

Sermon 4

Topic: Too Much A One Thing Good Fi Nothing, Part 1

Theme: Moderation in Eating/Bad Nutrition

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 25:16; Proverbs 23:20-21

Introduction

From the ancient Greek thinker Aristotle, we have *“the Golden Mean”*. This is the idea that, in regard to virtuous character and conduct, there is a middle way between the two extremes of lack or total deficiency and excess. In English Literature we have the popular phrase, *“All things in moderation”*, which makes the point that *doing “too much” of one thing is not a “good” idea — or that it may be detrimental in some way — even if that thing that one is “doing” or “having” is generally considered to be “good”*. Closer to home in the Caribbean, in Jamaican folk culture, that English proverb translated into *“too much a one ting gud fi nutten”*.

All of these sayings make the point that over-indulgence or excessive consumption of anything will eventually prove dissatisfying or harmful. Therefore, a moderate and balanced approach to life is far more desirable and beneficial than excessive consumption, overindulgent behaviour, and extravagant displays. For our purpose today and in light of our texts from the Proverbs we want to make an application, and attach particular relevance, to the matter of eating/food consumption and how we are to approach meeting our nutritional needs. For our purpose today and in light of our texts from the Proverbs we want to make an application, and attach particular relevance, to the matter of eating/food consumption and how we are to approach meeting our nutritional needs.

Proposition

Although food is a necessity, in order to get the best nutrition, we must ensure that we consume our foods in a manner, and in amounts that are helpful and not harmful to our health.

Exposition

Proverbs 23:19-21

¹⁹ Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path: 20 Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, 21 for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

Proverbs 26:15

¹⁶ If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and you will vomit.

Both of these passages are found in the **Book of the Proverbs**, which is a collection of Hebrew sayings in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Although generally ascribed to King Solomon, Israel's third king, **The Proverbs** reflect inputs from others (e.g King Lemuel, Prov. 31). Additionally, the Proverbs could be considered as the collective wisdom of the people as the sayings emerged out of the life situations of the community or the experiences of the people. And, with each succeeding generation, these sayings were passed on faithfully. A proverb in simple terms is a truth about life based on observations of human life and interactions, as well as, happenings in nature. Some may contain an element of wit and they are usually easy to remember.

Proverbs 23:19-21 is the sixteenth (16th) of thirty “sayings of the wise” which begin in Proverbs 22:17 and conclude at Proverbs 24:32. The purpose of the sayings is stated in the words of the speaker: “Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, ¹⁸ for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. ¹⁹ **So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even you.**” (Proverbs 22:17-19).

In essence therefore, these sayings are intended to engender godly living, which is at the heart of biblical wisdom. Among the sayings is a warning against excessive drinking and gluttonous eating. The instruction is clear, “Do not join those who drink too much or gorge themselves on meat” (v. 20). In a time when family gatherings were marked by lots of food and wine, it would have been easy to “eat, drink and be merry”. And yet, the wise are enjoined not to get carried away with the festivities, and consume extravagantly. While the speaker does not forbid drinking or eating, it is clear that amounts and manner are in view. So, he says, “Don’t join with those who **drink too much** wine. Additionally, it is

the “gorging” of meat that is forbidden. Meat was a staple of the culture and festal celebrations were sure to have lots of meat. The temptation to go “full 100” and “eat all you can” was real. It was this reality that necessitated the warning.

The harmful consequences of drunkenness and gluttony are then joined together in verse 21: ***drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.*** Drunkenness or excessive drinking does not allow one to function as a productive member of society and reduces one’s ability to engage in meaningful work. Thus, it may lead to poverty. Similarly, gluttony may leave one sluggish, sleepy and droopy thereby limiting effectiveness at work. These two situations are being suggested by the “drowsiness” effect and the net result is impoverishment. In sum, it is clear that too much drinking and too much eating can be detrimental to one’s health and well-being.

Proverbs 26:15

Like wine and meat, honey was also prevalent in the land where they lived. The place promised and given to the Israelites was described as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:7-8; Deuteronomy 27:3). Deuteronomy 11:10-12 and Deuteronomy 31:20 also confirm that “flowing with milk and honey” indicated Canaan was a land of high agricultural productivity (***pollination, green grass, flowering trees, water resources and abundant food***). Whether honey is taken literally or symbolically, the message is clear: good, enjoyable and pleasurable food was present in the land. Notwithstanding this abundance, the wise speaker entreats and adjures his listeners against having too much. Stated positively, he says explicitly, “***eat just enough***”. Yes, the honey is good and nice but do not have too much; ***eat just enough***. This again, as with the previous proverb, inveighs, warns against excessive consumption, even of that which is good.

Failure to exercise moderation and self-control, even in relation to that which is good, will lead to personal harm. That is the conclusion of the wise speaker. ***“Too much of it (honey), and you will vomit.”*** As enjoyable as the honey may be at first, if one keeps consuming it, there will come a point when it will no longer be helpful but harmful.

