

THE TEST OF TASTE.

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A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” — 1 Peter 2:3.

I THINK there can be very little doubt that Peter is here quoting from Psalm 34:8: “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” As I read you the chapter just now, I could not help observing the constant traces of Old Testament language. It endears Peter to us when we see how he prizes the ancient Word of the Lord; and, at the same time, it puts honor upon the Old Testament itself, when we see the Holy Spirit in the New thus quoting from the Old.

It is noteworthy that in Psalm 34:8 the Lord God is spoken of. The passage actually runs — “O taste and see that Jehovah is good”; and Peter does not hesitate for a moment to apply the passage to the Lord Jesus. The word “Lord” is here used in its utmost fullness of meaning, as the equivalent for Jehovah, and it is applied to our Savior Jesus Christ. That Peter is here speaking of Jesus we are sure from the context: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” The chosen foundation-stone is, beyond question, the Lord Jesus; and Peter uses words concerning him which were written by inspiration concerning Jehovah himself. Evidently, to Peter the Lord Jesus was Lord and God. He remembered the voice which he heard in the holy mount, when he was an eye-witness of his majesty: “For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Let us continually pay divine honor to our Lord Jesus Christ. If he be not God, our faith is vain, and our hope is gone; but his Deity is no cunningly-

devised fable. His own works, as well as the Holy Scriptures, attest his Godhead: the whole church of Christ believes in him as very God of very God, and on this rock we build our everlasting confidence.

Peter had special knowledge of his Lord; for you remember that, on one occasion, he said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 2:16, 17). The Father had manifested the Lord unto him as his only-begotten Son. We little wonder that he speaks of tasting that THE LORD is gracious; for by revelation he was made to know and understand to a very high degree the glory and majesty of the incarnate Son of God. That he should speak of his graciousness is also very natural; for he had himself tasted of his grace. This same Peter had denied his Master with oaths and cursings; and when, after his Lord was risen, he sent a message to him by Magdalene, then he tasted that the Lord is gracious. Afterwards, when the Lord met him by the sea, and put the question to him three times, “Lovest thou me?” and betokened the perfect reconciliation there was between him and his once false disciple, by giving him the charge to feed his sheep and lambs, Peter knew that he was wholly pardoned, and completely restored; and then he “tasted that the Lord is gracious.” When he was made so useful at Pentecost, was made to work miracles, was released by an angel from prison, and on many other occasions, Peter tasted “that the Lord is gracious.” It was Peter who used those explicit words concerning the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree”: for right well had he beheld the Lord Jesus as full of grace and truth, and in his own personal experience he had tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Taking these words out of the mouth of Peter, I shall ask you, my brethren and sisters, Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? No doubt is meant to be insinuated by Peter’s use of the “if,” for he believed that those to whom he wrote had feasted upon the love of the Lord Jesus. Assuredly I would suggest no doubt concerning my brethren by the use of the same words; yet I would put you upon a search, to make assurance doubly sure. Dear friends, have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? Is this fact past conjecture? Can you say positively, “We know in our own hearts the grace of our Lord Jesus”?

To help you to a happy conclusion, I purpose to handle my text in the following manner. First, here is *a royal dainty*: “The Lord is gracious.” Here is, secondly, *a special sense*, namely, taste: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Then, thirdly, we shall ask *a searching question*: Have we tasted that the Lord is gracious? Oh, for grace to answer truthfully! In the last place, we shall consider *a series of practical inferences*. If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, then such and such things follow thereupon. Throughout the whole discourse may the Spirit of the Lord rest upon us!

I. First, then, here is A ROYAL DAINTY: “The Lord is gracious.” Jesus is full of grace. Jesus flavours the mouth with grace when we feed upon him. In him is grace which can be tasted by us while here below. Once tasted, this grace is remembered.

