

Taste and See

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, May 17, 2015
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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Psalm 34:8

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

I believe I am speaking to someone this morning that needs to hear this word: Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Perhaps you're going through a time of great questioning. Your life seems to be in an unstable place. I want to address your heart today. I want to ask you to forget about the speaker, whatever you may think of him, and I want you to come to the table that the Lord has spread for you. There is a table that God has presented and it's yours if you will sit down and eat. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!" So, my friend, whoever you are, I encourage you at this moment to open your mouth and receive, take, do not reject and say, "No, thank You, Lord, I'm quite satisfied." Let none of us be satisfied with where we are in the experiencing of God's goodness.

One of the great traps of the enemy is to have us come to a place of spiritual satisfaction and experience a victory and then another victory and begin to think that we have learned how it is to walk in the Spirit and thereby remain. No, *constantly* taste and see that the Lord is good. Do not live off of yesterday's manna but today would you believe with me that right now the Lord has spread a table before you and He has given you the invitation, "Come and dine"? Then dine.

I. THE COMMAND TO EXPERIENCE

How many times I have read this verse and concluded, "Okay, the Lord is good." I acknowledged the fact that the Scripture is true. God is good. Then I continue reading. All the attention I gave to it was that God's goodness is a fact. It's something I know and acknowledge. A few weeks ago while reading this text yet again in my devotions, I sensed something in my heart that I was not to read it and go once again, "Oh yes, the Lord is good. Amen," but that I was to pay attention and listen because the Lord wanted to teach me something. Here's what He taught me: this is not a statement of fact that we are to agree with. Yes, God is good, but it is a command that I am to

experience the goodness of God. Oh taste and see. It says I am to do that. I am to experience the Lord's goodness. God is to be experienced and not simply explained or given mental assent to.

God wants for you and me today, at this moment, to experience His goodness, and I pray that you will leave here knowing there is never a moment when the table of the Lord is not set for you and the dinner not prepared. Knowledge of this truth isn't sufficient. To know something is not the same thing as experiencing it. Over and over again, I've had to come to this lesson and hear it. Just because the Lord has been faithful to allow me to gain knowledge of His Word, my knowledge is not sufficient if it doesn't lead me to the experience of what I know. Many of you look at me and say, "I'll never be able to know as much about the Bible as he does," and I look at others and say the same thing. The fact is, it doesn't matter how much you know, the question is how much are you experiencing? Don't be hearers only but doers of the Word.

Satan has a great toehold in many of us because we know a great deal of facts. I have faithfully over the years expounded the Word, that is my duty and my love. I'm one of the blessed few who get to do as a job what they love doing so it doesn't often seem like a job. I have been called to faithfully expound truth to you to share and teach the Word of God so that you might know the Scriptures, but not to cram your head full of knowledge or make you more intellectual or to make theologians out of you *only*. My job is to make theologians who, by the knowledge they have gained, experience more of the God they know about. "Oh come, taste and see that the Lord is good!" Truth is not just to be explained but experienced. I have said this often and I will say it more in the future because it needs to be repeated and we need to be reminded: Truth is not just to be explained but experienced and so God uses two simple words, *taste and see*, to explain something about our relationship with Him.

The physical senses we have been given are not given just to sustain the body. Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, are all given by this wise Omniscient God for spiritual allegory, spiritual lessons, and spiritual truths. For every physical sense there is a spiritual corollary, a spiritual parallel. If there is such a thing as physical taste there is also a spiritual sense of tasting. If there is physical sight, God has given you that to show there is a spiritual perception of seeing. *He that hath ears, let him hear. He that hath eyes, let him see.* God gave you those physical senses as a reminder and a lesson that there is a spiritual parallel. We can experience God in the spiritual realm as we experience things in the physical. And you are not just to know about the Lord, but you are to taste, hear, see, feel, and smell, Him. You are to be able with the spiritual senses to experience in the soul all that God has granted you with the physical senses.

