

The Fragrance of Christ • 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Power of Scent*

1. Have you noticed how in the last year - one of the new buzz words is *aromatherapy*?
 - a. you see it every where
 - b. at the grocery store - at the drug store
 - c. even at the barber and hairdresser
2. More and more people are buying products that claim to produce a certain mood
 - a. there's a candle that when lit will produce feelings of peace and well being
 - b. there's another that sends forth vigor and vitality
 - c. and then there's the red one that - well, you know!
3. This wave of aromatherapy comes after years of research into the sense of smell
4. Researchers have discovered that indeed, odors & scents have a profound impact on our emotion state
5. The reason why is because that part of our brain that registers smell, lies very close to the emotion centers of the brain - in fact, it appears they are wired together in a unique way
6. So when we smell something, it often carries over into some kind of emotional response
7. With some odors, the emotions are so strong and so quick, that they dictate an immediate reaction
 - a. for instance, if we get a whiff of something putrid,
 - b. the tendency is to immediately catch our breath and move away
 - c. if we smell something sharp extremely pleasant,
 - d. we tend to hunt around to discover what it is so we can enjoy more
8. Smells also are interesting because they seem to be easily remembered over long periods of time
 - a. if we smell something as a child, and it is identified for us
 - b. it may be years later that we smell it again, but we can easily remember what it is
 - c. then, what often happens, is that smell will recall that time in our lives to our memories
 - d. researchers have indeed discovered that smell and memory are closely linked

B. *Today*

1. I mention all of this about the sense of smell this morning because of what Paul writes in this passage . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 14-16

{14} Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

{15} For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

{16} To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

1. Paul uses a picture here that would have been readily understood by the people at Corinth
2. He is using the image of a Roman Triumph
3. When a victorious general returned home from battle, Rome gave him a public parade, not unlike our modern ticker-tape parades.
 - a. this parade was filled with pomp and glory
 - b. and in order to obtain it, the general had to satisfy certain requirements
 - 1) he had to have been the actual commander in chief in the field of battle
 - 2) the campaign had to be completely finished and the troops brought home
 - 3) at least 5000 of the enemy had to have fallen in one engagement -- and --
 - 4) the territory of the Roman empire had to have been extended
 - c. if this criteria was met, the Senate would vote to give the General a Triumph
 - d. the day was declared a holiday and the entire populace of Rome would come out and line the streets for the procession
 - e. at some point along the route the parade would take, a commemorative arch would be built with scenes of the Triumph
 - f. these archs de' triumph can be seen throughout Rome to this day
 - 1) in fact, one of the most memorable is that of Titus - the Roman general who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD
 - 2) on his arch are scenes of his soldiers carrying the furniture of the temple in the Triumph
 - 3) one can see the 7 branched lampstand, the golden table of showbread, and the trumpets used in calling people to worship
4. Each Triumph followed the same order
 - a. first came the state officials and the Roman Senate
 - b. then trumpeters to announce the parade
 - c. next came a long line of the major spoils taken as booty; including paintings of the conquered lands and models of the main buildings, and thousands of slaves
 - d. after that came the captive nobles, the princes, leaders, and captured generals - all bound in chains
 - e. right behind them came the Roman executioners carrying a bundle of rods wrapped around a sword, which was the Roman symbol of official punishment

- f. then came priests swinging incense censers
 - g. finally, the victorious general, dressed in a special purple tunic and toga embroidered with golden stars, carried in a marvelous chariot drawn by four white horses
 - h. and behind his chariot came his victorious army, dressed in their finest, carrying their own trophies of war, and waving to the admiring crowds
5. This is the picture Paul presents of Christ's victory
 - a. He has met the criteria and conquered his foes
 - b. His victory is complete - and he has extended the boundaries of the Kingdom of God
 - c. and in His ascension in to heaven, He has returned home to the consummate Triumph
 6. Paul speaks of this same thing in Colossians 2:15 when he says . . .

