

Nourishing the Tree

KENNETH A. SOLEN

Brothers and sisters, good morning! Several years ago a young returned missionary came to see me. I had been his bishop several years before and had helped him to work through some problems from his youth and to prepare to serve a mission. By the time he began his mission, he was ablaze with the fire of the gospel and served enthusiastically and honorably. It was now a year or two after he had returned home, and he told me that his excitement about the gospel and the Church had been growing dim. He also told me of a strained relationship with his parents and of his general discouragement and bitterness. He asked me in frustration, “Bishop, why am I losing my testimony?”

In response to his question, I asked him, “Are you nourishing the tree?” At first he didn’t understand, so we talked about the principle taught in chapter 32 of Alma. Looking back on our conversation, I wish now that I had said more and read more to him. Perhaps he is listening this morning or may see a replay of this devotional. Perhaps some of you have had or are having feelings similar to his.

Alma had likened the exercise of our faith—meaning our trust in the Lord—to planting a seed. As we continue to trust and obey the Lord, that seed will grow into a tree. But

Alma warned us that we are not finished at that point. Here are his words:

But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof. [Alma 32:38–39]

We often think of that discourse when we think of those who are first learning about the restored gospel and experimenting with the goodness of its glorious message. But it also applies to us after we have been in the Church for many years, and it applies to all of our relationships with the Lord. We need to continue nourishing the tree of faith, to continue deepening our roots, and to be partaking of the fruit of the love of God. Indeed, this metaphor

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applies very generally to our spiritual health, and Alma was teaching a true principle about spiritual nutrition.

So I've come today to talk about food—specifically, *spiritual* food—but also about its metaphorical connections to *physical* food. I realize that, in some ways, I'm preaching to the choir. After all, you are all here—at a BYU devotional. You already know of the importance of spiritual nourishment or you wouldn't be here. Most of you are probably very healthy, with the spiritual equivalent of rosy cheeks and sparkling teeth. But this life is full of challenges that would exhaust our spirits, weaken our resolve, and infect us with sin. There are times when we feel a little less than at our peak, a little less than fit for a celestial marathon, and maybe even a bit weak of soul. We all have spiritual peaks and valleys, and sometimes we may feel that we've been in a valley for an awfully long time and the memory of our last peak is fading fast. If so, there may be help in my message this morning.

As I've suggested, many of the Lord's commandments use words and images associated with physical food.¹ Thus, he teaches us that there is a close correlation between spiritual and physical nourishment. I believe that he uses this metaphor not just for poetic impact, but because it teaches some vital principles about how to avoid serious pitfalls and how to fulfill our mission here on the earth. Let's review that mission.

Latter-day scriptures make it clear that our ultimate goal is to become like our Father in Heaven and our Savior so that we can live with them. This is not an instantaneous transformation but requires a *process*—a process called “sanctification,” made possible by the Lord's grace. In fact, in this process, we receive “grace for grace” until we “receive of his fulness,” just as our Savior exemplified (D&C 93:12–13, 19–20). For our part of the process, we need to make righteous choices, and we need to be strong against powerful destructive influences.

As we do so, the Lord makes “weak things become strong” unto us (see Ether 12:27). Thus we grow stronger and stronger until we are able to live the law of a celestial kingdom, without coercion or restraint. This becomes the criterion for determining if we can ultimately live where our Father in Heaven lives and where there is celestial glory, “For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory” (D&C 88:22).

The Lord's commandments are really an instruction manual for the process. Among those instructions are guidelines to help us succeed rather than fail. To visualize this, let's think for a minute about a similar process: growing physically.

In elementary school and high school, we learned that our physical growth and health require that we provide our bodies with proper nutrition. We need a regular intake of protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals. If we have that intake, we are far more likely to have strength, energy, mental health, growth, healing, and a defense against the constant attack of infectious organisms around us. But the same is true of spiritual growth and health. That is, we need a regular intake of spiritual food—like prayer, scripture study, temple attendance, and loving service to others. If we have that intake, we will have moral strength, clear and inspired thinking, growth in spiritual stature, and a defense against the constant attack of the adversary.