Let me direct your attention to our need. Our need is to constantly experience the Lord. That's why sacred, sanctified imagination is important. That's why it's important that with the Word, the precept, we are able to enliven and quicken our imaginations because you are a person. You may be made up of three different parts—spirit, soul, and body—but, let's be honest, when was the last time you saw a soul? When's the last time you saw a spirit? You never have, have you? What you see are persons. As a person you are integrated so that you don't just need to know information. You were created to walk with God. Are you walking with God? Walking is a metaphor for experiencing Him. Are you truly experiencing God?

I had the privilege of preaching yesterday at our pastors' fellowship prayer weekend and I told the story of several years ago when *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby became quite popular in the Southern Baptist circles. At that time I was asked about it and my response was that Blackaby hit upon seven biblical principles and they were not original with him, men before him knew these principles because they go back to the Scriptures. I agree wholeheartedly with the principles, but my problem was why those concepts seemed so new to us Southern Baptists? Why was there an uproar and excitement over something that should be common knowledge—the experience of God? My prediction and fear was that it would be another fad, that we would learn those seven principles, we'd be able to recite and know them but we would not experience God. Sadly, I believe I've been proven right.

Have you experienced God this week? If you haven't, it's because you have not tasted and seen that the Lord is good. What reasons would we have for not tasting?

II. REASONS FOR NOT TASTING

To say that the Lord is good and not experience His goodness is a contradiction. Can you not agree? If you say God is good but you are not experiencing His goodness, then you've just contradicted yourself. You would not recommend a specific food if it were not good to you. And if it were not good to you, you would not recommend it; you gladly eat it because you enjoy it. No doubt, the better you like it, the more you desire to eat it. Therefore, to say to someone, including to yourself, that the Lord is good and not taste is a scenario that just doesn't make sense. Yet how many of us have said even this morning that the Lord is good? Are you currently tasting God's goodness or is it a fact that you've learned to repeat and even to believe? Has that become enough for you? But, it isn't enough.

Why don't we taste and see that the Lord is good?

Reasons For Not Tasting:

Well, we could as easily come to the answer to our question by asking why would you not taste a particular kind of food? The physical has a spiritual parallel.

I. You don't like the food.

Maybe you've tried it before and didn't find it palatable. Some of us say we've never seen a food we didn't like but there's got to be something you don't like. One year we planted kale in our garden because we heard it was one of the great super foods and we tried it. I didn't put it in my garden the next year. I didn't like it at all. There are just some foods you don't like and therefore you don't try them.

It's not hard for me to understand why there are people who never follow the Lord in repentance and faith, it's because they don't have a taste for God. They don't enjoy Him. They have no affection for Him. There's no love, there's no inclination, there's no taste for God. I understand that and if that's your condition today, then I pity you. I really do. You are a burden to me. One of the most terrible things that God can do in judgment toward a person is to leave their spiritual senses dull to Him and not quicken or enliven the spiritual sense so they could experience Him. So I pity you today.

I'm not here to condemn you. I'm not here to look down upon you. My heart goes out to the Lord, "Give them the ability to taste, to want You, to desire You as a starving man would desire something to eat." You don't like God and because you don't like God you do not try Him. You're still in unbelief and lost in your sins because there's nothing in you that desires Him and wants Him. How can we who are saved not weep for you? How is it that our eyes remain dry for the sinner whose heart is dull toward God? Even that condition is a mystery, is it not, dear Christian friend? That we would remain tearless for our lost loved ones?

It is good that we are burdened for them. It is good that we understand they are facing an eternity where they will be given all that they have asked for from God—nothing. The absence of God completely. God will set a table for them as well but it will not be of His goodness. He will

be absent from them in His goodness, kindness, mercy, and love. All they will know is the fierceness of His wrath, the judgment of His hatred and derision, where He will mock them for being foolish in the senses of their heart.

