

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

GOOD TASTE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 17TH, 1864, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“His mouth is most sweet.”—Song of Solomon, v. 16.

Now I think the first thing we have to do here is to get at the meaning, the precise meaning of these words, and then we shall be in a fair way to work out its beautiful suggestiveness. First, some have thought that the beginning of the book shows the meaning of this verse, where it is said, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for thy love is better than wine,”—that the impressions of the Saviour upon a heaven-born soul do indeed leave a sense of immortal sweetness with that soul wherever he has thus given the tokens of his favour. But this, I think, is not the meaning intended in our text. Then again, some have thought that it means the words of his mouth are sweet, most sweet. Now this is a truth, “His lips are like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.” There we have the words, and every word that he speaketh to the soul is fragrant. I therefore think that it doth not mean the impressions of his love, as indicated in the first part of the book, and I do not think that it means the words that he speaks to the soul. I think that the marginal reading is very much to be preferred, and evidently conveys the meaning, that “his palate is most sweet.” And the proper meaning is this, that his taste was so refined, or rather, it was so pure and so perfect, that he never could be deceived—receive error instead of truth. He was keen in his taste. This is a point we shall have to work out. Hence, as you are aware, the Israelites were prohibited from eating certain kinds of food which the heathen around them did eat. Therefore, as the Israelites lived upon that which the Lord prescribed for them, their taste was conformed thereto, so that neither taste nor conscience would allow them to deviate from that dietary which the Lord had prescribed for them. Hence Peter, not at the first understanding the vision, when he saw wild beasts, and four-footed beasts, fowls of the air, and creeping things,—the Lord said to Peter, “Arise, Peter, kill and eat;” and Peter said, “Not so; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” Here you have the idea, so that neither conscience nor taste would allow Peter, as a Jew, to deviate from that dietary which the Lord had prescribed. Now this, then, will help us to the meaning of the text; that the dear Saviour being pure, his mouth—that is to say, his taste, his palate—was most refined. You see it stands in the superlative degree, so

that he could never take anything into his mind that was contrary to the purity of that mind, that was contrary to the truth of the blessed God. Having said thus much, I at once proceed to notice some of the things—for it can be, in the time we have to speak, but a small sample of the things—suggested by the language of our text. Though our text be short, its significance is unbounded.

First, then, I notice *the purity of the Saviour's taste*; secondly, that *that purity stands in the superlative*, "His mouth is most sweet."

First, then, *the purity of the Saviour's taste*. We go first to the 45th Psalm, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." There he is distinguished from the children of men as having no sin, and therefore he had no taste for sin, because he had no sin in his nature. All the very natural tastes of the Saviour stood directly against error, and against everything contrary to the will of God. But before I enlarge upon those points to which I have now referred, I may take the Saviour's own explanation of our text. He speaketh thus,—and wonderful speaking it is, a kind of speaking that has cheered the hearts of millions while passing through this vale of tears, "My meat is to do"—that is my taste, that is my choice, that is my decision—"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Here, then, he delighted to achieve the great end for which he appeared in our world. Hence, then, in the 45th Psalm, "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips." And the next clause is wonderfully significant, "Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." Do you not read of grace given in Christ before the world was? and what grace was that but the covenant of grace, which covenant is called the covenant of life? and life is a matter, not of works, but of grace, that is, eternal life is a matter not of works but of grace. And it is called the covenant of peace, and peace with God is a matter not of human works, but of grace. Here, then, "grace is poured into thy lips." Therefore, as Jesus received the covenant of grace, the covenant of life, the covenant of peace, as he received it God blessed him for ever. And I shall have presently to bring in the people of God, and show their oneness of taste with the Saviour here. None of us have by nature a oneness of taste with him, because the things that were, we shall presently have to notice, so sweet to him, are to us, while we are in a state of nature, bitter; so that while we are in our natural state, we then call evil good, and the goodness of God, as declared in the gospel, is what we call evil, and is what the professing world in a majority of cases calls evil; the truths of the gospel, they call them evil. And so, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, and that put darkness for light;" something to be done by the creature they put into the place of the finished work of Jesus Christ, thus putting darkness for light; "And light they put for darkness," that is, they hate and detest the doctrine of that completeness we have in Christ. And also they put "sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet." The truths of the gospel are bitter to Satan; the truths of the gospel are bitter to the Pharisees, they hate them. But unto the real child of God they are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb; nothing he ever realizes can be so precious. Now, "Grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." So that Jesus Christ could be blessed only after the order of that covenant which he received; he could be blessed in no other way; and if he had not received that covenant (of course I speak now after the manner of men), then he would not have received the Father's will; he would not have worked out the Father's will; he would not have been the sacrifice that the Father willed; he would not have been the righteousness that the Father willed; he would not have been the Surety that the Father willed; he would not have been the Shepherd that the Father willed; he would not have been the husband to the church that the Father willed. But he did receive that covenant of grace, and calls his own infinitely precious blood the blood of the new