Unfortunately, there is also a negative side. If we deny our physical bodies the necessary nutrients over a period of time, we can develop deficiencies and even starvation. The symptoms of malnutrition and starvation include such problems as weakness, mental confusion, loss of memory, decreased growth, decreased defense against infection, and even a decreased ability to absorb nutrients (see Lawrence M. Tierney, Jr., Stephen J. McPhee, and Maxine A. Papadakis, eds., *Current Medical Diagnosis and Treatment*, 36th ed. [Stamford, Connecticut:

Appleton and Lange, 1997], p. 1129–32). Do you realize that there can also be spiritual starvation? If we deny ourselves spiritual nutrients, the results will include moral weakness, confusion, lack of growth, and more vulnerability to temptation and sin.

Brothers and sisters, these spiritual effects are real, and *we are all vulnerable*. Every bishop works with members whose lives have been devastated by serious sin. During my service in that office, I heard many confessions in which such a heartbroken member would say, “I never meant for this to happen!” Almost in disbelief, this devastated soul would explain that he or she had always been a faithful member of the Church with a strong testimony, sometimes even holding major leadership positions in the Church. How could this have happened?

My questions to the member were always, “Are you praying every day? Are you spending time with the scriptures every day?”

Almost without exception, the answer was, “No.”

I would question further, “Did you *ever* do these things?”

Sometimes, the answer would be, “Yes, I used to pray and study.”

Then I would ask, “When did you stop?” Invariably, I learned that the prayer and the scripture study stopped first, and then the serious problems began. I would walk away from those interviews with increased feelings of my own vulnerability and of my own need for the Lord’s protection and nourishment.

Not only does good spiritual nutrition help to prevent sin, it also helps with repentance, with spiritual healing. I use the word *healing* because sin causes injury to the spirit, it causes the wounding of our eternal soul. With Christ as our Master Physician, the healing process requires remorse and confession and restitution, but it also requires time and nourishment in order to regain our spiritual strength and equilibrium and to repair the painful damage. That is why repentance from serious sin will

always include regular prayer and scripture study—food for healing.

But we are also vulnerable, perhaps even more vulnerable, to another kind of spiritual disease besides the kind that leads to formal Church disciplinary action. I speak of the more subtle disease of spiritual retardation—a kind of stunted growth and lethargy that just prevents us from growing or going anywhere. It’s the kind of malady that was the point of a Mormon folktale about Satan and his generals discussing how to prevent a Latter-day Saint from achieving exaltation. In the story, one of Satan’s generals suggested, “Let’s tell him (meaning the Latter-day Saint) that there is no God and no Christ.”

Satan, thoroughly experienced in such matters, quickly dismissed that plan, saying, “That won’t work. He knows by the Spirit that there’s a God and a Christ, and he won’t believe us.”

At that point, a second general offered, “Well, all right, we won’t challenge his testimony of God and Christ; we’ll just tell him that Joseph Smith was a fraud and there was no restoration of the gospel.”

Again, Satan quickly saw the flaw and said, “That won’t work either; he’s read the Book of Mormon and has had the confirmation of the Spirit.”

Frustrated, a third general asked, “Isn’t there anything we can do to prevent him from reaching exaltation?”

With a wicked smile (because that’s the only kind he has), Satan answered, “Oh, yes. We’ll let him have his testimony of God and Christ and of the Restoration. We’ll just tell him that there’s no hurry.”

Well, it’s just folklore, but it teaches a true principle that if we aren’t diligent about our spiritual nourishment, we can lose our way. Without the energy derived from regularly feasting at the Lord’s table, we can weaken and then be tempted to indulge “just a little” in forbidden things like R-rated movies, pornography, dishonesty, gossip, Sabbath breaking,

meanness, and contention, to mention just a few of the spiritual poisons in Satan’s arsenal. Whether it leads to more serious transgression or not, it will surely prevent our progress and cause the tree to wither. We will withdraw ourselves from the Spirit of the Lord just a little—just enough not to have his help in the face of temptation or disappointment or to help us endure a trial, and just enough that the sweet and sacred experiences of the sanctification process just won’t happen (see Mosiah 2:36).