We weep. We plead for you to come to the table. However Satan has deceived you into thinking you will not like God and that you will find Him distasteful, no. Come. Come and see. Come and taste—He is good! Let Him bless you today. Don't withhold your heart from Him. Come and let Him show you marvelous things that I cannot describe nor tongue tell. He will bless you in ways the Apostle could only say are unspeakable and full of glory.

There are marvelous and ecstasies that you cannot know mentally or physically that are known by the Holy Spirit alone. By the Spirit you can experience ecstasies and joys that are withheld from you today. Why would you not want them, if He is truly good? The only answer is that you have no taste for these things. What must you do? Cry out to the Lord. You know what I'm saying is true, you know it when you look at us and at times you wish that you could have what we enjoy. Don't tell me that never crossed your mind. You've seen it. You've seen the joy we have in our hearts. You know of what we speak. You've seen it in our countenance. You've watched enough to know that we're not imagining this. We're not delusional. This is not some fantasy to live in to help us cope with the real world. No, if there's a wish then cry out to God today. Pray for God to give your heart taste buds inclined for Him and open your eyes to see how good He is.

There's another reason we don't want to taste.

2. No appetite.

You're not hungry because you're full of something else. Why would you not taste and see and experience God's goodness? Because you found something that you like better. You have stuffed yourself with the husks that the swine did eat and you've been deceived by the archfiend that somehow it is better than God. Oh no, my friend.

And here I am not talking to just the sinner. I'm talking to believers. Have there not been times in your Christian experience where you just simply were not hungry for God at all? I hate those seasons. I have no one to blame for those seasons but myself, but I'm not going to pretend they

don't happen. They do happen and I don't like them. The only reason I don't have a taste for God at that time is because I've satisfied myself on something lesser. Isn't it true?

Isn't it true that at times your taste buds get inclined for one particular thing? There's just one particular food you want. Whenever your mom or dad ask you what you want for supper it's always this one thing. Sometimes I get—can I use my Ozarkian, hillbilly term?—a hankerin' for a particular thing and it goes on day after day after day. I could eat it morning, noon, and night. You really like other things but right now as much as you like them this is that you want. That's what happens in the spiritual realm as well. It's almost identical.

You love God. It's not a question of whether you love Him or whether you have not tasted and seen that the Lord is good. It's not a matter of tasting Him and seeing that He's not good. No, you've tasted, you know Him, you love Him, He is good, but right now your spiritual senses are captivated by something other than Jesus and that's why you're not hungry for or experiencing Him. I challenge every one of us to take an examination of your spiritual diet. Take inventory of what you've set before you, not physically, but spiritually. What are you consuming most? Is it a relationship? What does your mind immediately go to when you have a moment of mental relaxation when you don't have to be consumed with work or some project? What do you think about? There will be what you're feeding on. That's it. That's the diagnostic to apply to know what you're feeding on because that's what's on your mind when your mind is not preoccupied with something else. *Lord, help us. Help us to understand that we have chosen the lesser.*

3. You don't believe the food will be good.

When you do international travel like I do sometimes, you are often confronted with things you have never heard of, things you've never seen, things you've never smelled, and certainly things you've never tasted. Perhaps our most enjoyable trip and most exotic in food was not in Africa, although there we walked through the market and saw baskets full of little crawly things—insects, bugs, and worms—we were spared that diet, thankfully. We tasted and saw that God was very good by giving us other things.

I remember sitting at the table in Poland for breakfast one morning when we had a professional chef cooking for us. They lived in the same building where we were staying. At our table was this clear congealed substance. There was little bits and pieces of different kinds of meat in it. The

three of us looked at it and looked at each other and looked at it and looked at each other and said, "I don't know what this is." I was thankful the chef was not in the room but had left after serving us. No one wanted to try it. I was either brave or foolish enough to try and I tell you the truth, I couldn't swallow it.

