

The Aroma of Christ

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[0:00] Last Wednesday night, a few of us in the church getting ready for the prayer meeting and we went outside and the streets were full. There were hundreds of people there and for a second we thought this is great, the prayer meeting is going to be busy.

But then we realised of course it was the procession for the Olympic torch. We put out some more seats just in case, but when we went out there was all these people there.

I'm sure most of you were probably among them and seeing everything that was going on, but you would have seen buses going past, music, people dancing in the streets, and there was all these crowds lining the streets just waiting to catch a glimpse of this torch coming.

That's really handy because the Bible today, what the passage we're going to be looking at is talking about the exact same thing. We're looking at a procession of what's going on. And today the Bible is talking about not the Olympic procession, but the Christians procession.

Let's look together at our passage we're reading in two Corinthians and we're going to be looking at chapter 2 in verses 14 to 17. The first thing we're going to note together today, our first point is that we are victorious.

[1:16] Verse 14, Paul says in it, but thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession, in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.

Here Paul has been writing to the Corinthian church and he's been instructed to them, and he suddenly just abandons what he's doing and he says, I just want to praise God. I want to praise God for his actions.

Well, if we go to the background here, you see Paul had written to the Corinthian church and he told them before, I really hope to come and visit you and I hope to stay with you. But whilst Paul was away, he faced a life and death situation and he wasn't able to get back to them.

And he talks about this in chapter 1. But in the meantime, people have been rising up in the church and they've been turning the church against them. And they've been telling them that Paul's not a man of his word.

You don't want to listen to him. And all this had been going on and Paul heard about it and he was heartbroken. So what he does is he says he writes a letter to them and he gives it to his brother Titus.

[2:21] He says, take it to them, take it to them and tell them that what's going on is wrong. And hopefully they will see this and they'll repent and they'll turn around from what they're doing. And he said to Titus, we're going to meet up.

We're going to meet up in a place called Troas and you'll tell me there if we've accepted it. And Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 2.12. He says, now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. Paul was really worried about what was going on and it's not until chapter 7 that we read that Paul and Titus eventually meet up and Titus tells them they received your letter, they understood it and they've repented and they've said we were wrong in what we were doing.

But Paul says, do you know what, throughout all of this, all this worry and everything that was going on, he says, thanks be to God because all this time he's been leading me in a triumphal procession. Well, this is Paul using the imagery of his day. You know, the Romans, if anyone could throw a procession, it was the Romans who could do it. And they were known the world over for these processions.

[3 : 43] If we think our procession in Edinburgh was pretty good, we've really, we have no idea. You see, what would happen in Rome, they would always have a procession for a general of an army. If he'd won a really big battle, he'd conquered another nation or he'd won a significant territory, they would have a big procession in honour of his name.

And he would be put on a chariot and a crown would be put above his head and he'd be marched through the streets of Rome and he would be the person of honour. He was the key person. And the lieutenants of his army, they would come behind him and they would go through the streets and the people would line the streets like they were doing the other week and they would throw flowers at him and they would cheer for him and they would burn incense so that there was this big sweet smell wafting throughout the city.

And everybody who lived in Rome would know this is a day of celebration. This is a day of triumph. Let's go, let's have a party. And here Paul takes this image and he says, I am in a procession also. I'm not a spectator, I'm not behind any barriers like we all were, I'm in the procession. But no, Paul doesn't say that he's the one who's the person of honour here.

Paul isn't the key person here. He says, I am in a triumphal procession led by God. God is the person of honour here.

[5 : 08] He's been led in Christ, he says. This is Paul's way of celebrating that I am in a procession because of Jesus Christ. Jesus has won a great victory.

Jesus has won a significant battle. And I am one of his soldiers, Paul is saying, I am behind him in this procession. Well, what's this victory that Paul's speaking of?

Paul has two things in mind here. Paul has two things in mind. The first is that Jesus has won the victory over sin and death.