Some Universal Truths to Consider

Food is absolutely essential and necessary for life, therefore food must be valued.

Although this is self-evident, it is worth stating, lest anyone is of the mind to think that the bible is against good or does not want us to enjoy all the nice things that may be available. On the contrary, the wine, the meat and the honey are all to be seen as God's good gifts to humanity. Embracing this mindset should then serve to inform how we relate to food. First, we must begin with an attitude of thankfulness, recognizing that our food is a gift from God. Second, we should not eat just because food is available, as expressed in another Jamaican saying, *"before good food waste, better mek belly buss"*. This perspective only leads to over-eating, which is exactly what the proverbs warn against. **Don't eat or drink too much.**

Finally, I don't think that food should be abused or wasted; neither should food be used as a weapon in domestic quarrels or as a tool of manipulation in relationships. Food should not be withheld from children or spouses as some form of punishment. Neither should it be used as incentive or enticement for behaviour change. All these are inappropriate use of food. When we value our food, we will treat it accordingly.

Food is absolutely essential and necessary for life, therefore food must be shared.

A wise person once said that there are enough resources in the world to provide for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed. I believe that is especially true when it comes to the matter of food. Through the abundance of God's provision there is enough food in the world. Unfortunately, due to greed and inequities some have in excess while others are starving. A godly approach would propel us to share our bread with the hungry and to give drink to the thirsty, so that no one is left without a meal. As with the manna that God gave to the Israelites in the wilderness, we should only take enough for our need (Exodus 16:4); leave some for others.

APPLICATION: The Texts for Our Context

While the proverbs were based on people's lived experience or observation, we are further blessed by God with the gift of science that can help us to live more meaningful lives. The science has revealed that in our Caribbean region is beset by very high incidences of lifestyle/non-communicable diseases such as diabetes (o/c sugar), hypertension (o/c high blood pressure) and cardio-vascular diseases (e.g. heart failure, stroke). These are some of the primary causes of deaths in our society and they can all be traced to lifestyle choices and our food consumption habits. What we eat, when we eat and how much we eat all contribute to the prevalence of these health maladies. What then must we learn from these proverbs as we consider areas for change and improvement?

Too Much a one ting gud fi nutten, therefore:

1. **Maintain a balanced diet** – We must eat a good mixture of vegetables, starch (e.g, bread and yams) and protein (e.g, beans and meat). Good nutrition is about ensuring that we consume adequate amounts of each of these food groups. Bad nutrition is manifested in diets heavy with sugar, salty foods, fats and too much starch. Thankfully our land is blessed with plenty of fruits, vegetables and ground provisions. Legumes (peas and beans) are also available, along with poultry, meats and sea-food. Maintaining a balanced diet also means having variety in our meals. We should seek to consume a variety of vegetables, different kinds of starch and have variation in our protein sources. Remember now: **Too Much a one ting gud fi nutten**

2. **Avoid Excesses**

In our Jamaican context there are many seasonal fruits and food. Because of this, certain produce are more prevalent at particular times of the year. Mangoes, apples, avocado pears and melons, are but a few examples. The case of mango has been immortalized in the Jamaican folk song, "mango time". In that song, once it's mango season the only thing consumed is mango; for breakfast, lunch, dinner and all the snacks in between. This approach should be avoided. Whenever we have too much of anything that is really an opportunity to share with others. As with honey in our text, so with all other foods: too much may cause us to become sick. Whatever it is that you may love to eat and

enjoy tremendously, make sure that you avoid over-indulging. So, let us practice portion control; remember now, **Too Much a one ting gud fi nutten.**

3. Change Your Lifestyle

In earlier times with less development and fewer recreational options most persons would engage in some form of physical activity. Before we owned our motor vehicle we used to walk more; before all these video and computer games, more children would be outside playing. Unfortunately, one of the unintended consequences of development is a less active lifestyle. This only serves to compound the problems created by unhealthy eating habits. What we are being called to do is to change our lifestyle in a holistic way. In order to enjoy good health we must modify our eating habits by eliminating certain foods from our diet while increasing our levels of physical activity. Just like with food, too much sitting down, too much screen time and too much inactivity are more harmful than helpful. **Too much of one ting gud fi nutten.**

Conclusion

Taking care of our bodies is part of being wise and it is part of being godly. We can do this by having a right attitude towards food and towards our nutritional health. It is clear that there are some things that are unhealthy and should be avoided. Let us learn the art of moderation and the practice of self-discipline when it comes to our approach to food. Let us embrace the divine perspective.

Long before Aristotle and the Greeks, and long before the economists described the law of diminishing utility, God through the wisdom of the Hebrews gave us some instructions on the need for balance regarding our treatment of food. God's point of view is aptly expressed in the Jamaican proverb that forms the title of this sermon: **Too much a one ting, gud fi nutten.** By God's grace, may we be guided by these truths as we go forward. Indeed, it would be to God's glory, and to our health and benefit. Amen.