

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO DOGS (#2):

DID SOMEONE SAY FOOD?!”

(Matthew 5:6; Hebrews 12:1-2)

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**[PROP NEEDED: (#1) Video of Buzz Lightyear’s Reaction to Food;
(#2) CD/MP3 of Steven Curtis Chapman’s Song “Magnificent Obsession”]**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 7-9-23]

--I--

1. **[ONE COMBINED SERVICE...** Read Text: Matthew 5:6; Hebrews 12:1-2 and Pray.]

2. Two weeks ago we began a new sermon series called The Gospel According to Dogs in which we're exploring a few of the lessons we can learn about life and Christian faith from “*man’s [& woman’s] best friend*” ... a dog.

A--It's intended to be a series that is both light-hearted and fun, but also contains life and faith lessons which are quite genuine and important.

B--For example, I mentioned in the first sermon that dogs, first and foremost, teach us the great value of humility, obedience, and surrender to their master -- values that the Bible says we're to practice as followers of OUR Master, Jesus Christ.

C--So today I want to introduce us to a second lesson we learn from dogs by inviting us to watch a short video from a while back about my former dog "Buzz Lightyear" ...
[SHOW VIDEO OF BUZZ’S REACTION TO FOOD...]

3. Now, although Buzz *thought* he was human, as I mentioned in the video, he’s really no different than any other dog in his reaction to food -- ALL dogs love food!

A--It's been said before that dogs are essentially “*chowhounds*” -- that if they’re not lazing around sleeping, or out somewhere playing, then they’re probably *eating!* (hence the title of today’s sermon “*Did Someone Say Food?*”)

B--In one particular episode of the comic strip *Citizen Dog*, the human character Mel asks his dog Fergus, “*What’s it like to be a dog?*” And Fergus replies, “*Well, I dunno. What’s it like NOT to be a dog? [I mean,] you’re asking me a very complex question, and I’m not sure that I have a good enough answer for you. The quality that is unique to being a dog, my 'dogness', if you will, is a very difficult thing to pinpoint....*” And then there’s silence before he continues ... “*But it has a lot to do with food.*” ¹

C--My point is that nearly all dogs have a fixation/obsession with food like nothing else -- that they have “*singleness of purpose*” = a one track mind.

--II--

4. Think for just a moment about that that parallels what we find in today's two scriptures:

A--In Matthew 5:6, Jesus says "*Happy/Blessed are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.*"

B--And in Hebrews 12:1-2, the writer challenges fellow Christians, saying,
"With endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer & perfecter..."

5. In other words, both of these scriptures tell us that as Christians, we're to learn how to develop & practice the "*singleness of purpose*" that our canine friends inherently possess.

A--We're to be "*hungry and thirsty for*" (i.e., be *obsessed* with) righteousness and truth.

B--And to do this, we first have to "get rid of" things -- like bad habits, unholy attitudes, or bitterness of heart -- that get in the way of our walk with Christ.

1--We're spiritually to cast these things off and "*lay them aside*", even though (as the Hebrews passage says) they want to "*cling... so closely*" (Verse 1) -- and as many of us already know... sin IS often hard to get rid of!

2--But with God's help, we're to persistently set out on what the Hebrews scripture calls "*the race that is set before us*" -- the "race" we call the Christian life, which is full of obstacles that can trip us up.

C--Because of this, along the way the writer urges us not to be looking left or right at all the difficulties & distractions that can hinder us, but instead to "*fix our eyes on Jesus*"

1--In other words, as Christians we're to learn to have a "fixation" upon / an "obsession" with *Jesus* -- to make him, his will, his ways, his people, and his calling THE priority of our lives.

2--Author Robert Short says that "*Christians...are those whose hunger has finally been satisfied by Jesus himself, the 'bread of life' (John 6:48),*" and he goes on to say that like our canine friends, "*Christians are the people who have correctly identified their master, now 'dog' his steps, and never stop paying the closest attention to him.*" ²

3--A dog follows his/her master around everywhere (Buzz used to even follow us into the bathroom, prompting Trish once to tell him, "*I've been doing this for a while now; I can handle it without you.!*"); despite this, you and I are nevertheless still called to 'dog' the footsteps of OUR "Master," Jesus!

