my church family and I don’t get to mutually benefit.
 - It’s hard to grow in love if we never process a sermon on love together.
- So when we gather to hear God’s Word:
 - it unites us,
 - protects us,
 - and grows us together.
- So what will help us to gather as one?

Application

- First, Fight to be here.
 - Treat Sunday worship like a family meal.

- Protect your calendar from spiritually isolating habits.
- And after you are committed to be here, be a bringer.
 - Make room at the table for someone else.
- Brothers and Sisters, Church is not about me and it's not about you,
 - it's about **US** united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- To eat the sermon for all its worth, we must first gather as one.
 - And we ought to...

2. Come Hungry

- The Israelites did not gather with passive obligation.
- They wanted the Book brought before them because they understood their need for God's Word.
- Verse 1 says the people told Ezra, "Bring the Book."
- Verse 3 says, "The ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law."
 - After years of exile and rebellion, there was now a grassroots hunger for God's Word.
 - They were finally ready to listen.
- Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."
 - There is blessing for those who hunger for the right things.
- But just as we can hunger for God's word, it is possible to spoil our spiritual appetite.
 - Our family often references a sermon illustration from another pastor we know who infamously ruined his appetite right before a steak dinner by eating a whole box of cheez-its.
 - So before dinner we'll sometimes remind each other, "Don't fill up on Cheez-Its."
- Spiritually, we can do the same thing.

- Often we can come into church full.
 - Our minds are full of worry.
 - Our affections depleted after a week of chasing idols.
 - Our attention consumed by judgment of others.
- Sometimes we don't want to eat the sermon because we are too full... of ourselves.
- Additionally, our attention is in high demand.
 - Everything and everyone is trying to get and keep your attention and if we don't say no to the junk, we will miss the good.
 - Friends, don't spoil your appetite for the Word.
- When we gather each Sunday, we should come ravenous and ready to receive what God wants to say to His church.
 - So how do we stay hungry?
- Application
- As best you can, clear your mind of distractions before church.
 - Prepare your heart with prayer and worship even while you're in the car.
 - Sit up front if you get easily distracted in the service.
 - If it helps, turn your notifications off on your phone and refuse to fill your mind with the latest rage bait.
 - Remind yourself that focusing on God is better than anything else in his world.
- And then come with the expectation that God has something **we need** to hear today.
 - Seek to give God and His word your FULL and undivided attention.
- To eat the sermon well, we must come hungry.
 - And then we must..

3. Chew the Food

- Listening to a sermon is not a passive exercise.

- Biblical preaching requires spiritual engagement, discernment, and thoughtfulness.
- Verses 7–8 say:
 - “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”
- The Levites helped the people understand the Word.
- The Law could be difficult to digest, so the leaders explained it clearly.
- Similarly, the job of whoever is preaching on any given Sunday is to help the church rightly divide the word of truth into clear understandable pieces we can chew.
- We need help seeing things in Scripture that we might otherwise miss.
 - But we are also responsible to actively chew on what we hear.
- We are called to actively listen, think, and follow along.
 - 2 Timothy 2:7 says, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding.”
 - Jesus said in Luke 8:18, “Take care then how you hear.”
- As we listen, we often face two temptations.
 - One is to thoughtlessly accept everything.
 - The other is to be picky eaters of the word.
- If a sermon is heretical garbage, spit it out.
 - If it is not grounded in God’s Word, it is not food fit for consumption.
- But if you simply don’t like what’s being preached, don’t tune out.
 - Just because you don’t like vegetables doesn’t mean you don’t need them.

- A pastor's job is not to entertain you. It is to help you understand Scripture.
- God's Word may be difficult to swallow at times, but He still calls us to receive it.
 - Sometimes the sermon addresses uncomfortable topics.
 - Sometimes it challenges long-held assumptions.
 - Sometimes it confronts sins we would rather ignore.
- But if God's Word is truly good for us, then we should not reject it simply because it is uncomfortable.
- I'll admit, I grew up as a picky eater.
- But after marrying Megan, I was introduced to foods I never expected to enjoy.
 - But I had to actually try them.
 - I had to chew.
- And over time, what once seemed unappealing became meals I now crave.
- If we want the preached Word to have its full effect on us, we must actively chew on it and seek to understand it.
 - But how do we do that?
- Application
- Stay engaged during preaching,
 - Take notes, physically or on your phone.
 - If you have questions about a part of the passage, write it down and save it for later.
- Actively listen along during the sermon.
 - Take in the sermon with discernment, not judgment.
 - Engage your mind.

- You can even actively participate during the sermon by throwing in an “amen” from time to time.
- In order to eat the sermon for all its worth, we must participate by actively chewing on the content of the sermon. And then we must...

4. Digest the Meal

- Chewing is not the same thing as digesting.
- We can hear a sermon attentively, take good notes, and still fail to let the Word truly sink in.
 - Digestion happens when the truth moves from your head to your heart.
- The Israelites actively listened and with the help of the leaders they were able to understand God’s law.
- But notice Verse 9 says they **wept** when they heard the words of the law.
 - Why weep?
- I don’t know you, but I don’t typically cry when I read legal documents.
- But they were not merely understanding the Law intellectually.
 - They were taking it personally.
 - They realized how far they had strayed from God.
- Romans 3:20 says, “Through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
 - For these Israelites, the ancient scriptures were convicting their hearts that very day.
- You see, The Word of God is living and active.
 - The more we carefully examine scripture, the more we will find that scripture is really examining us.
 - The ancient text of Scripture preached today connects directly to our lives today because God’s Word is alive today.

