

TASTING GOD

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August 12, 2018 (Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost)
New Millennium Church, Little Rock, AR

Psalm 34

Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.

³ O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Look to him, and be radiant;
so your* faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸ O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

*Bread of heaven, you feed us in the depths
of grief, sin, and hostility.*

*Nourish us with your word
through the long hours of tears,
and in the dawning awareness
of our need for forgiveness,*

so that we may be redeemed by your steadfast love. Amen.

O taste and see that the LORD is good.

A few months after my wife and I moved to Little Rock we became members of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, a nurturing and historic congregation of black laborers, educators, social and community activists, and elders located between two historic black higher education institutions (Philander Smith College and Arkansas Baptist College) on what was then 14th Street (now Daisy Gatson Bates Drive). Each Sunday, a deacon named Squire S. Currie, one of the elders of the congregation, would lead the prayer and devotional period. Although Deacon Currie joined the ancestors before God many years ago, I vividly recall him reciting this passage from Psalm 34:8. And when Brother Currie did so, he would smack his lips. Brother Currie had tasted God.

People often speak and write about their experiences with God using sensory words. We hear and read about *seeing* God, *hearing* God, *feeling* God, and *knowing* God. But we rarely hear or read about people *tasting* God. How does one *taste* the Divine? Is God sweet, bitter, or salty? How does a person approach God to obtain a taste? The Psalmist who wrote the words *O taste and see that the LORD is good* didn't answer those questions. Why not?

I suspect the answer is because the Psalmist was writing poetically, not literally. The Psalmist wrote at Psalm 34 about his experience with God using words that are full of passionate praise and thankfulness.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. Psalm 34:1-3.

Those words are a call to worship. That's poetic speech. It is expressive, vivid, passionate, and symbolic.

And in those words the Psalmist makes the bold claim that humans can bless God! *I will bless the LORD at all times...* implies that humans can actually bless God.

Humans have the capacity to bless God, or to choose to not bless God. We can praise God, or choose to not praise God. We can magnify God, or choose to not magnify God.

We can seek God, or not (*I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears*).

We can look to God and receive insight, hope, and strength, or not. *Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.*

When the Psalmist declared, *[t]his poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble*, we are reading words of personal testimony. We can choose to trust God, or not. We can choose to give God credit for our deliverance from trouble, or not. We can choose to testify that God is our help, our refuge, our strength, and our source of joy and peace, or not.

When the Psalmist wrote [*t*]he angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them, he proclaimed that we can choose to entrust ourselves to God’s care, grace and help, or not. Those poetic insights are expressed before we get to verse 8 and read the inviting words, *O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.*

The Psalmist wasn’t referring to God as a meal. He was describing the blessings of knowing God, trusting God, praising God, and thanking God. The Psalmist was describing the experience of experiencing such closeness to God that one no longer views God as hostile or the Holy “Other”. Instead, God is proclaimed to be *good* based on one’s intimate, personal – but never private - experience!

So the Psalmist was determined to *bless the LORD at all times*. Although we live in a troublesome and troubled world, the Psalmist announced his intention to *bless the LORD at all times* because he had experienced God’s grace, experienced God’s deliverance, and experienced God’s care. In times of trouble, the Psalmist had cried out to God. In times of grief and guilt, the Psalmist had cried out to God. When enemies threatened, the Psalmist had cried out to God.

The Psalmist was not naïve. He had experienced bad times, bad situations, and bad people. In the light of those experiences, the Psalmist declared *O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who can take refuge in him.* The whole history of the Psalmist’s experience trusting God, praying to God for strength and help, witnessing God’s deliverance from troubles,

and being sustained by God's grace is what inspired the Psalmist to call on us to *taste and see that the LORD is good*.

“Taste and see” is a call to trust God and discover the deliverance, hope, grace, and strength that results from living with God, for God, and in God's purpose. “Taste and see” is a call to trust God rather than believe we are gods.

“Taste and see” is a call to learn that God is bigger than every trouble. God's grace is stronger than our sin and guilt and shame. God's purposes are better than the oppression and other evils that wicked people and powers intend for us.

“Taste and see” is a call for us to experience God. It is a call for us to explore God through repentance and obedient faith. When the Psalmist declared “taste and see,” he called on us to lean on God, communicate with God, wait on God, come to God, be accepted by God, know that we are claimed by God, and rejoice in being part of the wonderful Oneness of God.

And like the Psalmist, we can invite others to “taste and see that the LORD is good.” Like the Psalmist, we can welcome others to “magnify the LORD.” Like the Psalmist, we can testify about how God's grace has sustained us, lifted us, renewed us, protected us, and established us. Like the Psalmist, we can “bless the LORD” at all times.

I think Deacon Squire S. Currie smacked his lips when he said “O taste and see that the LORD is good” because he had experienced God's grace, strength, and deliverance. Having been born before the turn of the 20th Century, this follower of

Jesus had been a witness as the power of God worked to outlaw racial segregation despite all the worst intentions and hardest efforts of hateful people who, in many instances, claimed to know and love God.

Squire S. Currie had witnessed the grace of God in his own life and in the lives of others. Brother Currie had cried out to God, and had experienced the blessing of answered prayer. That's why he smacked his lips when he said, with bright eyes and a glad heart, *O taste and see that the LORD is good.*

Amen.