

The Taste of Death

by Joseph Preston

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9).

Have you ever taken a big bite of your favorite dessert, only to spit it out because it was so disgusting? Imagine a nice warm brownie with a big clod of baking soda to chew on, or an apple pie with a rotten, wormy apple in it, or a bowl of ice cream that tastes like fishy sand from a beach, or a candy bar with caramel in it (that is, if you are like me and highly dislike caramel). What should have been good and wonderful is tainted and tastes horrible.

I want us to consider the concept of "taste" and how Jesus tasted death for everyone. Take a moment with me to consider something about the nature of God, our own nature, and the reality of what Jesus did for us nearly 2000 years ago.

GOD'S NATURE

Think about what God is like. The Bible tells us **God is . . .**

***a sovereign spiritual being** (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:15-17; John 4:24; Acts 17:24-27 - God is the Creator of the entire universe, and so he is a Being that is not made; he is not part of the physical time-space-matter universe; he is a spirit totally unique in his existence; because of this, he has the right to rule everything that he has made)

***eternal** (Isaiah 26:4; Jeremiah 10:10; Romans 1:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9 – God has no beginning and no ending to his existence; he is always living and never ceasing to function or exist)

***unique and ultimate** (Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John 5:20 – there is only one true God; all other beings, whether human beings or angelic beings, are created beings made by God; God is not superior by degree to all other beings, but is ultimately different in existence and therefore superior by nature)

***perfectly good and perfectly great** (Exodus 34:6–7; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 John Psalm 139 – God has no imperfections; he is perfectly good, right, and just; there is no one or nothing that is greater than he is; he knows all, is always present, and is not limited by anything; he is compassionate, merciful, and loving)

***true** (Psalm 25:5; 31:5; 40:11; 43:3; 1 John 5:6; John 17:17; Exodus 34:6; Psalm 36:5; Lamentations 3:22–23; 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2 – God is true in word and deed; he does not lie; he is faithful, always true and never false; he does not contradict himself, so he does not neglect one part of his character, like justice, in order to show another part of his character, like love; he speaks and acts out of the wholeness of who he is)

***personal and knowable** (Galatians 4:8–9; 1 John

4:7-11; Ephesians 2:14-18 – God is a relational being, whose very nature exists in three persons – Father, Son, and Spirit; Jesus’ prayer in John 17 expresses the personal relationship that exists between the Father and the Son; God is knowable, that is, God can relate to and interact with other beings; he loves us and wants to know us and wants us to know him personally)

OUR NATURE

Now think about what we are like. The Bible tells us (and the world around us reminds us) that **humans are . . .**

***created, physical-spiritual beings** (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13; Zechariah 12:1; John 4:23-24; Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; James 2:26; Ephesians 2:1-3 – God made the first humans and continues to make each of us as we are formed in our mother’s womb; as created beings, we are subject to our Maker for our existence and our purpose for existing; since God composed humans of both physical or material elements and spiritual or immaterial elements, we have the capacity to relate to God who is also a spiritual being; however, because of sin, our spirit is described as dead or non-functioning, so we can’t automatically know God; without a functioning spiritual connection to God, we are destined for wrath and eternal suffering)

***mortal** (Psalm 103:14-16; Isaiah 40:6-8; Romans 5:12; 6:23; 7:24 – none of us escapes death; we have

a beginning to our existence and sin in each of us guarantees that death will come, no matter how hard we try to avoid it; even those who receive eternal life because of faith in Christ will still receive the effects of sin in their bodies by experiencing physical death)

***all alike in our inferiority** (Isaiah 40:6-8; Psalm 8:3-4; 103:14; 104:29; Ecclesiastes 3:20 - we may have grand thoughts about our superiority in this world and over past generations, but none can compare to the greatness of God; we are here today and gone tomorrow; it is indeed amazing that God wants to know us)

***naturally sinful and personally accountable for sin** (Romans 3:9-20, 23; 5:12, 18; 6:20-23; 8:13; Ephesians 2:1-3, 12; James 2:10 - not only is no one perfect, but each of us is marred by sin in our lives; some may seem more "righteous," but even the slightest sin - and we are all guilty of some sin - indicates that we deserve the penalty that is due to any sin; each of us is accountable for our own sin, no matter how bad others might be; the consequence of our sin is physical death that leads to unending suffering separated from God; the only escape from the results that come after physical death is to have the eternal life that frees us from the lasting condemnation for our sin)

***inconsistent, broken persons** (Isaiah 40:6-8; Romans 1:28-32; 3:9-20, 23; Ephesians 2:12 - sin

hinders us from living to the potential that we were designed for; though God made us for a relationship with himself, our sin has become a barrier to that relationship; on our own, we'll only seek self-satisfying and self-promoting ends, even when we say we are being altruistic; whether we seek to be good or we seek to be as bad as we can, all of us fall short of God's standard for knowing him)

