

se7en: Gluttony

Reconnect – March 1, 2009

Text: Romans 6:12-13; Matthew 4:4

Key Thought: Sin disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.
(Romans 6:12-13, NLT)

Pre-Intro: “Be Our Guest” (Beauty and the Beast video clip)

Intro: This is something I know a little bit about

- You know, you do a series and sometimes there’s a week or two that you really look forward to
- And as I looked at the list of sins, I thought, “Now here’s one of those weeks – here’s something I know a thing or two about”
- If you don’t believe me, then just ask my wife – she’ll tell you, for sure – there are certain foods, certain moments, when she fears for her safety if she’s in between me and the goods, so to speak
- I wish that you could all see me eat a bowl of popcorn – because that is just a sight to see
- It’s too bad – it would be a perfect illustration – I wish there was someone here who had seen me eat popcorn a lot of times
- *[Tyler jumps up out of the congregation with a bowl] “I have!” [Then, he starts eating popcorn like me – loving that food...! Ultimately putting his face in it and generally getting it all over the place]*
- Gluttony – not too pretty when it’s not you, is it? Although, it is eerily enough like me that I am not completely repulsed...

Gluttony: Just a lightweight?

- Gluttony is generally seen as the lightweight of the seven deadly sins in our day – after all, how bad can it really be if it just affects yourself? Or at worst, the people eating dinner with you? It doesn’t really seem to line up very well with the other big baddies
- And which of the other deadlies do we even make a sport out of?
- The hot dog eating contest we watched a bit of earlier is every July 4th, at the Coney Island amusement park in New York City
 - Can you imagine eating more than 60 hot dogs in 10 minutes? Dipping the wieners in water so they slide down your throat without you having to chew them? Crushing the food in your fingers first so that there’s less of it to cram down your gullet? Jumping up and down to try to get your peristaltic action moving quicker, to move the food down into your stomach? And I don’t even want to THINK about what happens after the contest is all finished and things are... “winding down”, so to speak – maybe they end off with some of that yogurt that’s so popular right now, with probiotic cultures...

- And yet, for the monks that came up with this list in the first place so many centuries ago, gluttony was the WORST of the bunch – the one they were most concerned about
- Was it just because the food at the monastery was really bad? Or was there something more that they had in mind? What did they know that we’ve maybe forgotten?

Gluttony today: Eat all you want, but don’t dare be fat

- Our society is all over the place when it comes to gluttony
 - For example: it’s OK to overeat in our society – it can even be fun, a guilty pleasure, something we all do from time to time, depending on how our day has gone
 - I think about the restaurant that we went to in Florida, after seeing them again and again all over central Florida – “The Golden Corral”
 - It’s an all-you-can-eat buffet, and it’s spectacular – glorious, even
 - Island after island of incredible food – salads, desserts, pot roast, mashed potatoes, eighteen different desserts
 - And if you’re like me, and you were brought up to try a little bit of everything at a buffet, and then go back after for your favourites – well, you’re going to need a bigger plate – or three
 - I looked around at the people I saw – including myself – and thought, “These people are serious! They’re here to test the advertising – is it really all you can eat?”
 - And I must say, it was all that I could eat – four plates and three Pepsis later, I was looking for the designated driver
 - But at the same time, our society is obsessed with weight issues – thin is in, and even if no-one can live up to the ideal, being overweight is the last safe thing to make fun of in our culture
 - Women, especially, are held up to the ideals of artificially created magazine covers
 - It’s ironic in our age of going to the gym and the tanning bed, but in other times and other cultures, being chubby was actually a sign of wealth – when food is scarce, you have to have money in order to have some junk in your trunk
 - Statues of great leaders were made with love handles - “affluence rolls” – and women were painted as ideals of beauty with all kinds of rolls and cushion
 - And to be pale meant that you were so rich that you didn’t have to go out in the field and work with your hands in the hot sun for a living
 - Now, we have a subculture of those who starve themselves to the point where they can’t eat, or make themselves throw up so much that they damage their internal organs and even their teeth, all in the name of “Beauty” instead of “the Beast”
- And that’s just our society – www.bread.org says that almost 16000 children die every day of hunger, and almost a billion people in our world go hungry or malnourished every day – and we leave food on our plates, and the huge bins get thrown out at the end of the day
- Put all of this together, and what becomes very clear, very quickly, is that this must be sin – there can be no other word for such evil, such perverseness, such problems – when it comes to humanity, we are out of order on the topic of food – and that is gluttony

Gluttony: defined

- Gluttony isn't just about overeating – it's bigger than that
- It's when food or drink is out of order in our lives, one way or the other – the spectrum of anorexia/body image/bulimia/starving ourselves on the one hand, all the way to Oprah and morbid obesity and alcoholism
- And that food, so central to our survival, being out of order, means that everything else is out of order too – we are interconnected beings, in relationship with each other and with God
- That's what the monks saw – they saw something taking the place of God – and they compared their experience with what they read about in the Bible, in sections like this:

Read Text: Romans 6:12-13, NLT

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires.

Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning.

- Paul is writing his masterpiece – the summary of his teaching, the Coles Notes of his life's work
- And he's writing it to people who live in the centre of the excesses of civilization – it's going to Rome, where they invent the ways to sin for the rest of the empire
- The Romans made gluttony an art form, making sure that once you were stuffed, that you could find a place to throw it up again, and have help getting cleaned up to go back to the party and still eat more
- For them, it was about social status – the more you could eat meant the richer that you were
- But we have different motivations – different avenues into the trap of gluttony, to where we “let sin control the way we live”, whether we want to admit it or not

Gluttony: Motivations

- **Fear** – of not having enough food to eat at a later time (i.e. in Developing World)
- **Past** – not having enough food in the past, whether just extreme hunger recently or past trauma (i.e. people that lived through the Great Depression – “finish your plate, every bit!”)
- **Desire** to eat good food/anticipation/relaxing with friends
- **Take** from another or even compete with someone else – “Because I can”
 - **III. – My Chinese Food parking lot story – Mandarin in Richmond Hill**
- **Comfort/compulsion** – coping behaviour – insecurity – like me with a **Pepsi**
 - I have them for so many different reasons: I like the taste, I like to have one with a book, I like it with lime
 - I also like to use it to wake up in the morning and even then to go to bed at night
 - But then having three full-size fountain drinks at Dairy Queen because I can refill them, on top of a little something in the afternoon and then a big glass at night – well, that's just wrong – and if I can't recognize that, then it's completely got me
 - Who's in control? Me or the sweet beverage? Why does a drink make me feel so good?
 - Or when I'm down, or I've had a hard day, then the chips and dip start calling me – and I feel I deserve nachos at least once a week – food's like a person or something for me!

- And any of these can be the way that gluttony and its price tag comes
- **III. – when I got food poisoning**
 - One of the turning points in my life with food and my attitude towards it happened when we first came to Ottawa and Tyler was still living in Lindsay
 - He came up for the weekend to visit, and so of course, to show him around, we decided to eat and eat and eat
 - We went out for dinner on Saturday – the Bifteck – a big steak, salad, bread, everything
 - Then of course, junk food after that
 - Then, the next day after church, was St. Hubert’s – half chicken dinner, Pepsi, the whole deal
 - And then, the critical moment – the (literal!) tipping point – when I thought, wouldn’t it be nice to have a little bit of ice cream to cleanse the palate?
 - So we went to Mac’s and got some ice cream sandwiches
 - Tyler drove home, back up to Lindsay
 - I ran to the bathroom, and threw everything back up almost as far as Lindsay
 - I threw up until there was nothing left and then some more, just in case
 - I threw up food I hadn’t eaten in years – it just kept coming
 - Thank you, Mac’s milk, for keeping ice cream sandwiches all year long!
 - And sometimes, as you may know, throwing up makes you feel better - but in this case, throwing up just made me hate food
 - And after losing roughly ten pounds in less than a week, I thought, “Maybe I could stand to lose a little weight”
 - That led to me eating only applesauce for about the next two weeks – it was all I could stomach – and eventually losing about 60 pounds that year
- You could argue from that story that gluttony came with a silver lining – but only if you didn’t have to go through what I did in that bathroom that day – not the way to lose weight, believe me!
- Gluttony has a price tag – whether you come at it from the side of overeating, or from the other side of undereating – we risk our health, our happiness, and we cut ourselves off from those who love us, because food is more important than people – not to mention that it costs a lot of money!
- But God doesn’t want us to be run by food – He made us for more than that, and like any good parent, He wants to make sure that we’re healthy and doing well
- Paul goes on to say in the second part of the section,

Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life.

And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.

