

SWEET SAVOR
NO. 688

A SERMON
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“I will accept you with your sweet savour.”
Ezekiel 20:41

GOD does not cease to observe the sins of His people. As the eye of Moses never waxed dim, so the eye of God does not grow dim with regard to the sins of His chosen. We may learn this from the recapitulation of those offenses which we find in the chapter before us and in many other places in Scripture. He looks down from heaven and beholds their wanderings, the hardness of their hearts, the stubbornness of their will, their daily and continual violations of His statutes and commands.

Mercy has some other source than that of laxness in the memory of God. He knows the sin of man, and He hates the sins of His people, just as much as the sins of other men. Nay, if there be sins which are worse in God’s estimation than others, they are the sins of His own elect. But notwithstanding this severe strictness, and although God must have a much clearer view of the evil of sin than any of us ever can ever obtain, He freely pardons those whom He reserves.

He casts their sins behind His back, and remembers not their iniquity. He blots out their transgression like a cloud, and their iniquities like a thick cloud. He has a time to chasten, but He has also a set time to bless. He afflicts, but He does not afflict from the heart, and when He turns in a way of grace to His people, He then seems to be flying on the wings of the wind, for He comes with all His soul, most heartily and richly to display His favor and His love toward the objects of His choice.

One would have thought that the persons described in this chapter never would have been acceptable to God. They had so thoroughly defiled themselves, and after so many trials had been so desperately incorrigible, that one would have supposed the chapter would have concluded with thunderbolts of vengeance, and a terrible voice condemning them to be driven forever from the face of the Most High.

Instead of this it concludes with mercy. The trumpet ceases its loud swell, and the dulcet tone of the harp is heard in gentle notes of melody. The thunder and the lightning are over, the storm is past, and the still small voice, in refreshing calm proclaims the infinite pardon that proceeds from a tender Father’s heart.

Our text seems to me very full of fatness. Its savor will be doubtless passing sweet to those who have grace to appreciate it. We shall contemplate it in two lights. First, we have a promise that *the persons of His people shall be accepted with savor*. Sinners are accepted through the merits of Christ, “I will accept you with your sweet savour.” I cannot accept you otherwise, but I will accept you so.

Then, secondly (which is more consistent with the context), *we are assured that our offerings shall be accepted*. “I will accept you with your sweet savour.” I will not only love and receive you, but I will also receive your worship and your service. Your sweet savor, those same things which once you offered to idols, you shall henceforth bring as an offering to Me, and when I have accepted you and you are reconciled to Me, then I will accept your good works, and your prayers, and your praises too.

I. First of all, as being the fundamental evidence of grace, THE LORD ACCEPTS THE PERSONS OF HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE SWEET SAVOR OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The merits of our great Redeemer are sweet savor in the nostrils of the Most High. Whether we speak of the active or passive righteousness of Christ, there is alike an overpowering fragrance. Such was the merit of His active life by which He honored the law of God, and exemplified every precept like a precious jewel in the pure setting of His own humanity.

Such too, the merit of His passive obedience, when He endured with uncomplaining submission hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, and with the ever-deepening stream of sorrow, at length yielded to that agony unknown when He sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, when He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked out the hair, stretched His hands to the nails, and was fastened to the cruel wood that He might suffer the wrath of God on our behalf.

These two things are sweet before the Most High, and for the sake of His doing and His dying, His substitutionary sufferings and His vicarious obedience, the Lord God of infinite justice accepts us with the sweet savor of Christ.

There are many sweet savors mentioned in the Old Testament, one of the first is the sacrifice of Noah, where the word is used which is implied here. As soon as Noah came out of the ark he offered up clean beasts, and it is said, “the LORD God smelled a sweet savour of rest.” That is the very word here—a sweet savor or a savor of rest. And Noah obtained a covenant made with him and with all creatures on the face of the earth, that a flood should no more destroy the earth, that covenant being given partly as the result of the sweet savor of rest.

