

## **“AXE THE EXCESS!”**

by Rom A. Pegram (3/18/18)

Jane brought me an Internet ‘gem’ a while back. It was all about God populating the earth with good things. Listen:

*And God populated the earth with broccoli and cauliflower and spinach, green and Yellow vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.*

*And Satan created McDonald’s. And McDonald’s brought forth the 99-cent double-cheeseburger. And Satan said to Man, “You want fries with that?” And Man said, “Supersize them.” And Man gained pounds.*

*And God created the healthful yogurt, that woman might keep her figure that man found so fair. And Satan brought forth chocolate. And woman gained pounds. ... (God=salad, Satan=ice cream; God=healthy veggies & olive oil, Satan=chicken-fried steak, etc.) And man gained pounds and his bad cholesterol went through the roof.*

*And God brought forth running shoes and Man resolved to lose those extra pounds. And Satan brought forth cable TV with remote control so Man would not have to toil to change channels between ESPN and ESPN2. And man gained pounds. ...*

*And God brought forth the potato, a vegetable naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fat fried them. And he created sour cream dip also... And Man clutched his remote control and ate the potato chips swaddled in cholesterol. And Satan saw and said, “It is good.” ...*

Folks, WE GIVE SATAN WAY TOO MUCH CREDIT, DON’T WE? I should have titled this sermon “Eat Your Veggies” ... because that’s kind of what our lesson is about today—*what we choose to feed our lives with!* Daniel’s our Bible teacher for today, a Jewish exile to Babylonia, long before Esther or Nehemiah. His setting was the royal court of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. And, Daniel’s the one who’s going to help teach us yet another way to be ‘more than survivors—spiritually’ in this world. No, it’s not the Lion’s Den story ... and it’s not the story about his 3 buddies (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) getting thrown into the fiery furnace. It’s the first 20 verses of Daniel that talks about *eating habits*. Listen (Daniel 1:1-20, NLT):

During the third year of King Jehoiakim’s reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> The LORD gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

<sup>3</sup> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah’s royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. <sup>4</sup> “Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted

with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon.” <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. <sup>7</sup> The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. <sup>9</sup> Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. <sup>10</sup> But he responded, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded.”

<sup>11</sup> Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>12</sup> “Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said. <sup>13</sup> “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.” <sup>14</sup> The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days.

<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. <sup>16</sup> So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

<sup>17</sup> God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams.

<sup>18</sup> When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. <sup>20</sup> Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanterers in his entire kingdom.

We live in a society, folks, that *promotes compromise* ... even giving into things we *know* is not of God. We know better! We’ve been raised differently! And, yet how often do we find ourselves listening to the world ... instead of to God? In this world, certain kinds of compromise can lead to spiritual ruin ... instead of survival. Some things we give into can actually damage our spiritual health; did you know that? Daniel knew that to be true in *his* world. He could have given into 1) exciting environment, 2) exciting perks (food), or 3) an exciting career (astrology). So we can learn from Daniel about what it takes to survive, instead of compromise, in this world that we live in. First...

**KNOW WHAT IS ALRIGHT WITH GOD!** What does God want *you* to feed your life with? Daniel *knew* what God would be pleased with and what he wouldn’t ... and we can too...

In Verse 5 it says, “The king also gave orders that every day they were to be given the same food and wine as the members of the royal court.” This, folks, is what the *world* was suggesting to Daniel and his comrades. Would they fall victims to compromise ... or would they stay true to what they knew God would be pleased with? *Oh, let’s see—royal banquets or veggie trays?*

The real question this morning may be, “Which would *you* choose?” We need to know what God would be pleased with and what he wouldn’t! So, *how* do we know that ... in this world we live in? If I were to ask some here, today, I know what they’d say: “The Bible, of course. That’s only logical!” And, they’d be right; we’ve been given God’s instruction book (Bible) to help us maneuver through this world God’s placed us in...

How about going back to Exodus, Chapter 20? Do you remember what that section of scripture is all about? You know, it’s those 10 Suggestions ... or, I mean Commandments. And you don’t have to go past #1 to get a good picture of what God expects of us, as we learn to be more than survivors in this world. Just as a reminder, it says, “Worship no god but me” (Exodus 20:3, TEV).

Folks, how often do we place many things in our lives ahead of God? It doesn’t matter what it is. If we compromise our Godly-values and allow anything in our lives to come *before* what we know God wants us to do, that’s making a god out of something else in life and worshiping that! It doesn’t take long to know what we should be feeding ourselves & what we shouldn’t, in order to be spiritual survivors...

So, what is the world suggesting we eat ... compared to what we know God would be pleased with? Well, next you need to...

**MAKE UP YOUR MIND TO FOLLOW GOD.** We have to *decide* to make changes in our lives before they can actually happen! Verse 8 says, “Daniel *made up his mind* [*italics mine*] not to let himself become ritually unclean by eating the food and drinking the wine of the royal court...” Some of us, in the midst of temptations to *compromise*, need to do some ‘deciding’ ... When we know what’s right with God, we need to *decide* to follow God, no matter what!

