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Daniel 1:1-21  
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### Eating Well

In the documentary *Super Size Me*, Morgan Spurlock ate exclusively at McDonald's restaurants, for three meals a day over the course of 30 days. At the conclusion of his experiment, he found himself 25-pounds heavier and in poor health. Not surprising!

There is one telling scene that displayed the power of the media on small children. A series of pictures were shown to 1st grade students who were asked to identify the individual in the picture.

The first picture was of George Washington. Though a few struggle, most are able to identify him and make statements (if not entirely accurate) about who he is:

"He was the fourth president."

"He could never tell a lie."

The viewing audience cannot see the next picture shown to the children. "Who is this?" Spurlock asks.

One little girl shrugs her shoulders, another shakes her head, but only one even offers a guess.

"George W. Bush?"

"No," says Spurlock, "but that's a good guess."

Spurlock turns the picture around to reveal a painting of Jesus.

The last picture was of Ronald McDonald. Every child was immediately and enthusiastically able to name the hamburger clown.<sup>1</sup>

We call this cultural captivity and the effects of ramped consumerism.

We are what we eat.

Twenty five years ago the average American consumed 1850 calories per day. Since then that number has gone up 304 calories or the equivalent of two cans of soda which could equate to an extra 31 pounds per American per year.

This morning as we continue our sermon series on experiencing the Kingdom of God as we share meals with one another, I want to talk about the importance of healthy eating. Our culture wants us to conform to its consumerism. Eat more, more, more.

But the Bible encourages us to "offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God - This is our spiritual act of worship." We are 'not to be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our

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<sup>1</sup> *Super Size Me* (Samuel Goldwyn and Showtime Independent Films, 2004); produced and directed by Morgan Spurlock; submitted by David Slagle, Atlanta, Georgia posted on Preaching Today Website.

minds. Then and only then we will be able to test and approve what God's will is for our eating together- his good, pleasing, and perfect will."<sup>2</sup>

We are going to look the story of Daniel in the Old Testament. He was one of the best and brightest young men of Israel who were taken into exile by the Babylonians in 605BC. It was there that he was challenged to conform to the cultural consumerism of the royal Babylonian court. So join me as we read his story and see how it might inform our discussion today.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

There are several things that I would like to point out from Daniel's story that can inform the way we eat today. We see how Daniel resisted enculturation...in other words doing what everyone else is doing simply because everyone else is doing. Instead Daniel took control over what he ate. He had a plan, was bold, took risks, and had a community of faith that held him accountable to his plan. But ultimately what we see is that Daniel had faith in God and that alone informed the way he ate.

First let's consider that Daniel resisted enculturation and took control over his diet. For three years he and his buddies were to be trained in King Nebuchadnezzar's palace where they would wine and dine off the same food that was served to the king. This was not any ordinary food. This was rich, royal food. The best cuisine that could be offered a young man.

Now I like good things and I especially like good food. Rich, royal food would have been extremely difficult for me to turn down. But Daniel knew that if he didn't want to put on the freshman fifteen, if he wanted to stay not only in top physical shape but mental acuity that he needed to not indulge in what everyone else was consuming.

A royal Babylonian diet would have been very different from what Daniel was accustomed. For one thing it certainly wasn't kosher. For another, it was probably a far cry from the plant based, clean diet of God's people. Back in Israel, "lentils, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, dates, nuts and fish were all quite popular. For snacks, some even ate grasshoppers and crickets. All these foods provided proper and satisfying nutrition without excess fats or cholesterol.

According to some nutrition experts, "Many people ate most of their food raw, which also bestowed additional health benefits. The additional chewing that raw food requires burns more calories. Daniel would have eaten very little red meat or poultry."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>3</sup> What Would Jesus Eat? The Science Behind the Bible. posted on Dr. Oz Website at <https://www.doctoroz.com/article/what-would-jesus-eat-science-within-bible>

Daniel had a plan and took control over what he ate. “Test us for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance to what you see.”

Now I confess that I have always struggled with keeping my weight under control. Though I feel like I have always been in good health, its those extra daddy pounds that have been difficult to shed. It seems as though no matter how much I work out, nothing worked. I had this notion however that it had something to do with what I was eating and how much.

During my sabbatical summer of 2013, I was able to focus on my personal wellbeing. I kept track of what I ate, how much I ate, and how often I worked out. A simple equation of the calories consumed minus the calories I burned equaled the weight I lost. So if I consumed more calories that I burned, I would gain weight.

Sticking to the program over the years hasn't been as easy because of the enculturation of wanting to consume more than I need.

We see that Daniel was bold, willing to take risks. Notice how Ashpenaz, the chief of the king's royal court, was hesitant to let Daniel follow through with his plan. Ashpenaz said, “I am afraid of my lord the king who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse that the other young men your age? The king would have my head because of you.”

Daniel knew that it wasn't just his skin in the game. But also Ashpenaz's. Failure would have cost both of them everything.

But I love how God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. He agreed to let them try it for ten days. Not only were they healthier and better nourished, but God gave them special knowledge and understanding which set them above and beyond their peers.

One of the great benefits for Daniel was that he had a community of faith that backed him up and held him accountable to his plan. There were his buddies Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Studies show that having a good support system is key to losing weight and keeping it off. Good communities can offer inspiration, motivation, accountability, and tips to help you succeed.

My support community was my wife, Karen. We were in it together. And watching each other lose weight provided the inspiration to stick to the program. We held each other accountable for what we ate, recording what we ate, and making sure we were staying active and going to the gym regularly. We also researched recipes and tried other foods to keep our cravings at bay. We also developed some new eating habits that impacted us as a family.

I discovered an online article described the following Ten Meal Habits of Healthier Families.<sup>4</sup>

Pass bowls around family style.

Sit at the table longer and be less rushed while eating.

Leave a little on our plates. Who remembers the “Clean Dinner Plate Club?” We don’t encourage that any longer.

Put away electronics and interact with one another.

Use smaller bowls and plates.

Ask kids if they are hungry.

Try out all sorts of new foods.

Don’t rely on fast food. We stopped buying take out pizza and instead started making our own from scratch. It tastes much better and is healthier since I know exactly what goes into it.

As with Daniel’s diet, drink lots of water. Carry a refillable water bottle with you throughout the day.

I find that the kind of eating I do often depends on the stress level I am under. With higher stress, I lean toward comfort foods with more saturated fats and carbohydrates. With lower stress, I tend to eat more healthy foods. I also find that when I’m not under stress or rushed, that I take more time to plan out my lunches and meals with healthy foods and quantities.

Truthfully, much of the advice on eating well can be boiled down to one word: moderation. By eating different foods from every part of the pyramid and watching our portion size, we can take control and enjoy what we eat.<sup>5</sup>

But ultimately it was Daniel’s faith in God that informed everything about the way he lived...even his diet. God may not be asking us to be kosher, but God certainly is inviting us to be more aware and intentional with what we put into our bodies. For we are what we eat.

So may we be inspired by Daniel to perhaps eat more healthy this year than last. May we resist being captive of a culture that demands that we always Super Size It. And may we trust God believing that the Kingdom of Heaven arrives as we eat well.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Online Article September 21, 2017 located at <https://www.eatthis.com/meal-habits-of-thin-families/>

<sup>5</sup> Chris Woolston, M.S., “What’s Wrong with the American Diet?” posted on Health Day Website at <https://consumer.healthday.com/encyclopedia/weight-control-39/obesity-health-news-505/what-s-wrong-with-the-american-diet-644659.html>