In like manner there is a covenant made with the chosen seed through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is unto us a sweet savor of rest because God delights in Him as our blessed substitute and representative.

But I prefer to confine your attention this morning to one figure peculiarly instructive. These words, “sweet savour,” appear to me to contain an allusion to the incense which was commonly offered in religious worship. And particularly to the incense which was used in the Jewish tabernacle, of which you will find a description in the thirtieth chapter of the Book of Exodus.

In order that the sweet merits of the Lord Jesus may be the more fragrant to your understanding, I ask you to turn to that chapter and let me refer you to some points in which the holy incense brings out clearly before our eyes the qualities and excellencies of the merits of Christ.

You will read at the thirty-fourth verse—“*And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: and thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: and thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume, which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.*”

Now, you observe that this incense was sweet unto God. So too are the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, as a Spirit infinitely and exclusively holy, delights in holiness. As a truthful Spirit He cannot be satisfied with anything that is untruthful. As a most just, and yet loving Being, He finds in the person of Jesus Christ an expiation which was in every way honorable to justice, and a revelation of grace according to the goodwill of divine love, which is precious to Himself beyond all expression, and admirable to all holy creatures far beyond all blessing and praise.

Whenever the great God contemplates His own dear Son, He feels an intense delight in surveying His character, and in beholding His sufferings. You and I, so far as we have been taught of God, must find infinite and unspeakable delight in the person and work of Christ. But alas! we are like common people who look upon a fine picture without a cultivated understanding in the art of painting, we cannot perceive the whole beauty, we do not know the richness of its coloring, and the wondrous skill of all its touches.

Who but JEHOVAH understands holiness? Who like God knows what great love means? Or who save the Lord can comprehend justice and truth to perfection? Therefore it is that as He gazes upon that matchless masterpiece of love and justice, of truth and holiness, embodied in the person of His dear Son, He finds that infinite satisfaction which our faith is perpetually struggling by small degrees to realize.

There is no doubt a discipline by which every faculty may be educated. If I may use so homely an idea, the nostril of one man may be refreshed with a coarse perfume which would disgust another man

of finer taste. The educated nostril may be able to discern between this and that savor, till it is only to be gratified with something exceedingly refined and delicate.

Adhering to the metaphor of the text, the Lord our God is so holy, and just, and true that the coarser virtues of mankind, the best of all that we can bring, might disgust Him. But when He looks upon His dear Son, there is such a rarity of sweetness in the sacred confection of His blessed character that He takes delight in it, and the savor thereof is sweet unto Him. We love Him, we delight in Him when we think of His character. In our inmost souls we feel that there is nothing we could find fault with, but everything to admire and adore.

But the most holy God finds even greater satisfaction, and the merits of the Savior are so sweet a savor to Him that we strive in vain to reach the knowledge of it. The sweetness of the incense in the temple was meant to set this forth. The incense, however, was not the result of one sweet drug, but of several mixed together. We have four mentioned. The Talmud says there were eleven, we do not know whether there were or were not. We are content to believe, as the Scripture tells us, that there were four.

Many ingredients then, are mixed and mingled together to make up the one surpassing sweetness of this incomparable perfume. And brethren, it is certainly so in Christ Jesus.

If we take the characters of other men, however excellent they may be, they only excel in some one, or possibly some two points. But when you contemplate the Savior, you find all the virtues enshrined in Him. Other men are stars, but He is a constellation, nay, He is the whole universe of stars gathered into one galaxy of splendor. Other men are gems and jewels, but He is the crown imperial, where every jewel glitters. Other men finish but a part of the picture, and the background is left, or else there is something in the foreground that is but roughly touched. But He finishes the whole, not the minutest portion is neglected, His character is perfect and matchless.