covenant: "This is my blood in the 'new covenant;'" "Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." His taste, therefore, was most pure, so that his meat was to do this good will of God, and to finish his work. The Lord Jesus Christ did live as man upon the word of God. Hence his answer to the enemy, when the enemy said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." You know what his answer was, "It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." And we cannot, any of us, fully understand how delightful to the Saviour were the Old Testament Scriptures. You know the many scriptures in the Old Testament that predicted his mediatorial success; how delightful, how sweet those scriptures were to his taste! Just the same now, when the Lord brings home a promise to your soul; suppose the Lord were to say to your soul, when you are under a trembling sense of guilt and fear, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins." Why, you would begin to sing with the poet,—

"If sin be pardoned I'm secure;
Death has no sting beside:
The law gave sin its damning power,
But Christ my ransom died."

Or suppose the Lord should say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee;" or suppose the Lord should say that he will yet do great things; or suppose the Lord say, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" he assures you that he will continue with you, and take care of you; and sometimes he will repeat the same scripture over, that 8th verse of the 54th of Isaiah, "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer," by which my soul was brought into liberty, has been applied to me a great many times since; not with so much power as it was at first, because I have not been in the same state; but I am hardly ever in trouble long before those words will come stealing and whispering into my mind; "with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer;" and that gives me a spirit of confidence before the Lord, and I feel that things will come straight. And how sweet are those words to us,—

"Though cisterns [creature cisterns] are broken, and creatures all fail,
The words he has spoken shall surely prevail."

Now, I say, the Saviour saw in the Old Testament the promises that belonged to him. Amidst other differences, that is one great difference between the Saviour and men,—he never doubted his Sonship, he never doubted the truth of the scriptures that belonged to him. Take, for instance, the latter part of the 91st Psalm: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet;" and so, many other promises; all these the Saviour understood, and he knew that they belonged unto him. His taste was to do the will of God, and not to leave anything for you to do; and that your business should be, by divine teaching, to know what Christ has done, to receive what he has done, to lean upon it, to live upon it, to trust in it, to rejoice in it, to be complete in it, to see by it, to be clothed by it, to be housed by it, to be saved by it, to be justified by it, to see God by it, to get to heaven by it, overcome all your foes by it, acquire good health, riches,—everything by it. Honours eternal and unbounded crown his brow! he has not left a particle for us to do; he went to the entire end of sin. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And such are the wonders that shall be revealed by this completeness of the Saviour's work that eternity will be none too long for us to survey them, to recognize them, to realize them, to enjoy them, and to be made happy by them. "His mouth," then, "is most sweet;" perfection in taste. If the word of God be compared to a river, or to a well, or to a brook, in this also the Saviour shows the purity and perfection of his taste.

Now the 110th Psalm itself is called a brook. And what have we in that Psalm? First, the enthronement of the Saviour. "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Jesus when on earth would drink that in. He would say, There is my Father's love, and my Father's counsel, and my Father's purpose; there is my place; I shall reach it, I shall get there, I shall rise again the third day, and I shall be the resurrection of my people; because I live they shall live also. "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion;" that is, the gospel; not to stand shivering at the door, as people tell us; not standing hoping, and trusting, and begging, and praying, and beseeching that the dead bones will turn themselves into men. The Saviour would scorn to put himself, in salvation matters, into such a position. His old-covenant language, when he wept over Jerusalem, was another thing; that belonged to another covenant, another spirit, and another line of things. But when we come to this matter, mark the language, and he would drink that in with delight; "Thy people shall be willing." That was one object of his work in dying: he died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God; and there is the promise of God the Father—positive promise—to his dear Son, that his people shall be willing. And I say it with reverence before God, which I may do, because it is only a similar mode of speech to that of the apostle, that if there was one left to die unwilling, eternal dishonour would redound to him that has promised to make them willing. God the Father has engaged to make them willing; "Thy people *shall* be willing;" they shall be willing; God the Father has promised that it shall be so. Is God unrighteous, then, to forget his promise? No. "In the beauties of holiness," and what are the beauties of holiness; how are the beauties of holiness? By faith in Christ; he is your sanctification, that is one beauty of holiness; he is your justification, that is another beauty of holiness; he is your salvation beautification, for "I will beautify the meek with salvation;" that is another beauty of holiness; and there are many more. And they shall be willing; Christ shall be their sanctification, and Christ shall be their justification; he will be their beautification. "From the womb of the morning;" there is his resurrection. The morning supposes a night,—that a night has preceded; and so a dark night preceded his resurrection; that is, the dark night of his sufferings; and from this morning of his resurrection he hath the dew of his youth. Hence, the church here, in the very paragraph to which our text belongs, and with which I must not now meddle, views the Saviour in his resurrection state,—in his state of freedom from sorrow and from trouble; in that resurrection morning. And that resurrection was founded in the perfection of his work, and the perfection of his work was founded in the will of God, and the will of God was founded in his own good pleasure, for God formed his counsel as he pleased, he formed his will as he pleased; in the formation of his will he was not guided by any but himself, for his will was formed from everlasting, his mind was made up from eternity; "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." And therefore it is that Christ's resurrection was based, I say, upon the perfection of his work; the perfection of his work based upon the good will of God, and the will of God based upon God's good pleasure; formed his will as he pleased, doing as he pleaseth. And the longer you live, the more you will prize this truth—the Lord doing as he pleaseth. "Thou hast the dew of thy youth." And what is our eternal youth? From the same source. Christ is represented in this paragraph as "white and ruddy." Dr. Watts speaks nicely of it,—