The greatest battle the world has ever seen was won on the cross. It wasn't won by thousands of men charging upon thousands of other men.

It wasn't won by 100 men defeating an army of 10,000. The greatest battle ever won was won by one man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God himself on the cross at Calvary.

[6 : 11] Because Jesus saw us in sin. And when you are sinful, you can't be in a relationship with God because God is holy. Sin and holiness are two opposites.

The two can't go together. The Bible tells us of our sinfulness. In Ephesians 2,1 it says, As for you, you were dead. You were dead in transgressions and sins.

Jesus looked upon us in our sin. He saw that we are spiritually dead and that we couldn't be in a relationship with God. And he said, I will go and take your sin away from you.

And in doing so, he defeated sin. By going to the cross at Calvary, he defeated sin. Ephesians 1, where we are reading a couple of verses later on, says, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin.

But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ. Even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved.

[7 : 24] Note Paul says here, Christ has come to take our sin away from us so we can be in a relationship with God again. And he says he did this while we were dead in transgressions.

Christ didn't come to die for us because he looked at us and thought, Do you know what? They're actually not a bad bunch. He looked upon us and he saw all our sinfulness, the whole lot of it. And he said, even though you are dead in your transgressions, even though you have not merited this in any way, I'm going to come because I love you still.

I still love you. Now Paul says, I am in this triumphal procession because I am in Christ. I am in Jesus' victory.

He has taken my sin from me. I am in a relationship with God now. Jesus is the victor because he has defeated sin and death for all who call on the name of the Lord.

You will be saved. The second victory that Paul is thinking of here is mission. It's the good news that Jesus has died for your sin.

[8 : 35] That's good news. We can smile. We can rejoice in that. It is the good news that Jesus has been resurrected from the dead and that he has come to save us. And he says, this is spreading throughout the world.

Paul says here in the passage we're looking at in verse 14, but thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ. And through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

Here Paul is saying the knowledge of Jesus' victory is spreading and it's spreading through us. Paul's mission was to make Christ known to the world, Christ the conqueror of sin and death. And he says that is just like spreading this fragrance. If we go back to that picture of the procession, remember we said that there would be incense burnt in the streets so that everybody in Rome would smell this sweet smell and they would know this is a day of victory.

Here Paul says that we who are spreading the gospel, we are being used by God to spread the smell of Jesus' victory. It is the aroma of Christ, His saving work done for you and I on the cross. [9 : 52] And that is spreading through us. So Paul says thanks be to God for what? He says for making us victorious, for dying for our sins, leading us in this triumphal procession.

And he says thanks be to God that he has given us a mission to spread this good news. What are we going to do with this today?

When you're hearing this word and you're thinking, okay that sounds okay, what are you going to do with it? First thing I'd say friends is accept Jesus if you haven't yet. Accept Him, join the triumphal procession.

It's there for all of us. If you go to Jesus and you say to Him, I am a sinner, take my sin from me. He says yes, I take it from you.

And he says I bring you back to a relationship with God. He says you are part of my triumphal procession. And then after that he says let God use you.

[10 : 58] If you want to know what to do with this today, if you are a Christian you need to let God use you. We need to be a fragrance to all we know.

We're going to throw around words like being missionaries and being mission orientated today. We're not talking about going to the other sides of the world in particular, that is part of it, but we are to be mission orientated to our friends, our family, our colleagues, those we meet, those we happen to bump into and chat to.

These are the people we are talking about. Friends, we stand in victory if we are in Christ. And God leads us in this triumphal procession, not behind barriers but in the procession.

And Jesus is the centre of it. He is the centre. That's what we're here to today. That's what we're doing. We're wanting to talk about Jesus.

And we can join with Paul in this and we can say, I praise you Jesus for leading me and for using me. So friends, today we are victorious.

