Mark 8: 34- 38; "The Kitchen of Christian Discipleship", Sermon # 54 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 8th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.

In our sermons, going through the gospel of Mark, we have come to this place where Jesus is defining the requirements for anyone being His disciple. To be a disciple is to be a follower of Christ; learning by His grace to do His Word. I have labored to show you that no one becomes Christ's true disciple unless they believe in His finished work on the cross. It is when we believe in what He has done for us as sinners that we are saved. It is when we come to believe that He was the only One who has lived a righteous life in perfect love for God and men; living in perfect self-denial in relation to sin and selfishness; it is when we see that Jesus never turned aside from doing the Father's will; it is when we see that the Lord Jesus lived with that one object in view; that He would deliberately go to the cross on our behalf to die there for our sins; it is when we believe this and embrace Him by faith that we are saved. When we do sincerely believe, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then we are enabled to truly deny ourselves in the Biblical way. It is only then that we have the ability to pick up our own cross, on a daily basis, and follow Him. That is the very first thing; being forgiven of all of our sins when we have believed the gospel, and realizing that we have received grace from Christ to walk with Him; then we are truly able to begin to think about self-denial and cross-bearing. When the Lord Jesus defines for you and me what it will require of us to be His disciple; the requirements have not changed from that time period to this. The text in verse 34 is clear: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

In helping us to try to come to terms with what discipleship will mean for every person who can think and learn; I have been using the illustration that Christian discipleship is "living in the house which Christ built". "Christ has been faithful in all His house as a Son", it says in Hebrews 3: 6, "whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of hope firm to the end." In verse 5 of that same passage it is mentioned that "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant", which means that He was faithful to what God revealed to him in the shadows and types of the law concerning Jesus Christ. He was faithful as an Old Testament believer in Christ. Indeed, it says in Hebrews 11: 25, that Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, <u>esteeming the reproach of Christ</u> greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward.". There will be great rewards indeed for those disciples of Christ, both Old Testament and New, who are faithful to their Lord.

I said to you that if Moses needed to be faithful in his house as a servant of Christ, then you and I who believe in Jesus need to do the same thing. This house of discipleship is the place where we will live and move and have our being as Christians. There are a number of rooms in this house, and two weeks ago we looked at the living room of self-denial. We saw that there was a vertical dimension, a horizontal dimension, and we also spoke of the centrality of self-denial to living the

whole Christian life. I will not go back over all of this; simply to say that true Christianity is not being part of a popular movement. The cross of Christ has an offense to it. Many people do not think that they need to be saved from sin. But if so; then why did Christ make it His one ambition to go to the cross and die? Many people do not think that going to church is important. They think that it is an insignificant thing to hold up the worship of God by coming to all the services of worship on the Lord's Day. God, however, sees it as a very significant thing and He is expecting you to deny yourself in relation to your work and your personal pleasures to be here in His house on His day. Many people think that it is more important to be accepted by others, than to live by the truth of the Bible. When you follow Christ by being baptized with believer's baptism, and when you tell others, and show others, that it is your intention to keep all the commandments of New Testament Christianity; you may lose their good opinion of you. But if you are willing to deny yourself and "lose your life"; your present selfish and sinful life; then you will find it. The centrality of this room of self-denial is such, that all the other rooms in the whole house are connected to it, and I will attempt to show you the connections as we go along and tour the rest of the house.

Now, today, we want to proceed into the kitchen of this house of discipleship. The kitchen is where the food is kept and prepared, in preparation for its being served in the dining room. We want to look at the dining room next in our tour of this house, but this morning we want to spend some time in the kitchen. This room, the kitchen, represents what you do, or others do for you, in the preparation of the spiritual food that you take into your soul day by day. I think that quite a few of us need to hear this message this morning, because we do not treat the hungering of our soul as we do the hungering of our stomach. We will regularly go to the kitchen, each and every day, and open the refrigerator and look into it, and if we are wise, we will think about what would strengthen and nourish our bodies. We are thinking about what would refresh and delight us in regard to the physical need for food that we have, in relation to our bodies. But ask yourself now; do I do the same thing for spiritual needs of my eternal soul? Your soul has a need to be fed on a regular on-going fashion, even as your body does. So I want you to ask yourself; what is it that I am doing to feed and nourish my own soul? You need to ask yourself this question, because this room is a very important room in the life of a Christian disciple. What you do in relation to this room will affect your level of strength, and the vitality of what you will do in all the other rooms of the house. It is this room where your activity or inactivity will determine your present and your future strength and usefulness to Christ. It is in this room where you will either be occupied with what is wise, or what is foolish; what is profitable, or unprofitable. So what I want to do this morning is, first of all to ask you; What is on the menu (i.e. Who is the Chef upon whom all the progress of your Christian discipleship rests?) Secondly - what are the spiritual foods that you should feed upon, in order to become a strong Christian disciple? Thirdly - How should we partake of this food so that God will be glorified and I make progress in my Christian discipleship?