Let me remind you that *the Lord is gracious in his person, nature, and character*. He would never have been Immanuel, God with us, if he had not been gracious. What brought him from above to take upon him our frail humanity? What held him here while he endured “such contradiction of sinners against himself”? What but his natural and innate graciousness as “the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”? What did he here that was not gracious? Was he not always feeding the hungry, healing the sick, teaching the ignorant, comforting the mourners, or raising the dead? If you read his life — take which you will of the four evangelists — you cannot help feeling that you have beheld the face of one who was altogether love, goodness, graciousness. “He went about doing good.” From his lips poured gracious words, and from his hands streamed gracious deeds. Our precious Christ is gracious both as God and man; gracious in his tone and manner and spirit; gracious in every office; gracious to all sorts and conditions of men; gracious in the promise of his coming, and gracious in delaying it, that by his longsuffering men may be saved. The Lord is good; blessed are all they that put their trust in him. We know that our Lord Jesus is gracious by nature.

But, beloved, we have found him exceeding *gracious in the manner of dispensing his salvation*. He is most free, spontaneous, and generous in his gifts of grace. He needs not to be prompted or persuaded in order to make him gracious. We do not drag grace from him as from an unwilling giver, but he delights to bestow his mercy; for the Lord is essentially gracious. Remember his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead

in trespasses and sins. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” When we were his enemies, he reconciled us to God by his blood; and when we had neither thought nor wish to come to him for salvation, he came to us *with* salvation. Many of us are living trophies of his conquering grace — grace unsought, and utterly undeserved. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Though we now love the Lord our God, we cheerfully confess that “we love him because he first loved us.” When we lay polluted in our blood, cast out, and ready to perish, it was with him a time of love; and he passed by and said to us, “Live,” and we did live through his eternal word of life. He began to deal with us when we had no dealings with him. Remember his coming to the grave’s mouth when we lay wrapped in the grave-clothes of trespasses and sins, and were, like Lazarus, even beginning to stink. He came, and by his mighty Voice he called us forth, and we arose to newness of life. Gracious, indeed, is he who, in the freeness and sovereignty of his grace, is found of them that sought him not, and is made manifest unto them that asked not after him.

Beloved, as we know he is gracious by nature and gracious in manner, so is he *gracious in his gifts*. How gracious was he when he gave himself for us! This was a gift unspeakable. What priceless boons follow therefrom! He gave us pardon and life. He took us from beneath the gibbet, and lifted us up to justification and acceptance. God-condemned and self-condemned, we stood shivering between the jaws of doom, and then did Jesus come and speak our pardon, perfect, clear, and irreversible, sealed with his own blood, and spoken by his own word. He gave us his pierced hand in token that we were accepted in the Beloved. Beloved, you know all about this; but I would stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. The Lord is gracious in blotting out our sin. Once we had not obtained mercy, but now we have obtained mercy. Because he is gracious he has put us among the children by the gift of adoption, and has made provision for us as members of his family. We are clothed with his everlasting righteousness; nourished upon the bread of heaven; led, and taught, and trained by his wisdom, and preserved, sanctified, and prepared for the mansions of glory by the power of his Holy Spirit. Oh, the gifts that he bestows upon worthless good-for-nothings like ourselves! Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. Oh, the wonders of love! Truly the Lord is gracious!

Since we have come to know our Lord, how gracious have we found him to be! "*He giveth more grace.*" No word can express all that Jesus has been to us; but this word "gracious" goes some way towards it. We have had many inward struggles and conflicts, and much we have needed grace; but as our need such has been our supply. It has sometimes gone hard with us, my brethren, while pressing on to God; but whenever we have been ready to slip with our feet, the Lord has held us up, for his mercy endureth for ever. Ay, and when we have stumbled, he has set us on our feet again, for he is always gracious. When he might have chidden us sharply, ay, and might have laid on the rod, yet has he sweetly smiled and reminded us of his great love, and restored us by his graciousness. We have been full of faults, but he has removed them all; for he is gracious. We have been full of wounds, but he has healed them by his own stripes. We have been full of wanderings, but he has brought us again to his fold. Even now, sitting in this house, some of us feel ourselves to be the most unworthy creatures out of hell; and yet we know that Jesus is ours, and we are his. We cannot but cry out, "Depths of mercy!" We are the chief of sinners, and yet in the matter of obtaining grace we are not behind any of his saints. We are both vile and precious — black as the tents of Kedar, and fair as the curtains of Solomon. Oh, the wonders of free grace, in its continuance and perseverance! Truly, "the Lord is gracious."

