

## “What Happened to Lunch?”

### **Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

Graphic: lunch, overworked

Key Verse: 13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

Ask them to: Foster order in ministry and work at it...

### **1) Introduction**

- a) Our text for this morning comes from Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, and in that letter, Paul is trying to encourage people to continue to work hard for the Lord until Jesus returns...
- b) As I thought about work ethic, my mind began thinking about what it must have been like to see Moses leading the people out of Egypt, as described in the book of Exodus. I mean, there probably wasn’t a day that went by for about forty years in the desert that Moses didn’t have to do some sort of leading or some sort of tasks for the Lord and His people.
- c) Have you ever thought about Moses taking a lunch break? Kinda kickin’ back and hangin’ out?
- d) What about Abraham and Sarah, or any of the Judges or Prophets? Did these guys and gals take lunch breaks?
- e) What about Jesus? We know that Jesus ate dinner with people sometimes...but as he was going through his day, did he ever want to just kick back and not do anything? Even when Jesus tried to get away, the people would follow him and he would feel compelled to help them.
- f) And today, it’s no better and no easier to get a break...
- g) In a recent survey of more than 1,000 employees, some 63 percent of respondents said that the lunch “hour” is the biggest myth in office life today. More than half of workers take 30 minutes or less to eat, and some of them do so at their desks while they continue working. Others use the time to run errands.
- h) And the trend is that our lunch breaks are getting shorter and shorter, to an average of 31 minutes, down from 36 minutes 10 years ago.

- i) And so, I'm thinking that we have a bit of a problem here...we all have to struggle with the fact that there are only so many hours in the day, and we all only have so much energy, and we have demands on our time from our bosses and our daily routine, YET we are called to continue working hard for the Lord, to earn our keep, and spread the Gospel message of hope without ceasing.
- j) And do all that without burning out and without getting frustrated at the people around us who aren't working as hard as we are, and we have to not give up when the going gets tough, even though we want to.
- k) The secret here, I think, is working together...pulling in the same direction...and supporting each other with our words, our actions, and our prayers.
- l) Being a Christian means slugging through the mud sometimes. And it means being connected to each other for the good of the church...

## 2) Paul's letter to the Thessalonians/Disorder

- a) Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
- b) Paul talks about that work ethic in this second letter to the Thessalonians, and if we take his comments at face value, we might assume that the apostle would be right there with employers who encourage us to work through the lunch hour.
- c) "Now we command you, beloved," Paul writes, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness ...." Further on, he adds, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat." And he chides those "living in idleness" as "mere busybodies," and he tells them to get cracking.
- d) Paul seems to be leaning toward a work-fare program. With an ethic like that, I think you'd agree that Paul would be a highly-prized shop manager at any major corporation today, or so it would seem.
- e) But when we read Paul's advice in the context of the full letter to the church, we see that the apostle was talking about life in the **Christian** fellowship, and in that setting, his words take on a different meaning.

- f) For one thing, some of those early Christians expected Jesus to return to earth in their very near future. It seems that some concluded that working hard at making a living was pointless or working to share the Gospel was futile, because the kingdom of God was at hand and Jesus was coming back really soon.
- g) And secondly, it's also possible that some in the fellowship were poor and expected that the church should take care of their needs indefinitely. Even though they were operating under a commune-like state, people were expected to work hard for the good of the church.
- h) But Paul says "keep away from believers who are living in idleness" — or at least that's how the NRSV translates it. But the underlying Greek means not so much "living in idleness" as "living in disorder" or "being disruptive," and it even carries a sense of insubordination.
- i) In fact, in this case, the old KJV is closer to the actual meaning when it translates Paul's words as "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly ...." And J.B. Phillips' translation gets at it too when he words it, "don't associate with the brother whose life is undisciplined ...."
- j) But the rendition I like best is how the Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles renders it: "Part company with every brother who bucks out of the harness ...." I'll come back to that in a minute...
- k) But it's clear from Paul's words that he's not talking about the workplace, here, but in fact, he is talking to and about the church, the worship-place. He's addressing this to believers and people in the church.

### **3) The Church**

- a) And he's warning against believers who are disorderly in that they don't pull a share of the church load.
- b) That means that it matters what ministry we place on the shoulders of others within the faith community.
- c) We could come up with examples about how this plays out in the life of the church. We could talk about the things to which God is clearly calling us: tithing and serving in ministry and inviting people to church...growing the Kingdom of God. When, for whatever reason, we as individuals don't do

some of these things, the outcome is that someone else will have to do it or it won't get done.

