

The Word Appreciated

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"How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" — Psalm 119:103

It is delightful to find how exactly the experience of David, under the Jewish dispensation, tallies with the experience of the saints of God in these gospel times. David lived in an age of miracles and divers manifestations. He could have recourse to the Urim and the Thummim and the priesthood; he could go up to Zion and listen to the holy songs of the great assembly; he could converse with the priesthood; but, still, the food of his soul was supplied to him from the written Word of God, just as it is with us now. As that is the food of our souls, so it was the food of David's soul.

Martin Luther says, "I have covenanted with the Lord that I would neither ask him for visions, nor for angels, nor for miracles, but I would be satisfied with his own Word, and if I might but lay hold upon Scripture by faith, that shall be enough for me." Now it seems to be so with David here. The honey that gratifies his taste is not found in angels' visits or miraculous signs or officiating priesthoods or special revelations, but in the words of God's mouth and in the testimonies of Holy Writ.

Let us, then dear brethren, prize this Book of God. Be not ambitious, as some are, of seeking new revelations, or enquire for the whispers of disembodied spirits, but be satisfied with this good household bread which God has prepared for his people; and while others may loathe and dislike it, let us be thankful for it and acknowledge with gratitude the bread which came down from heaven, testifying to us, as it does, of the Lord Jesus, the Word of life that liveth and abideth forever.

This exclamation of David is clear proof that he set the highest possible value upon the Word of God. The evidence is more valuable, because the Scripture that David had was but a slender book compared with this volume which is now before us. I suppose he had little more than the five Books of Moses, and yet, as he opened that Pentateuch, he said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" If that first morsel so satisfied the psalmist, surely this fuller and richer feast of heavenly dainties ought to be yet more gratifying to us. If, when God had but given him the first dish of the course, and that by no means the best, his soul was ravished with it, how should you and I rejoice with joy unspeakable, now that the King has brought on royal dainties and given us the revelation of his dear Son!

Think a minute. The Pentateuch is what we would call, nowadays, the historical part of Scripture; and haven't you frequently heard persons say, "Oh, the minister read a passage out of the historical parts of the Word." I have, with great pain, heard persons speak in a very depreciating manner of the histories of Holy Writ. Now, understand this. The part of the Word which David loved so much is mainly historical, and if the mere history of the Word was so sweet, what ought those holy Gospels and sacred Epistles to be which declare the mystery of that narrative — which are the honey whereof the Old Testament is but the comb — which are the treasures of which the Old Testament is but the casket? Surely we are to be condemned indeed who do not prize the Word now that we have it all.

That Word of God, which David so much prized, was mainly typical, shadowy, symbolical. I do not know that he understood it all. I *do* know that he understood *some* of it, for some of his Psalms are so evangelical that he must have perceived the great sacrifice of God foreshadowed in the sacrifices described in the books of Numbers and Leviticus, or it would not have been possible that he should, in so marvelous a style, express his faith in the great offering of our Lord Jesus. I put it to some professors here: do you often read these at all? If, now, your Bible was so circumscribed that all was taken from you but the Pentateuch, would you be able, to say, "Thy Word is sweet unto my taste?" Are not many of us so little educated in God's Word that, if we were confined to the reading of that part of it, we should be obliged to confess it was unprofitable to us? We could not give a good answer to Philip's question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Oh, shame upon us that, with so many more Books, and with the Holy Spirit so plenteously given to guide us into all truth, we should seem to value at least half of the Word of God even less than David did!

A great portion of the Pentateuch is taken up with precepts, and I may say of some of them that they are grievous. Those commandments which are binding upon us are not grievous. Some of the commands of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are so complex, that they were a yoke of bondage, according to Peter, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. Yet, that wondrous 20th chapter of Exodus with its ten commandments and all the long list of the precepts of the ceremonial law, which you may perhaps account wearisome to read, David says were sweet to his taste, sweeter than honey to his mouth. What! *Did he so love to hear his heavenly Father speak that it did not much matter to him what he said so long as he did but speak*, for the music of his voice was gladdening in its every tone to him? Now that you and I know that all the bondage of the ceremonial law is gone, that nothing remains of it but blessing to our souls, and now that we are not under the law, but under grace, and have become inheritors of rich and

precious and unspeakably great promises, how is it that we fall so far short, and do not, I fear, love the Word of God to anything like the degree that David loved it?