"White is his soul, from blemish free;
Red with the blood he shed for me;"

but that is not the meaning of these words. The doctor gives a good piece of poetry, and it is a good piece of divinity too, because it is the truth, but it is not the meaning of those words. "White

and ruddy" here mean his immortality, in contrast to the pallid cheek, sunken eye, and dying creature; Christ stands in contrast to this, blooms with eternal health; no sign of sickness of any kind, no sign of death; "white and ruddy;" to all eternity he is the same. So some of us that are reckoned rather ugly now—never mind that—shall be as good-looking as any of you by-and-bye. We are all to be like him; we shall be white and ruddy then. Some of us may be rather swarthy now, but we shall be white and ruddy then, bless the Lord! get rid of all ugly appearances; we shall appear then in the perfection of beauty, for Christ is there the representative of what his people shall be. Now Jesus Christ would drink all this in—this 110th Psalm—as the brook out of which he drank. Why, say you, I have drunk out of that; I like that Psalm very much. You do? You will get to heaven then. Ah! if the fountain did not belong to thee, never hadst thou been favoured to taste the stream; no. If these blessed truths are made dear to thine heart, and thou canst and dost sometimes drink them in, to the refreshing of thy soul, and make thy soul as a watered garden, whose waters fail not—for these truths fail not,—then the fountain belongs unto thee, or thou never wouldst have been thus led to drink of the streams. "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." Now, some of you that form a part of the company on a Wednesday night—those of you that do not prize your shops above hearing the word for an hour—those of you that do not prize going out for an idle bit of gossip above coming to chapel—some of you that are here on a Wednesday night will remember what we had upon this matter of the Lord swearing by the priesthood of Christ. I will just repeat the substance of it. Why would not the Lord swear by the Levitical priesthood? Because there was nothing in that priesthood that made it worth the Lord's while to abide by it; because it could not take away sin, so he would not swear to abide by it. The reason that he hath sworn to abide by the priesthood of Christ is because there is in that priesthood that which makes it worth the Father's while to abide by it; because the Father's purpose was the putting away of sin, and the constituting his children all that of which his dear Son is the pattern. Now, then, Christ's priesthood brings this about, and so God the Father has sworn to abide by it, and in abiding by that he abides by us. Now, this is the brook, then, and the Saviour's pure taste led him to drink of this brook, and lifted up his head and saw, and was sure of the joy set before him. Not only the Saviour's enthronement, the willingness, the resurrection of his people; not only his eternal priesthood, and Jehovah's swearing to abide by that, but also the victories he should work. "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath." Kings there mean ruling powers. These scriptures must be taken spiritually. When it is said, "The Lord shall strike through kings," it means ruling powers. "In the day of his wrath," wrath with these kings. King Enmity once ruled over you; God came in and smote him to the ground. King Unbelief once ruled over you; God came in and killed that king. King Ignorance ruled over you; King Devil ruled over you when you were in a state of nature. Jehovah was wrath with these kings; at the same time he loved thy soul while he was wrath with these ruling powers; he smote through these ruling powers, and thou wonderedst what was come unto thee. Thou couldest no longer hate God; thou couldest no longer disbelieve in Christ; thou couldest no longer be ignorant of thy state, nor ignorant of God; thou couldest no longer stay away from the throne of grace, nor from the book of God, nor from the house of God, nor from the Christ of God, nor from the name of God, nor from the ways of God. "He shall judge among the heathen;" he becomes the judge. Take Saul as a specimen. He comes in and takes Saul. Says Saul, If I were judged, I should be judged one of the best men on earth; I should be judged to

