WHAT’S ON YOUR PLATE?

SEPTEMBER 25, 2022 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE THESE DAYS? I IMAGINE YOUR RESPONSE TO THIS HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH FOOD AND A LOT MORE TO DO WITH HOW FULL YOUR CALENDAR AND "TO DO" LIST ARE. WE ARE SO OBSESSED WITH FOOD THAT *WE EVEN ENVISION OUR LIVES AS A DINNER PLATE!* WHAT WE SEEM LESS OBSESSED WITH, HOWEVER, IS WHAT WE PUT ON OUR PLATES IN THE FIRST PLACE. DESPITE AN EPIDEMIC OF OBESITY AND NUMEROUS WARNINGS THAT OUR PLATES ARE FULL OF HARMFUL FOODS, AMERICANS STILL TEND TO CONSUME WHAT'S BAD FOR THEM. I KNOW I DO, WHILE WRITING THIS SERMON I WENT THRU A BAG OF JELLY BELLYS. EVERYWHERE WE LOOK, WARNINGS DESCRIBE OUR UNHEALTHY EATING HABITS. LOOK UP "HARMFUL FOODS" ON YOUR COMPUTER AND YOU'RE GOING TO GET A BELLY FULL OF INFORMATION ABOUT KILLER FOODS YOU PROBABLY HAVE IN YOUR HOUSE, AT LEAST I DO. ONE OF THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL OF THEM IS THAT THEY ARE "RICH" IN THINGS THAT ARE BAD FOR US LIKE: *SUGAR, "DIET" PRODUCTS, PROCESSED FOODS AND FRIED FOODS. ALL THE GOOD STUFF.*

THERE'S A REASON WE CALL THESE "JUNK" FOODS. THEY CONTRIBUTE NOTHING GOOD TO OUR WELL-BEING AND, INSTEAD, MAKE US FEEL LIKE JUNK. BECAUSE THEY PROMISE TASTE AND PLEASURE, WE GORGE OURSELVES ON THEM, NEVER BEING CONTENT WITH ENOUGH. REMEMBER LAYS POTATOE CHIPS, NO ONE CAN EAT JUST ONE....MAYBE A WHOLE BAG. ON MY RETREAT THIS WEEK THERE WAS DESERT AFTER LUNCH AND SUPPER AND SNACKS IN THE MEETING ROOM, NOT TO MENTION THE SNACKS I BROUGHT WITH ME IN CASE I GOT HUNGRY. AND I ATE AND I ATE!!!!

OK, GREAT NUTRITIONAL LECTURE BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE SCRIPTURE TEXT? WELL IM WONDERING WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON OUR SPIRITUAL PLATE? HOW CAN WE FILL UP OUR PLATES, BOTH THE FOOD AND THE SPIRITUAL, IN WAYS THAT MAKE US RICH IN HEALTH AND RICH IN LIFE? I DON’T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE, AS PAUL CALLS IT, A LIFE THAT IS REALLY LIFE! IN WRITING TO HIS YOUNG MENTEE TIMOTHY, THE APOSTLE PAUL OUTLINES A STRATEGY FOR GETTING RID OF THE JUNK ON OUR PLATE AND, INSTEAD, BECOMING RICH IN THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

PAUL TALKS ABOUT THOSE WHO THINK THAT "GODLINESS" IS A MEANS OF MATERIAL GAIN. IN PAUL'S WORLD, MANY BELIEVED THAT SERVING GOD WOULD LEAD TO FINANCIAL WEALTH. THEY POINTED OUT THEIR GOOD WORKS IN EXPECTATION OF A BLESSING. WE MIGHT THINK OF IT AS THE EARLY VERSION OF THE "HEALTH AND WEALTH" GOSPEL WHERE YOU "NAME AND CLAIM" WEALTH AS A BLESSING FROM GOD. THIS KIND OF THINKING IS AS EMPTY OF SPIRITUAL NUTRITION AS A BAG OF CHIPS OR A DIET SODA.

INSTEAD, PAUL SAYS, "*THERE IS GREAT GAIN IN GODLINESS COMBINED WITH CONTENTMENT, FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD SO THAT WE CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT; BUT IF WE HAVE FOOD AND CLOTHING, WE WILL BE CONTENT WITH THESE".* THIS IS THE IDEA, THE SPIRITUAL DIET OF ENOUGHNESS, OF CONTENTMENT. IN FACT, PAUL OFFERS UP HIS OWN SHORT LIST OF TWO HARMFUL FOODS *HARMFUL FOODS THAT WILL DESTROY OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE* THAT WILL "PLUNGE" US INTO "RUIN AND DESTRUCTION" AND "PIERCE" US WITH "MANY PAINS" (V. 9-10). WOW AND OUCH!!! HERE THEY ARE:

FIRST, DISCONTENTMENT: WE SEEM ALWAYS TO WANT WHAT WE CANNOT HAVE INSTEAD OF WANTING WHAT WE ALREADY HAVE, RIGHT? IT’S THAT IDEA THAT IF ONLY.....I HAD THIS OR COULD DO THAT OR WAS THIS PERSON, IF THEN THEN....I WOULD BE....... YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN....WHETHER IT IS ABOUT MONEY, RELATIONSHIPS, CAREER, OUR KIDS AND GRANDKIDS, OUR LIFE RIGHT NOW. FOLKS, I LIVE HERE. MY PERSONALITY ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE WISHING AND HOPING FOR THE NEXT THING, THE BETTER THING, THE MORE FULFILLING THING, THE MORE ADVENTURESOME THING. MAYBE THAT IS JUST ME?