The Lord is gracious, for he hears prayer. Our course is set with memorials of the Lord's answering our pleadings. That bedside of ours is a witness that the Lord is good. That old arm-chair, where you are wont to kneel, could tell strange stories of what you have sought and found. Everything has gone cross with you in business, but you have bowed the knee and found grace to help in time of need. You cried unto the Lord when the child was sick, and you were comforted. You sought the Lord when the dear one was dead in the house, and you found the living God to be your consolation as you went to the open grave. When your wounds were bleeding through bereavement they were stanch'd in answer to prayer. When your soul's windows were darkened, grace was the sun which came shining into your gloom. You have knelt before the Lord at times when you have been weighed down with a heaviness which you could not explain, and none could remove; but you have not knelt in vain. Dark night seemed settling down upon your spirit, and neither moon nor star appeared; but even then

*“Prayer made the darkened cloud withdraw,
Prayer climbed the ladder Jacob saw.”*

You came forth from the closet rejoicing, for the Lord was gracious to you, and had put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness. Now you can sing —

*“In all my trials here below
I’ll humbly kies his rod,
For this, through grace, I surely know,
He’s still my gracious God.”*

I hardly need remind you of these things, because they must be ever present with your soul. The Lord has been gracious, very gracious to you. Beloved, some of you have been *favored with choice times*, “as the days of heaven upon the earth.” You have climbed the mount and been alone with God; and there you have seen your Lord and heard his voice in your soul. Oh, the rapture of intimate fellowship with God! Those to whom the Lord is gracious often enjoy an experience which they would not dare to tell, lest they should seem too familiar. If we were forced to tell our joys, we should have to use expressions like those of Rutherford, or say, rather, those of Solomon’s Song, which alone can express the high, mysterious joys of those who lean their heads upon the bosom of their Lord.

*“When in my heart his heavenly love
He sweetly sheds abroad,
How joyfully he makes me prove
He is my gracious God!”*

Possibly your experience has been of a sadder kind: you have backslidden, and *he has restored you in his grace*. You grew cold; you took less delight in the things of God; you began to absent yourself from the house of prayer; your Bible grew dusty, and your closet was forsaken; you were almost carried away captive by the world. Though you had tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, you had almost fallen away; and if you had altogether done so, you know how it is written, “It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” But Jesus held you back from that fatal step; for the Lord is gracious. Your eyes were opened, your heart was broken, you were laid low in the dust of self-abasement, and you began to cry unto the Lord — “Return, O Holy Dove, return.” The Holy Spirit did return, and he brought you back to Christ, and to peace and holiness. Then you sang sweetly, “He restoreth my soul.” In that day the

Lord was seen to be a gracious God. Your face was black because the sun of this vain world had looked upon you; and yet the Lord saw comeliness in you, and still kept you in his heart. Though you had broken the holy vows which bound you to himself, yet he would not cast you away, but still declared that he had espoused you unto himself in faithfulness, and that therefore you should know the Lord. Oh, the graciousness of our Lord to his erring ones! How kind is he to those who fall!

But you do not know, and I do not know, to the full how gracious the Lord is. Remember that *he is preparing us for a glory inconceivable.*

Everything is working out his perfect design. Here in this world we look upon the wrong side of the fabric that is being woven in the loom of providence. When we ascend to heaven we shall see the true pattern to which Christ is working by all his dealings with us, and then we shall perceive that he was carrying out a plan of grace by which we were made meet for glory. Beloved, the Lord is preparing us for perfection of holiness and bliss. He is working us into the image of his Son, and we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is. He is making us fit to dwell among the angels of light, and eternally to drink of the rivers of God's pleasure. We are being educated by all the processes of his providence and of his grace to dwell in that celestial land where the Lamb is the light, and the Lord God is the delight of his people.

“The Lord is gracious” — gracious to the uttermost. There is enough for a sermon in this one sentence. It is a great dish to taste of — “that the Lord is gracious.” Before we go to the next point, I hope you have begun to enjoy the fragrant savor of your Redeemer's name, and the exquisite flavour of his Word. Blessed be the name of Jesus, he is gracious! Grace is poured into his lips. His hands drop the sweet-smelling myrrh of grace, and perfume all they touch.