Charles Hummel says in his popular little booklet “The Tyranny of the Urgent” that our greatest ministry danger is *letting the urgent crowd out the most important*. Hummel goes on to celebrate the lasting significance of a well-ordered life: “Jesus’ prayerful waiting for God’s instructions freed him from the tyranny of the urgent. It gave him a sense of direction, set a steady pace, and enabled him to do every task God assigned. And on the last night he could say, ‘I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.’” (I doubt if Jesus talked in ‘old English,’ but you get the idea.)

As a pastor, I have to decide to follow God *no matter what* ... and not bow down to the enticements of this world—*what other’s think I ought to be doing*...

- I have to take the better part of one day a week for prayer & study ... because I know that’s what God wants me to do...

- Do others understand that concept (Sabbath)? Some do; some don't ... probably because 'it's never been done that way before' ... but, I have to be true to what God's called me to do, no matter what...

My main concern is *not* what others think I should be accomplishing—the *urgent*. My main concern is what *God* wants me to accomplish—the *important*. Why was Moses always up the mountain spending time with God? Why wasn't he ever around when his people needed him? The same could be said about Jesus. Or why does your pastor spend a day a week (or, at least, attempt to) in study & prayer? Because I have 300+ people who I'm officially responsible for their spiritual wellbeing ... and I have to answer to God for that! That's some heavy accountability, isn't it? So, no matter whether others fully understand what God's called *me* to do or not, I have to do it...

I've *made up my mind to follow God* no matter what ... and we all need to do the same. *Once we know what is right with God, we need to make up our minds to follow God ... no matter what.* Don't let the *urgent* things of this life crowd out the *important*! Daniel learned that he couldn't, if he was to remain true to God. And finally...

**DON'T BE AFRAID TO PROVE GOD.** Give God 10 days and see what happens! In verses 12-13, Daniel said to his keepers "Test us for ten days. ... Then compare ...." Folks, don't be afraid to prove God!

I want to share with all of you a challenge today—a challenge to *prove* God! Yes, physically many people need to develop some new habits and care for the bodies God's given them ... and I'm working on *that* area off my life, too. But, what about the *spiritual* food God wants us to feed on? What about that which God has commanded in our lives, for our benefit, that we might be better in many ways ... just like Daniel and his friends?

[Hold up the Bible.] Here's the spiritual food source we're supposed to feed on. How about—for the next 10 days—you prove God and daily get into his word? Spend the next 10 days reading the book of Daniel (only 12 chapters long)! And see if, like Daniel and his friends who didn't compromise and whose lives were nourished God's way, you too don't notice a positive difference in your life after 10 days in God's word?

For some, this might be a new adventure. But, there's my challenge. Too often, we compromise by letting things like...

- Rich food...
- Television...
- Toys or hobbies...

...get in our way of living for God like we should. So, here's your 10-Day Challenge: Spend as much time reading God's word over the next 10 days as you do reading your newspaper, or watching TV, or being involved in your hobbies or games. Like Daniel, *don't be afraid to prove God!* All these things...

- Knowing what's right with God...
- Making up your mind to follow God and...
- Not being afraid to prove God...

...will help you be more than a survivor in this world we've been placed in! If we can learn the lessons of Daniel in 'how to eat our veggies'—what we know is good for us & from God ... we too can thrive spiritually in this world!

Folks, it's time to 'Axe the Excess.' That's our practical application for this week. Cut out of your life anything that's not of God (and you know!)—anything that may be a *compromise to your life in Christ*—a distraction to take your eyes off of God. Axe the Excess!

Scientists now say that a series of slits, not a giant gash, sunk the *Titanic*. The luxurious 900-foot cruise ship sank in 1912 on its first voyage, from England to New York. Fifteen hundred people died in the worst maritime disaster of the time. The most widely held theory is the ship hit an iceberg, which opened a huge gash in the side of the ship. But, now, an international divers and scientists have used sound waves to probe the wreckage, buried in mud two and a half miles deep. Their discovery? The damage was surprisingly small. Instead of a huge gash, they found six relatively narrow slits across the six watertight holds...

Do you see where I'm going? Small damage, below the water line and invisible to most people, can sink a huge ship. *If we continue to allow even little things that are not of God to creep into our lives, sooner or later our frantic lives will be found out; our lives will begin to sink because we've not taken care of the small things that eat away at our lives and eventually drain us of the Spirit of God.*

Folks, *axe the excess!* Cut out of your life all that's keeping you from walking with God. **We are ultimately responsible for what we feed ourselves—what we feed our lives...** So, *eat your veggies!* Fill your life with all that you know God would be pleased with ... starting with a regular diet of God's Word!