- d) Paul understood and I think we all understand that being a church isn't about doing things, yet John Wesley points out that once we are saved by the grace of God through Jesus, our works are the fruit that others can see and will know that we have Christ living in us.
- e) And it's not about whether we take lunch breaks or not. Paul wasn't urging Christian believers to work through their lunch hour – to be busybodies; he was urging us to pull together in the ministry of the church.
- f) In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul makes a similar point by using the human body as a metaphor, with each church member being the equivalent of a body part that functions on behalf of the whole body.
- g) Here's another analogy –
- h) In California's Death Valley National Park, you can view the remains of the old refining operation of the Harmony Borax Works, near what is now Furnace Creek Ranch in the park. That recalls the years in that late 19th century when borax was hauled out of the valley.
- i) Borax is a mineral widely used in industrial, chemical and household applications, and in Death Valley, it can be found lying on the desert floor in a compound nicknamed "cottonball." Starting in 1883, the Harmony Borax Works processed cottonball to separate out the borax. The problem, however, was getting the borax to the customer. The nearest railhead was 165 miles away at Mojave. The route to get there was a combination of desert, with temperatures sometimes as high as 130 degrees, and mountains, with steep grades. And much of the route was waterless.
- j) The solution the company came up with was a team of 20-mules pulling two wagons filled with borax and a third wagon containing a 500-gallon water tank. The total weight was 36.5 tons.
- k) As noteworthy as all that is, *here's the part that's especially fascinating:* Driving this team was not simply a matter of cracking a whip and saying "giddyup," especially when it came to navigating curves in the mountain passes. The animals were all hitched to an 80-foot chain that ran back to the wagons, and as the team started around a sharp curve, the chain tended to be pulled into a straight line between the lead mules and the wagons. If that

were allowed to continue, the lead animals would pull the rest of the team and the cargo straight over the edge of the precipice.

- l) When the train came to a curve, one of the two teamsters, the guys who guide this whole operation, moved out with some of the mules in the middle of the team and ordered them to jump over the chain and pull at an angle to the rest of the team, while they also sidestepped forward. This forced the chain to conform to the bend of the curve. The whole procedure was a grand demonstration of training and teamwork: The lead animals kept the train on track, while the rest guided the wagon and pulled with muscle.
- m) This mule team is a good image of how a church should function. We each have our gifts, and should exercise them, each doing what we do well, but working them in harmony for the forward motion of the whole congregation. And Jesus is the one leading the way.
- n) But do we like to be placed in a harness...is the image of us as mules difficult to imagine? Well...here's the truth, being a church means working together in ministry, and to do that, we have to agree to lean more toward order than disorder. We agree to lean more toward not being idle than toward idleness.
- o) But harnessed?
- p) Poet Robert Frost captured an important concept when he wrote, "Freedom is riding easy in harness."
- q) *The life completely unfettered is a life of emptiness and meaninglessness.* It has no direction and has no one to help.
- r) Freedom is only real within protective boundaries and with a worthwhile task at which to spend our time. The freedom of the gospel is not one of *no* harness. Jesus himself talked about his followers taking on his yoke (Matthew 11:29-30), and a yoke is part of a harness system. The yoke Jesus offers us is not a restriction like the harness of legalism, but a guiding rein that steers us into spiritually healthy lives.
- s) But let's return for a moment to Paul's comments in this passage about those who buck the harness. Notice that he calls them "believers." Notice he does not say "put them out of the church." But notice also that Paul's advice is to keep away from them.

- t) Despite the wording, he's not talking about shunning or cold-shouldering people, as the rest of the passage reveals. Paul says that such out-of-harness persons are not living according to the "tradition" that they had received, which, with the example of Paul and his coworkers, was to continually pull their part of the load. He further says church members should "imitate" him and his coworkers, who used their gifts for the good of the faith community.
- u) So what he means by "keep away" from idlers is "don't imitate them." Instead, pattern yourself after those who work for the good of the whole church.
- v) By calling those within the congregation who are out-of-the-harness, who appear to be taking a huge lunch break—by calling them "believers," Paul reminds us that it's not up to us to decide who is and who is not part of the church.
- w) When it comes to looking for models of faithfulness, we should recognize that those who are using their talents and gifts for the health of the church and the effectiveness of its ministry are expressing their Christianity in vital ways according to a spiritual work ethic that dates back to the apostles themselves. People in the church following that tradition are the folks to copy.
- x) In our small groups...while we're serving in ministry...while spending time with our fellow believers...we each have the opportunity to look to others who are modeling this kind of work ethic in the church and begin to ask ourselves how we are being called to imitate them...people who are moving the congregation forward for the cause of Christ...so that all people in our community and in our lives would hear the message of salvation through Jesus.
- y) So that we all will be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us...while we are working hard together.

#### **4) Recognition of Service**

- a) The Apostle Paul ends this section of his letter, in verse 13 b saying, "Never tire at doing what is right." This morning, our Youth have taken on a really neat project to recognize those who are tireless in doing what is right.
- b) As we spend time working for the kingdom of God, we sometimes find ways to thank each other for the tasks we do and the time we spend for others.

And this morning, our Youth would like to recognize some of you for all you do...

c) ...let's pray...