II. But now let us think of A SPECIAL SENSE which is exercised in tasting that the Lord is gracious. Faith is the soul's eye by which it sees the Lord. Faith is the soul's ear by which we hear what God the Lord will speak. Faith is the spiritual hand which touches and grasps the things not seen as yet. Faith is the spiritual nostril which perceives the precious perfume of our Lord's garments, which smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Faith also is the soul's taste by which we perceive the sweetness of our Lord, and enjoy it for ourselves.

Taste is an inward sense, a private, powerful, personal appreciation. To taste is to know a thing in the essence, outcome, and enjoyment of it. To taste is to exercise discernment, to make discovery, and to gain assured knowledge of a thing. Apply this to the fact that the Lord is gracious, and what a weighty matter it is to taste thereof!

In answering the question, what is meant by taste? I would bid you notice the likeness of the word “taste” to another, namely, “test.” *Taste is a test* as to things to be eaten. We prove and try an article of food by tasting it. He that goes to the market to buy cheese, draws out a piece and eats it, that he may judge of the bulk by the taste. So it is with anything the value of which depends upon the flavour; it has to be tasted that it may be tested; and taste is the best test. If you desire to know the graciousness of God, you must taste and see, by accepting his grace and all its blessed influences. No test is superior to this. Experience teaches as nothing else can. The empiric moves in danger, speculating at every step; but the man of experience walks on solid ground. Even so, we do not speculate upon the grace of God, but “we have known and believed the love which God has toward us.”

In order to spiritual taste, there must be *apprehension*. We must know and believe that the Lord is gracious. If I do not know the fact, and believe that it is so, I cannot begin to taste it. We must have some idea of what being gracious means, and some conviction that this is truly the character of our Lord Jesus. The clearer the knowledge, the more distinct the taste may become. Some of you have come as far as that: you know and believe that the Lord is gracious, though you fear that he may not be gracious to you. This is the first step; but it is evident that more is needed.

After apprehension must come *appropriation*. Martin Luther saith: “And this I call tasting, when I do with my very heart believe that Christ hath given himself unto me, and that I have my full interest in him, that he beareth and answereth for all my sins, transgressions, and harms, and that his life is my life. When this persuasion is thoroughly settled in my heart, it yieldeth wonderful and incredible good taste.” In order to taste, we must make a very close appropriation. We place the gift of God, not in our pocket, but in our mouth, when we taste it. That is the closest appropriation, when we taste a blessing. O my hearers, I fear that many of you have heard of our gracious Lord for years, and yet have never tasted that he is gracious. You believe that he is so, but you have never personally

tried him for yourselves. See, there is honey! Jonathan saw the wood to be flowing with it; for it dropped from many a bough! But this was not enough: he tasted, and his eyes were enlightened. “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” Take to yourselves the blessings of his grace. Appropriate Christ, I pray you. Let each one take him to himself, and then you will know what tasting means.

But taste further means *appreciation*. You may have a thing within yourself, and yet not taste it; even as Samson’s lion had honey within its carcase, but he was a dead lion, and so could not taste it. A man may get the gospel into his mind, but never taste it. It wants a living man, and a living appropriation, and a living appreciation, or else the royal dainty is not tasted. Have you ever enjoyed the truth that the Lord is gracious? “Oh,” say you, “not as I should like to do.” You have well spoken; but I only asked about a taste, I did not enquire about feasting to the full. “To be filled with all the fullness of God” is our inheritance; but just now it will suffice if we so taste as to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Just now we are talking about tasting: and a taste of grace, though it bring us but little joy, is a great thing as an evidence of more to follow. Have you tasted enough of your Lord to know that he is incomparably gracious? Have you taken enough of the Lord to yourself to be assured that there is none like him? Have you found all fullness dwelling in him? There is no grace like the grace which comes from a dying Christ, a risen Christ, a reigning Christ, a coming Christ. Jesus is all in all to all who are in him.

