

BUT WE DO SEE HIM WHO WAS MADE FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS, NAMELY, JESUS, BECAUSE OF THE SUFFERING OF DEATH CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR, SO THAT BY THE GRACE OF GOD HE MIGHT TASTE DEATH FOR EVERYONE.

(HEBREWS 2:9)



hUMAN BEINGS POSSESS AN UNCANNY KNACK FOR DRAINING ALL THE SUBSTANCE and meat from the traditional components of life. For example, furniture for the masses used to be heavy, substantial, long-lasting. Now that substantial quality is reserved for those able to pay for more high-end merchandise. It is the same with clothing. Though we were of the very lowest middle-class when I was growing up, my parents could still afford a durable shirt that would last for my older brother, last for my wearing, and still have plenty of life left in it for the next person. If I were growing up today, under those same fiscal conditions, we could only afford shirts that might not survive even the first washing.

As we have devalued our commodities, we also have devalued our activities. Today our seeing has degenerated into more of a glance. Our public speaking has become common, and forgettable—just compare a speech by the average politician today to the eloquence of Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill. Common everyday people used to listen to symphonies, and

read the classics. Now, more often than not, common everyday people listen to garbage—and read nothing at all.

Sampling

Likewise our definitions have changed. Today if I were handed someone's flavorful drink and told to "taste" it, my generous friend would be sorely offended if I downed the entire contents of the glass. By today's definition, he would have expected me only to take a *sip* of his drink—not to polish it off. The word "taste" has become synonymous with "sample."

But in Scripture, the word "taste" means not just to sample, but "to eat," "to experience (fully)." As is usually the case, God's timeless definitions are far more substantial than modern man's. So when the writer to the Hebrews says,

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

he doesn't mean that Christ "sampled" death. It means that Christ suffered through the complete, awful experience of death upon the most tortuous instrument of death at the time. His tasting of death was not at all like the wine-taster, who swishes the fragrant liquid around in his mouth before spitting it out unconsumed. No, Jesus swallowed the entirety of death. He experienced it fully.

The Taste Experience

Since the children are made of flesh and blood, it's logical that the Savior took on flesh and blood in order to rescue them by his death. By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death and freed all who cower through life, scared to death of death. It's obvious, of course, that he didn't go to all this trouble for angels. It was for people like us, children of Abraham. That's why he had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed. (Hebrews 2:14-18 *The Message*)

Just as God *touches* man through Jesus, He *tastes*—experiences—the things of man through the Son.

- When we are lonely, bereft of friends and family, and we cry out to the Lord in our longing, He knows what it is like, because He, too, tasted separation from the Father while on earth.
- When we are frustrated or angry, and struggle to channel those emotions for righteousness, He understands this volatile condition of the flesh. He tasted that most explosive emotion of the flesh.
- When we are filled with happiness, even joy, Jesus is able to share it with us, for He, too, has tasted the fragile happiness of man.
- When we draw strength from the companionship of a brother, Jesus has experienced that sustaining bond. But He also has tasted the bitter disappointment of being let down by a friend.
- When we feel Satan's powerful tug, tempting us away from holiness, Jesus knows our struggle, for He, too, was tempted by the nemesis.
- When our flesh cries out from pain or hunger, Jesus understands, because He, too, has tasted that vulnerability of the flesh. He, too, has experienced weakening hunger, and the agonies of pain—even the ultimate agony of death.

God in Christ has not just sampled the things of man—He has *lived* them.

Union

When the Godhead created man in its own image, it went far beyond a similarity of appearance. God experienced His life through His senses, and so He crafted man to experience life by the same means. More than that, He designed man to commune with his Maker through those same senses.

In our creation, God implanted in us both the ability and the yearning to listen for and to His voice.

**I will hear what God the Lord will say;
For He will speak peace to His people,
to His godly ones;
But let them not turn back to folly.
Surely His salvation is near to those who
fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.
(Psalm 85:8-9)**

Our sense of smell is not sufficient to detect the aroma of God, but it is sufficient for us to detect the aroma of Christ in each other. When Jesus lives within, we exude His fragrance to everyone around us—to some, the sweet scent of salvation; to others, the rotten stench of the grave.

**But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.
(2 Corinthians 2:14-16a)**

We haven't His penetrating vision, but God has given us the ability to see evidence of Him all around us, and thus to commune with Him through the beauty and creativity of His creation.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

We cannot touch God, but we can touch others in His name. Whenever we do, there is manifested the mystical, yet palpable presence of God.

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:20)

Just as Christ tasted death upon the cross, He invites us to partake of that same death through the saving grace of His shed blood. He calls us to His Communion table to taste the bread and the wine, so that we will never forget His sacrifice on our behalf. And when we are at last in His glorious presence, we will recline, and dine with Him at His table.

"And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last." (Luke 13:29-30)