If I look at Peter, I admire his courage. If I look at Paul, I wonder at his industry and devotedness to the cause of God. If I look at John, I see the loveliness and gentleness of his bearing. But when I look to the Savior, I am not so much attracted by any one particular virtue as by the singular combination of the whole. There are all the spices—the stacte, and the onycha, and the galbanum, and the pure frankincense, the varied perfumes combine to make up one perfect confection.

Still more remarkable is the perfect balance of the Savior's character as typified to us in the exact proportions of these spices. You observe they are to be of equal weight. If you look, there is not to be so much stacte, and then but half as much of galbanum, but each one in its fair proportion. They are to be of equal weight. So is it in Christ.

It is difficult to get a fully-balanced character. You can see in some men indomitable energy, but you cannot see at the same time any delicate tenderness. You will see in another an exceeding tenderness which degenerates into effeminacy, through want of some sternness to modify it.

Who among you would wish to imitate Elijah? He is sterling in his integrity, a noble specimen of humanity, but the gentleness which should temper his fiery courage is so far lacking that much as you admire you cannot love him.

Even Moses—though I may venture to say that among those that are born of women there has never been a greater, never been one beside himself who could have his name ennobled in the same song with our great prophet, the song of Moses the servant of God and of the Lamb—yet, as you look at Moses, beautifully balanced as his character is in most respects, that condescending loveliness which glistens in the Savior you cannot detect about the glory even of the Hebrew lawgiver.

Brethren, the Savior's character has all goodness in all perfection. He is full of grace and truth. Some men, nowadays, talk of Him as if He were simply incarnate benevolence. It is not so. No lips ever spoke with such thundering indignation against sin as the lips of the Messiah. "He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." While in tenderness He prays for His tempted disciple, that his faith may not fail, yet with awful sternness He winnows the heap, and drives away the chaff into unquenchable fire.

We speak of Christ as being meek and lowly in spirit, and so He was. A bruised reed He did not break, and the smoking flax He did not quench. But His meekness was balanced by His courage, and by the boldness with which He denounced hypocrisy. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; ye fools and blind, ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?” These are not the words of the milksop some authors represent Christ to have been.

He is a man—a thorough man throughout—a Godlike man—gentle as a woman, but yet stern as a warrior in the midst of the day of battle. The character is balanced, as much of one virtue as of another. As in Deity every attribute is full orb'd. Justice never eclipses mercy, nor mercy justice, nor justice faithfulness. So in the character of Christ you have all the excellent things, “whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report,” you have them all. But not one of them casts a shadow on another, they shine each and all with undimmed splendor.

Turning to the incense again, I shall want you to notice that all the ingredients of this incense were of the very finest kind, *pure* frankincense. And then again in the thirty-fifth verse, “*pure and holy.*” And then the thirty-sixth verse—“*most holy.*” So all the virtues of Christ were the best forms of virtue. His love was not love in word but in deed. His faithfulness was not the faithfulness of cynicism, which criticizes and finds fault, it was the faithfulness of a friend that loveth at all times.

Select any one trait in the Redeemer’s character, I mind not which it is, you shall find that in that respect He will surpass the greatest master of that virtue be he whomsoever he may. Take His faith in God—I do not think we sufficiently admire the faith of Christ—that faith never wavers. Even in the time of His strong crying and tears, as David so richly describes it, He still trusts in God, rests on Him—appropriates the divine name, “My God, my God,” and with adoration exclaims, “Thou art holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel.”

Oh that mighty faith of His! You shall take Abraham’s faith and put it side by side with the faith of Jesus, and you find the patriarch failing here and there, the father of the faithful though he was. But the faith of Jesus was steadfast and immovable. Did it seem to stagger once when He said, “O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me”! Oh, it never failed! His steadfastness was never more illustrious than when He thus spoke, “Nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt.” Or again, “Thy will be done.” Was not that faith exercised in purest submission?