III. So, having considered the spiritual sense which tasteth heavenly meat, I now come to press upon you A SECOND QUESTION: “If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Dear friends, *this is a very simple elementary question*. It is not, “If so be ye have preached that he is gracious.” Many of you will never preach, nor even write for others. Nor does it say, “If so be ye have laid it all down doctrinally in theological form.” No, no: some of you will never be theologians; but that is not the matter in hand. Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? I may not know what a dish is made of; but I may have tasted it, for all that. I may be grossly ignorant of the mysteries of cookery, but I can tell whether a dish is sweet to my taste. Our self-enquiry is about a primary matter, in which even new-born babes in grace are concerned. I

put it to everyone here, whether babes or strong men — Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious?

However simple is the question, *it goes to the root of the matter*; it takes in the whole case of a man's soul. Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? Do you know Christ by personal reception of him? If not, you are in an evil case. If you only know the Lord Jesus in the book; if you only know him by the ear through the preacher; what do you know to purpose? You are sick, and there is the medicine; you can interpret the doctor's Latin, and so you ascertain every drug in the mixture. Will this heal you? No; you must taste the medicine, you must receive it into your inward parts, or you will derive no benefit from it. Suppose you are hungry, and before you is spread a meal. There is the menu, and you read it through. Yes, you approve of every course. Will this satisfy you? No; you must sit down and handle that knife and fork and get to work, or you will remain hungry. I do not need to press you: you are a willing guest at the table. But when I set forth the truth that the Lord is gracious, many of you are content to hear about it, and do not proceed to make the test and taste that the Lord is good. Oh, that you would come to the feast! Oh, that you would eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness!

Every man here must answer that question for himself. I hear a good wife say, "I hope my husband has tasted that the Lord is gracious." My good friend, go on hoping; but your husband must know the grace of God for himself, or your hopes will be vain. A father here says, "I hope my daughter has tasted that the Lord is gracious." I am pleased that you have such a hope for her; but your daughter must taste for herself. We cannot in this matter be sponsors for one another. Tasting is an operation which must be performed by the individual palate. There is no other method of practicing it. No man can say that he has tasted my food for me; and none may dream that they have tasted Christ because their friends have feasted on him. We must know the Lord for ourselves, or die in ignorance of him.

I am afraid this question *will have to be answered in the negative* by many hearers; for they have never tasted Christ. This is an extraordinary thing with some of you, for you are very sound in the faith, religious in your conduct, and moral in your lives. You would not be content with any preaching which was not the unadulterated milk of the Word, for your mind would reject the concoctions of heresy; and yet, though you know the truth, you have not tasted this particular and all-important fact, that the

Lord is gracious. What is the good of knowing that food is good if you leave it untasted? It must be a wearisome business to sit at a table, and have the dishes all brought before you, and then taken away again. It must be tantalizing to have a sniff of the food, but never to have a morsel in your mouth. Many hearers remain in that wretched state. The river of God is at their feet, and yet they are dying of thirst. The banquet of grace is spread at their door, and yet they perish with hunger. Alas! the mass of mankind have never tasted, do not know what it means to taste, and do not care to know. Ah me! this is woe upon woe.

Those who rejoice that they have tasted that the Lord is gracious, yet confess it with a deep blush, because *they have only tasted*. Still there is a great deal in the tasting, for he that can taste will desire more. I would to God that all of us would go to Jesus, and feed upon him to the full. Oh, for a divine hunger which would make us eat abundantly! I would be ravenous for Christ. Would God we thirsted after him, as the hart panteth after the water brooks, for then we should soon be filled! I fear the most of us must confess that we have only tasted that the Lord is gracious, whereas we might have been sitting in his banqueting-house, having our souls satisfied with the rich provisions of his house.

