



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Prepared by Rev. James R. Wilson, D. Min.
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church - July 24, 2011

Sermon Title: It's Time for Solid Food!

Sermon Text: Hebrews 5.11-14
Related Texts: Matthew 11.28-30; 2 Timothy 3.10-17

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What is your favorite food to prepare on the barbeque? What is your all-time favorite entrée?

II. Introduction

The writer of Hebrews begins to take the readers into theologically deep matters as he cites in 5.8-10 that Jesus, by submitting to the will of the Father and by acting in obedience, became complete in his role of high priest. This meant bearing the sin of the world and suffering humiliation and anguish and death. But because of his doing so, Jesus became the source of salvation - reconciliation with God - for all who obey him. Jesus has become the sympathetic high priest who invites us to the throne room of heaven where we find mercy and grace. He is also the high priest "of the order of Melchizedek." But here the author abruptly breaks his train of thought as if to say, "but wait a minute... you're not ready to learn these things..."

III. Study the Text – Hebrews 5.11-14

- 1) In verse 11 the preacher/author begins a series of exhortations to the Hebrew Christians who are weary, pressured, and ready to turn away from faith in Jesus. The writer wants to convey some deep, significant truths to these people. How does the writer describe the Hebrews in verse 11? What do you think caused them to become "dull in under-standing" (NRSV) or "slow to learn" (NIV)?
- 2) What role do the following things play in our being "slow to learn?"
 - 1) False humility "I could never understand the Bible..."
 - 2) Pride "I know it all already..." (This could also be from over-familiarity)
 - 3) Laziness "It's just too much effort..."
 - 4) The lure of "amusement" (which literally means "without thought")
 - 5) Spiritual resistance – unwilling to live out the deeper implications of the gospel

Note: It is easy to see a parallel between the condition of the Hebrews and some Christians today. In many ways we can become "slow to learn" or "sluggish" or even "lazy" (as the Greek term can be translated) despite the fact that we have a plethora of

resources and opportunities for learning God's word. Such sluggishness can often result from spiritual resistance – we simply do not want to go deeper in living out the implications of the gospel and of obedience to Jesus.

- 3) What is the accusation leveled against the Hebrew Christians in verse 12?
- 4) The reference in verse 12 to being "teachers" actually means having the opportunity for mature believers to lead others by word or example to spiritual maturity. How can you help another person towards spiritual maturity? What would help you to do so?

Note: The imagery of milk and solid food is used by the writer in a way that was common when speaking of classical education. Those in the elementary stages of their education were thought of as infants who needed a diet of milk. Those who had attained an advanced stage of education were thought of as adults who could enjoy solid food. This may be behind the use of this imagery by the author of Hebrews.

- 5) Milk is a necessary part of an infant's diet and continues to be part of a good balanced diet for an adult. According to verse 13, what characterizes one who is nourished only by milk? By what are they **not** being nourished?

Note: The author uses the phrase "teaching about righteousness" which means the teaching about the fundamental truths of the gospel and of God's purpose of reconciling all things through Jesus Christ. In other words, one who consumes only spiritual milk is not being taught and shaped by the whole counsel of God in the scriptures and the words of Jesus.

- 6) In verse 14 the author asserts that solid food is for the **mature** ("perfect" or "complete" – from the Greek "telios" as in 5.8). The mature, by constant use of scripture and the words of Jesus, have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. The term translated "trained" is the Greek word "gymnasium" and suggests exercise and training and repeated effort. How does a person "train" to develop spiritual discernment that leads to mature, wise, and godly decisions?

IV. Theological Reflection

The Hebrews author urges the readers to willingly press on in spite of the pressures and their suffering to a deeper understanding of the gospel and to the entire breadth of what God has revealed in the written word and through Jesus, the living Word. This process of studying and applying God's word results in spiritual maturity. It leads to maturity or "telios" which means perfect, mature, or complete. It is used to describe Jesus in Hebrews 5.8. Maturity results from a life-long pursuit of obedience to Jesus and the word of God.

V. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) How is this exhortation motivating to you as a follower of Jesus? In what ways do you need to accept Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11.28-30 to "come to me... (and) learn from me?"
- 2) What prevents you from digging deeper into God's word and applying it to your life?
- 3) How can you be a mentor to others – in your family, in the church, and among your friends and neighbors - and help them to know Jesus, study God's word, and become mature themselves? How can God's word, according to 2 Timothy 3.10-17, help in this process?