Take any other of the virtues (I have not time to do so this morning, nor is it necessary that I should, but), wherever you fasten your meditations, you shall see Christ excelleth there. His gold is the gold of Ophir, His jewels are of the first water, His wheat is the finest of the wheat—the fat of kidneys. And when He lays Himself upon the altar, it is not as the lean bullock which of old Israel would bring to God, but as the fatted one offered with the whole strength and perfection of every part of Him unto the Most High. Every component part then of the incense was pure, and so was every part of the merit of Christ.

You will not fail also to observe that there is no stint as to quantity. In some other parts of the temple service quantities are given, as, for instance, in the twenty-third and the following verses of this chapter, you have the quantities of each ingredient for making the anointing oil, yet here you have no quantities whatever for the incense. The anointing oil had five hundred shekels worth of one principal spice, and two hundred and fifty shekels worth of another. But this is to be made without limit, as if to indicate that the merits of Jesus Christ know no bound whatsoever.

Oh, when that sacred box of precious ointment was broken on the cross, who knows how far the merit of it extended? It perfumed the earth to its utmost bound, so that God has had patience with it. It acted as a salt to all creation, so that it might not be destroyed, and the sweet perfume went up to heaven. The angels knew it and returned their harps, and God perceived it, and with benignant smile looked upon the human race.

***“Oh the sweet wonders of that cross,
Where God the Savior loved and died!”***

*Her noblest life my spirit draws
From His dear wounds and bleeding side."*

There is no end to the merit of Jesus. You lost sinners, you need not think that it cannot avail for you. However great your sin, its ill savor can all be quenched through the sweet savor of His perfect merit. And though your sins should be so many and so numerous that it should seem impossible but that the swift witnesses as avengers of blood should follow you up with their clamors, yet God regards more His Son than He does the sin of man, and has an eye to the merit of the Savior as well as to the demerit of the sinner. The first is greater than the second, so that He passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin, and remembers not the transgression of His people because His mercy in Christ Jesus endureth forever. It is without stint or quantity.

I hope I shall not weary you, but this seems to me to be a rich vein. I would observe that all through this incense is spoken of as being peculiarly holy, most holy unto God. The entire dedication of Christ's life and death to God is most remarkable. You can never see a divided aim about the Savior's action. When but a child, He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my *Father's* business?" To the very last He was still consumed with the zeal of His Father's house. He never had a thought of fame.

It is really wonderful how little Jesus Christ seemed to notice what people thought of Him. There used to be an idea that Christ did a great many things to prevent people from forming such and such erroneous impressions of Him. For instance, it was supposed that He was anxious after His resurrection to make it clear that He was Himself, and that He was not an impostor.

I do not think such a motive ever entered into His mind. He was so simple and childlike, that He acted out His whole self, not perpetually guarding against misconstruction, nor restricting Himself because of the adversary. His character was too transparent, and His actions were too unvarnished to admit of His continually blocking up that loophole, or stopping up that gap. Not He! His life was clear, without a spot of defilement. His whole soul drifted right on to this one thing, the glory of God through the salvation of man.

He was not deluded for a moment by the golden apples that were cast in His pathway. They would have made Him a king, but He was a King too great to stoop to an earthly crown. As temptation could not attract Him, so neither could trials and difficulties restrain Him.

Like an arrow from a bow, that has been drawn by a strong archer, He sped right onward to the great goal of His existence, the accomplishment of the work that God had given Him to do. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" He set His face to go up to Jerusalem. He never turned His face away until He could look up to heaven and say, "It is finished!" and then He gave up the ghost. Christ's merits are most holy, purely offered unto God, no selfishness, no worldliness, but everything divine.

This incense, although little is said of it, was of course compounded when the ingredients were all brought together. It had to be compounded with great care, according to the art of the confectioner. Now, there certainly is great art and wondrous skill in the composition of the Savior's life.

Why there is wondrous skill about the record of it, for those who have denied the authenticity of the evangelists ought to accept a challenge which has often been put to them. Are there four narrations written, would somebody who believes these to be forgeries kindly forge a fifth? Would somebody be pleased to write another which, though as much a forgery as any of the other four, should be consistent and have something new to recommend it?