Yet, blessed be the Lord, *we have tasted*. We have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To us this taste has come through the Word. Have you not often cried, when you have gone out of this house, "Blessed be God for what we have heard to-day"? So, too, in reading the Scriptures, we have felt that the Lord is gracious. When we have enjoyed assurance of our salvation we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. In answered prayer, in providential supplies, in gracious renewals, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. In our work or suffering, in our joys or sorrows, in our meditations or praises, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. There is no getting this truth out of our soul's creed: we are sure of it. If a man has tasted a thing, he knows the flavour of it, and is not to be argued out of his knowledge. I have eaten sugar, and I find it sweet. Here comes a philosopher, and declares that it is sour. Go on, philosopher, and philosophize as long and as much as you like; but my palate defies your philosophy. When last I took quinine I held very dogmatic views as to its bitterness. Men who have tasted are inclined to be positive. But, cries one, "It must be wrong to be dogmatic." I care nothing about hard words: I will be dogmatic about what I positively know. When a man is sure of things, why should he pretend to be undecided? There are some matters about which I am past argument, past

the power to doubt; and the graciousness of my God is one of these things. This I have seen, and handled, and tasted; from henceforth let no man trouble me — the die is cast.

Let me tell you when we have tasted the graciousness of the Lord. We have done so *after great bitterness*. Our Lord, as George Herbert would say, has put his hand into the bitter box, and given us a dose of wormwood and gall. We have drunk the cup in submission, and afterwards he has made us taste that the Lord is gracious, and then all bitterness has clean gone, and our mouth has been as sweet as though wormwood had never entered it. It is wonderful how the delectable grace that is in Christ Jesus drowns the offenses of life, and makes us say, “Surely the bitterness of death is passed.”

When a man is ill, he often loses his taste. The most delicious food is nauseous to him. “His soul abhorreth all manner of meat.” But such is the flavour of the truth that the Lord is gracious, that it is more pleasant to us when we are sick than at any other time. The love of Christ is a delicious refreshment for a sufferer. When our pains multiply and our spirits are depressed, then is a gracious Christ more precious to us than in the day of health and joy. We get fresh sips of sweetness, and new tastes of delight when our tribulations abound.

The taste of grace is always on some men’s palates, their mouths are filled all the day with the praises of the Lord. These are happy beings: let us be of their number.

When a man grows old he sometimes loses his power of taste. Barzillai at fourscore years said to David, “Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink?” Age had dulled his palate. But the natural law is not law in the spiritual world; for the older we get the more do we relish the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers grow more heavenly as they get nearer to heaven; or at least, they should do so. As earth goes, Christ comes. Christ is very choice to us when we are young, but when we are gray-headed he is sweetness itself. We realize our Lord more than ever, and we have a keener perception of the grace which he has manifested towards us. Shortly we shall be with him where he is, and shall behold and share his glory: then will he be surpassingly delightful to our perfected taste. Again I put the question — Do you know anything about it? I fear that some of you are quite at sea as to what I mean. You know the taste of fine old port, or sparkling champagne; you know the delicacies of the season: but you

have never tasted that the Lord is gracious, and you smile as you hear the question; for it seems to you too absurd. Why, you have no taste which could apprehend such things, and, indeed, you have no spiritual life. Dead men cannot taste the food of the living. So men who are spiritually dead cannot taste spiritual delights. The Lord quicken you! May you this morning find Christ, who is the resurrection and the life! The moment you live unto him you will begin to crave the milk of the Word, and soon you will have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

IV. So we come to our last point, which is A SERIES OF PRACTICAL INFERENCES.

I have seen by the glances of many of you that you feel you have been made to sit at the table of salvation. You have not partaken so fully as you hope to do; but yet you have, at least, tasted that the Lord is gracious. Well, then, as the text puts it, "*Desire the sincere milk of the word.*" If you have tasted it, long for more of it. Do not hanker after the dilutions and concoctions of "modern thought," which you will find vended in many a pulpit. Beware of dangerous foods, compounded of speculations and heresies. If you have ever tasted the true milk of the word, you will not desire any other; for there is none like it. When the other foods come into the market, say to yourself, "The best is good enough for me, and Christ Jesus is the best of the best. The Lord is so gracious that none can compare with him for a moment, and therefore I shall not leave him." Let others fly to poisoned cups of error, or intoxicating draughts of superstition, we will keep to that which is so grateful to our taste, so nourishing to our souls.

