

Have you ever seen one of those bandwagon health companies on Facebook? You know, one of those programs that one of your friends bought into, and is now filling your newsfeed with their chosen, life-changing *wunder*-product?

For those of you not on Facebook (or perhaps just not familiar), there are multiple health-peddling companies out there on social media, and they all work something like this:

There is some health product they want to sell – some juice cleanse, smoothie diet, essential oil and vitamin concoction that, they promise *will change your life!* Why, the pounds will just melt off! Cellulite – a thing of the past! You will have more energy than you ever thought possible. You will look and feel great!

But there's more!

This *wunder*-product could change your life not only physically, but also financially!

If you fall in love with this *life-changing* product as much as your Facebook friend (who is working as a salesman for that company), then you can sell it too. You can become a sub-salesman to your salesman friend and sell this *life-changing* product to your family and friends and make some good money on the side, from the comfort of your own home. And if you can get some of your friends and family to sell this product too, you can make even more money (as you get a cut from anything they sell)!

Now, if you find yourself among those who like a good energy-boosting juice cleanse every now and again, I want you to know there's nothing wrong with that. I have no problem with you doing that at all – you just won't catch me doing it. I like meat and potatoes a little too much to find any enjoyment living off of smoothies and essential oils.

There is, however, one little bone I would like to pick with these bandwagon health junkies, and it is that one little phrase they so often use to sell their product: *It will change your life.*

I had a Prof back at Sem who put it this way: It is amazing how many people in America today are killing themselves to die healthy.

Now, I (and that Sem Prof) know well that it is a good thing to take care of the bodies God has given us. And I know from experience that I cannot live off a diet of Doritos and frozen pizza and expect to feel good when I wake up in the morning – like I did back in college. But I would challenge that commonly quoted idea that eating the right things is going to *change my life* – at least in a meaningful and lasting way.

Yeah, it may improve the quality of how I feel each day... a bit. But it isn't going to change the fact that I am still a sinner living in a corrupt world... and I'm still gonna die, no matter how many juice cleanses I do.

Yeah, it may lengthen my life on this earth... a bit. But it isn't going to change the fact that I am still a sinner in a corrupt world... and I'm still gonna die – and for every health-nut out here in his 90's there's also smokers, and bacon-eaters in their 90's – so it *might* change your life for the better, *a bit*, but even then there are no guarantees. Death is indiscriminate, and juice cleanses cannot change that big facet of my life.

And if you ask that fellow on his death bed what about his life he would change, I'm pretty sure he's not going to say he wished he had done a few more juice cleanses in his life.

Now, I know this may all seem a bit morbid, a bit inflammatory for an Easter Sunday sermon...

But here's something else I know, something that drives me to bring this up. John Calvin once said that the human heart is an idol factory.

That heart beating inside your chest is as efficient at cranking out a product as the latest Ford assembly line, only instead of cars, your heart is cranking out one false god after another. Every day we wake up and we put our hope in hundreds of little things – hope that they will *change our lives* – even if it's just a little bit. And that friends is idolatry: putting your hope in something other than God to change your life.

Our hearts are this way because all of us recognize the same thing. We look at our lives, as they are right now, and we realize, deep down inside that something's not quite right. I am not the way that I should be. My life is not what it should be. And so every day we wake up and we look for things that will change our lives for the better.

We hope that if we eat the right foods, it will change our lives. We hope that if we make the right choices in life - if we marry the right person, have the right amount of kids, find the right career, make the right amount of money, build the right house, drive the right car, make the right friends, they will *change our lives* for the better. We hope they will help assuage that feeling that things are not what they should be.

And all of those things (like eating healthy) are not bad things in and of themselves – understand me on that today, those are all gifts from God and important things in our live - but they become bad, they become idols when we expect them to do for us what they were never intended to do.

Eating healthy foods will not fix what is wrong with your life.

Marrying the right person will not fix what is wrong with your life.

Finding the right career will not fix what is wrong with your life.

All of those things are good, gifts from God, *but* none of the them are capable, nor are they intended to change your life in a meaningful and real way because none of them address the root problem with your life and this world. None of them address sin – sin that has corrupted this world, corrupted you, and separated you from God.

We all have this desire to find something that will truly change our lives for the better. That is good. That is a good desire that comes from a realization that sin has infected you and this world – you are not perfect, and neither is this world.