I would even venture to say would somebody attempt to make one new miracle, or indite the fabulous record, and they would find it as impossible to write a miracle on paper as to work the miracle. For there are some traits and points about the miracles of the Savior which betoken their genuineness, since to describe or imagine them were not possible. We could easily prove our point if this were the time, but it is not necessary.

There is a matchless beginning in the life of the Savior and a matchless ending. In what is not done there is as much that is characteristic about Christ as in what is done. If you have ever read those spurious gospels which profess to contain the early life of the Savior, the Protevangelion, you will see that this absurd, ridiculous, preposterous composition never could be harmonized with the life of the Savior. What is not there even in the record is as wonderful, I say, as what is there. The whole life is a compound of the confectioner.

But it seems that when compounded it had to be all bruised and broken. "Thou shalt beat some of it small," says our version. Look at that "some of it." How did it get there? "Thou shalt beat of it." Not "some of it," but "all of it." "Thou shalt beat of it small, very fine."

Now, certainly the whole life of the Savior was a process of bruising Him very fine. He begins with grief, He concludes with agony. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests," but He has not where to lay His head, and at last He has not a rag to cover Him, but hangs naked to His shame upon the cross. His very grave is borrowed, just as was the manger in which He lay as an infant.

Altogether the whole sweetness of the life of Christ is brought out by the exquisite griefs which He is made to suffer. I question whether anybody knows anything about the sweetness of Christian grace till he has been tried. We are told that when the ships are floating near Ceylon they can smell the perfume of the cinnamon groves.

*"What though the spicy breezes
Blow softly on Ceylon's isle."*

But navigators tell us that the perfumes are only smelt in poetry, that you never smell them there, that in fact cinnamon does not smell, and that we might wander through all those groves without knowing that they were odoriferous. But take the cinnamon, and begin to grind it, begin to pound it, above all begin to burn it, then it is that you get the sweetness.

And the good man's goodness is not known so much in his days of happiness and pleasure as in his times of sorrow and of grief. We must be put into the mortar, we must feel the weight of the pestle to get the sweetness from it. And the Savior's whole life was just that pounding beneath the heavy hammer of human wrath, and at last of divine anger against sin, and then the sweetness came forth.

But this incense was most sweet to God when it came to the burning. It was put upon the altar amidst the hot coals, and then the sweet perfume went up. So, beloved, the very preciousness of Christ in its extremest and best degree is to be seen when He is put upon the hot coals in Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. However, I need not tell you the tale over again. You loving hearts have learned it well. You tender souls have wept all along the Via Dolorosa up to the cross, and through the hours of grief and suffering, and you know what a sweet savor that must have been when the thrice holy Savior offered Himself as a holocaust to God that He might put away the ill savor of human guilt.

Thus I have run through the whole. You will observe I do not stop to say a word about the four ingredients. It is very easy to spiritualize, and more especially the most difficult passages, because then you can say any nonsense you like. I have however omitted to do so. I do not really think there is anything to be said about them except just this, that the stacte appears to have been a form of myrrh which dropped from the myrrh tree without cutting, and therefore was highly esteemed. The voluntariness of the sufferings of Christ, in that He gave Himself and laid down His life no man taking it from Him, does certainly render His sufferings peculiarly delightful both to us and to God.

As for the onycha, there is a great dispute about it. The word seems to be allied with another signifying a distillation, and the Savior's blood is a marvelous distillation from His body, and His grief from His soul.

The galbanum appears to have been a very bitter drug, and it has been thought therefore by commentators, that it could not have been used as a sweet perfume. I think differently. It is well known that many of the bitterest tasting drugs are sometimes the sweetest smelling when they come to the fire.