- “give yourselves completely to God” – that’s the key – it’s really a trust issue, because for most of us, most of the time, it’s all about control
- We eat because we feel bad and need comfort, or we don’t eat because we feel bad and we want to make ourselves feel better – and the fact that we have control over what goes in or doesn’t go in is a great comfort to us
- Until we realize that the irony is, we ourselves are controlled by the sin and its power over us

Peter Kreeft: “The motivation for gluttony is the unconscious self-image of emptiness: I must fill myself because I am empty, ghostlike, worthless... Only a knowledge of God’s love for me can fill that emptiness, make me a solid self, give me ultimate worth” (Back to Virtue)

- The way to freedom from that sin and others is to give AWAY control – reject having it – and keep on giving it back over to God – trusting God and letting him be in control
- Trusting HIM to provide, to love us, to keep us well, to keep caring for us, to be wise, to show us and reassure us that we are loved
- Paul says that God has given us new life, and that’s a big enough deal to be able to trust Him with the rest of the details
- And that doesn’t mean that we will have to live on bugs and cold soup, as if that was “spiritual”
- Listen to what Tomlin has to say on this:

‘Christianity actually likes food. Jesus, it seems, was rather fond of a party, regularly turned up at them, and mixed with people who also liked a good meal and a glass of wine or two. Many an abstemious, disapproving teetotal Christian has scratched their heads at Jesus’ first choice of miracle (at least in John’s Gospel): turning water into wine. Hence the common grumble from the religious people of Jesus’ day that he was ‘a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’ (Matthew 11:19). (Tomlin 103-104)

Giving God Control:

- But what does it look like to give that over to God? To have the right, “spiritual” perspective on food?
- To, **“use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God?”**
- It’s about keeping a rhythm – a cycle of feasting and fasting – and it’s by having both of those in our lives that we are able to live in the freedom from food issues that we were meant to enjoy
- **First, we fast** – and this can be a shock to the system
 - Fasting is traditionally even more outdated than sin – fanatical, even – why ever do it?
- But fasting as a choice does some things to food:
 - Keeps food in its proper place in our lives (not in control) – i.e. Lent
 - Connects us more closely to the hungry (30 hour famine)
 - Brings us back to equilibrium – cleansing, clears the head to help us seek God
 - **III. My gum surgeries and applesauce**
- **Then, we feast – we party it up**
 - Thankfulness
 - Fun/Celebration
 - Community

- **Warning:** Feasting becomes hollow quickly without fasting – fasting becomes misery quickly without feasting – both are needed, and they provide a rhythm to life – Christmas versus New Year’s, summer versus winter, Thanksgiving, and so on
- Fasting quickly becomes religious ritual and rules, which the Bible warns us about – it’s not about rule-keeping or denial for its own sake
- But when we get this right – when we “get food” and “get drink” right – then we are a shining light to those around us that there is another way – that we are tied in to a better source
- We are called to live lives that shine, and this is it – to live so relieved that God is in control, and that we are free to fully enjoy what he’s given us

Key Thought:

**Sin disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote:
a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.**

People need more than bread for their life;

they must feed on every word of God. **- Jesus (Matthew 4:4, NLT)**

Conclusion: The Meal Together

- The ideas of food and community come together at the heart of following Jesus, of having him in the centre of who we are and the lives we lead
- Different traditions call it different things – the Eucharist, a love-feast, communion – the Lord’s supper

“...the heart of Christian worship is not a solemn procession of priests or a drab litany of confession, but a meal. The only ‘service’ Jesus said was essential to Christian gatherings was eating together as a way of celebrating each other and remembering Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and in a way bringing them all into the present. If Christianity has it in for food, wine and enjoyment, it would be strange to make such an event the centre of our response to God and his gift to us.” (Tomlin 104-105)

- Why do we do a meal together once a month? Is it just an excuse to spend money? Or indulge?
- It’s much more than that – it’s a shared meal together that I envisioned as evolving into a time where we are together because of who we have in common – more than church attendance, more than the same place at the same time – it’s a remembering of Jesus
- We’re going to talk more about the Lord’s Supper in the next few weeks, because we are going to start to build towards our very first Sunday communion – on April 5th, Palm Sunday – as a way to remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus
- It’s pretty exciting to do this for the first time, because it’s one of the few things that Jesus commanded us to do – eat and remember, together
- That’s an in-service thing – but we have another opportunity today to be together, to share and to in some way, live out that command of Jesus in our enjoyment and our conversation

- Food is not the most important thing in life, but it is important, and God will care for us with it
- **“Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31)**
- But it’s a matter of trust – that God loves us, that we are secure in that, and then we are set free to enjoy food and drink, without being owned by them
- God has more for you and me, and He doesn’t want to share us with the plate in front of us

Response: In Christ Alone (reprise – the band)