The young returned missionary who came to see me and to seek help with his weakening testimony admitted that he had lost the good habits practiced during his mission—habits of daily personal prayer and daily scripture study. He was spiritually malnourished and was displaying the symptoms of that condition. His vision was cloudy and his strength was too low to overcome the dark influences of the evil one and to maintain an eternal perspective.

Brothers and sisters, it is vital that we recognize how vulnerable we are to the forces that would prevent us from returning to our celestial home. We need spiritual nutrition to strengthen us against those forces and to help us in our growth process. It is that kind of nourishment that the Lord repeatedly urges us to obtain as he uses the metaphor of physical food. Let’s review some aspects of that metaphor.

The Savior said we should hunger and thirst after righteousness. “Blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). The Lord is telling us how much we should desire the things of eternal value. To hunger and thirst are among the most powerful urgings of our physical being. This is not a description of a casual interest or even of a pleasant longing; this description is of a physical craving for life-sustaining sustenance—for that which we need for our very existence. He is telling us that we should crave righteousness

as though our existence depended on it—and, of course, it does. Incidentally, we hunger and thirst for things we don’t yet have, and the Lord is commending us and promising us a blessing not because we are already righteous, but because we desperately wish to be.

The things of the Spirit become “delicious” to us. Said Alma, “The word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me” (Alma 32:28).

Think of the power of the word *delicious*. Of all our sensory experiences, one of the most intense is associated with our sense of taste. It uses not only our taste buds but also our senses of smell and touch. In fact, taste is so potentially pleasurable, it plagues those of us who try to resist its tempting call. By saying that the influence of the Lord’s Spirit would be “delicious,” Alma was teaching us that that influence would become the most pleasurable of all pleasures. Said the psalmist, “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalms 34:8).

We all can relate to the power of this metaphor. One of our favorite family stories is about our son Aaron when he was two years old. Climbing up on the couch, where his mother was reading the scriptures, he asked, “Mom, why are you always reading that book?”

She answered, “Because it is delicious to me.”

Just then the phone rang, and she went to another room to answer it. When she came back a few minutes later, there was Aaron with several pages from the New Testament in his mouth, testing his mother’s description. To this day, her Bible is missing Romans 10–14.

Many scriptures reinforce this metaphor. To the Hebrew Saints, Paul talked of those who had “*tasted* of the heavenly gift, and . . . the good word of God,” and King Benjamin spoke to those who had “*tasted* of [the Lord’s] love.” And to Lehi, the fruit of the tree in his vision was “most sweet, above all that [he] ever

before *tasted*" (Hebrews 6:4–5, Mosiah 4:11, 1 Nephi 8:11; emphasis added).

The Lord wants us to “feast” on the word.

We are not only to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to find it delicious, but the Lord wants us to respond proactively by seeking spiritual nourishment. Nephi instructed us that after we are baptized, we must “press forward, *feasting* upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20; emphasis added).

Imagine yourself at a feast. What kind of food would be there? Would it be what we sometimes call “junk food,” or would it be nutritious food carefully and lovingly prepared? Would you sample a few items and then hurry away? The instruction for us to “feast” suggests that we partake slowly and deliberately, enjoying the quality and goodness until we are filled.

I’d like to talk for a few minutes about what Nephi’s counsel can mean in our lives by talking about *feasting in prayer*, *feasting in the scriptures*, *feasting in service*, and *feasting upon Christ*.

First: Feasting in Prayer

In the first few years after my wife and I joined the Church, my prayers would not be classified as “feasting in prayer.” They were more like nibbling or, at best, snacking. They were brief and often without depth. Seldom did I feel like I was communing with our Father in Heaven or that he was hearing me. Have you ever felt that way? Influenced by the scriptures and numerous talks from the pulpit, I realized that I needed to spend more time in prayer. So I finally decided that I would pray for a half-hour each morning. The first day I arose early and locked myself in a spare bedroom in our apartment, knelt by the chair, and placed my watch next to me on that chair. I then began to pray. When I had finished repeating to the Lord the same things I had said to him rather routinely every day for the previous year or two and could think of no more to say, I opened my eyes and looked at

my watch. Three minutes had elapsed.

