

## Psalm 104:31-34

### Sweet Meditations on Christ

*My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD – v. 34*

The larger catechism question that I cite each time we meet around the Lord's table tells us that during the time of the administration of the Lord's supper we are to *heedfully discern the Lord's body, and affectionately meditate on His death and sufferings*. Underscore that phrase *affectionately meditate*. I can remember a time in the not too distant past when meditation was something associated with the mystical Eastern religions.

Joel Beeke makes an interesting observation about the practice of meditation. He writes: *Our hindrance to growth among Christians today is our failure to cultivate spiritual knowledge. We fail to give enough time to prayer and Bible-reading, and we have abandoned the practice of meditation. How tragic that the very word 'meditation,' once regarded as a core discipline of Christianity and 'a crucial preparation for and adjunct to the work of prayer,' is now associated with unbiblical New Age spirituality. We rightly criticize those who engage in transcendental meditation and other mind-relaxing exercises because these practices are connected with false religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and have nothing to do with Scripture. Such forms of meditation focus on emptying the mind to become detached from the world and to merge with the so-called Cosmic Mind – not to attach to, listen to, and to be active for a living, personal God. Yet, we can learn from such people the importance of quiet reflection and prolonged meditation.* Beeke goes on to note that *At one time, the Christian church was deeply engaged in biblical meditation, which involved detachment from sin and attachment to God and one's neighbor. In the Puritan age, numerous ministers preached and wrote on how to meditate.*

We find in the Psalms especially numerous references made to the practice of meditation. So in Psalm 1 – in the very opening verses which describe the *Blessed man* we read in v. 1 that the blessed man is a separated man – he does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly nor stand in the way of sinners nor sit in the seat of the scornful – that's the blessed man negatively considered focusing on things he does not do. But in the next verse you find the blessed man positively considered with a focus on what he does do. *But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* We have many other instances in the Psalms where reference is made to meditation:

- Ps 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*
- Ps 49:3 *My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart [shall be] of understanding.*
- Ps 119:15 *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

These are but a few of the references in the Psalms. We can add to these the verses the words of our text –

Ps 104:34 *My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD.*

I would like to focus on this text in particular this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table. And in considering this text I want you to see the practice to be exercised – the nature of the practice – and the anticipated result which flows from the practice.

### I. The Practice to be Exercised – *meditation*

From the verse I've already cited in Psalm 19 I think you could say that the exercise of meditation is something that must be exercised with a consciousness of God. Listen again to Ps. 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

The verse speaks to us of words spoken and meditations harbored in the heart. The Psalmist's desire is that both be acceptable to God. Certainly the implication behind the text is that words spoken and meditations contemplated are not necessarily in themselves things that would be acceptable to God.

How often do we speak carelessly and how often do we harbor notions in our minds that spring from pride or the pursuit of vain-glory. We have a tendency to turn meditation into carnal day-dreaming. The true spiritual exercise that we should endeavor to engage in must be done with an aim to pleasing God and must be done with the sense that God knows. He hears what we speak and He knows what we think. And the example of the Psalmist in this verse provides us with a very simple and practical guideline when it comes to meditation. We need help. We need the Spirit's help.

Our aim must be the aim expressed by Paul in 2Cor. 10:5 where he speaks of *casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* I've made reference to Joel Beeke's book already – *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*. In this book Beeke devotes an entire chapter to the Puritan practice of meditation. He notes that the Puritans wrote of two kinds of meditation: occasional and deliberate. Occasional meditation does not mean meditating occasionally it means rather developing the discipline of being able to view every occasion in life from a spiritual perspective.

Thomas Manton explained: *God trained up the old church by types and ceremonies, that upon a common object they might ascend to spiritual thoughts; and our Lord in the new testament taught by parables and similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices among men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with an heavenly mind, that, whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ and heaven.*

Occasional meditation is relatively easy for a believer because it may be practiced at any time, any place, and among any people. A spiritually minded man can quickly learn how to spiritualize natural things, for his desires run counter to the worldly minded who carnalize

even spiritual things. I'm afraid that in our day carnalizing spiritual things rather than spiritualizing natural things has become the order of the day. We want religion that is pleasing to the flesh.