1st of all - What is on the menu? (Who is the Chef upon whom all the progress of your Christian discipleship rests?)

Is it you; or is it Christ? The answer is that it is Christ, because it is only by His grace that you will be strengthened to do His will in all the particulars of His Word. Christ is the great Chef of the Christian life; and He is also the food of the Christian life; He Himself is the main course. All the good works that you will do; all the effectual witnessing for Him that you will do for Him; all the love that you will show to God and other people, and all the truth that you will try to convey to others around you; all of these things which make up your progress as Christ's disciple, come from seeing Him as the great Chef of the house of Christian discipleship. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble of heart," He says in Matthew 11: 29. He says in John 15: 5 - "...for apart from Me you can do nothing." Christ has the recipes and Christ knows how to mix all the ingredients necessary for you to be a strong disciple. The Christian must feed upon Christ before he can walk and work for Christ. And the Christian disciple, in His spiritual feeding begins by understanding that all the spiritual foods that he will feed upon come from Christ Himself. When you feed upon spiritual things, you are feeding upon the faithfulness of God and Christ. Turn to Psalm 37 with me and you will see this. Verse 1 says, "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness." "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." You can see the contrast here, can't you? It is between feeding on sin (being envious of workers of iniquity and the things that they obtain by their sinful plans and actions), and feeding upon the faithfulness of the Lord. The Lord is the giver of every good and perfect gift. The Lord gives you the spiritual foods of His grace and righteousness and peace to feed upon and to feast upon, by faith. As a disciple of Christ you learn by faith to feed upon Christ's faithfulness. You feed upon His faithfulness in fulfilling the Law of God perfectly for you. He has worked out a perfect righteousness for you who believe in Him, purchasing peace and pardon for you. This is the doctrine of justification. God imputes Christ's righteousness to your person and all your works, so that you stand complete in Him, and you are accepted by Him. Because of Christ's righteousness, God looks upon you as He would look upon Christ. This means that even though your works and your words are not perfect; that Christ's blood covers all of the defects and shortcomings in your obedience, while you strive to be holy even as He is holy. Your progress in obedience is based upon your trusting in Christ to be your helper in regard to your observing every command that Christ has given to you. You will not be condemned because your righteousness falls short of the perfection which God demands, because you are seen by God as "in Christ." Christ is your righteousness, and because of that, "your righteousness exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees." You will be repenting of your sins. You are not now interested in merely being outwardly righteous and moral; you are interested in right thoughts in your heart and right deeds in the sight of God and men. You are no longer walking in the

flesh, but according to the Spirit. You are no longer under the Law, but under grace; you are observing God's law in relation to Christ.

Christ has also purchased by His death, grace for you, so that He will be supplying your heart's every need to be sustained and nourished and strengthened to do God's will, each and every day. This is the basis of your sanctification. As a believer you now have new desires that Christ has placed in your heart. And God through Christ gives you these new things of His Word and His Spirit to be satisfied with. You now desire more than anything to learn to do His will. You aren't looking to other people to meet your needs; you now have come to know that God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. You now no longer love the World or the things of the World; it is the love of God that has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit. You come to realize that you needn't fret because of evil-doers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. All that they obtain materially, they will be forced to leave and let go of eventually. And they do not have any spiritual blessings to feed their souls with. Therefore, do not be envious of them. But rather feed upon Christ by trusting in Him for every good thing which will sustain your soul. That which you feed upon; that which sustains you and nourishes you spiritually, are the truths and doctrines concerning Jesus Christ, and His faithfulness to God. It is through His faithfulness to supply you with grace that you yourself will become a faithful servant to God.

Secondly - Let us ask this question; what are the spiritual food and drink that you should feed upon in order to become a strong Christian disciple?

Turn with me to Hebrews Chapter 13, verse 8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines." "For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them." "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." Now the whole purpose of the Apostle Paul in writing this blessed epistle was that Christ, His person, His priesthood, and His sacrifice were all the fulfillment of the Old Covenant shadows and types, and that He brought in, by means of His righteousness and His shed blood, something better and more substantial for the heart of each one trusting in Him. So all that men may strongly assert, about what will bring a person to a greater spirituality or to salvation from sin, or to a greater holiness; if they are not the truths about Christ, which are found in His Word the Bible; the soul will not be saved and the heart with not be established. The altar which we worship at is Christ's offering up of Himself on the cross. He Himself is our High Priest, and He Himself was the sacrifice. What flows from all of His high-priestly ministry is grace in connection with the truth concerning Christ. The Christian disciple feeds upon grace. It is grace which establishes the heart. It is not an Old Covenant priest with His distinctions of what kinds of meats from a certain kind of animal sacrifice that will give grace or establish the heart. In our own time, it is not even the Catholic priest trying to offer up Christ in the ritual sacrifice of the Mass which will save a