And honey, which is so sweet to the taste becomes sour when laid on the flames. I think the bitterest form of galbanum would be the most significant if that be what is intended, for it would then express the bitterness of His griefs to His own taste, but the sweetness of the savor of these bitters to the Most High. Frankincense especially you know is exceedingly bitter tasting, but extraordinarily sweet when laid upon the hot bars of iron or upon hot coals. There were many sorts of frankincense. There was one which was very rare and highly esteemed, which appears to have been the pure frankincense intended here.

But whatever each of those drugs may have been, or may not have been, it is certain they made a compound which God reserved to Himself, and enjoined that it should never be used by men for any sort of purpose. It was reserved for Himself to set forth the holy merits, the inimitable perfections, the transcendent glories of the character of the sufferings of that precious Redeemer of whom God says to us, "I will accept you with your sweet savour."

Now for two or three practical words before I pass on. Do you feel your need of this sweet savor? How can you hope to be accepted before God in yourselves? I think that the word "loathing," which occurred in our reading just now, is what we must feel with regard to our sinful selves. There may be some of you, very much growing in sanctification, who possibly look upon yourselves, and congratulate yourselves on the progress that you have made. But I confess, if I know anything of the divine life, that while I do feel myself more consecrated to Christ than ever I was, yet I do feel my unworthiness to be permitted to say so.

My utter powerlessness to do anything as of myself is a present pressing and overwhelming thought with me, one that lowers me into the dust and ashes, and makes me sometimes wonder that Christ should even touch such an one, and yet at the same time to hope that if God, foreseeing all this evil, could nevertheless look upon me, He will not cast me away. Brethren, do you not feel that you cannot be accepted unless it is through this sweet savor?

Well then, when you feel this, will you, in the next place, prize that sweet savor. Speak of it in the highest and most eulogistic terms? You cannot exaggerate when you speak of the virtues and merits of the Redeemer. Set a high store by His person, prize His life, and like St. Bernard, you may say—

***"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast."***

Brethren, what a preciousness must there be in Him to overcome our want of preciousness! What a savor to put away our ill savor! What a cleansing power in His blood to take away sin such as ours! And what glory in His righteousness to make such unacceptable creatures to be accepted in the Beloved! And if you have gotten so far as to prize it, the next exhortation I would give you is, never come before God without it.

Turning back to that passage in Exodus you notice that the Lord says in the thirty-sixth verse, "Thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee." Oh, never assay to meet God without that precious incense, never think of such a thing, for as the apostle tells us, "Our God is a consuming fire." Give Him this incense to consume, that He consume not us. Bring Him this merit, lest our demerit should compel Him to smite us as He did Nadab and Abihu when they offered strange fire before the altar.

What a blessed thing then, to stand in prayer and feel that you are offering up again the blood of Jesus! What a delightful exercise in praise to feel that your praise comes up accepted because of the incense which He offers! Oh, to live under the shadow of the atoning cross! Brethren, we do not experience enough of this.

I confess, sorrowfully, the wanderings of my own spirit away from Calvary. May the Master bind us to the horned altar where His blood was shed, and may we never venture again to go away from that blessed spot! Do not attempt to meet God, except through the merit of this sweet savor.

Take care, dear friends, that you never doubt your acceptance when you once have it. You cannot be accepted without Christ. But when you have once gotten His merit, you cannot be unaccepted. Notwithstanding all your doubts, and fears, and sins, JEHOVAH's gracious eye never looks upon you in anger. Though He sees your sin, and perceives it since He is omniscient, yet He looks at you through Christ, and then He sees no sin, for He answers the prayer of that hymn,

*“Him, and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesu's wounds on me.”*

You are always accepted in Christ, you are always blessed and beloved, always dear to the Father's heart. Therefore lift up a song, and as you see the smoking incense of the merit of the Savior coming up perpetually before the sapphire throne, let the incense of your praise go up also.

*“Now to the Lamb, that once was slain,
Be endless blessings paid;
Salvation, glory, joy remain
For ever on Thy head.”*

II. It is certain from the connection that the text means that THE LORD WILL ACCEPT THE OFFERINGS OF HIS PEOPLE WHEN HE HAS ACCEPTED THEIR PERSONS.

