

“Bitter or Sweet?” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Pentecost 14 September 3, 2023

- I. **Matthew 16:23** - ²³But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Also, **Jeremiah 15:16** - ¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.”
- II. **Show of hands**...
- a. How many of you would like to know your Bible better?
 - b. For those of you who did not raise your hand, you are now the new Adult Bible Class teacher.
 - c. As Christians, all of us know that we have a great source of truth, a strength for our faith, a peace that passes understanding, and the promises of God in written and spoken form.
 - i. The Word of God is foundational to our faith and life – and as I’ve said many times, being familiar with it is being familiar with God.
 - d. So, what’s the hang up?
 - i. Why do we put off, set aside, and avoid getting to know God better?
 - ii. Why do we spend so much time consuming the world’s information and activities – while fasting on the Word of God?
 - e. We are gluttons when it comes to doing things that interest us... or stave off boredom...
 - i. We consume media in all its forms –
 1. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, X (Twitter) and TikTok take up more hours than we will admit.
 2. Some read fiction books and stories – or listen to them as audio books for hours and hours a day.
 3. Others watch TV for much of their day – whether it’s old TV shows, movies, or perhaps news channels and political commentary.
 4. Still others spend many hours playing video games – and this includes the older generations on their smart phones.
 - ii. We consume activities and events.
 1. Many of us spend large sums of money on outdoor equipment and vehicles in order to “get away”.
 2. Sports may include watching on TV, or participation, which means practice, traveling, and an all-consuming schedule.
 3. Eating out, going to concerts, movies, live performances, or going to casinos and gambling are a big part of some people’s lives.
 - iii. We consume hobbies of every type.

1. I'm probably going to get in trouble here, but things like quilting, crocheting, knitting, and crafting take up lots of time and money.
2. Some people like to target shoot with expensive equipment and supplies.
3. Others go fishing, or go antiquing, or garden.
- iv. The point of all these activities is pleasure and contentment in life, but what the world offers does not lead to real peace.
 1. Many of these activities are not wrong or bad, but when they take the place of spending time in God's Word, it's a matter of managing our time better.

f. So, why do we avoid getting to know God's Word better?

III. **Peter went from hero to zero in our reading today.**

- a. Last week he was praised for identifying Jesus as the Christ, or the Savior – and Jesus said that Peter's confession of faith is the rock on which the Church is built.
- b. Jesus then explains His fate – that He will go to Jerusalem and die by the hands of evil men... only to rise again.
 - i. Peter will have none of it – especially since his impression of Jesus as the Messiah doesn't have room for a miserable death – nor does he want to lose his teacher and friend.
 - ii. The words Jesus spoke to him were bitter... not acceptable... beyond comprehension.
 - iii. Jesus does not pat Peter on the back and say, "I understand you don't get it Peter, but just believe whatever you want, and everything will be fine..."
 1. No! Jesus rebukes Peter – aligning him and his desires as satanic... another bitter truth and word to hear.
- c. Jesus goes on to compare the cross, a symbol of torture and execution, to our walk as Christians and followers of Jesus.
 - i. We take up our cross – we follow Jesus – even when we hear the bitter truth of God's will and desires over our own.
- d. Perhaps this is one reason we choose a hundred other things to do than read God's Word and become familiar with His will for our lives?
 - i. The Word of God has so many challenges to our understanding of life that we struggle to mesh, or connect, it to our daily lives.
 - ii. The Word of God calls on us to change... or to go through a metamorphosis... which leaves behind the things we hold dear, while serving God and placing Him at the center of our day.

IV. **Wait a minute, is placing God at the center of our lives bitter?**

- a. I hope we do not see it that way, but sin is a powerful force that does not want us to give up any control over our own will and desires.
- b. What we might first see as bitter – or even upsetting to us and our egos – soon becomes sweet as we see God at work.

- c. Imagine our friend Peter looking back 10 years after Jesus' death and resurrection... would he consider it bitter... or sweet?
 - i. Certainly in the moment, as Jesus told him the plan of salvation, Peter did not like what he heard – and in shock and astonishment, he rejected the news.
 - 1. Yet, after the resurrection... after the ascension of Jesus into heaven... and after the Day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit coming in power and glory... did Peter see the plan of salvation as bitter?
 - 2. No, Peter became familiar with the truth of God's rescue mission – and the reality that we are not going to win the day by our own power and might – but instead we experience a victory in weakness.
- d. Jesus was the picture of weakness as He went to His death.
 - i. No fighting, no legions of angels to rescue Him, no divine power to make the process easier or less painful... Jesus surrendered Himself to betrayal, false accusations, torture, and an excruciating death.
 - ii. How bitter was it to witness that entire process as His disciples and others who believed Jesus was there to overthrow the worldly evil powers oppressing them?
 - iii. But then, three days later, an empty tomb... grave cloths in the spot where a body once laid... and a resurrected Savior appears in victory.
 - 1. This is the sweet truth of Christ crucified – He forgives our sins of selfishness and going against His will – and rises again so that we are called “not guilty” (Romans 4:25).
- e. So often we perceive God's Word as bitter, but the Gospel is sweet... the good news of our salvation and the forgiveness of sins is so sweet because Jesus did whatever was necessary to rescue us.

V. **The Word of God is sweet, and it's worthy of our daily attention.**

- a. Not everything is perfectly clear – even for the most trained theologian – but that is a process of discovery and understanding that comes in time.
- b. The point is time... it takes time and commitment to digest the Word of God and allow it to engage and transform us.
 - i. It takes time in Bible studies, time in devotions, time in reading and meditating, time in listening to sermons, time in prayer.
 - ii. Last year I prepared a sheet that shows many different ways to study God's Word throughout your days and weeks... and it's available on the welcome desk.
 - 1. Some people struggle to read... that's why there are abundant audio versions available.
 - 2. Some people are visual learners... that's why videos can supplement the reading.

3. Others need a plan to follow... that's why many Bible reading plans exist to build a daily habit.
- c. Regardless of our current situation or ability, God's Word is sweet, and it is ready to engage us – and transform us as followers of Christ.
 - d. Without question, God's Word is the Truth we must have – and so I invite each of you to consume it on a daily basis – the one place being a sweet tooth won't cause any problems at all. Amen.