

WD January 16, 2023

“No Added Preservatives”

Have you actually looked at what goes into our foods these days? So, one of my bad habits has been drinking a certain diet drink that starts with a “c”. Recently, I have consciously tried to avoid the stuff and have switched to water and diet tea. Water’s fine if you don’t care if what you are drinking has flavor or not. It’s fine once in a while but I prefer some flavor and I like having something quick to grab. So, there it is. I know that I am not alone. Everything it seems, has some kind of preservatives in it.

Now I’ve just this week read an interesting article from webmd.com. The article spoke about one of the most common preservatives in drinks and food called, Sodium Benzoate. It’s designed to keep away harmful bacteria, mold, and spoilage. By the way, it is also used as an anti-corrosive and preservative in things like mouthwash, toothpaste, sunscreen, moisturizers, and baby wipes. Who knew!?

It is also been said that people who drank beverages containing high levels of sodium benzoate have increased deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms. And the most interesting thing about Sodium Benzoate...when mixed with ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) is that it can become a carcinogen that may cause cancer. So, watch out for drinks with both at the same time.

According to the article, the FDA believes that our exposure to such sodium benzoate is minimal and does not harm our bodies. The FDA allows for 0.1% concentration relative to the portion provided. The good news in all of this seems to be that our bodies do not retain the preservative for long. Our bodies metabolize and excrete it through our urine within 24 hours. Interesting stuff. I’ve linked the article below so you can go and read it for yourself.

Here’s the thing. Added preservatives presume that a product is going to break down; it needs help to keep going. This also presumes a shelf life to the product that must be artificially kept fresh long after the item is actually “freshly” made or grown. We have all seen how long leftover last in our frig. Such are the things of men create. This is the nature of the world. But Jesus makes a distinction between the artificial and that which lasts.

In John 6 Jesus says, “⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Jesus speaks of eating Flesh and drinking His blood which give off strong connections to the Lord’s Supper. But this also alludes to something significant for us on a more common level. Jesus never spoils and neither do the things He gives us. To digest something is to make it a part of our lives, integrate it into our very cellular make up. Jesus and His Word are to be digested, integrated into the cellular structure of our lives.

The problem however, comes with the artificial stuff that makes things colorful and delicious that don’t actually last and don’t always produce anything eternal. In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells of a rich man who had a great crop. He’s already rich and can afford to be generous. Instead of being gracious he goes after an artificial happiness He decides to build bigger barns and keep it all for himself and then eat, drink, and be happy. The Lord concludes the parable by calling this man a fool because none of those things can give him the same thing as the bread of life.

Something else that is artificial is religion. The Religious leaders were very religious in their observance of hand washing, sabbath keeping, tithing, praying, and even going to church. They looked the part but Jesus called them white-washed tombs. On the outside they looked great, but on the inside they were lost souls. Such is life of all the causes and movements that have come in these most recent years. They all do a good job of framing their cause as spiritual in some way. But they are all artificial in their wisdom and often tend to make idols out of their focus. Like the religious leaders of old, those chasing a cause frame themselves as champions, protectors of the people, animals, and the world, and anyone like Jesus or His Word as dangerous.

As I mentioned in yesterday’s message at church it is surprising how subtle those artificial things can be. The disciples, those closest to the Lord, were still very much influenced by the artificial teachings of the religious leaders. As part of their teaching Jesus had to teach them the eternal things. For example, in John 9

they assume the blind man or his parents had sinned because of his blindness. That was a pharisee message not Jesus'. The Pharisee's always associated illness with sin. Luke 9, when Jesus wasn't well received by some Samaritans they ask Jesus, "Do you want us to call down fire on these Samaritans." That was a pharisee message believing such people outside of God's grace. The disciples also fought over who was the greatest in the kingdom which was a pharisee and Gentile message but Jesus says, "unless you change and become like little children you will not see the kingdom of God." In Matt 16:5-6 Jesus says to His disciples, "Be careful...Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." The yeast of a cause will not be satisfied until it has spread and commands every corner of one's life.

The good news is that we still hold all the cards for what we digest or consume. It takes a little effort to eat right. We may have to adjust our diets much the same way one who has to with a peanut allergy or for those who have to be on a gluten free diet. Such folks pay lots of attention to what they buy and eat. We are no less called to evaluate and discern what we consume with our ears, our eyes, our minds, and let into our hearts. Like almost everything in the grocery store, most things have a lot of artificial preservatives that in the long run have no real eternal value to our bodies or souls.

Often the Word tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above and not on earthly things (Col 3:2). Why do that exactly? Well, go to the bottom of John 6. When Jesus was done teaching in many of the disciples who were following Jesus left and went back home because what Jesus was teaching was hard for them to accept. Seeing what was happening Jesus asked the twelve if they wanted to leave too.

Two things to notice. First, Jesus didn't beg the people to come back. He didn't adjust His message to make it more palatable so people would stay. Jesus was never concerned about lots of numbers as much as He was focused on the Truth of His Word. It is only by the Truth that we are set free. That truth is being honest about our sin which loves the artificial. The freedom is the deliverance from that sin in Jesus' cross. Remarkably, when the people decided to leave Jesus let them go. Jesus is not going to force feed anyone.

Secondly, Jesus' teaching then as it does now is meant to evoke a response. Peter responds with a very wise response in verses 68-69. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus gives us all the opportunity to stay with Him or go as well. They chose to stay.

Note the reason why. "You are the Holy One of God." He didn't say, "Because You love us." Even though that was true. He didn't say, "Because Your cause is just." Though it was. He didn't say, "Because You make us happy." Which by the way, wasn't always true. He didn't say a lot of things that could have been said. Jesus is the Holy One of God. They realized right there and then that there is nothing artificial in Jesus. There is only Truth and what He brings is eternal. Peter's response was not only a confession but a declaration to remain and feed upon the bread of life. It was also a declaration to follow Jesus even when He conflicts with all the popular ideas, causes, and religions. Jesus evokes a response. Bear fruit or don't.

Artificial preservatives are a major part of our food supply. They do not have to be part of our faith.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30

<https://www.webmd.com/diet/what-to-know-about-sodium-benzoate#:~:text=Sodium%20benzoate%2C%20potassium%20benzoate%2C%20and,used%20as%20an%20antimicrobial%20agent>