[12 : 05] Our second point today is we are also called, we are the aroma. We are the aroma. In verse 15 of 2 Corinthians 2, Paul says, for we are to God the aroma of Christ, among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

Here Paul calls himself and his friends the aroma of Christ. He takes this image, this sweet smell of Christ's victory, and he says, in God's eyes, I am the aroma.

That is what we are. If we have accepted Christ into our lives and we are seeking to spread the good news of Jesus, know this, God looks upon us with pleasure because he sees in us the victory of his Son at work.

We are to God the physical evidence in this world that Jesus is victorious. We are like perfume, Paul is saying. Now if you think of, if you've ever been in a room and somebody comes in wearing strong perfume and it kind of wafts around the room, doesn't it?

You begin to associate them with that smell. Paul says that in his missionary work and his missionary endeavours, he is the evidence, he is that smell.

[13 : 28] People associate him with the gospel. He is the evidence that Jesus has died on the cross and won our salvation. And that is the same for us.

If we are part of that procession, if we are in Christ, it's the same for us. We are the aroma of Christ to God. In his eyes he looks upon you and you are the aroma of his Son and he is pleased with you. But when we go out into the world, we are like a perfume which is spreading so that those we are meeting are realising there's something different about them. They're in Jesus, they're in Christ. Matthew 5.14 is a great verse and it says, you are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We are God's missionary strategy to the world, friends. God has placed his mission into your hands. We carry the torch now if we want to think about the Olympics.

[14 : 36] It's been passed on to us. And God uses us to tell the world about Jesus and he says, you have a responsibility to let your light shine.

And when we are doing this, the Bible says, we are the aroma of Christ. Paul now goes on though and he says, when you're the aroma of Christ, you're going to face two possible responses. There are two responses to your missionary work. We pick up in verse 15 of 2 Corinthians 2. It says, for we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing to the one where the smell of death, to the other the fragrance of life.

The effects are twofold. To some, you will be the aroma of death. You will be a stench that they hate. They will reject your message. They will reject what you say.

They will want nothing to do with Jesus. But in doing so, they are rejecting God himself. Paul says, you are going to be this foul smell to them because you are going to be bringing them death.

[15:55] That is because in your words, when you bring on the gospel message, the sentence of condemnation also lingers. Jesus said in Luke 10.16, we bring it up.

He who listens to you, listens to me. He who rejects you, rejects me. But he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me.

Jesus is saying, because you carry my words to these people, if they reject what you say, they are rejecting my words. They are rejecting me and they are rejecting my Father in heaven.

And if they are rejecting God, they are condemning themselves to being sinful, lost, damned. They are condemning themselves to being a spiritually dead person.

When you witness in the world, the world might not believe you, the Bible says. They might think you are strange. They might think you are foolish. They might think you have got this funny, fancy philosophy.

[16:59] But when they reject you, they reject God. They reject His Son, the one who has died for our sins. That is why Paul says to these people, you are the aroma of death, because when they reject you spiritually, they are dead.

Friends, if you are not a Christian today, I beg you to take this in. If you reject the gospel message that we are talking about, you are not just rejecting what I might be saying or what people here might tell you afterwards.

You are rejecting God Himself. You are rejecting the one who has had victory over sin and death. And that path leads you to spiritual death.

However, Paul adds to this. He says to those who accept your message, you are the smell of life, you are the aroma of life, because you are giving them eternal life.

It's as Simon Peter said to Jesus in John 6.6.8, he says to whom shall we go? You Jesus have the words of eternal life. We're not simply just spouting together some phrases here and some nice thinking and we're not making this up.

[18:19] Friends, in these words are the power of life and life eternal. We're not just making up a nice story to please ourselves.

And Paul says, those who receive this message, to those who receive Christ, they are accepted. They are awakened out of their spiritual death and they are resurrected to life in Christ.

That's why Jesus said in the Gospels to Mary and Martha, I am the resurrection in the life. That's why he says in John 5.24, I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned.