person's soul. It is only when people are brought to feed upon Christ and His Word, by faith, that they are saved and made strong to be Christ's disciples. It is blasphemous for men who are called priests to keep sacrificing Christ in the Mass, because Christ was offered up once for all for the sins of everyone who will believe in Him. He is not to be sacrificed over and over again as if something needed to be added by men's earthly ministry to save them. It takes away from the glory and power of what Christ has actually done and accomplished. The sacrifice of the Mass will keep people from being saved and from having full assurance of their salvation because the participant is led away from believing that simple faith and feeding upon Christ's one and only sacrifice for sins at the cross is enough to be saved. The heart of sinful men and women is only changed by grace through faith, and not anything of men's sacramental ministry, or of themselves. It is the food of grace alone, received by faith alone, which comes from Christ alone, that the sinner feeds upon. It is good that the heart be established <u>by grace</u> and not by other strange doctrines which men might make up concerning Christ. He is the One whom we feed upon spiritually. We feed upon His faithfulness to atone for all of our sins, and fulfill the righteousness of the Law so that we can be justified and sanctified by His precious grace.

Turn with me to John Chapter 6 and you will plainly see this declared. In verse 26 we find Jesus speaking to those people who were following Him for the wrong reason. "Jesus answered them and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled." "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." These people were following Jesus and wanting to make Him their earthly King because they saw Him as the One who could provide for their earthly needs. They were following Him for that reason. Many people do this today as well. They will follow Jesus as long as every earthly need is provided for. The heavenly and the spiritual things that He wants them to learn and to do, and to grow in; they are not inclined to pursue. This is not true discipleship. And so Jesus tested them by giving them these wonderful, but difficult spiritual sayings that follow. But first; they ask Him a question. Verse 28 - "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" They are asking, "How can we be true disciples." "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." You see; this is the most important work of discipleship; to believe in the Lord Jesus in all things, and in all situations. Verse 30 - "Therefore they said to Him, 'What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You?" "What work will You do?" "Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat." "Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives the true bread from heaven." "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Then they said to Him, Lord give us this bread always." "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life." "He who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." "But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe." "All that

the Father give Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." You see; that for every true disciple, Jesus becomes their spiritual bread and water. When they believe in Him and continue to believe in Him, He supplies all the needs of their heart; provides for them in every way so that they might be saved spiritually, satisfied spiritually, and even eventually overcome sin, the world, and death.

This is how we grow in regard to our salvation; this is how we make progress as disciples; we feed upon Christ and His faithfulness; and we feed upon His blessed Word and the doctrines of grace. The Word then comes with power to our soul in connection with the good work of the Holy Spirit so that we might increase in grace and in our obedience to the commands of God's word. It all comes to us from Christ, and because of Christ. This grace of Christ comes to us in connection with our being faithful as His disciple, to feed upon the Word of God. Are you diligent to go looking for this spiritual food? Christ does not want lazy servants in this regard. He wants those who would be His faithful disciples to diligently search His Word, and meditate upon His Word, and abide in His Word. He wants you to come into the kitchen and learn to prepare your own food. He has been perfect and faithful in His obedience to God on our behalf. He has prepared the main course. He would have us to persevere in becoming more like Him and learn to feed ourselves by faith, meditating upon that which He has died to give to us; the bread of life. He is faithful to supply us with grace, but He chooses to do so in connection with our faithfulness to pray and to feed upon His Word. These are the "green pastures of the truth that Christ's grace works in conjunction with.

Let's now begin to look at how the Word of God is spiritual food to the soul of the true disciple. Turn with me to 1st Peter 2, verse 1. Here we find that one of the spiritual foods that nourishes the soul of a young believer is milk. "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." The way that the young believer in Christ grows is to drink in the pure milk of the Word of God; the Word concerning Christ. Milk is the most basic of foods, and for the young child it is supplied through the mother's breast, or by someone else feeding them with a bottle. It is the most basic of doctrines that the young believer needs. With these he should be fed by the pastor of the church and by these He will grow. They need to feed on the faith of the good examples of other believers around them. They need to receive and understand, and see living examples of the graces of patience and hope and love; of kindness and goodness and faithfulness in those in the church around them. The young believer should be encouraged to read the Bible for themselves and to pray over it as they read; asking that God would enlighten their mind to what He is like; what He is expecting of them. They should ask many questions related to the Bible, from other Christians around them. They should spend much time drinking spiritual nourishment from the bosom of the church that they attend. They should desire the

pure milk of the Word, and if they have a healthy appetite for it, they will grow. They should see that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Now 3rdly and finally - How should we partake of this food so that God will be glorified and I make progress in my Christian discipleship?