I remember thinking, “Oh great, what am I going to talk about for another 27 minutes?”

It was then that I admitted to myself that I wasn’t allowing the Lord into my heart. Part of the problem was that I wasn’t even allowing *myself* into my heart. You sisters are probably saying, “Typical male!” I simply wasn’t thinking consciously about my concerns, about the people I loved, or about my own repentance. I wasn’t even taking the time to prepare for my time with the Lord. Think about that. If you had an appointment to talk with President Hinckley, wouldn’t you plan ahead and think about what you would like to talk with him about? Yet I wasn’t doing that with the Lord.

That morning, realizing my problem, I began constructing a list of things that were really important to me and that I would like to talk with the Lord about. Each morning I reviewed that list before beginning my prayer, and the list continued to grow as I thought of new things to add. In the next few days and weeks, my prayer became much more meaningful, and I began to feel the promptings and reassurances of the Lord during my prayer. I began to look forward eagerly to my private interview with the Lord. Furthermore, it soon became common for me to look up at my watch and discover that the 30 minutes had already gone by, and I had only discussed the first few items on my list.

My young brothers and sisters, I urge you to feast in prayer. I’m not suggesting any particular length of time for your prayers. I am only suggesting that you take the time to move past the formal and familiar phrases that often become too routine. Remember the Lord’s counsel about “vain repetitions” in prayer (Matthew 6:7 and 3 Nephi 13:7). Even more important, take the time to commune with the Lord—to share with him the innermost thoughts and feelings of your heart—and the time to listen and to taste of his love.

Second: Feasting in the Scriptures

One of the greatest sources of spiritual nourishment for all of us is the scriptures. Here again the Lord counsels us to feast rather than hurriedly rush through some verses to satisfy the requirements of a religion class or merely to complete a goal, like finishing a marathon.

There is strength and renewal in the Lord's words. President Spencer W. Kimball said:

I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns. [TSWK, p. 135]

President Kimball was talking about feasting and nourishment, as was President Ezra Taft Benson when he promised:

There is a power in the book [of Mormon] which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. . . . When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance. ["The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, p. 7]

I hope you have experienced the fulfillment of that promise, as one student who, after spending time on a reading assignment in the Book of Mormon, reported:

This week I have four tests and two papers, and I have been neglecting my spirituality. This section [of reading] uplifted me a lot at a time I really needed it. I still have the same amount of work to do, but I feel relaxed and at peace.

That principle was reinforced in our family when, over a number of years, my wife

suffered serious health problems that left her completely exhausted. The only way she could find the strength to continue on each day was to drink from the scriptures for 30 minutes to an hour every morning. Because she was so exhausted, she doubted that she would remember very many details of what she had read, but regardless of what she could remember mentally, she felt strength come to her to sustain her physically and emotionally throughout the day.

But the nourishment of the scriptures also feeds our minds, because the Lord has promised that the Holy Ghost would bring all things to our remembrance that he has said unto us (see John 14:26). Continuing with the story about my wife, after a number of years her strength began to return, and she was called to teach Sunday School, a position in which she still serves. To her delight, she experienced a fulfillment of the Lord's promise, as the Holy Ghost does indeed bring to her remembrance scriptures that she read during that very difficult time when she didn't think that she would remember anything at all. But the promise is a two-edged sword, for if we never read his words in the first place, there is nothing for us to remember.

Third: Feasting in Service

We all know that the greatest commandments are that we love the Lord and that we love our neighbor (see Matthew 22:35–40). The word *love* in these commandments is a verb—something we do. As we perform acts of kindness and service for our neighbors, we nourish *them* with the warmth and encouragement of fellowship within the covenant. Because of the love they receive, they are strengthened in their resolve to keep their covenants with the Lord and to follow our good examples. But the miracle is that *we*, who provide the service, are also nourished. Feelings of the Spirit buoy us up and draw us closer to the Lord, and our spiritual health is increased.

One of the miracles of the Lord's Church is that it is designed to involve us in serving each other. As we perform the duties of our callings and work together in Church service projects of love, we experience the joy of serving others, and we are nourished and strengthened.