He has crossed over from death to life. In Christ you are spiritually taken from death to spiritually being alive. When you preach and you witness and you share the word of God for those who believe and ask Jesus to come into their lives, they join this triumphal procession being led by God to these people, you are the aroma of life to them.

You are the sweet smell of Jesus' victory on the cross. Friends, we have one message. Jesus died to take away your sin and to give you life and life eternal, to bring you to a relationship with God.

[19:50] That's what it's about. It's about being in a relationship with God. And God says when you are in the world and you are doing this, you are the aroma of my son who I love.

And he says it doesn't matter if they reject or they accept, I look upon you with pleasure. It's not your responsibility if they accept or reject.

That's on their own heads, that's on your head. But God says when you go in and you're telling them, Jesus died for your sin, you can rejoice, you can be thankful because you know my Father in heaven is looking down upon me with pleasure right now.

The Bible though is not silly though, it knows and it tells us. Some won't take the message, some will reject it. And Paul writes about this to the Corinthians in this first book in chapter 118.

He says, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it's the power of God. We are the aroma of Christ and we are missionary agents in this world.

[20 : 57] In your hands, friends, you hold the words of eternal life. That's a responsibility. It's a responsibility to let your light shine for Jesus.

The world's future is in our hands. What are we going to do with it? Are we going to keep this message to ourselves? No, we're not going to keep it to ourselves.

We are going to be the aroma of Christ to this world. We are going to be missionary people to those we meet every day. We are going to be the aroma so that when they see us, they'll have this association that they've got Jesus.

If we stand victorious in Christ, friends, then we are the aroma of Christ. Let's go on to our last point today. We're victorious, we're the aroma, and we are sincere.

We might be thinking, who can do this? Who could possibly take the words of eternal life to somebody? Who can go to someone with a question which will determine their place in eternity?

[22 : 12] Paul says as well, he says, and who is equal to such a task in verse 16? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ, we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

Paul almost picks up on this, and who is equal to such a task? Who could possibly think that they were prepared enough to go and tell someone about their future dwelling place in heaven or in hell? Who could really tell the world how great Jesus is? Who could do it justice? Because the reality is we're not dealing with temporary situations here. We're not dealing with just a pretend account about somebody.

We are dealing with real lives, real people, real emotions, and what we say affects them. It changes people's lives. If you think about when you were first came to know about Jesus and you accepted him, look at how your life changed dramatically.

That is the message you're taking. It's not just a fable or a story. It is the words of power. Paul says, who could do this?

[23 : 19] Who is equal to such a task? Well, in chapter 3, verse 5, he answers the question and he says, Get up.

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.

Our competence is in God. Who could do it? We can do it. Because our competence comes from God. It is only those who are relying on God.

It is only those who are in Christ can do this. Because it was those who are in Christ that God is leading in the procession, isn't he? We're not making our own way. God's leading us, and he is leading us in our missionary work.

And it is those who rest in His power and rely on His Spirit and who go out in the humbleness of knowing that I am proclaiming a great message and I'm doing it in God's strength. Those are equipped to spread the word.

[24 : 28] Don't look at that verse and think ministers, well, that's not me. I'm not a minister. We're all in this, friends. We're all spread in this word. And the Bible says only those who rely on God's ability can do this.

We are a sincere people. We're not like those who peddle the word of God for profit. That's what Paul says there. Now Paul is talking at this time about those who are in the church in Corinth. Remember who said he was turning these people against Paul. These people have been rising up in the church. And he said they are peddling God's word. Back then this word which was used had this huge image attached to it.

And the word conveys a sort of salesman's type approach that these people were kind of bargaining with God's word. We're kind of cheapening God's word. They were kind of going through this salesman's type pattern, trying to get on side with this person.

They were doing it as well to secure some sort of profit for themselves. It's somebody taking the gospel message and getting them kind of twisting it. I'll distort it. I'll make it sound nice and I'll get them to say the prayer.