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

7. But whereas the Roman Triumph only lasted for a couple hours, Jesus' goes on and on
8. Notice how Paul puts it . . .

{14} Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ,

- a. Paul sees Christ's triumph as going on and on
 - b. it never ends - it is one continual parade of victory
 - c. moving from day to day and place to place
9. Now, I would ask you to carefully note what Paul says here
 - a. God always *leads* us in triumph in Christ
 - b. Paul sees Christians as a part of the Triumph, and part of the victory parade
 - c. we are not mere spectators who stand on the curb cheering
 - d. we are IN the Triumph
 10. The question is: What part are we?
 - a. are we part of the spoils He has captured?
 - b. or are we His troops?
 11. Well, you can certainly make the case for saying that we are the spoils of His victory over sin and death - and that is the way many commentators see things here
 12. But I don't think that is what Paul had in mind
 13. The clue is to understand the Roman Triumph from which he drew this image and then to ask who the victorious general *lead*: It was His troops
 14. We who believe in Christ aren't merely spoils of war -
 - a. we begin there,
 - b. but then we join ranks of His army
 - c. working side by side with Him and with one another to extend the boundaries of the kingdom of God even further
 - d. and in each struggle, in each new campaign - we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us
 - e. He always leads us in triumph!

15. Paul has another image he wants to draw from the Roman Triumph; it is

that of the incense that came from the priests' censers

{14} Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

16. As the parade wound its way through the streets of Rome, the priests stood in about the very middle of it
 - a. they would swing their censers back and forth
 - b. long billowing lines of fragrant smoke rising in to the air
 - c. as the parade would occasionally stop at some place along the route, the smoke would drift on the breeze,
 - 1) into the crowds along the side of the road
 - 2) into the long line of slaves and nobles ahead
 - 3) and back into the face of the general and His troops
17. The incense, which was a symbol of praise going up before the gods, was also a way of making the parade *interactive* with the spectators
 - a. not only could they see and hear the majesty of the triumph
 - b. but they also got to partake of it in smelling the incense offered up from the midst of it
 - c. it was a way of bringing the spectators *into* the triumph
18. Paul applies this idea of fragrance to us as we live our lives, marching in Christ's triumph
19. You see, being a Christian isn't merely a religious *part* or *segment* of our lives
 - a. we do not put on our Christianity on Sunday mornings and then take it off and hang it back up in the closet on Sunday afternoons
 - b. Christian is *who* and *what* we are, 24-7
 - c. and as we live, the reality of our relationship with Jesus emanates from our lives like incense smoke rising from a censer
20. See what Paul says in v. 15?

{15} For we are to God the fragrance of Christ

21. We are the fragrance of Christ
 - a. now, don't think of this like Jordan's cologne -
 - b. or *White Diamonds* - Elizabeth Taylor's fragrance
 - c. Jesus is not some kind of perfume or cologne that we splash on
 - d. the image is the other way around - *we* are the fragrance of Christ
 - e. in other words, as we live and abide in Him, He uses us to disperse the knowledge of Himself throughout the world
 - f. like that smoke the rose from the censers and spread about on the breeze
 - g. you and I are the fragrance of Christ, He is not our fragrance!
22. So the question we all have to ask ourselves is this:
 - a. What do I smell like to others?
 - b. as I live and work and play - what do others see and hear and smell?
 - c. is it the sweet fragrance of Christ - or the sour stench of my rotten flesh?
 - d. we must be diligent to insure our aroma is pleasant, not putrid
23. Some years ago a group of missionaries was preparing to go to China and

was in language school

- a. the first day of class, the teacher began by walking into the classroom and walking up and down each row
- b. then she left
- c. after a couple minutes, she re-entered the room and asked the class, "Did you notice anything special about me?"
- d. there was silence for a long time, then one woman said, "I noticed that you had on a very lovely perfume."
- e. the rest of the class chuckled but the teacher said, "That was exactly the point."
- f. "You see, it will be a long time before any of you will be able to speak Chinese well enough to preach the gospel, but even before you are able to do that, you can minister the sweet fragrance of Christ to these people by the quality of your lives."

24. Still, even when we are living lives of sweet communion with Christ, people can react *differently* to our influence

25. Paul says . . .

{15} For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

{16} To the one we are the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life.