I want to mention a few more foods of Christian discipleship in this final point and talk about how we should spiritually eat. Turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 55 and you will see the great provision that has been provided for believers in Christ. Verse 1 says, "Ho!" "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat." "Yes, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?" "Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance." What is being said here is that there is an abundance in Christ and in His Word which is found in no other place in the World. You may supply yourself with many earthly, physical foods, and still not be satisfied with your life. But if you come to Christ and to His word, you will find truths to satisfy every aspect of your being because God Himself is found in being a partaker of His Word. Come to the waters of the Holy Spirit's blessed influences. Come and drink in the spiritual realities that await you when you are faithful and diligent as a disciple to read God's Word. You have no money, but you do have time that you can spend, if you will give it to God. You will find the wine of the exhilarating truths of the doctrines of grace; all that God and Christ have done on behalf of everyone who will believe. You do not need drugs and alcohol to find these heights of heart experience. You simply need more of the blessed Holy Spirit's working in your life; the grace of Christ in connection with the truth of the Word. You remember Pentecost. The people thought that the disciples were full of new wine. Well, they were not drunk as the people who were watching and listening supposed. Peter preaches Christ to them and says in Acts 2, verse 32 - "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses." "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." Come and buy wine and milk in the Word of God. Come and obtain more of the Spirit's influence and power. Come and let your soul delight itself in abundance. This is the kitchen of the life of Christian discipleship. These are the foods which are prepared for you, and which you will prepare for yourself if you are wise.

We have spoken of milk, and bread, and wine. Let us speak also of meat. Turn with me to Hebrews Chapter 5, verse 11. The Apostle wanted to say many things about Christ to his readers, but they had a problem in their spiritual diet. Here in verse 11 he says, "Of whom (that is - Christ) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." 'But

solid food belongs to those who are mature (of full age), that is, those who reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." There is a growing process which should be taking place in the Christian life of discipleship. It is that you would not always remain a babe in the faith, but that you would grow up into maturity. If you have life in Jesus name, you need to nourish that life with 2 things. Good spiritual food and spiritual exercise. The babe is the person who has found life in Jesus name, but who needs to be fed milk by others so that they can grow up to take over what others are doing for them. They have life, and they will grow because of God's faithfulness. But the real question is; in terms of discipleship, will that person remain a babe in their perspective of how the Christian life is to be lived and how Christ is to be followed? That is the question. And whether they will go on to eat meat and whether they will exercise their spiritual senses will determine the degree to which that person shall glorify God and their Savior, Jesus Christ, with their life. Not all Christians go on to maturity. Not all Christians become "skilled in the word of righteousness." Not all Christians exercise their spiritual senses to discern the difference between what is profitable and unprofitable; what is good and evil; and as such they remain babes. I would venture to say that there are many babes in our churches here in the United States of America at this time. Solid food, or meat, belongs to the mature who have their senses trained to discern the difference between good and evil. To apply this; ask yourself whether you are so studying the Word of God that you are learning how to discern what is right and what is wrong with every situation of life that you are involved in. There is a right way to think and speak and do things, and there is a wrong way. 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 20 says, "Brethren do not be children in understanding; however in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." Many people do not want to think about this very important fact. Being a true disciple of Christ means that you deliberately try to learn more than just the elementary principles of Christ. It means that you go on to learn the more difficult and challenging principles of what it means to become like Christ as well.

Look at Hebrews 6: 1 - "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (to maturity), not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms (that is; defining the difference between water baptism versus Spirit baptism), of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." "And this we will do if God permits." The triune God evaluates your progress in these matters and leads you accordingly. But you have a solemn responsibility to learn to feed yourself spiritually in the Word of God every day of your life. Turn with me to Psalm 81 and we will close with this. Hear God's voice to you as He spoke to Israel of old. Verse 8 - "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!" "O Israel, if you will listen to Me." "There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god." "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." This is how you eat spiritual food. You open wide your mouth to receive the spiritual truths and grace

that Christ will give to you. You deliberately live your life of Christian discipleship in this way. He will feed you, but he will also be looking at what you desire. Verse 11 says, "But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me." "So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels." You see, this is what you and I need to be very careful about; that we do not end up feeding more upon the counsels of the World and unbelieving people; even the counsels of Worldly professed Christians, more than the counsel of God Himself. If you are spending more time occupying your heart and mind with the things of the World and the pleasures of this life, either sinful or innocent, you will not be growing much in Christ- likeness. But if you are feeding on the promises and precepts and principles of the Word of God and living them out; you will. Listen to the last verses of Psalm 81. "Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!" "I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries." "The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure forever." "He would have fed them with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you." I believe that the finest of the wheat and honey from the Rock refer to the highest and best blessings, the most satisfying spiritual realities that God can give would have come to them. They would have had Christ and they would have had all things. Let us pray to be faithful disciples so that we would have all of these rich blessings of fellowship and communion with Him.