It was the first time I've ever been on a mission trip where I could not eat something. I mean, I've eaten soup with the fish heads and the eyeballs looking at you. I've eaten almost everything you can imagine. I would have prayerfully eaten the grub worm if that had been served me but this stuff... I didn't know what it was until I began to try and chew it. It's hard to chew clear fat. That's what it was. It was fat that had been, like butter, clarified, and the inside of it was all the leftover meats. Thankfully, I disposed of it and no one knew. So today, if I see anything close to that it may be the most wonderful thing, it may be awesome, but I am firmly persuaded that it's no good. I believe! I am a believer and therefore I will not taste.

I could make application to the man or the woman who is not a Christian. You do not believe the Lord is good. You do not believe and therefore you do not taste. But I don't want to aim my remarks at you right now. I want to aim them at my own heart. I come to confess to you today that as I contemplated this verse a few weeks ago, that there are times in my life—too many times—when I have believed that God was not good. I'm not talking about before I was saved; I'm talking about since I've been saved. I want to be honest with you and if you're to have any benefit from this I must. I would never have thought that I believed that God was not good. I certainly wouldn't have said that. But in my heart I didn't believe God was good and therefore I could not taste or experience His goodness. I believed the lie that was whispered in my ear that I, better than God, knew what was good for me. Or I believed the lie that what God was dishing out to me at the time was not goodness but the opposite. Have you not felt that God was being unkind?

I wonder how many listeners I have that can really identify with me? Have you not known times when you really struggled with believing what you were enduring was really in your best interest? Friends, that is doubting that God is good. Let's call it what it is and confront it no matter how painful. That's what the problem is. When you're wondering if this is really God's best for you, no matter the situation or issue, which is a belief that God isn't good. You cannot believe He is good and not experience it. More on that in a few moments.

In my life there are seasons I really wonder if God is good. I'll never forget the year 2000. It stands out in my mind as being the epitome of this struggle. The church had grown from about 55 when we first came to about 130 and that's when we started making plans for the new building. Everything seemed to be going wonderful and one night, a Sunday night, God spoke to my heart and told me I was building on me and my gifts and abilities and because of something that had happened in the spring of '95, a lot of people feared me more than they feared God. That's what He said to me. I'll never forget trying to close out the service that night, I couldn't. Because I was so broken I had to leave and go to the office and I stayed there on my face for two hours promising God that anything I built here, if I had to keep it sustained, then I would know it wasn't from Him and I'd let it die. Ever since then I've been trying to keep true to my promise. Sure enough, everything that I built began to disassemble and come apart. People began to leave. Challenges came. I began to doubt if God really loved me. I even came to the point where I thought, maybe, maybe, I haven't been converted. Maybe my own conversion was a sham and a self-delusion. That's how bad I got.

I remember coming to the pulpit and preaching and nothing happened. It was like a glass wall between me and the audience and I felt like, "Oh God, please, not another Sunday. Please, no." I didn't want to preach, I got so low. "God, You're not loving me. This is not kindness. Maybe You've never loved me." For a whole year I went that way. Thankfully God reminded me of His goodness to me by one verse of Scripture, "For by grace you have been saved, through faith, that not of yourselves it is the gift of God."

I've shared this with you many times and I'm sorry I have no new illustrations this morning but I just want you to know that I do know what I'm talking about. There have been times where I have found it hard to believe that God really cared for me as much as He cared for any of you. Why, I don't know. I've thought about it a lot. It probably had something to do with my childhood and not experiencing love. Expressed love in our household was very rare when I was a child. I never remember my mother telling me she loved me until I was an adult and only after I had told her. So, for that, perhaps there is this insecurity. If you're not sure your parents love you, how can you believe God loves you? Even after being saved I have struggled time and time again with that notion, "Do You really, really, really love *me*?" When you doubt that, when you question that, you'll never taste and see that God is good to you and that He truly does love you.

That leads me to my final point.

III. HOW TO EXPERIENCE

How do we experience it? How can you taste and see that God is good? The psalmist answers in the next refrain.

Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Some of your translations say, "Blessed is the man who finds his refuge in Him," in other words, a refuge is a place you go for safety. If the tornado and storm sirens sound, you know you need to go to your storm cellar because it will be a place of safety. You believe, you trust that it will keep you safe during the storm. A refuge is the same concept here as a hiding place, a place you can trust. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him. Faith is the palate and the eyes of the soul. By faith we appropriate His goodness. It's not by how good you are. This is not about your goodness. Thank God it's about His goodness and His goodness is not merited, earned, or deserved. Jesus has already done that for you. His goodness is freely offered to us and all He requires of you and me is to really believe that He is good, not to people in general but to you in particular. Do you believe that?

Dear non-Christian, do you believe that God really loves and is good to you? You must if you are to experience it. The same principle is true for those of us who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. You constantly have to be drinking from this same fountain and eating from this same table because God wants relationship. He wants intimacy. He wants you, as unbelievable as that may sound. It's true. He delights in you. He rejoices over you, Zephaniah says, with singing. I don't know what song He sings but I know one thing, He has a special song about you.

At least once a year around Valentine's Day, I try to write my sweetheart a poem. Why? Because I have a little ability, not much, and I want to express that love in poetic form or verse. How much more the Great Lover of our hearts? How much more Jesus has a song written just about you, not us in general but you specifically and He sings over you? Oh, do you believe that? To the degree you believe that is the degree you will experience it.

Do not be tempted to believe that God is good based upon your circumstances or experiences because they're deceptive. In hard times and difficulties, things appear that God is against you. That was my mistake in the year two thousand and I've repeated that a few times but not in as

long of a duration did it take me to get out of that unbelief, but that's the problem—I was judging God's love for me by how good circumstances were. Surely you know there are some things you can only learn through difficult circumstances and therefore love demands them. It would be the act of hatred that God not take you through those difficulties. It would not be loving kindness it would be animosity, to withhold those difficulties from you.

Do not gauge God's love or goodness by circumstances. In fact, I want to say that in the midst of the difficulty you can taste and see and discover that He is not only good, He's *real* good. For it's in the valley, in the difficulty, that most of us have testified that God's presence seemed more real and more beautiful than when we were experiencing ease and comfort. Why is that? Because you believed. You had no other choice, did you? Some difficulties can be so pressing that God has removed every option of any other alternative and you have nothing but God. Thank You, Lord. When you're that desperate, you can trust, you can depend and then you will taste, you will see, faith is the very taste buds, the very retinas to see that God is certainly good to you.

It's not feelings then faith; it's faith then feelings. That's why the Lord says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," to people who are already His because often our feelings tell us otherwise. So if you don't feel that you are in a good place today experiencing God's goodness, then this command is really to you. God is saying, "I am commanding you to come back and experience more of Me today, right now, this very morning, because you of all people need to know that I am good to you and that I love you."

It's faith then feelings, faith then receiving. You cannot receive it until you first believe it. You receive in your heart before you receive in your hand, Hebrews 11:1. We must believe God really does love us.

Faith = a simple trust, a commitment to the truth that God has stated about Himself, and you commit yourself to that truth.

Great faith = a faith that comes to God with no doubts, full of assurance with no reservations

That is my struggle. I can believe God, but sometimes with my faith there is a wrestling with unbelief. How many of you know what I'm talking about? Just this past week maybe you prayed and

said in effect, “God I know You *can*, but I’m really struggling with if you *will*.” You need a great faith, a faith that’s full of assurance so that no matter what your physical eyes are seeing your spiritual eyes are fixed upon Jesus and you see that Jesus is good.

You must believe that God really loves you and one of the things that hinders that is our sins, is it not? I mean, how many of you feel the goodness of God when you sin? How many of you really feel loved by God when you’ve just blown it? We don’t, do we? That’s not the time we think about experiencing the love of God. I’m telling you it’s the time you must. It’s the time when it’s long past getting real with God and real with yourself and pursuing His goodness. You need goodness when you sin. *No, pastor, I need God’s discipline.* What do you think God’s discipline is? Is it punishment?