6. Unfortunately, even we Christians too often find ourselves “fixated” on things other than God and Jesus: ...

A--...our nice homes, cars or other possessions; our work (to the point of “workaholism”); alcohol, drugs, illicit sex, gambling, and other addictions to fill the emotional voids of our lives; and we even sometimes make “good things” like our family and church more important than our relationship with God.

B--So today’s two scriptures are not necessarily an explanation of what our lives currently ARE, but are a calling to what they COULD BE if we will devote ourselves *wholly and singly* to following Jesus -- to acting as he did; treating others as he did; and speaking with love and compassion as he did.

C--The story is told that in 16th-century Germany, the founder of the Protestant Reformation Martin Luther was once at his dinner table eating when he noticed his dog intently watching him eat, with open mouth and motionless eyes (like Buzz in the video earlier). And Luther later wrote, “*Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish or hope.*” ³

D--You see, that’s the spiritual posture the Bible calls us to have in our daily walk with God -- to be so fixated on / obsessed with Jesus that he’s ALL we want & think about.

E--Christian author John Piper says it this way, “*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.*” ⁴

--III--

7. I don’t know where you are in your relationship with God, but this singleness of devotion and purpose towards Him is the mature goal that we’re all called to develop and practice as committed followers of Jesus Christ. ⁵

A--Now I’ll be the first to admit: I’m not there yet... But I *long* to be; and I’m on a journey of faith that I trust will take me there.

B--You see, just like a dog -- obsessed when someone says “food” -- I long for (and am actively seeking) the day when I will have given myself wholly, completely and singly to a “magnificent obsession” with the one who is *my* spiritual “food” -- Jesus himself.

C--Today, God is inviting each of us to join in that same quest. Will you come along?

8. If you’re willing to say yes, then as we all bow our heads in prayer, I want to invite you to take out your bulletin insert, and let the words of the song on this insert become YOUR prayer to God, as well...

[PRAISE TEAM SINGS (or play MP3/MP4)...]

*“Lord, You know how much, I want to know so much in the way of answers and explanations
I have cried and prayed and still I seem to stay in the middle of life's complications
All this pursuing leaves me feeling like I'm chasing down the wind
But now it's brought me back to You and I can see again*

[CHORUS] *This is everything I want, This is everything I need;
I want this to be my one consuming passion.
Everything my heart desires, Lord, I want it all to be for You, Jesus
Be my magnificent obsession.
So capture my heart again; take me to depths I've never been
into the riches of Your grace and Your mercy.*

*Return me to the cross and let me be completely lost
in the wonder of the love that You've shown me Cut through these chains that tie me
down to so many lesser things Let all my dreams fall to the ground until this one remains*
[REPEAT CHORUS]

[BRIDGE] *You are everything I want, and You are everything I need Lord, You are all my
heart desires You are everything to me You are everything I want; You are everything I
need I want You to be my one consuming passion Everything my heart desires, Lord, I
want it all to be for You I want it all to be for You.”*
[REPEAT CHORUS] ⁶

Lord, let these words be the prayer of each of our hearts here today. In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen.

ENDNOTES:

¹ *Citizen Dog*, copyright 1997 Mark O'Hare (Universal Press Syndicate), cited in Robert L. Short, The Gospel According to Dogs: What Our Four-Legged Saints Can Teach Us (HarperSan Francisco), p. 78.

² Short, pp. 80 and 84.

³ “Martin Luther's Table Talk,” magazine Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 4. One can also apply our walk with God to Henry David Thoreau statement about life when he once wrote: *“How to compose your life: pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life, as a dog does his master's chaise. Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still”* [Henry David Thoreau, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #6902].

⁴ John Piper, A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Prayer and Fasting (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997). *“Christian faith is always totally satisfied with the love it receives from its humble God -- its “dog God”* (Robert Short, The Gospel According to Dogs, p. 34).

⁵ *“Just as dogs are totally dependent on their master, so real Christians are totally dependent on theirs.”* (Robert Short, The Gospel According to Dogs, p. 28). Note that someone has noticed that the acronym for the phrase “Dependence On God” actually spells “DOG.”

⁶ Steven Curtis Chapman, song “Magnificent Obsession,” from his album Declaration (2001). This song is based on Matthew 13:44-46; Hebrews 12:2; and Philippians 3:8-10.