The other kind of meditation is deliberate meditation. This takes place as a deliberate exercise in which time is set aside to go into the closet, as it were, and spend time in the Word and time in prayer and to spend time reflecting on the truth of God's Word. Thomas Watson defined meditation as *a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves.*

Paul issues a command to Timothy in 1Ti 4:15 that Timothy was to *Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.* I think the next verse makes it clear just what it is that Paul wanted Timothy to give himself wholly to. In v. 16 Paul writes *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

You can see from these verses that deliberate meditation calls for a commitment or a deliberate act of consecration. It's an exercise you must give yourself wholly to. It cannot be something that is practiced casually. And would you note also from these verses that when the practice of meditation is engaged in the Christian will profit from the exercise and not only profit but profit in such a way that his profiting appears to others.

This, in my mind, is the right alternative to the prevalent practice of altar calls. Preachers are so anxious to know whether or not their sermons have had an impact on people and so they call for a show of hands or for people to come forward at the end of a service when an invitation is given. I think you can gain a more accurate gauge of the effectiveness of a sermon by how Christians will take the sermon and meditate on the sermon or as Thomas Watson puts it – they'll bring the truths of God to remembrance, and seriously ponder upon them and make the application to their own lives and as a result their spiritual growth will be apparent.

It is sad in our day that the practice of deliberate meditation has all but vanished. Christians don't like to think or they don't have time to think. There's too many other things to do and there are countless distractions – sources of entertainment or amusement to keep a Christian from pondering the things of God. Thomas Watson again noted that *A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost.*

We find, then, an exercise to be practiced. May God help us to put it into practice. The lack of this practice can account in large measure for a lack of spiritual growth in our lives. Especially is our time around the Lord's table to be a place where deliberate meditation is practiced. And this leads to my next consideration from the text which is:

## II. The Nature of the Practice

Would you notice how the Psalmist describes his meditation – *my meditation of him shall be sweet*. He describes his meditation as being sweet. We know, of course, that the sweetness of the Psalmist's meditation is on account of the object of his meditation. Note again the words *my meditation of him shall be sweet*.

The reason that our meditation of Him can be sweet is because the offering of Christ was sweet to His Father. In the Old Testament economy of animal sacrifices we find a number of sacrifices called for. There was the burnt offering – there was the meal offering – there was the peace offering and the sin offering as well as the trespass offering. I have found it interesting to contemplate how these offerings were named. They were named for what occasioned them – the sin offering and the trespass offering. They were named for the manner in which they were offered – so we have the burnt offering. They were named for what they accomplished – so we have the peace offering.

In every instance with the acceptance of the trespass offering each one of these other offerings is said to be *a sweet savour unto the LORD*. *And the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD* we read in Lev. 1:9 as well as in several other places in the early chapters of Leviticus.

We know, of course, that all those Old Testament sacrifices were designed to point the offerer to Christ. And so we may conclude that the sweetness of our meditation of Christ, therefore, is grounded in the truth that God the Father viewed His own Son's sacrifice as a sweet savour. The offering of Christ, you see, must be viewed in the context of His perpetual obedience. He was *obedient unto death even the death of the cross*. And it was this obedience of His life and His death that was so impressive to His Father.

Since the fall of man into sin God has never been impressed with the obedience of sinners. Our obedience at its best still falls short of the glory of God. It's a shame that so many Christians and even so many preachers fail to take this into account. How often is the blessing of God presented in such a way as to suggest that it's contingent upon the degree to which we can impress God with our own obedience. This is the kind of thinking that breeds pride and self-righteousness.

Sunday is the only day of the week where I set my alarm so I wake up earlier than I do on every other day of the week. I have a radio alarm clock next to my bed and I have it set to an AM talk station. On Sunday, however, you find religious broadcasting on this station and so I woke up this morning to a program sponsored by the religion of Christian Science – the followers of Mary Baker Eddy. This morning the broadcast featured the testimony of a couple of people who basically shared how their works-righteousness led them to God. The universe is governed by certain laws – that sounds kind of scientific, doesn't it? And by yielding to and following these laws as they've been discovered and explained by Mary Baker Eddy these adherents to Christian science (so called) have found peace with God and they bask in the love of God. And all their heart needs are now being met.