Ah, if that’s your view of discipline then no wonder you cannot taste and see that the Lord is good. God is not out to punish you. He’s not out to hurt you. He’s not out to inflict pain willfully or even whimsically. He’s not some God who is vicious. No! Stop thinking that way. God is not hard! He’s been won over to you by His Son’s death. There at Calvary, the hardness and harshness of God was seen, righteous albeit, but hard nonetheless. Jesus took the blunt force of His vengeance so that you can be the recipient of His kindness. So when you sin, when I sin, it’s not then that we should give into the lie that says God cannot be good to you because you don’t deserve it. No, come and taste and see.

Why can I say that? Because that’s what the Bible says. You don’t come to the throne boldly, if God has something against you. But you come boldly because He holds nothing against you, not one thing. If you don’t really believe God loves you and that He’s good, you won’t be at peace with yourself or anyone else. There are some people you’ve known, maybe they’ve even been a part of our fellowship but they just can’t be loved. It’s sad. They will not let people get close to them because they cannot run the risk of being rejected.

Dear, dear friend, you’re not at peace with anyone else because you’re not at peace with God because ultimately you’re not tasting how good God is. It’s not personality conflicts, though you blame it on that. That’s the physical excuse but there’s something spiritual going on. A man who is right with God and is experiencing the goodness of God can get along with anybody. They may not be getting along with him but he can get along with anybody, I guarantee you he’s at peace. He’s drinking from the fountain. He’s seated at the table. And it’s good.

If you really believe God loves you, you can risk loving other people and facing their rejection because God loves you and nobody is better than God.

Ravi Zacharias. He tells a true story of a friend of his named Nick Charles, who in two thousand eleven passed with cancer. He was the very first sportscaster for CNN and he contracted cancer. Weeks before he passed he called Zacharias and asked if Zacharias would make the trip to New Mexico where he had moved. Because he loved the scenery of the mountains, Nick had moved he and his family to New Mexico. Zacharias was all too happy to do so.

Though very weak, Nick and his wife took Zacharias out to dinner and after dinner returned home where he shared an experience he had.

One night he was in the living room, lying down in the dark in excruciating pain, when he simply prayed, "God, please, I can't take the pain anymore. Would You go ahead and take me home tonight? Tonight, Lord, please, this is too unbearable. I cannot endure this anymore." He said as soon as he prayed that, in the corner of the room, in the darkness, there was this shadow of a man. The shadow came out of the corner and drew near him and Nick recognized Him as Jesus. "He looked just like what I thought He would look like. He came over to my bed and sat down and took my hand and said, 'Nick, I'm coming for you but not tonight. I'm coming for you, but not tonight.'" At that point, Nick told Zacharias that all of his fear of dying immediately ceased. From that moment on he was no longer afraid to leave his family, to leave this world, and to go into the presence of God. Total peace consumed him from that moment on. The Lord of life who had saved him had come to comfort him. Though Nick's body would continue to weaken and continue to give in to cancer, Nick had been sustained by the Bread of Life that had come into the world. He had tasted and seen that the Lord was good.

It was one thing for him to know it with his mind but that night it meant everything to him for the Lord who was good to come to him and grant him the ability to taste and see God's goodness.

Dear friend, God is here for you to experience right now. Nothing more has to take place. Nothing more has to happen. How do I know? It's a command. Look at it. "Taste and see." Do you not see the table is always open to you? The kitchen never closes with God. This command stands day and night, morning and evening, come anytime and He has prepared a table for you. Your cup will overflow with goodness. You can come right now and experience God's goodness.

I want to say to the Christian who I addressed earlier in this message, would you come to Jesus' table and experience this? By faith will you say *no* to every whisper of doubt, will you say *no* to your circumstances, *no* to what your eyes are saying, *no* to what your emotions are communicating and will you simply trust Him now with a submission that says, "Oh God, Thy will be done, for You are the Judge of all the earth and You will do right"? Amen.