

Tab 1

Week 5: The Aroma of Christ

2 CORINTHIANS: "STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS"

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Introduction

In our text this morning, Paul is going to spend a couple sentences defending his decision to go to Macedonia instead of to them. Then he is going to say some profound things that reveal how he understands ministry in general, as well as what church leadership should look like.

I think these few verses are very much needed in our day, where ministry so often gets mixed in with very worldly ideas.

The short answer: it's all about Jesus.

Paul is Not Fickle

READ 2 Corinthians 2:12–13 (NET)

12 Now when I arrived in Troas to proclaim the gospel of Christ, even though the Lord had opened a door of opportunity for me, 13 I had no relief in my spirit, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and set out for Macedonia.

Paul was being accused of being fickle and undependable because he had said he was coming to Corinth, and instead he went to Troas and then Macedonia at the last minute.

An evangelistic opportunity came up in Troas that he couldn't pass up. So he went there, and Titus was supposed to meet him there with a report from Corinth. But he couldn't find Titus, and was very concerned for him and went to Macedonia to locate him.

So he changed his plans because of a kingdom of God opportunity, and out of concern for his friend.

This explanation reveals how much trust has been lost between Paul and the church in Corinth.

To God, Among the People

I'm using the NET Bible translation here because it does a better job of showing the parallel ideas, even though the ESV is more readable.

READ 2 Corinthians 2:14–17 (NET)

14 But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and who makes known through us the fragrance that consists of the knowledge of him in every place. 15 For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing—16 to the latter an odor from death to death, but to the former a fragrance from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? 17 For we are not like so many others, hucksters who peddle the word of God for profit, but we are speaking in Christ before God as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God.

Diagramming It

VERSE 15-16

Sweet aroma
of Christ
to God
among those who are being saved
and those who are perishing
for the perishing: the stench of death
for the saved: the aroma of life

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Sweet aroma
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for the saved: the aroma of life

<> This "sweet aroma" isn't just a general aroma, it's the aroma that comes from Christ.

<> It's directed at God, not anyone else.

<> Yet it is observed by the crowd, made up of the perishing and the saved.

<> Those two groups experience the aroma of Christ differently: to the perishing it smells like death, to the saved it smells like life.

VERSE 17

We are not gospel hucksters
We are speaking
in Christ
before God
as persons of sincerity
as persons sent from God

VERSE 17

We are not gospel hucksters
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<> They are not selling the gospel for profit, they actually believe what they are saying.

<> In fact, they are speaking as Christ himself.

<> Once again, the object of their speaking is God, not the audience.

<> They do so as true believers sent by God

Paul's Ministry Paradigm

Both of these scriptures show the paradigm of ministry that Paul is working from.

He sees God as the ultimate object of his ministry, and the hearers are essentially bystanders. They are very important bystanders, but they are not ultimately the focus of his ministry efforts.

He also does not see himself as the source of the ministry, but rather it is Jesus. It is not the aroma of Paul, or Silas, or Timothy, or Titus. It is the aroma of Christ.

This metaphor of a "sweet aroma" is a loaded metaphor. The scripture uses that exact word to refer to the animal sacrifices of the OT temple where the sins of the people were put on the animal and the animal was burned.

The smoke would go up into the sky, and it was said to be a "sweet aroma" to God.

If I grill a delicious, thick ribeye steak for my wife on the grill outside, the entire neighborhood will enjoy the aroma.

But the steak is for my wife, not them. *This is how aromas work.*

In Paul's usage, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, slain for the sin of the world. And we are the smoke of that sacrifice going up into heaven to the delight of God. That aroma is going out across the world, resulting in the knowledge of God being spread.

As people smell the aroma of the sacrifice of Jesus, the knowledge of Christ spreads. Many of those that come to know of Him, will then believe in Him and be saved.



God saves sinners,
we worship God.

Evangelism is about delighting God, not saving the sinner. **God saves sinners, we worship God.** Paul is excited about the "knowledge of Christ" being everywhere, but doesn't seem to be focussed on converts at all. (That doesn't mean that he didn't care about that, but it certainly isn't his primary aim)

We minister to God,
God does the work.

This is the essence of worship, we minister to God, God does the work.

How To Smell Like Jesus

Only Jesus can smell like Jesus. You can't reverse engineer the aroma of Christ. You can't dress someone up like Him, and pretend. It's just a bad imitation of the real thing. No one is fooled, especially not God.

Only Jesus can smell like Jesus.

There is a big difference between the
aroma of me, even on my best day, and
the aroma of Christ.

There is a big difference between the aroma of Ben, even on my best day, and the aroma of Christ.

How, then, can Paul say that their ministry was the sweet aroma of Christ? Had Paul super-sized in some way that he became a super Christian in a way that none of us can ever live up to?

I don't think so. The answer sits very quietly in verse 17.

VERSE 17

We are not gospel hucksters
We are speaking
 in Christ
 before God
 as persons of sincerity
 as persons sent from God

"WE ARE SPEAKING IN CHRIST."

When you come to faith in Christ, you are hidden in Christ. You are united with Him forever. Where He goes, you go. What He experiences, you experience. His righteousness is your righteousness.

And His aroma is your aroma. His ministry is your ministry. His worship is your worship.

Conclusion

God has ministry for you to do, and all of it is hard to do. The scope of what God has called you to do is beyond your capabilities.

Whether it's raising children, building a family, nurturing a marriage, being a provider, figuring out your parents, leading a ministry, building a business, or whatever your calling entails...

All of it is out of your reach.

But life is not a big test from God where you are trying to pass the test so you can level up and go on to the next test at the next level.



Do you remember Donkey Kong? You are Mario running up these slopes and ladders while Kong sits at the top throwing barrels at you.

This is how many of us see our lives. God is up there throwing things at us while at the same time telling us to hurry up and climb. Each time we pass a level, we just get dumped out into a harder level with the same obstacles, just more of them at once.

But the truth is, there is no game. Jesus beat the game fair and square, and has destroyed it. It's only the lies of The Accuser that convince you that you are in a game of cosmic Donkey Kong with God.

Doing ministry from that frame of mind is miserable. *If your ministry has measurable results, you feel good about it. If it doesn't, then you feel like you failed some kind of test and got squashed by another barrel.*

If you are in Christ at all, you are all in forever. If you are in Christ, you are the aroma of Christ. Life is about discovering what Jesus is already doing ahead of you. You aren't on a pioneer mission, you are on a mission of discovering where Jesus has already been. **Jesus is the pioneer.**

You aren't on a pioneer mission,
you are on a mission of
discovering where Jesus has
already been before you.



Your job is not to convert people, to change people's hearts and minds, to bring people around to your point of view, to get people to repent, or any of that. Your job is to minister to God, to delight in Him, and to delight Him with your worshipful ministry to others.

Tell people about Jesus because you love Him.

Pray to Jesus for other people, because you love Him.

Use your gifts in service of other people, because you love Him.

Stop thinking of ministry as passing a test, and instead think of ministry as service to God who is already pleased with you.

This changes everything about how you feel about ministry both inside and outside the Church.

COMMUNION

Jesus gave us The Lord's Supper to keep us focussed on Him, what He has done for us, and what our focus should be on as we follow Him.

This is our unity with Christ made visible. We feed on Christ, and we invite others into the same feast.

Matthew 26:26–29 (ESV)

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."