***personal and knowable** (John 3:5-8; 6:40; Romans 8:11, 16; Ephesians 2:14-18 - while experience shows that we can interact and relate to other humans, our spiritual longings for something beyond this life suggest that there is a God that we could know; the Bible reveals that these spiritual longings will only be satisfied when we come to know the true God, the one who made us and wants to give us eternal life so we can spend forever with him; living forever in a personal relationship with God is only possible when God gives life to our spiritual nature, giving us life that lasts forever; but sin prevents us from finding God on our own, so though we have the potential to know God personally, we can't know him on our own terms)

HOW WE TASTE TO GOD

Now back to my disgusting dessert illustration: Considering how different we are from God, how do we "taste" to God? When God looks at us, he looks at us with love, longing to know us each personally and forever. But the "taste" he gets is our sin. Because God is so good and

perfect, even the slightest imperfection tastes rotten to him. What should have been good and wonderful is tainted by sin. Sin blocks us from knowing God personally. Our sin prevents us from finding God and prevents God from accepting us into an eternal relationship with him.

In order not to “taste” bad to God, we can try to clean up our act and cut out the bad spots in our lives to be on our best behavior, or we can try to point out those around us that are more rotten or sour than we are, or we can try to sweeten ourselves up by doing good things for others or going to church or doing all the right stuff. But none of this will work. The problem is, sin permeates the whole person. You can't cut out the bad parts because the whole thing is bad. You can't expect to be okay just because everyone else is worse when you yourself are still rotten through and through. And no amount of sweetness can cover up the stench of sin. So no matter how we look at it, on our own and by our own efforts, we'll never be good enough for God. So we'll never be good enough to earn a relationship with him and we'll never be good enough to get away from death and eternal condemnation.

JESUS TASTED DEATH FOR US

But then there is Jesus, who “tasted” death for us. Hebrews 2:9 says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Isn't that incredible? Because we are helpless on our own, God sent His own Son Jesus to die for us, to pay the penalty for our sins (Romans 5:8; John 3:16; Hebrews 10:1-24). God himself in the

person of Jesus willingly took on a human nature in all its weakness (but without sin) in order to have the penalty of sin be applied to him in our place (Philippians 2:5-11; John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-17). Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Because Jesus took the penalty for all our sin on himself through his death on the cross (1 John 2:2), he has cleared the way for us to have a relationship with God. He "tasted death for everyone."

Now we need to be clear at this point. When Jesus "tasted" death, he did not sample it and decide not to actually die. "Taste" in this sense means to fully experience it. It is more like "consuming" something rather than just "nibbling" on it. Death is like a poison. If what you are eating has it, it will consume you no matter how small a "sample" you might be trying to take. But Jesus wasn't trying to just take a sample or small bite. Jesus willingly took all our sin upon himself in order to receive God's full wrath against sin. Jesus willingly faced death and was swallowed by death in order to experience all the consequences of sin and death on our behalf. Because Jesus died for our sins, we do not need to die for our sins. Jesus' death provides forgiveness and cleansing so that we can each come to God. While everyone will still "taste" or experience physical death as an ongoing result of sin's presence in the world (John 11:25), Jesus' death for us means that that does not need to be the end for us. Those who turn to God through faith in Jesus "have passed from death to life" (John 5:24; Romans 6:13). We receive eternal life and will live forever with God. While death had swallowed Jesus, it

could not hold him in the grave. Death itself has been swallowed up in Christ's victory over sin and death. On the third day after his death, Jesus rose back to life, guaranteeing that eternal life means eternal life, life that will last forever for each of us who receive it by faith in Jesus (John 5:24-29; 6:40; 11:25-26; 20:1-31; 1 Corinthians 15).

TASTING HIS SON

So when we put our faith in Jesus alone, trusting him to give us eternal life because of his death to pay for our sins, God looks at us differently. Now when he "tastes" us, he does not taste our sin, but "tastes" his Son in all his delicious perfection. Our lives are purified so that God sees his Son Jesus in us (Titus 2:14). We are no longer condemned but are now alive forever in a personal relationship with our God who made us and loves us. Jesus "tasted" death for us so that we might "taste" or experience life forever with God.

TASTE HIM

What about you? Will you "taste" the Lord? If you are not a follower of Christ, if you've never put your faith in Jesus, I ask you to consider two things. First, will you take a sample, exploring what it would mean to put your faith in Jesus and start a personal relationship with God that has no end? Take some time to talk to someone about what faith in Jesus is all about. Don't write it off because you think you are doing okay on your own. Second, will you consider "tasting" Jesus in the sense of actually experiencing a relationship with him? Will you turn from trying to beat sin and death on your own? Will you let

Jesus have your life and receive from him real life that lasts forever? Will you put your faith in Jesus, receiving his forgiveness and beginning a relationship with God?

Those of us who have "tasted" Jesus through faith in him know that there is nothing better than a personal relationship with our God. We have "tasted and seen that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). We can go on "tasting" Jesus in another sense: we taste Jesus by savoring him, enjoying every texture and nuance of our relationship with him. How will you savor your relationship with your Lord today?

Take some time

to rejoice that Jesus was willing

to taste death for us

so that he could conquer death and rise again,

making a way for us to taste eternal life

in a relationship with God

through faith in Jesus.

Thanks, Lord!