be one of the best friends that God Almighty has on earth; hardly know what God Almighty would do without me, I am so good. He was his own judge all this time, and jury too. But when the Lord came, and took Saul's kingship and judgeship away from him, and turned him into the prisoner, What do you say now, Saul? Say? why I judge very differently now. Well, what are you? "A blasphemer"—how different! "injurious"—how different! "the chief of sinners"—how different! But you have a good heart? Heart! my heart! why, there is all manner of concupiscence in it. "Oh, wretched man that I am!" God is the judge now; and as God has brought me down here by judgment, here I must remain till he shall raise me up by gospel judgment. And so the Lord did raise him up by gospel judgment. "He shall fill the places with the dead bodies;" figurative, and must be spiritually understood. Take the day of Pentecost. When Peter preached he killed three thousand men at once; these were all dead bodies, all dead bones. Where is your ceremony? Dead. Where is your Jewish descent? Dead. Where is your circumcision, and where is your blamelessness in the law? Dead. Why, I am dead. Strange people these; dead people talk. Yes; they are spiritually dead, and this kind of death indicates a new life. And then, when they were killed, when the place was filled with dead bodies, spiritually dead, they said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Why, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and that will settle it. And so they did, and walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and in the fear of God. "He shall wound the heads over many countries;" and any ruling powers that rule over a soul that Christ died for, these ruling powers shall be crippled, shall be wounded, and the sword of God shall rule over these ruling powers, and they shall come under the one dominion of Christ Jesus the Lord. Now, then, here is his enthronement, the rod of his strength, the willingness of his people, the eternity of his priesthood, the certainty of his triumph. And this Psalm to him was as a brook: "He shall drink of the brook by the way; therefore shall he lift up the head."

Now let us see whether we are one in taste with him here. We have tried to notice what his taste was in relation to the truth of God, but time does not permit me to enlarge upon the cup of tribulation which he drank, nor to enlarge upon the cup of condemnation which he drank, the cup of trembling that belonged to us. Those were the bitters of his humiliation life; but the bitters, as one saith, made the sweet the sweeter. Now this new covenant, then, is to become sweet to all the people of God. We seem to have this beautifully hinted at in the 23rd chapter of the Second of Samuel:—"The man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel." And David never once composed a gospel psalm that is not embodied in what he saith in his dying hour. David there is called "the sweet psalmist of Israel;" and he sums up all he had ever said; and if that which he there saith be sweet to us, it is a proof that we are of the same taste as the Saviour. "The Spirit of the Lord," he says, "spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just"—and that is Christ Jesus; he is the Just One,— "ruling in the fear of God," which Christ to perfection did. "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds," which the Saviour is, "as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain," which the Saviour is. Now David embodies all that made him the sweet psalmist of Israel. "Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me," written in my heart and soul the truths of "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." Now, my hearer, if we are of the same taste as the Saviour, that is, laying aside the simile for a moment, of the same spirit as the Saviour, this same new covenant of which he was the Mediator

will be sweet unto us. And those systems of *ifs*, and *buts*, and *may-bes*, and creature responsibilities, where none exist, which the Saviour ever cast out—he would not have anything mixed up with his righteousness, his atonement, his covenant. He is the one Surety, the one Mediator, the sole Mediator of that covenant. And if we are taught of God, and our taste is right, we shall stand point-blank, decidedly against everything that is contrary to this covenant. Thus, then, Christ was conformed to the truth; it was his meat, it was his drink, the truth of the new covenant; and Christians are conformed to the same.