He will not only receive them into His love, all that they do for Him He will likewise receive. Before a man is accepted his best works must be unacceptable, they come from a fountain that is impure, and they are defiled. Moreover, a man who is not reconciled to God offers nothing to God. He may seem to do so, but he has always some sinister motive which renders all his doings selfish. He has something to gain thereby, or some misery to escape, and therefore he does not serve God out of a pure motive.

But as soon as the man knows that he is saved, being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, then God becomes his God, and he worships Him as such, and his offerings are really presented to the Most High. These are accepted. Those things which we offer to God must be such as He has appointed. The sweet smelling savor must not be made of cassia, and cinnamon, and calamus, but it must be made of stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, and frankincense.

Many persons serve God sincerely, but from want of serving Him according to His ordained method their services cannot be accepted. God has given us a Statute Book, let us follow it. Let us not bring before God as the Papist does, works of superstition, or works of supererogation, but let us bring such as are commanded. For to obey is better than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams. Let our lives be lives of obedience, not lives of fancy, superstition, and inventions of our own. Prayer, praise, consecration, almsgiving, holy living, these are all ordained. Let us be diligent in the mixing up of these sweet savors.

We must bring before God, if we would be accepted in our works, something of all the virtues. It must not be all galbanum nor all stacte, not all intrepid courage without any subdued reverence, nor all the simplicity of affection without any of the sublimity of faith. It must not be all self-denial, though there must be some of it. Gravity itself must be tempered with cheerfulness. There must be something of every form of virtue to make up the blessed compound. We must endeavor to bring something of all exercises, not prayer without praise, nor work without prayer; not mental energy without spiritual gifts, nor gifts without holiness; a mixture, a compound of the whole.

We must bring something of all our powers, not all intellect, not all heart. It must be something of intellect in judgment and understanding, something of the heart in enthusiasm and joy, something of the body, for the members of the body are members of Christ. But much of the soul, for the soul's service is the soul of service. We must bring to God a compound of excellencies from all the powers which He has renewed and consecrated to Himself. Oh it were matchless, if God the Holy Spirit should graciously

enable us to imitate Christ in this, that we might have some of all the graces, not lacking in any respect, but as a man of God thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

We must, above all, pay great attention to small things. “Thou shalt beat some of it very small.” If we would bring a holy life to Christ we must mind our fireside duties as well as the duties of the sanctuary. We must be attentive as servants to our service, as masters to managing the household. We must look to our private devotions, we must look to our hearts’ secret longings. There must be the brief pious utterance as well as the long prayer. There must be the grateful spirit as well as the song of praise. Oh, that we could bring to God a life beaten small, so that even in little things the Holy Spirit might be manifest, working in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

We must take care that this sweet incense of ours is not made for man nor used by man. Accursed is that life, however good, which lives only for man to gaze upon. But blessed is that life which is lived for God’s sake and for Christ’s sake, for higher motives than man’s eye could suggest, and for a nobler reward than man’s hand can ever give.

To be holy unto God is the grand thing, my brethren and sisters, to feel truly that you are not living for self, that you are not even living for your country nor for your fellow man, so much as you are living to the Most High God—the marks of whose ownership in yourself you desire to bear in your body and in your spirit. May it be yours and mine to have a life which, both in its prayer and praise, its giving and its ordinary living shall be redolent with the fullness of the Spirit of God—a perfume that may make our life like walking through a garden, a fragrance that may make us like the king’s storehouse, wherein all manner of precious fruits are laid up and all manner of sweet frankincense stored away!

You will say, “But there will be so much imperfection notwithstanding.” Ah! that there will. “There may be much defilement when we have done our best.” Ah! so it is. The best of men are still men at the best. But the word comes very sweetly—“I will accept you with your sweet savour.”

