

Fit Out: Dining Room

You are what you eat: Sound

Paul B. Bailey

You are what you eat. I want to suggest that you eat what you are. We are attracted to things, experiences and people who scratch an inner itch or feed an inner hunger.

In Matthew 15 Jesus says something that is incredibly insightful, the background to this passage is that Jesus and his apprentices are out and about, they get very hungry and decide to have a meal. In their hunger they forget or neglect to wash their hands. Apparently, it was a very important tradition of the elders for law-abiding Jews to perform ceremonial washings. A group of men from the Pharisees begin to rebuke Jesus and his disciples. Jesus challenges their mindless adherence to tradition and their willingness to condemn others. In his debrief with his followers Jesus says, “Listen and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” ¹⁷ “Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” ¹⁸ “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

Jesus is saying that it is not what you eat that messes you up, but it is what is already going on in your heart, the innermost part of yourself that makes you clean or unclean. This means that a person with an unclean heart will seek out sights, sounds, flavours and or textures that stimulate that uncleanness.

This is why censorship does not work, a person who wants to see illicit materials will seek this material out and if he or she cannot find it, they will create it with their imagination. The issue for me is not what you consume or what you want to see, taste, feel, and smell or hear but why you want these things. What is going on in our hearts and how can we change what is going on in our hearts so that our desires are increasingly good and pure.

Today I want to talk about how we can change the nature and quality of our hearts so that we desire what is noble, good and true.

The Bible says in Romans 10

⁸ But what does it say?

**“The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart”**

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ **For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.** ¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴ **But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?** And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” ¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has

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believed our message?" ¹⁷ **So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.**

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for
"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."

¹⁹ Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,
"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,
"I have been found by those who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

²¹ But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."
Romans 10.8-21, NRSV

Notice throughout the passage the interaction between the spoken word, the hearers and what's happening in the hearts and minds of hearers. Specifically look at verses 8, 10, 14 and 17.

Words, words, words! Last week Sam shared with us a quote from Steve Turner "Sticks and Stones will break your bones but words will tear your heart out!" This quote reflects the destructive power of negative words. There are people whose lives have been crippled because of words that they have heard and inwardly digested, metabolized and allowed to become part of their innermost being. We have also heard or read about people who have been inspired to achieve greatness because of words spoken in faith, hope and love.

The Bible also bears witness to the live changing power of God's word. In fact, in Romans 1.15-16, Paul says, "'I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." The word about Jesus and God's kingdom is God's power at work to change lives. Let me say that again, the word about Jesus and God's kingdom is God's power to change lives.

Karl Barth wrote, **"God's speaking is never idle chatter, it is speaking with a purpose and it has power to effect that purpose. God's word has the power and the authority to make what it says happen... God's word is never just a set of truths or ideas it is always an event, which on the one hand it brings us into personal contact with the one who speaks and on the other hand works its will on the persons and situations to which it is addressed. By it God creates and re-creates, judges and forgives... [God's word] is a life changing and history making event that provokes a crisis, a decision, a parting of ways where ever it is spoken..."**

There are words and then there is the word. The word I am speaking about is the word that God says is near you, is accessible to you and available to you. This is what Paul means when he says, "The word is

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near you, on your lips and in your heart.” This word has within it the power to totally transform your life, and through you transform the lives of the people around you.

It does not matter what your condition is, it does not matter what your addictions are, it does not matter how entrenched your negative behaviours are, or how stubborn your destructive thought patterns, God's word, carried by the wind of God's Spirit, has the power to change your life. That is why we preach. Here is what we believe; as we proclaim God's message, God's Spirit creates the optimum environment for personal transformation.

Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians **“The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** He goes on to say **“God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe...”** 1 Corinthians 1.18,21, NRSV

God has decided to set people free, to rescue them, to restore, to heal and to make people whole through the spoken word.

However, transformation does not happen as if by magic, you have to engage, you must actively participate with the word. There has to be an inter-penetration between the word spoken and the heart, mind, will and emotions of the people hearing the spoken word. This is what Paul means when he says, “...If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” Look at the extent of this interaction there is the lips and the mouth, then heart and the mind. Lips and mouth, heart and mind fully engaged with a word uttered, spoken, breathed, heard, understood, believed and confessed, literally spoken out from within the innermost part of both speaker (i.e. God) and the hearers (i.e. us).

There is no way for your life to change without your active and willing participation in the process. The word of Jesus and God's kingdom is God's power at work to change lives however, you have to open your ears and your heart to hear, understand and then believe the message. You have to tune into God's frequency.

God is broadcasting transformation, this is what Paul means when he quotes from the Psalmist, “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

When Paul says, “Their voice has gone out...” he is saying God is broadcasting but the question is are you tuning in to what he is saying, are you getting the message?

If transformation is to take place, you must have faith. But how does faith come?

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Paul says, “¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” James D.G. Dunn commenting on this verse writes, “Such faith comes by hearing- a hearing which is not merely a registering of a sequence of words on the mind, but a hearing with an understanding of the significance of those words and a response appropriate to that significance.”¹ Dunn goes on to write, “Paul was well aware of how critical that transaction was between speaker and hearer- when mysteriously, not merely words are conveyed, but an understanding, a conviction, a life-changing commitment...”²

If you are going to experience life-change of the God-kind, if your soul is to be renovated, you must hear the word. There must be a critical transaction between hearer and speaker in which by hearing you experience understanding, conviction and faith

If you can truly hear God’s word you will be changed.

Isaiah writes,

“⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

God sends his word to heal, to restore, to make whole, to give life, strength purpose and mission. If you will open your hear and create a hearing space for God’s word in your heart and life it will accomplish God’s purpose and will succeed in the thing to which he has sent it.

How then do I receive God’s word?

James gives us clear and invaluable instructions, he says,

“²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls. ²² And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself. ²³ For if you just listen and don’t obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. ²⁴ You see yourself,

¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary 38B Romans 9-19*, p. 628, Word Books Milton Keynes, England 1991

² James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary 38B Romans 9-19*, p. 628, Word Books Milton Keynes, England 1991

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walk away, and forget what you look like.²⁵ But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.”

Firstly he says accept God's word humbly, that is a deep awareness of who you are, what your strengths and limitations are and where you most need help.

The James says make a commitment to put in practice immediately what God's word says. Commit yourself to be an active doer of the word and not just an avid listener.

Listening to do takes a different level of focus and attention than merely listening to hear. There is a level of urgency and intensity when you are listening to do.