But the concept of feasting in service implies that our attitude of service extends beyond the Church to all of our interactions with others. I call this the attitude of "shepherds versus hirelings." The Savior said:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, . . . seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: . . .

The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. [John 10:11–13]

When someone around us encounters a problem or challenge, do we "flee" to the safety of indifference, or are we one of the Savior's undershepherds who provides real caring and real help? This metaphor has become a common part of the vocabulary in our home. For example, there seem to be numerous instances in our everyday lives when we are given the proverbial runaround and brush-off by someone who is supposed to help but doesn't. So when my wife or I encounter a clerk or receptionist who is truly helpful and concerned, we say, "I found a shepherd today."

Most of the people on this campus are wonderful examples of shepherds who give loving and professional care, but, unfortunately, there are occasional lapses. One of my colleagues tells of a student coming to his office for help with a problem. The student had been trying for several hours to resolve the problem and had been sent from one office on campus to another. The student was also from another country and was not only bewildered by the new culture but felt very helpless. The last

office that sent him away told him to come to our department, and by the time he entered my colleague's office, he was nearly in tears. After listening to the student describe the problem, my colleague made one or two phone calls and, within a few minutes, solved the problem. The grateful student thanked him over and over again for being his savior.

Knowing how many good people work in the offices at BYU, I am surprised when I hear stories like the one I just related, but I do hear them occasionally. And the sheep who are abandoned are not just students but also include other members of the university as well as visitors to campus. My plea is for all of us—faculty, staff, administrators, and students—to feast on service by being shepherds. As we do so, we will be nourished as we also nourish others and help to build Zion here at BYU.

Fourth: Feasting upon Christ

This is the ultimate and most important spiritual food of all. We are to feast on the "word," but remember that *Christ is the word*. This is how he said it:

I am the bread of life. . . .

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. [John 6:35, 54–56]

This imagery reminds us of the ordinance of the sacrament, but its significance extends beyond the ordinance as well. When we eat and drink, we bring something *inside us*—even more than inside us, we make it part of us as our bodies incorporate that food into our very cells. Our Savior is pleading with us to do likewise with him: to bring him inside us figuratively and to incorporate him into every fiber

of our being. In the sacrament we internalize the important aspects of his Atonement, including the Resurrection and our purification from sin. But we also renew our covenant to remember him. He is the ultimate food, and we remember him best by assimilating his characteristics into our souls. I am suggesting that in all of our praying, all of our studying, and all of our serving, we strive to become like him who is the Example of all examples and the Goal of all goals.

My final plea this morning is that we feast often. With physical food, we eat regularly and frequently to provide a steady supply of nutrients. Why should it be otherwise with spiritual food? With prayer, the Savior commanded us to “watch and pray *always*, lest [we] be tempted” and also to “pray *always*, that [we] may not faint” (3 Nephi 18:15, D&C 88:126; emphasis added; see also Luke 18:1, 21:36; Alma 13:28). How often is “always”?

We all remember Lehi’s vision of the tree of life. Lehi saw the process by which we are to reach eternal life. He saw those who had entered into the path, and his son Nephi later explained that the gate leading to the path is baptism (see 2 Nephi 31:17–18), so we conclude that those on the path had already been baptized. But those on the path could not see the way because of the mist of darkness, representing the temptations of the devil (see 1 Nephi 12:17). Only those who were “clinging” or “holding fast” to the rod of iron that led by the path were successful in reaching the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:24, 30).

Have you ever tried walking without being able to see? Maybe it was a game with blindfolds, and you started off walking in what you thought was the right direction. Do you remember taking off the blindfold and being surprised at how far you had wandered from your goal? Maybe you almost pinned the tail on the lampshade instead of on the donkey. Would a rod of iron have been helpful?

Now here’s the point: How do you walk while clinging to a rod of iron? Unless you release your first grip, you can’t walk very far. So you obviously need to let go and then re-grip the rod with every step. Each new grip restores your bearings. Each new grip helps prevent you from going very far off course. If you stop using the rod, thinking, “I remember what direction to go,” you may quickly wander off the path, just as you did with the blindfold. How often do we need to feast on the word, which was represented by the rod? At every step, or, in other words, every day.