WHAT IS CONTENTMENT, REALLY? IT IS RECOGNIZING THAT WE ARE DEPENDENT ON GOD, OUR DAILY BREAD, IS HOW JESUS PUTS IT, FOR EVERYTHING. SEE, IT IS ALL ABOUT THE FOOD!!! I’M NOT SAYING, “JUST SIT BACK AND WATCH WHAT GOD’S GOING TO GIVE ME”, NO WE ARE CO-CREATORS OF OUR LIFE. BUT IT’S NOT SOMETHING YOU EARN EITHER BY BEING GODLY AND GOOD, SO YOU ARE REWARDED. BUT IS RATHER A GIFT FROM GOD, IT’S GRACE.

SECONDLY, THE LOVE OF MONEY. PAUL SAYS THAT THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL. HERE ME, NOT MONEY, BUT THE LOVE OF MONEY. AT MY RETREAT THIS WEEK WE TALKED ABOUT HOW RACISM HAS ALOT TO DO WITH THE LOVE OF MONEY. HOW PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ENSLAVED BECAUSE OF MONEY. LAST WEEK I MENTIONED IMMIGRANTS BEINGS BUSSED AND FLOWN AROUND THE COUNTRY BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF MONEY. WHEN WE PUT MONEY FIRST BEFORE PEOPLE, WE ARE PUTTING MONEY BEFORE GOD AND ALL KINDS OF EVIL ENSUES. IT’S LIKE LOVING SUGAR SO MUCH THAT YOU EAT IT AND EAT IT AND DON’T CARE ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES TO YOUR BODY, YOUR MIND, YOUR HEALTH.

PAUL TELLS TIMOTHY TO AVOID THE LOVE OF MONEY AND THE LURE OF DISCONTENTMENT LIKE WE/ME NEED TO AVOID THE JUNK FOOD AISLE IN THE GROCERY STORE. INSTEAD, WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO GO FOR THE THINGS THAT HAVE A HIGH VALUE IN SPIRITUAL NUTRITION: RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS, FAITH, LOVE, ENDURANCE AND GENTLENESS. THESE ARE THINGS YOU CAN PILE ON YOUR SPIRITUAL PLATE, LIKE SALAD WITHOUT THE DRESSING!

BECAUSE GOD SUPPLIES WHAT WE NEED, AND WE ARE CO-CREATORS WITH GOD, WHAT IS IT THAT WE CAN BE DOING TO OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD’S GRACE? PAUL ENCOURAGED TIMOTHY TO PUT THOSE IN HIS CONGREGATION ON A REAL SPIRITUAL DIET. SO HOW DO WE DO IT? HOW DO WE PARTICIPATE WITH GOD SO THAT WE CAN FILL OUR PLATES WITH A POWERFUL SPIRITUAL DIET THAT GIVES US THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE? PAUL SAYS:  
 BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS. WE HAVE BEEN STUDYING LUKE SUNDAY MORNING AND HE HAS BEEN CHALLENGING US TO SHOW HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS, REACH OUT TO THOSE ON THE MARGINS AND THIS WEEK I HAVE BEEN CHALLENGED BY THE SCRIPTURE FROM MICAH: WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU? DO JUSTICE, LOVE MERCY AND WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD.

I WAS AT A 5 DAY ACADEMY WITH THE THEME OF SPIRITUALITY AND JUSTICE AND WE SPENT MANY HOURS LOOKING AT RACISM AND OUR COMPLICITY AS WHITE PEOPLE, THAT WAS MOSTLY WHO WAS THERE AS UNITED METHODIST. I WAS MOVED AND CONVICTED AND FRUSTRATED. MY SPIRITUAL DIET WAS DEFINITELY CHALLENGED. I AM CONVINCE THAT I AM TO BE AN ALLY TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MARGINALIZED, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE OF RACE. I HAVE BEEN GIVEN SO MANY PRIVILEGES, SIMILAR TO HOW WE ARE GIVEN GRACE JUST BECAUSE ARE. PRIVILEGE IS LIKE THAT. I AM CHALLENGED TO SPEAK UP, TO WORK FOR RECONCILIATION, TO “FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT” AND DO GOOD AND RIGHT TO ADD THIS TO MY SPIRITUAL PLATE. TRUST ME, YOU WILL HEAR MORE ABOUT THIS IN THE COMING WEEKS. WE ARE TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS.....DOING WHAT IS RIGHT PROVIDES GOOD, NUTRITIOUS FUEL FOR THE SOUL, IT BURNS OFF OUR EXCESS FAT AND MAKES OURSELVES AND OTHERS HEALTHY IN BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT.  
 BE GENEROUS AND READY TO SHARE -- WHEN WE SHARE WITH OTHERS, WE "STORE UP THE TREASURE OF A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE." JESUS CALLED IT "TREASURE IN HEAVEN," OR THAT WHICH PUTS US IN LINE WITH THE WAY OF GOD'S KINGDOM. A GOOD SPIRITUAL DIET WILL LEAD US TO LESS CONSUMPTION AND FREE US UP FOR MORE DISTRIBUTION; WHETHER THAT IS CARING FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, OR CARING FOR CREATION BY CONSUMING LESS SO THERE IS MORE FOR THE FUTURE, ALL SO THAT OTHERS MAY COME TO KNOW CHRIST AND TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT REALLY IS LIFE.

A FULL PLATE CAN EITHER BE A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING, RIGHT? . IT JUST DEPENDS ON WHAT FILLS IT UP! AN OLD ADAGE SAYS: "YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT." ARE WE HEAPING OUR SPIRITUAL PLATES WITH FAST, CHEAP AND EASY SPIRITUAL FOOD? OR ARE WE, GOD’S PEOPLE TAKING THE TIME AND CARE TO SPIRITUALLY EAT RIGHT, SPEND RIGHT AND SHARE RIGHT?   
  
WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?