

Sermon 10-7-18

LWML Sunday The Diet that Transforms Lives

Philippians 3:12-21

Do you know what the following have in common?

The Atkins...the Ornish...the South Beach...the Zone...the Grapefruit...the 7 Day...the 3 Day...etc.

All of these are diet plans. All of these make great claims... “Lose 20 pounds in 30 days...”

Do these diet plans really work? According to a report by CNN two things seem to be important in the success or failure of these diet plans.

1st - all of these diet plans need work if you exercise, too

2nd – pick one diet and stick to it

The report also said that these diet plans usually fail because very few people actually stay on the diet plan. One study said that 3 out of 4 quit their diet plans.

Not only do people often quit their diet plans but many will jump from one diet plan to another trying to find the one that is best for them.

There are some people who look at religion the same way they look at diet plans.

1st – they will move from one non-Christian religion to another trying to find one that “works”

2nd - they often quit their religious experience rather than staying the course

In spiritual terms, there is only “one spiritual diet plan” that works - The “Christian faith” diet plan. It is the plan which the Apostle Paul says here in Philippians “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” 3:21b Our bodies will be transformed by “this” diet plan not just for a week or a month or a year but for all eternity.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is:

THE DIET THAT TRANSFORMS LIVES

How do we get on this plan? How do we become Christians?

Paul says in Philippians “Christ Jesus took hold of me.” 3:12b

I Corinthians 12:3 “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

John 15:16 Jesus said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”

In a way you could say that Jesus choose a diet plan to save us. Jesus plan for Himself was a diet of suffering, sacrificing His body and dying on the cross so that we might receive the forgiveness of sins. Jesus took hold of us that we might have hope, life and victory over death. Romans 5:8

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

What is our response to what Jesus has done for us? What does the Apostle Paul say here in Philippians?

Verse 12 “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

I press on...

Paul says “I press on” which means “I will stick to this plan of the Gospel”

Paul uses this phrase “I press on” twice here in this portion of Philippians.

We find it in verse 12 and verse 14. The words “press on” in the original Greek of the New Testament refer to a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. As a hunter you “press on” to find your prey...you keeping going for the prize or goal of your hunting trip.

Paul says “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me...I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” v12; 14

Stick to the Gospel plan

Paul is saying to all of us “Stick to the Gospel plan...Don’t quit...Stay with it...Believe in Jesus!”

We have been given a diet of forgiveness and righteousness which brings us spiritual health and life. Stick to this plan of Jesus Christ...Pursue it as a hunter hunting down his prey.

What is the greatest drawback of diet plans? Answer: FOOD
If you are on a diet plan, you will be tempted to go off it by FOOD.

What are the temptations to our faith?

Discouragement

1st the temptation of Discouragement = the temptation to walk away from Jesus if things don't go our way. We don't like the answers God gives to our prayers. We don't see the Gospel working for us in our daily lives. We get discouraged and think God doesn't care for us.

Pluralism

2nd the temptation of Pluralism = some people expert with other religions...non-Christian ones trying to find that "peace" which only the Prince of Peace, Jesus, can give. Yet, there are many who try to define their own definition of truth. Many refuse to believe that there are Absolute Truths. The Bible says there is only ONE WAY to be saved...only ONE NAME given to us by which we are saved - Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Bread of Life who continues to feed us with forgiveness and righteousness. Yet, sadly there are many who reject Jesus as Paul says here in verse 18b "...many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

May we keep our mind on heavenly things. How do we keep our mind on heavenly things?

Paul says here in verse 13 "But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead..."

Focus and Future

Paul makes two points here. Focus on one thing and look to the future. Devote yourself to 1 thing: Believing in Jesus and living for Him.

In the Old Testament the prophet Nehemiah was given the task of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem after the Jewish people came back home from their 70 year

captivity in Babylon. During his work on the wall he was constantly tempted to stop and come down off the wall and meet with people. Nehemiah said: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down.” Nehemiah 6:3

Live for that which matters most!

1st Focus on 1 thing - Jesus and the life he gives us

2nd Forget the past and look to the future

To “forget” as the Bible speaks here in Philippians does not mean to fail to remember the past but it means to be no longer influenced by the past. It means to break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past.

What was the Apostle Paul’s past? Rounding up Christians to be imprisoned and killed.

Don’t you think he was tempted to dwell on that. How could I have done such things?

Paul could change the past but he could change the way the past influenced him. He knew he was forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Paul’s focus was on the future and no longer tied to the past.

The Bible says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! II Corinthians 5:17

As you live the Christian faith look forward not back. We look forward because our home is in heaven. Paul says:

“But our citizenship is in heaven! And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 3:20

Our names are written in the Book of Life. Revelations 20:12, 15

Jesus says: “However...rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Luke 10:20

Citizenship is important – the citizens of Philippi were privileged to be Roman citizens. When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that its name be registered on the legal records. When a sinner becomes a believer his or her name is written in the Book of Life.

Paul says about his believing friends: “Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Philippians 4:3

Jesus says: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

As citizens of heaven we talk about Jesus. We worship. We study the Bible. We pray. We confess our sins. We serve God and others. We have a spiritual diet that has changed our lives.

In 1921, Lewis Lawes became the warden at Sing Sing Prison. No prison was tougher than Sing Sing. Lewis Lawes’ wife Catherine was a young mother with 3 small children when her husband became warden of the prison. Everybody warned Catherine that she should never step foot inside the prison walls to visit her husband. Did she listen? NO

When the first prison basketball game was held, she went...walking into the gym with her three beautiful kids and she sat in the stands with the inmates. She said: “My husband and I are going to take care of these men and I believe they will take care of me! I don’t have to worry!”

She insisted on getting acquainted with the inmates. She discovered one convicted murderer was blind so she paid him a visit. Holding his hand in hers she said “Do you read Braille?” “What’s Braille? he asked. Then she taught him how to read in Braille.

Later, she found a deaf-mute in prison. She went to school to learn how to use sign language so she could communicate with the prisoner. Many of the inmates said “Catherine was the body of Jesus that came alive again in Sing Sing prison.”

Catherine was killed in a car accident in 1937 while her husband was still the warden. While her body was resting in the casket for her funeral about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the prison the inmates were all gathered outside the main gate of the prison. The acting warden approached them and saw their grief and tears of sadness. They wanted to be allowed to attend the funeral. The acting warden saw their faces and said “All right, men you can go. Just be sure and check in tonight!”

The inmates were allowed to walk the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile without a guard to stand in line and pay their final respects to Catherine Lawes. And everyone of them checked back in. Every one!

Jesus transforms lives.

- * He has transformed us...we in turn are used by Jesus to show love to others
- * He transforms the lives of others

Jesus transforms the lives of those in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League in their mission: "to assist each woman of the Lutheran Church – LCMS in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world."

Jesus' diet plan for us is one filled with love, hope and witness. His plan transforms lives for eternity. Stick To It! Amen.