Next, *expect to grow, and pray that you may do so.* You, dear friends, have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and now you desire to be nourished up in sound doctrine, that your whole nature may be developed. How do Christians grow? If they grow aright, they grow all over. Some grow in knowledge, but they do not grow in virtue: this is as if a child's head should get bigger and bigger, and the rest of his body should remain as it was: he will become a hideous creature, or will die of water on the brain. Some say they will make their hearts grow, and never mind their heads. This also will not do. If your heads remain pimples while your hands and feet increase, you will be deformed. We must grow up into Christ in all things. How? Why, by drinking in the unadulterated milk of the Word. To feed thereon makes us grow. Why are some stunted? Because they do not take enough spiritual food, or else because it is not the true word of God

which they hear. It is sad that there should be so much evil teaching: it is the pest of our age. One of the most active agencies in London for the spread of certain diseases is milk; and though persons take in their milk carelessly, and think it is an innocent fluid, there may often be death in the can, and the pint of milk may be a pint of poison. The gospel is the most sustaining food for the soul; but if it is adulterated, it may convey spiritual disease and death into the soul. More mischief can be done by the pulpit than by all other agencies put together. Brethren, pray for ministers; for if they preach the gospel and water, so that the gospel loses its power; or if they preach gospel and poison, so that it ceases to be pure truth, then the people cannot grow, nor even live. Brethren, let us pray for more faith, more hope, more love, more zeal, and so let us grow. "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow."

Next, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," *abhor the garlic flavor of the world's vices*. I mean those alluded to in the first verse — "malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and all evil speaking." If the Lord is gracious to you, be gracious to others. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, do not carry about with you the bitterness of malice, or the sourness of envy. Have no savor of cunning about you, nor the least taint of hypocrisy, nor the foul tang of evil speaking. Is not even a smack of evil too much? A man that has tasted that the Lord is gracious ought to have a sweet mind, and a sweet mouth; he should judge charitably, and speak kindly of others. If you do not do so, I advise you to taste again and again that the Lord is gracious, till the powerful devour of grace shall abide in the mouth, and cast out all the noisome savors of hate.

I want you also, dear friends, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, *to lose taste for all earthly trifles*. Some amusements we are supposed to condemn; but we have not condemned them indiscriminately. We have nothing to say about their suitability for those who can be satisfied with them. Many diversions may be suited to those whose natures can be gratified with them. As to the children of God, we judge for them by quite another rule. Let the ox have its grass and the horse its hay; but souls must feed on spiritual meat. A farmer takes me over his farm. I see that he keeps swine, and I see the men bring out for them barley-meal and wash. The farmer asks me what I think of it. I think it is capital stuff for those for whom it is prepared. I do not condemn the swine for enjoying it, nor the farmer for providing it for them. But if he asks me whether I will have some of the wash, I am quick at answering, "No, farmer, not I." "Why

not?” “Well, I have other tastes. In your own house I have eaten bread and beef, and other foods are not what I hunger for.” That is all I say. Those who want vain amusements may judge themselves by their likings; but if so be that we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, our tastes are henceforth spoiled for the world’s impure delights. To dispute about taste is acknowledged to be unwise; and when sin and holiness become matters of taste with men, we shall soon see what manner of men they are. The taste of the world will never be our taste. I hope it never will; for if it were, we should have grave cause to fear that we were of the world. If we were of the world, the world would love its own, and we should love the world’s own as much as the world loves it. May you lose all taste for the apples of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah!

Lastly, if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, *taste again*. For what does the next verse say? “To whom coming, as unto a living stone.” You have come to Jesus; keep on coming to Jesus. You tell me that you trust Christ; trust him again, my brother. “He is all my hope.” Hope in him yet more. “He is my joy.” Rejoice in him still more. “He is my love.” Love him with all your souls. If you have tasted and enjoyed, then feast and enjoy. “Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” There is no stint at my Lord’s table, and you need not restrain yourself from fear of surfeit or sickness. You can never partake too freely of the grace of Christ Jesus your Lord. No man was ever made ill by feeding too freely upon heavenly things. No, the dainties of heaven create an expansion of soul, and as we receive we gain capacity to receive yet more of holy gifts. We feast on when once we have tasted that the Lord is gracious. The Lord feed you to the full, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON

— 1 Peter 1:17 -25; 2:1-12.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 913, 724, 715.