I come, now, to another point, or rather other parts. First, the professing world, he tastes that. Now if I do not pray to God from a sense of my wretchedness as a sinner, if I do not pray to God from a sense of my miserableness as a sinner, if I do not pray to God from a sense of my neediness as a sinner, if I do not pray to God from a sense of my ignorance as a sinner, if I do not pray to God from a sense of my need of the Saviour's eternal righteousness, then my prayers do not taste sweet to Christ; he does not like them, he will reject them. If my praises do not rise from a recognition of these eternal mercies, they do not taste nice to him. If my profession of his name be not a profession of heart and soul decision for him, they do not taste nice to him; his palate is so keen. He came to the Laodicean church, and he tasted that church in their prayers,—and in their praises, and in their profession—sickly, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot;” either stand out and hate my truth, or else stand out and love it, one or the other; “so, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” So, my hearer, our prayers, our praises, and our profession, if they are not of the right kind he can taste, he knows in a minute. “Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” He tastes, and when you bring that offering he tastes it; he says, Away with it, away with it; who hath required these formal, fleshly, duty-faith services at your hands? No, the prayer must be real, praise must be real; our needs, our poverty must be felt, then we shall pray in reality; and as we recognize and realize his mercies, we shall praise him in reality. See how the Saviour appears to the Laodiceans there. “The amen;” that's what they were lukewarm towards; they didn't like an amen election, because that's a positive and eternal election; they didn't like an amen salvation, because that would be a positive, a complete, and a certain salvation; they didn't like an amen covenant, because that would be a positive and certain covenant, and that would dreadfully infringe upon their popularity and fleshly respectability, amusement, and entertainment; and therefore they were neither cold nor hot; they admitted these truths in a cold, clammy sort of way. Yes, well, I think they are true. I hold them very strongly. Yes, and you hold something else. Whereas the man taught of God, if anything will set his soul on fire it is these truths; if anything will make him love God it is the yea and amen of these truths; if anything will make him willing to shed the last drop of his blood in defence of the name of Jesus, it would be these blessed truths, for which the martyrs died. The Christian, therefore, his prayers, and praises, and services, are savoury and pleasant; Jesus accepts them. You are a traitor to your profession if you admit anything contrary to this new covenant. Why, if the Saviour had done that, you would have been damned to eternity. He never deviated a hair's breadth from it, never; and the real people of God will never commit the great transgression of apostatizing from God's truth, or giving up that order of things which alone can save our souls and glorify our God.

There has been prophesying that I shall get a little softer as I go on. Well, friends, if I don't live to see that prophecy fulfilled, you will not, will you? Certainly not. I am quite satisfied I shall not live to see it; and if

I don't, I think you will be puzzled to it, so we will drop it for the present. Now the Saviour, then, "his mouth was most sweet,"—means a perfection of refined taste; and so the people of God are brought, shall I say, to eat the same meat, and to drink the same drink. And he saith, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock;" he doth in the new covenant, to test people; "if any man hear my voice I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." You will not want two tables, nor two plates, I was going to say. I knew a couple, rather foolish,—I dare say it was; but I don't see what other people have to laugh at, if they liked it;—I knew a young couple, they were married, and they lived to be a considerable age, and they were so fond of each other they never placed two plates at table, always ate out of one plate. Of course the husband must always have been in a very loving mood, and the wife the same. But I was going to say, with the dear Saviour we shall not want two tables, hardly two plates; bless the Lord, no. We shall eat the same, I was going to say, heavenly food, drink the same wine, feast together to all eternity. Ah, the blessedness that shall subsist and be enjoyed in perfection between the Lamb and his bride for ever, is that which we get, even through the telescope of Solomon's Song, a distant view of; it brings it near, it makes our souls long to be there, puts our souls on the wing, and makes us anticipate with joy the day when we shall be brought to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when we shall, with perfection of taste, enjoy a perfection of provision, and that for ever.

Now I have not said a quarter of the things that I have seen in this subject. Just another word. I dare say some one will say this is a very rambling sermon. I generally do ramble when I have more than I can put upon one dish, as it were. Now our text puts the Saviour's taste in the superlative degree, "*most sweet*." Now he always had a perfection of taste; never could charge him with bad taste. I could easily prove, in many natural senses, how he showed good taste, but time will not permit that. He was born with a perfection of taste—"That holy thing;" he lived with a perfection of taste; died with a perfection of taste; he rose with that perfection; dwells in that perfection: whereas we come to it by degrees; there is sweet, sweeter, and most sweet. Bless the Lord, I am got to the first. What is that? Sweet? Yes, yes; the truth is sweet to my taste, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. We want to progress; as our old friends the Wesleyans say, let us go on to perfection: so say I; but not their perfection—mine is Jesus Christ. Want to go on sweeter and sweeter. Now then, come, before I close, let us ask the question, Can you say that that new covenant, wherein the Saviour in carrying it out showed the perfection of his taste, can you say that that becomes sweeter to you? Can you say that you are less and less inclined to deviate from it, and more and more inclined to live upon it? "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David;" covenant of sure mercies. Here am I with sure sins—there is no doubt about my sinnership; there is a covenant of sure mercies to pardon these sins. May it be our happy lot more and more to love the truth, for his name's sake.