

“You’ve got to taste this!” Our mothers said this as they thrust Brussel Sprouts beans into our face. “You’ve got to taste this!” Wives say this to husbands as they test their latest concoction of tuna casserole. But all this pales in comparison to the taste test conducted by a gourmet cook as she thrust *dog food* upon unsuspecting guests.

It all happened at an elegant reception near Denver. The dog food was served on delicate little crackers with a wedge of imported cheese, bacon chips, an olive, and a sliver of pimento on top. Yes, it was hors d’oeuvres a la Alpo. The hostess had just graduated from a gourmet cooking course and decided it was time to put her skills to the ultimate test. After doctoring up those miserable morsels and putting them on a couple of silver trays, with a sly grin she watched them all disappear. One man just couldn’t get enough. When they broke the news to him, he probably barked and bit her on the leg! In all likelihood, he was famished for real food.

Amos also knows about people hungering for real food and finding none. In Amos 8:11 the prophet announces that no longer will the people

experience famine and drought brought about by destruction of the natural world (e.g., Amos 4:6), rather, they will undergo an even harsher judgment. Hunger and thirst will arise because of a famine in the hearing of God's words. Without access to divine words, Israel will be lost (cf. John 6:68).

In their deepest moment of need people will finally turn to the LORD (unlike the stubbornness described in Amos 4:6–11), but at that point God will offer no word. The divine silence will be deafening and destroying. Israel rejected God's words (2:11–12; 7:10–17). Now the punishment will fit the crime.

God's anger is sometimes demonstrated by His silence. Micah 3:4 says as much: "Then they will cry out to the LORD and He will not answer them; and He will hide His face from them." In Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25 we hear that "Israel had no king." In Judges 17:6 and 21:25 we learn that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The result was that "the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there were not many visions" (1 Sam. 3:1). God's refusal to speak also occurs in 1 Samuel 14:27: "So Saul

inquired of God, 'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?' But God did not answer him that day" (cf. 1 Sam. 28:6, 15-16).

In like manner, Israelites who would not listen to the LORD'S word through Amos (Amos 2:11-12; 7:10-17) or through disasters (4:6-11) will be completely cut off from divine communication. The conversation was over; words don't work. Actions will now deliver God's just judgment.

Jesus gives this same warning to the church in Ephesus, "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:5). In this case the "lampstand" indicates Christ's presence. Divine absence means silence and death.

Luther uses the term *Platzregen* to describe a local downpour of the Gospel that then moves on. The Reformer writes:

Let us remember our former misery, and the darkness in which we dwelt. Germany, I am sure, has never before heard so much of God's word as it is hearing today; certainly, we read nothing of it in history. If we let it just slip by without thanks and honor, I fear we shall suffer a still more dreadful darkness and plague. O my beloved

Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God's grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again, when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can.<sup>1</sup>

Why do you and I experience a famine of God's Word? Why are there times when God is silent and so distant?

Oh, we **try** to stick to a diet of thanksgiving, kindness, and humility, don't we? We try to stay on a spiritual diet of God's Word that brings vigor and victory, strength, and power. But then we slip, a tiny bit of

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<sup>1</sup> Walther I. Brandt, ed. "The Christian in Society," vol. 45 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 352–53.

coveting, one piece of pornography, just a little bit of slander, a touch of sarcasm, and then it's all downhill from there. We just can't get enough. And this is killing us.

The enemy thrusts junk food before **us** on silver trays and with a sly grin watches it all disappear. Filled to the brim with his miserable morsels our desire to regularly study, memorize, learn, defend, trust, believe, love, and live out God's Word becomes a chore, a bore, a snore until we say, "no more!"

And the result is a famine in the hearing of God's Word.

This is why God decided to serve up one more Word. As a man His appetite is defined in Hebrews 2:9, "So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

Talk about a taste test. This was it for all time! Jesus tasted the demonic delight called death, the soldiers' spit, their cheap wine, sweat running down His cheeks along with His own blood. But there was more. Jesus drank the cup of the Father's wrath. He drank every last drop. And it killed Him.

Yet Jesus not only tasted death. He swallowed him up, chewed him up, and spit him out! In 1 Corinthians 15:54 Paul announces, “Death has been swallowed up in victory!”

And this means that our famine and hunger has ended. The feast is here! It was Luther who pounded the table at Marburg with the Latin words, “*hoc est corpus meum.*” In English it means, “This is My body.” The forgiveness and love, mercy and salvation accomplished at Calvary is now present in the bread and wine by the power of the Word. The Bible does not teach real absence, but real presence. Christ’s true body and blood are here to completely forgive you of all your sins and wipe them out forever.

The famine has ended. The feast is here! Amen.