We might be tempted to say, “I prayed a lot during my mission” or “I read the scriptures a lot when I was a Sunday School teacher, so I can stop for a while” or “I remember those feelings and those details, so I don’t need to do those things right now.” Isn’t that like saying, “I remember what food looks like or tastes like, so I don’t need to eat for a few weeks or a few months”?

Every culture develops habits of eating their meals at certain times to help its people remember to eat. Young people of your age may think it amazing that anyone would forget to eat. But it’s very helpful to have the habit of eating meals at certain times. Notice, I said, “meals,” rather than snacks, which we might be tempted to reach for in place of more well-balanced offerings. In our culture there’s breakfast (unless we sleep in until right before class), lunch (which you hope you can start eating if the devotional speaker would just stop talking), and dinner. The *habit* of daily spiritual meals provides a similar value.

Years ago a family home evening manual told the story of 17-year-old Karen, who received for her birthday a beautiful lamp in the shape of a parasol. When the light was lit, the parasol also turned. As she placed it on her dresser, she told her nine-year-old sister, Lisa, who shared her bedroom, “Never touch this lamp.” One night while Karen was out on a date, Lisa thought that it would be fun to have

the special lamp on while she waited for her older sister to come home. Excitedly she ran across the room, and just as she reached for the lamp, she tripped on the shoes she had left on the floor. Down went Lisa, and down went the lamp, which broke into pieces on the floor.

When Karen later quietly tiptoed into the room, she was greeted by the sudden sight of the broken lamp and the equally sudden attempt by Lisa to quickly explain what had happened. Karen became furious. In her anger she hurled cruel, hurtful words at Lisa for what she had done. In quick, angry movements she got ready for bed. Then, because it was her practice—her good habit—before she climbed into bed, she knelt down for her evening prayer. Have you ever tried to pray when you're angry?

As she knelt there, this daughter of God wrestled in the spirit against the forces of the evil one. In the background she could hear the sobs of her little sister. In a situation that defines one of the most important battles of mortality for all of us, Karen prayed for help. Finally she was able to rise from her knees and go to the bed of her little sister, where she told Lisa that she loved her and that she was far more important than any lamp.

Karen was helped because she had the good habit of regular spiritual feasting. Before she even recognized Satan's attack, her wise habit was providing protection. We all need that kind of protection.

I'd like to conclude by going back to where I began—with Alma's discourse. To my young returned missionary friend and to all of us, Alma's warning is vital. Indeed, if we neglect the tree and take no thought for its nourishment, it will wither away. But, like all of the Lord's warnings, there is also a bright side, a promise. Here it is, in Alma's words:

Nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree. . . .

And . . . behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet . . . ; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. [Alma 32:41–42]

That we may commit ourselves to habits of daily spiritual nourishment and be sanctified is my sincere prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Note

1. James E. Talmage, in his book *Jesus the Christ*, includes the following note about the metaphor of food in relation to spiritual things:

*"The idea of eating, as a metaphor for receiving spiritual benefit, was familiar to Christ's hearers, and was as readily understood as our expressions—'devouring a book,' or 'drinking in' instruction. In Isaiah 3:1, the words 'the whole stay of bread,' were explained by the rabbis as referring to their own teaching, and they laid it down as a rule, that wherever, in Ecclesiastes, allusion was made to food or drink, it meant study of the law, and the practice of good works. It was a saying among them—'In the time of the Messiah the Israelites will be fed by Him.' Nothing was more common in the schools and synagogues than the phrases of eating and drinking, in a metaphorical sense. 'Messiah is not likely to come to Israel,' said Hillel, 'for they have already eaten Him'—that is, greedily received His words—'in the days of Hezekiah.' A current conventionalism in the synagogues was that the just would 'eat the Shekinah.' It was peculiar to the Jews to be taught in such metaphorical language. Their rabbis never spoke in plain words, and it is expressly said that Jesus submitted to the popular taste, for 'without a parable spake he not unto them' (Mark 4:34)." — Geikie, *Life and Words of Christ*, vol. i, p. 184. [James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1956), pp. 347–48]*