As I peeled myself out of bed and shut off the radio alarm I was able to rise with a sense of thanksgiving that I was free from the bondage that was being propagated to ensnare the souls of men. If only they knew what a terrible stench their view of their own righteousness was before God. In each instance we find mention made of these Old Testament sacrifices it was the sacrifice itself that was a sweet savour to God. It was not the offerer that was a sweet savour, nor was it the priest that was a sweet savour it was the sacrifice alone as that sacrifice was burned on the altar that became a sweet savour to God. And so we find the truth emphasized again and again that Christ's obedience unto death is a sweet savour to His Father.

You know how certain air fresheners are designed to eliminate odors and replace them with a more refreshing fragrance? So in the case of Christ we conclude that the sweet savour of His obedience unto death has eliminated the odor of our sin – including our pride and religious efforts. Aren't you glad that where sin abounded grace did much more abound? Aren't you glad that Christ's obedience unto death is what moves God to accept you and to bless you?

Our meditation of Christ is sweet to our souls, then, because Christ's obedience unto death was sweet to His Father. We may add, of course, the benefits of Christ's accomplishment which makes our meditation of Him sweet to our souls. In the previous Psalm – Psalm 103 we find some of these benefits listed. Listen as I read them and let the sweetness of them fill your soul. *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

These are all benefits of grace. These are all blessings that we're not worthy to receive. And yet in the very next verse of Psalm 103 (v. 6) we read how *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all who are oppressed.* The benefits of the previous verses were secured for us by God exercising righteousness and judgment upon His Son. This is how we know that our salvation is secure and that these blessing are ours forever. They've been gained by the execution of righteousness and judgment. They've been gained, in other words, by the broken body and shed blood of our Savior.

And so we find our meditation of Him to be sweet this day and every day. It's no wonder the Westminster Divines call on us to affectionately meditate upon His sufferings as we partake of the Lord's table. We are bountifully blessed in Him. We are safe and secure in Him. Because He is a sweet savour to His Father He is also a sweet savour to us. And as a result of keeping close to Him and reckoning upon our union to Him Paul could write to the Corinthians *that we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish* (2Cor. 2:15).

We find in our text, then – an exercise to be practiced. We are to meditate on Him. And we find the nature of this practice stated. You could view the statement as a statement of resolution or a statement of expectation when you read *My meditation of him shall be*

*sweet*. I trust that will be your resolution and your expectation around the table of the Lord this morning. It remains for us to consider finally that in this text we find:

### III. An Anticipated Result that Springs from the Practice

Notice the second sentence in the verse *My meditation of Him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the LORD*.

In our last communion service we focused on the petition of Moses in Ps 90:14 *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days*. It is around the Lord's table, of course, that we feed and drink in the mercies of the Lord. It is around the Lord's table that we affectionately meditate on our Savior's sufferings.

We count our blessings and we reckon by faith those blessings to be ours. In obedience to the gospel we reckon upon everything that comes between us and God being nailed to the cross of Christ and being washed away in His blood so that there's nothing to hinder us from being glad in the Lord.

I love the phrase in our text *in the LORD*. We will be glad in the Lord. This is a phrase that speaks to us of our union to Christ – that mystical and spiritual union through which God sees us in Christ. The spiritual blessings that have been bestowed on us have been bestowed *in Christ*. So we read in Eph 1:3 *Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ*:

It is by virtue of this union that you and I are a sweet savour unto God. Because God is pleased with His Son He is also pleased with those that are joined to His Son. And so there's no excuse for the people of God not to be glad in the Lord. And to the degree that we manage to take the precept of our text and put it into practice we will enable ourselves to be glad all our days.

We know through experience, however, that we'll forget Christ. We know that other things will succeed in captivating our minds and distracting us from Christ. We know too well what it is to lose our spiritual sensitivity and become worldly and carnal. The Lord also knows of our propensities.

This is why He calls us back to the table of the Lord. When we've become negligent in our meditations upon Him and life has become sour or stale rather than sweet than it is time to return and to devote ourselves to the deliberate meditation that focuses on His condescending love in becoming a man. It's time to return to the deliberate meditation that focuses on the blessings He's purchased for us and on the blessing of being ourselves His purchased possession. The Lord's table, then, calls us back to sweet meditations on Christ.

I trust this morning that your meditations of Him will be sweet as you affectionately contemplate His broken body and shed blood. Make it your resolution and the expectation of your faith this morning that your meditation of Him will be sweet and that as a result you will indeed be glad in the Lord.