24. The people around us are going to react one of two ways
 - a. either they are going to be attracted to Christ
 - b. or they are going to be repulsed
25. I love incense - almost all kinds of it
 - a. in fact, if you've been in my office, you've smelled the scent of incense
 - b. even long after the stick is burned out, the fragrance lingers
 - c. it's been two weeks since I burned any incense but the perfume is still present
26. While I love incense, my wife loathes it - it gives her a headache
27. That's why I burn it at the office and not at home
28. That's true of many smells;
 - a. one person will like something and find it fragrant
 - b. while another finds the very same scent to be obnoxious
 - c. people react differently to the same smell
29. Paul says that people react differently to the fragrance of Christ that comes from us
 - a. to those who are saved, we are the sweet aroma of life
 - b. to those who are lost, we are an offensive odor of death
30. In the Roman Triumph, the smell of the incense reminded those destined for execution that they were doomed
31. But for the victors, it was the sweet smell of victory and life
32. Think of it - same smell - very different reactions
33. You and I are not called to try to *make* ourselves spiritually attractive to the Lost
 - a. we cannot bend or compromise in an attempt to "make the sale"

- b. we are not to attract people to ourselves - we are to attract them to Jesus
- c. and if they do not come to Him as He is, then we are not to alter the picture to make it more appealing
- d. God does not measure success in the number of converts we manage to make but in our faithfulness to Him
- e. as we live in and for Him, He uses our witness as a way to either draw or harden the lost

B. Our Sufficiency

1. Paul ends v. 16 with a question

And who *is* sufficient for these things?

- a. Paul is overwhelmed with the idea that the Christian has been called to carry on the ministry of Christ
 - b. we have been given the mission and ministry of reconciling lost sinners to God
 - c. we are called to be the fragrance of Christ in a hostile and stinky world
 - d. so, who is sufficient for these things - who can live in such a way that the rancid smells of sin can be overcome by the life-giving aroma of Christ?
2. He doesn't answer this question till 3:5

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God,

- a. all our strength -
- b. all our power to live the Christian life comes from God

III. CONCLUSION

A. The Power - How Strong?

1. The strength of your Christian influence with others is directly proportional to the vitality of your intimacy with Jesus
2. Dr. Howard A. Kelly had a unique and effective way of "witnessing".
 - a. he was never seen in public without a beautiful pink rose in his lapel.
 - b. people would almost always say, "That's a lovely rose, Dr. Kelly."
 - c. then he would say, "Yes, it is. Actually, it's a 'Christian rose!'"
 - d. then they asked what he meant, and he would then turn back his lapel and display a tiny water bottle which held the stem of the flower and kept it fresh and sweet.
 - e. "It's a 'Christian rose,'" he would explain, "because it has a hidden source of life and beauty. When our Savior pardons our sins, He also unites us with Himself and thereby nourishes and strengthens us. He becomes the secret reservoir of our joy, and any fragrance of testimony we exhibit to the world comes from Him."

B. How Do We Smell?

1. All of us leave behind some kind of aroma - what's yours?
2. Emerson wrote, "The best effect of fine persons is felt after we have left

- their presence."
3. What effect has your presence left on the lives of others?
 4. One day President Woodrow Wilson was having his hair cut and a shave
 - a. as he sat in the chair with his face covered by towels, another man came in to the shop
 - b. Wilson sat and listened as this man had his hair cut
 - c. every word the man uttered showed a personal interest in the man who was serving him.
 - d. It was DL Moody and Wilson said that he felt like he had witnessed an evangelistic service.
 - e. he said that he purposely lingered in the room till after Moody had left and noted the singular effect that his visit had brought upon the barbershop.
 - f. they didn't know it was Moody but they knew that something had elevated their thoughts
 - g. and Wilson said he felt that when he left that barbershop we felt he was leaving a place of worship.
 5. In conclusion, have you ever noticed that you tend to pick up the smell of where ever it is you've been spending time
 - a. if you go bowling, you usually come home with an scent that is an interesting mixture of cigarette smoke and the oil they use on the lanes
 - b. if you barbecue, the smoke gets in your clothes and hair
 - c. if you go fishing, you smell fishy
 - d. I remember well my years in fast food - I couldn't wait to get home and take a shower so I could wash the smell of fried food out of my hair

 - e. but on the other hand, I love going in to craft shops because of the wonderful potpourris they have - when you leave, the scent stays with you
 - f. Charles Weigle was once teaching at a Bible Conference in Pasadena
 - 1) during the break one day he decided to visit one of the many famous rose gardens in Pasadena
 - 2) when he got back to the conference, everyone he met asked what he thought of the roses
 - 3) he was mystified how they knew he had gone,
 - 4) till someone told him the fragrance of the roses was all over him
 6. What fragrance do we leave with others?
 7. Well, were have we been spending our time and our lives?
 8. Do we diffuse the odor of a lost world or the perfume of God's love?
 9. If we would be the fragrance of Christ, we must needs spend time in His presence