- It is easy to mentally process biblical information and call it a day.
- If we only process the sermon intellectually and never personally,
 - we will miss what God is trying to do in us.
- The Israelites wept because the law revealed the reality of their personal sin.
- So why, then, did Nehemiah, Ezra and the other Levites tell the people not to weep?
 - Did they connect the word of God wrongly to their lives?
- No, The Israelites needed to hear how much they failed to uphold God's law,
 - but they also needed to hear that God would never fails.
 - God had not abandoned his people and he was restoring them through repentance.
- This is the same good news found in Jesus.
 - Sin has taken us far from God, but God pursued us.
 - The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
 - Jesus came to save sinners by grace through faith.
- A faithful sermon should convict you where needed, but it should never leave you hopeless.
 - You should find things that both challenge you and encourage you.
 - We should be able to say, "Man, that sermon was convicting, but praise God the joy of the Lord is my strength."
 - We should be able to say, "Though I am a great sinner, I have a great savior!"
- So how can we best digest the sermon?

- Application: When you are listening to a sermon take note of where the Spirit is poking and prodding your heart.
 - Avoid the temptation to only think, “my wife really needs to hear this.”
- I like to put a little star in my notes where I am feeling personally challenged or encouraged.
- As you digest a sermon, some good questions to ask yourself are:
 - How does this message connect to my life right now?
 - Why is God bringing this to my attention this week?
- And like digesting physical food, digesting the sermon also takes time and consideration.
 - I have found it best to process a sermon in the context of a LIFE Group.
 - Taking time to discuss the sermon in a small group setting forces us to wrestle with God’s word together.
- To eat the sermon for all its worth, we must digest and internalize the meal personally. Then, finally, we must...

5. Burn the Calories

- Eating has a purpose.
 - Its fuel that produces energy and movement.
- The Israelites did not merely respond intellectually or emotionally, they responded practically.
- They did exactly what they were told to do and Verse 12 says the people went away rejoicing “because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”
- It became clear to the Israelites that they had neglected God’s commands.
 - But now that they understood the Word and wept in repentance, they were ready to change.

- They were 70 years late, but they were going to make up for lost time.
- Their response to God’s Word was immediate and joyful obedience.
- In the age of information, many are content to simply know things.
 - Knowledge is power right?
 - But what good is knowledge if we never act on it?
- Jesus said in Luke 8:21, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”
- And in John 13:17 he promised, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”
 - The blessing is not mainly in the knowing, it’s in the doing.
- I fear many Christians have become “Spiritual Couch Potatoes.”
 - We may consume the word, chew on it, and even digest it personally, but we do nothing with it.
 - And like fat in our bodies, knowledge gets stored up with no intention to use it.
 - Knowledge puffs us up, but a healthy Christian burns the calories through joyful obedience.
- Beloved puritan pastor Richard Baxter said of sermon application,
 - “Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it, and to work your own hearts to those suitable resolutions and affections which it bespeaketh. Chew the Cud, and call up all when you come home ...”
- After we eat the sermon on Sunday, we should go home with every intention to use what we’ve learned.
- So how can we apply what we know about applying application?
 - (This is an application inception of sorts.)
- Application
- Aim to apply one thing from the sermon each week.
 - Ask yourself, “What is one thing God is asking of me this week?”

- I have found this series of questions from Pastor Colin Smith helpful,
 - “Is there a promise for me to believe, a command to obey, a warning to heed, an example to follow, or a sin to confess?”
- Less is more here.
 - Try to focus on one thing and do that one thing faithfully that week.
- Charles Spurgeon said, “An ounce of obedience is more than a ton of learning.”
 - There may be many things to apply from any given sermon, but even an ounce reaps much good.
 - So seek to apply one thing faithfully.
- Additionally, share what you plan to do with your spouse, a friend, or your LIFE Group so they can cheer you on and hold you accountable.
 - Having a gym partner increases your odds of going to the gym and the same is true in growing in obedience.
- I’ve mentioned LIFE Groups as a key way of processing the sermon.
- Sometimes it can be hard to process the sermon in a group setting so I’ve created what I call the sermon “RECAP” that includes many of the questions I’ve suggested today.
 - RECAP stands for Read the word, Engage the word, Connect the word, Apply the word and Pray the word.
- We send out these RECAP questions with each week’s sermon outline via an email.
- You can subscribe to those emails through our “At a Glance” emails.
 - RECAP is a great way you can effectively eat the sermon on your own or together in your LIFE Group.

Conclusion

- The habit of eating the sermon each week will make us a healthier church.
- If before today you didn’t know what to do with a sermon, I hope you now feel equipped to process God’s Word each week.

- But if you have subtly started believing that taking the sermon seriously is optional, I want to warn you.
- Before their exile, the Israelites had the temple.
 - They had priests.
 - They had access to God's Word.
- But eventually they stopped taking it seriously.
- They believed they could live on bread alone instead of every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- Brother, sister—
 - you have the church.
 - You have pastors.
 - You have access to God's Word.
- Don't believe the lie that sermons can go in one ear and out the other
 - week after week
 - without consequence.
- Ask yourself honestly:
 - Am I eating the sermon each week?
 - Or am I missing what God wants to teach me and my church family?
- Not every sermon will radically change your life.
 - But every faithful sermon should nourish your soul with the truth of God's Word and the hope of the gospel.
 - And through the preached word of God, you will slowly but surely grow in faith, hope and love to the glory of God.
- Eating the sermon each week:
 - unites us around God's Word,
 - helps us come hungry,
 - teaches us to actively chew on the truth,

- helps us digest it personally,
 - and spurs us to apply it faithfully.
- May we be a church that never wastes a bite of God's good Word.
- Let's pray.