The first step to actually finding something that will change our lives in a meaningful and lasting way is to understand what *can't* change our lives, to understand how our sin soaked hearts function – to identify the idols we are trusting in to change our lives and realize how inept and incapable they are at bringing about the change we desire.

We need to go through that at times morbid and inflammatory step of idol smashing so that when we come to the real thing, we can see it in all of its life-changing

beauty. We need to clear away the clutter (all of the things that distract us) from the one thing in this world that actually can and has changed our lives in a real, meaningful, and eternal way... and what is this *wunder*-product that can change our lives?

It's the gospel (a word that simply means "good news"), good news that Paul, the author of the letter to a church in the city of Corinth, in Greece (what we call 1 Corinthians), spells that out for us today.

**"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of *the gospel* I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved... for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: (here's his definition of the gospel now) that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."**

He then goes on to say that there is verifiable, first-hand proof that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead – that there were hundreds of people to whom the original readers of this letter in Corinth could go and ask, "Did you see Jesus alive after he had died or is this Paul guy just blowing smoke? Tell me about it."

But back to that gospel, that good news... Paul says the gospel consists of three things: Jesus died *for our sins*, he was buried, he rose from the dead.

And this gospel friends, is the only thing in this world that has the power to actually change your life, in fact it changes everything! Want proof? Want proof that I'm offering more than a juice-cleanse peddling Facebook friend? Look at Paul again.

Paul used to go by the name of Saul. Saul was an important guy from an important family in an important city. He studied at the feet of the one of the most highly-regarded Rabbis in the history of Judaism, on his way to becoming a prominent religious leader who enjoyed Sabbath, and long walks on the beach, he oversaw the arrest of and occasional killing of pesky Christians for their blasphemies. Saul had everything that a guy at that time and place could have wanted. He was *that guy* that everyone else aspired to be. He had it all from a human perspective.

Then he decided to change his name to Paul, join his enemies (the Christians), throw away his reputation, authority, wealth, social standing, and every other thing he had worked for his entire life, in favor of traveling thousands of miles and willingly subjecting himself to lashings, beatings to the brink of death, stonings, shipwrecks, starvation, dehydration, and years of imprisonment, all so that he could tell people the GOSPEL, that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again (if you want to read more about that transition, read the book of Acts).

Either he did this because he was bored with his super-nice life... or he had found the one thing that could actually change his life in a real and meaningful way, and he would tell anyone who would listen until the moment his head was lopped off for doing so.

Dear friends – friends who are aware, perhaps painfully so, that your life is not going the way it should, who know you are not the people you should be – today I want to remind you of a message that has the power to change your life, change it in a way that nothing else in this world can.

And that message is this: Jesus died on his cross *for you*. He took on his shoulders everything about yourself that you would change – everything about you that God would change. His death on his cross means that thing that is at the root of everything wrong with your life – sin – has been forgiven. It has been washed away. You have been set free from the overwhelming pressure to fix yourself and your world by making the right choices and doing the right things. You have been set free because Jesus fixed it for you.

And Easter morning, this beautiful message of Jesus rising from the dead, is the potent, real-life sermon that what this man, Jesus, has to offer is real and it works, and it's yours.

Did you wake up this morning feeling cruddy because your body is decaying? A juice cleanse may help you perk up for a few days. The Gospel tells you that the solution to the sin-induced decay of your body *isn't* essential oils. The solution to your decay is the message that Jesus has earned for you an eternal and perfect body in heaven, where the decay of this world will be nothing but a distant memory. The Gospel tells you that because he lives, you also will live... forever with him in heaven!

Do you beat yourself up because you know you are not the spouse, or child, or employee, or Christian you should be? Does it break your heart that no matter how hard you try in this world to get ahead, to find contentment, to fix what is broken, it just always seems just out of reach, or incredibly fleeting? Trying harder might help you change one or two little aspects of your life. But the Gospel tells you that the solution to your broken life *isn't* trying harder. The solution is that man who died on a cross *for* your broken life, and he promises he will take you *from* this broken life to be with him in heaven. And Easter morning tells you that his death on that cross worked, *for you!* That when Jesus promises you that in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world, he actually did.

Nothing is more important in this world than that we understand what Paul did, **"By the grace, (the undeserved love) of God (in Jesus) I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect."**

The Gospel, the combined message of Good Friday and Easter morning, really does change everything, for you and for me. And I would pray this morning that you would spend the rest of your days on this earth, with me, remembering that, dwelling on that, learning how true and life-changing this Gospel is.

God grant it.

Amen.