[25 : 38] But this is looked upon with disgrace. These people were changing the message to suit the hearers. They were playing to their consciences and trying to tell them, yeah it's alright, don't

worry, you're a nice person.

They were soothing those ears. Paul says these people, they peddle God's word. They're not sincere. The Bible speaks of these people. They call them wolves and sheep's clothing. Paul says we are not like these people. We preach the whole gospel and nothing but the gospel. We don't corrupt God's word to try to profit ourselves.

We don't leave bits of the Bible out because we're embarrassed about them. And we don't pick and choose which bits of the Bible we follow. We proclaim the whole word of God unashamedly. That means looking at things like sin. We don't like sin these days because it shows us what we really are. It shows us that we need a saviour, that we can't do it by ourselves.

[26 : 45] We like to neglect it, don't we? Don't preach on sin, minister, you're frighten people away. Don't preach it about hell. People will just get up and go because it's not nice to hear about today.

It's too negative. But friends, if we take hell out of the Bible, we can't understand heaven. If we take sin out of the Bible, we can't understand holiness. If we take pain out of the Bible, we don't understand God's comfort.

If we take God's wrath out of the Bible, you can never understand his love. If you take suffering out of the Bible because it's not a nice thing, you can't understand God's care.

And if you take out of the commandments because they're not politically nice, how can you understand God's holiness? How can you understand God's requirements for your life?

And if you don't like suffering and if you don't like pain, then you might as well take the cross out of the Bible because it's all about suffering and pain. But if you take the cross out of the Bible, you take out Christ's sacrifice for your sins.

[27 : 46] You take away your salvation. If you take out to Trinity out of the Bible because it's quite difficult to understand at times, you take God out of the Bible. And if you take anything out of the Bible, Revelation 22 says, you're cursed.

We might want to pass by some bits because they're a bit awkward, they're a bit difficult, they're a bit close to the bone. But as a Christian, we're not allowed to do this.

We might want to abandon some bits of God's word because we think that's not politically correct. We've moved on since then. The Bible says you're not allowed to do this. We hate the whole Bible and we proclaim it unashamedly.

We don't peddle God's word to please those around us. We don't take away the bits which are too close to the bone. Rather, let us join with Paul and he says, in Christ we speak before God and we speak before God with sincerity.

We speak before God the truth, not for personal gain. I don't stand here to gain for myself. I stand here and we stand together to proclaim Christ, the one who is in the procession, the one in front of us.

[28 : 58] We are cheering for Him. God knows what we say. He knows our actions. And that does tell us we need to be careful with what we say.

But the biblical point here is not, don't be discouraged. Be encouraged. Encourage yourself by knowing this, that when you are witnessing for God and people are rejecting your message, know this, God is with you.

You are the aroma of His Son. Friends, if you are trying to witness for God today, I want you to be encouraged because He is with you. You are the aroma to this world that Jesus died for your sins. And God looks upon that with pleasure and joy. Paul is praising God. Despite all his inflections and his pain and the troubles that he's been going through, he is saying, you know what, through all this, I know God has sent me.

And he says this in 2 Corinthians 5, 20. He says, we are there for Christ's ambassadors. As though God were making His appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

[30 : 15] Friends, that is the plea today. Be reconciled to God. Join in the triumphal procession by going to Him if you have not already been saying, I'm a sinner and I'm apart from you, God.

I can't get close to you because sin is stopping the way. And go to Jesus and say, take my sin away from me. Take my sin away from me like you did on the cross.

Take it away that I can be in a relationship with God. I want to be in the triumphal procession. I want to be there cheering, glory to Jesus for what He has done.

And then be the missionary people He wants you to be. Let us be a fragrance to this world that Jesus Christ has died for our sins.

And let us be encouraged, even though when people say, I don't want to know, let us be encouraged. We know that God is looking upon us and that we are doing His work in His name and in His power and strength.

[31 : 18] It's a great message we have today, friends. It's a message of joy. It's a message that we can rejoice in.