When God accepts you, He accepts what you do for His sake. He sees you no longer as a mere fallen man, but as a man renewed by His Spirit. He counts you a vessel to honor, and He puts these sweet things into you, and loves them as He sees them in you. I know the prayer is broken, but it is the prayer of His own dear child, and therefore He whom we call “Abba, Father,” accepts it. I know the praise has little of music in it to the tutored ear, but it is the praise of one whose heart loves God, and He hears no discord there.

I know your gifts to His church and His poor are necessarily but little, for yours is the poor widow’s portion perhaps, and you can give only your two mites. But I know that as they fall into the treasury, Jesus sits over against the treasury and hears sweet sounds in the dropping of your gifts.

I know your life is such that you mourn over it every day, but still you serve God in it, and you long to serve Him more, and that love of yours is written in the book of the King’s record, and you shall be His in the day when He makes up His jewels. And your works shall be His too, for your works shall follow you to the skies when you rise in Jesus; and your reward even for a cup of cold water shall be as sure as it will be gracious, and your entrance into the joy of your Lord shall certainly be bestowed upon you according to the grace which is in Christ Jesus by which He has accepted you.

Desire dear friend in Christ, to be such a savor, make it your grand ambition that your life really may be fragrant to the Most High. Do not be satisfied to be an unbroken alabaster box. Do not be willing to be a flower that “wastes its sweetness on the desert air,” or “a gem of purest ray serene” that is hidden in the caverns of seclusion. Seek to do something, seek to serve Christ. Do pray that you may be a sweet savor of Christ unto God in every place where providence may cast your lot.

And if you are such a sweet savor, rejoice that you are so, rejoice that your name is written in heaven. What though men shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for Christ’s name sake, rejoice that you are numbered with the honorable multitude who have suffered for Jesus’ sake. And though you are not knights that ride first in the fray, be thankful that you may be as the esquires who follow at their heels, willing for the fray and able to bear the buffeting which the Lord may appoint you.

Care less and less for man's esteem. Remember that your holiness will never shield you from calumny. Rest assured that the most strict walking will never preserve you from the envenomed tongue of slander. If your life should be as pure as the crystal river that springs from beneath the throne of the Most High, there will be found some that will muddy that stream, and mire it with their feet. Coals of juniper, hot coals of juniper shall be given unto thee, O thou false tongue!

But as for you, believer, care not for that tongue, though it is sharp as a razor, and though every cut of it be poisonous as the poison of an adder. Bear thou it! Bear thou it! for do you not understand that your incense was never meant for man's approbation, but for the Most High.

It must be for God, and for God only, and if man cannot smell it, or appreciate its savor, what shall I say but, Though it was meet that my pearls should not be cast before swine, if they have happened to be where swine may trample on them, the swine acts but according to its nature, and the pearl is not hurt by the swine's feet, it is still a pearl when trampled in the mire, a pearl that God's eye will see and fetch out notwithstanding all.

And oh, dear friends! bless the Lord Jesus day by day, that your works are made accepted with yourself through Him. When you have done anything that is right, and good, and pure, bring it and lay it at His feet.

Come hither, ye that toil with holy industry, and bring your sheaves to store in the garner of your Boaz whose fields you have reaped. Come hither, you that have found jewels, diving into the depths of human sin to bring them up, and lay these pearls at the feet of Solomon, who is master of the seas into which you have dived. "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." And especially are we the blood-bespinkled ones, the sacramental host of God's elect, ordained as priests to offer sacrifices acceptable unto God.

Oh, let us praise the love that bought us, the blood that redeemed us, the power that sustains us, the grace that smiles upon us, the righteousness that covers us, the arm which supports us, and the whole Redeemer who is able and willing, and ere long will receive us to Himself and to our great reward.

May we all look to Jesus and to His merit, and then go forth, for the love we bear His name, to show Him afresh in our own persons to the sons of men. The Lord accept this morning's offering for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 20

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.