David here speaks of all God's words, without making any distinction concerning some one of them. *So long as it was God's Word, it was sweet to him, whatever form it might take.* Alas, this is not true of all professors. With an unwise partiality, they pronounce some of God's words as very sweet, but other portions of God's truth are rather sour and unsavory to their palates. There are persons of a certain class who delight in the doctrines of grace. Therein they are to be commended, for which of us do not delight in them if we know our interest in them? The covenant and the great truths which grow out of the covenant, these are unspeakably precious things and are rightly enough the subjects of joy to all believers who understand them. Yet certain of these persons will be as angry as though you had touched them with a hot iron if you should bring a precept anywhere near them; and if you insist upon anything being the duty of a believer, the very words seem to sting them like a whip; they cannot endure it. If you speak of the "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord," and speak of it as a holiness which is wrought in us by God the Holy Spirit and as a holiness of mind and thought and action — a personal holiness which is to be seen in the daily life — they are offended. They can say, "How sweet are thy doctrinal words to my taste, but not thy precepts, Lord; those I do not love; those I call legal. If thy servants minister them, I say they are gendering bondage and I go away from them and leave them as Arminians or duty-faith men or something of that kind; for I love half thy Word and only half of it." Alas, there are not a few of that class to be found every here and there.

And there are some who go on the other side they love God's Word in the precepts of it, or the promises, but not the doctrines. If the doctrine be preached, they say it is dangerous — too high; it will elevate some of God's servants to presumption it will tempt them to think lightly of moral distinctions; it will lead them to walk carelessly, because they know they are safe in Christ. Thus they love one half of the truth and not the whole of it. But, my dear brethren and sisters, I hope you are of the same mind as David. If God shall give you a promise, you will taste it, like a wafer of honey, and feed on it; and if he shall give you a precept, you will not stop to look at it, and say, "Lord, I don't like this as well as the promise;" but you will receive *that* and feed upon *that* also. And when the Lord shall be pleased afterwards to give you some revelation with regard to your inward experience or to your fellowship with his dear Son, you welcome it with joy, *because you love any truth and every truth so long as you know it to be the truth of God's own Word.*

It is a blessed sign of grace in the heart when God's words are sweet to us as a whole — when we love the truth, not cast into a system or a shape, but as we find it in God's Word. I believe that no man who has yet lived has ever proposed a system of theology which comprises all the truth of God's Word. If such a system had been possible, the discovery of it would have been made for us by God himself: certainly it would if it had been desirable and useful for our profit and holiness. But it has not pleased God to give us a body of divinity; let us receive it as he has given it each truth in its own proportion — each doctrine in harmony with its fellow — each precept carefully carried out into practice and each promise to be believed and by-and-by received. Let the truth and the whole truth, be sweet to our taste. "How sweet are *thy* words!"

There seems to be an emphasis on the pronoun, "How sweet are *thy* words!" *O my God, if the words be thine, they are sweet to me.* Had they come to me from the prophet, and I had perceived them to be merely the words of man, I might then have estimated them at their own weight, without reference to their authority; but when my Father speaks, when the Spirit lives and breathes in the truth to which I listen, when Jesus Christ himself draws near to me in the preaching of the gospel — then it is that the Word becomes sweet unto my taste. Beloved, let us not be satisfied with the truth except we can also feel it to be God's truth. Let us ask the Lord to enable us, when we open this Book, to feel that we are not reading it as we read a common book — truths put there by some means, unimportant to us how; but let us recollect that we are reading truth put there by an inspired pen — that we have there God's truth such as he would have us receive — such as he thought it worth his while to write and to preserve to all ages for our instruction.

The psalmist is not content to say, "God's Word is sweet, and sweeter than honey," but "How sweet are thy words unto *my* taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to *my* mouth!" After all, *the blessedness of the Word is a matter to be ascertained by personal experience.* Let others choose this philosophy and that form of thought, let them gad abroad after the beauties of poetry, or dote upon the charms of oratory; my palate shall be satisfied with thy Word, O God, and my soul shall find an excess of sweetness in the things which come from thy mouth into my mouth!

The Word of God, then, while in itself certainly most sweet, and all the sweeter when we recognize it as coming from God, will only be sweet to us in proportion as we are able to receive it and to feed upon it. Every man must in this case feed for himself. There can be no proxy here. I wonder not at those who think lightly of God's Word, notwithstanding the rapturous admiration they have heard expressed by others; for, unless they have tasted it, and felt and handled it, they still must be strangers to its unspeakable sweetness.