

2 Corinthians 2:12-17 – “What Kind of Aroma Are You?”

We pick things up in verse 12 today, and as we do, Paul is picking up his thought from verse 4. Remember, Paul has been defending himself to the critics that crept into the church and who were trying to discredit Paul and claim he was unreliable and untrustworthy. He's been clarifying to the church that his delay in coming to them was not because he changed his mind, or had a better offer, it's because he didn't want to come to them again in heaviness and harshness. Paul was hoping that in his absence they would begin to take his words to heart and once again align themselves with what God had for them.

2:12-13 - *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.*

After his initial time in Corinth, Paul had made a painful visit to Corinth, it was one where he had to deal with various issues and bring some church discipline. He then returned to Ephesus and wrote a third letter, which is now lost. After being forced out of Ephesus because of the riot provoked by the silversmiths (Acts 19:23–41), Paul left Ephesus in the spring of a.d.56, bound for Macedonia (Acts 20:1). He made a preliminary stop in Troas where he hoped to meet up with Titus (2 Cor. 2:13) and receive news from him about the situation in Corinth.

Now here's one thing I love about Paul, he's forced out of Ephesus because he preached the gospel, a mob was ready to take his life, but what does he do next? He goes to a new place and preaches the gospel!

- Paul doesn't sit around and question if he's on the right track here. He doesn't question his calling or adjust things to keep the peace. He just keeps doing what he's called to do.
- This was Paul's heart and mission – to make Christ known; to preach the gospel. You're always in the will of God when you share the good news! Sure there are times you need to be tactful, and we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). But as you move forward in these things, you can be assured that you're stepping out in God's will.

Now notice, as Paul goes, God opens up a door. Not a literal door of course, but this speaks of an opportunity – an opportunity to share the gospel.

As far as we know there was no direct or clear calling to go to Troas. This came about because Paul was being pushed out of Ephesus. So, what does Paul do? He just gets going and seeing what other adventures God has for him. This is the exciting walk of faith.

- We don't have to have everything figured out in front of us before we step out. In fact, if we're trusting in our plans or relying on our resources, then it's not a step of faith.
- I love how we see so many characters in the Bible just moving out at just a word from God without knowing exactly where they were to go. They just trusted God and He led them as they went.
- It's been said that God can't steer a parked car. And how often we fail to see what God will do because we stay idle until all the details are worked out and we have clear direction ahead. But like I said, it's not a walk of faith if we have it all figured out.
- Ecclesiastes 11 speaks about this action of faith. And in those first 4 verses we read the words, *'you do not know'*. You see, we just never know what God might do. Maybe a door of opportunity will be opened to you, and maybe it won't. And that's ok. But we'll never know unless we go and move ahead in faith. That's what Ecclesiastes 11 is about. There are certain risk and reward actions that we are faced with. We may not always see the reward, but you're guaranteed to miss the reward if you never step out.
- Don't be afraid of failure, be more afraid of not trying.
- Paul moves on from Ephesus in faith not knowing what lays ahead, and the Lord provides an open door of opportunity in Troas.

Now even though God opens a door of ministry in Troas, Paul's heart was agonizing for the church at Corinth. Paul was hoping to find Titus in Troas. Titus had delivered Paul's third letter to the church at Corinth and Paul was hoping to find out how the church received what he had to say to them.

Now what's interesting is that Paul kind of keeps us in suspense as to what happened. He explains that he moved on to Macedonia, but we don't really know if he found Titus or not. He moves away from this narrative only to pick it up again in **2 Corinthians 7:5-6**, *"For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. ⁶ Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,"*

It seems that as Paul thought about his experience here and the arrival of Titus, he stopped short of sharing it out of joy for all that came out of it!

And now for the next number of chapters, until he resumes this narrative in 7:5, Paul breaks into a praise of the privilege of his position in Christ and the richness of the ministry of the new covenant.

- “While Paul was defining and defending his work in Corinth, he was giving us a measuring stick for all ministry done in the church, whether by laity or by clergy. There are those who feel this section may be a digression. But I feel it is possible this is Paul’s reaction to those who have raised grave questions about the integrity of his ministry. We have therefore been presented in this section of his second letter with one of the Scripture’s grandest pictures of the ministry of all Christians.”¹

2:14 - *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.*

When Paul begins to reflect on the faithfulness of God and the way that he has been sustained in the ministry, he just launches out in thanks and praise of God! Paul can overlook the criticisms and questions from the false apostles in Corinth when he remembers who he is and what he has in Christ!

At this point we look at an interesting scene that was a familiar one to many in this area at this time. Paul compares the ministry and the preaching of the gospel to a Roman Triumph.

The highest honor that would be given to a Roman General was a Triumph. Certain conditions would of course need to be met for this sort of celebration.

- The particular general had to lead the charge on the battlefield.
- There must be 5,000 enemies defeated.
- The campaign must be completed with the area being completely overtaken and victorious troops returning home.

William Barclay explains the Roman Triumph:

“In a Triumph, the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Behind them came those carrying the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shewbread

¹ Chafin, K. L., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1985). *1, 2 Corinthians* (Vol. 30, p. 211). Thomas Nelson Inc.

and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships, followed by the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Walking behind all these were the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, who were shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the officers who attended the magistrates, the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was dressed in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand, he held an ivory sceptre topped with the Roman eagle, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family, and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *Io triumphe!*, their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, surrounded by the cheering crowds, it made a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime.”²

Why Paul draws from this imagery is to show how Christ is like our Great General who has secured the victory for us! He came to foreign soil and defeated the work of our enemy. He died on a cross and rose again to bring life to all those that put their trust in Him. Like a general that needed to defeat 5,000 of the enemies’ army to earn a Roman Triumph, we read in **Acts 4:4**, “*However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*” Jesus saved lives. We were all enemies of God, but through Jesus we’ve been saved and reconciled. We’ve been captivated not by a sword, but captives of His love and grace!

And now He ***always leads us in triumph in Christ***... This means as followers of Christ, we are following Him in His triumph, and we experience this triumph by laying our lives down for Jesus. We’ve surrendered to Him because He has given us life. And these lives are meant to be lived for Him and His glory. As we live surrendered to Him, He ***diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge***... I love these oil diffusers that have been quite a popular trend. When you have a house of teenagers, or you live out in the country, it’s a necessary thing.

² Barclay, W. (2002). *The Letters to the Corinthians* (3rd ed., p. 218). Westminster John Knox Press.

Suddenly the stench that may have been in your home, gets taken over by a much more pleasant and life giving aroma.

- There is a stench that is tied to this world. This world and the things of it are passing away (1 John 2:17). There's a decay to it, and that never leaves a good odor.
- This is where we as believers step in. We get to be a difference maker to a world that has lost hope, a world that is looking for answers, we get to be an aroma of life as we reflect Jesus and live a life full of hope and triumph as we follow Jesus.
- Just as some diffusers work through lighting a candle under the fragrant oil, so too, there are times our lives go through the fire. Not only does this try and purify us, but it causes this fragrance to be omitted even more so to the glory of Jesus! And our lives exist for the glory of God!
- Interestingly, the church of Smyrna (the persecuted church in Revelation 2:8-11) got it's name from the word 'Myrrh', which was a burial spice. It was a resin which let off a beautiful fragrance only when it was crushed. And you see, though we go through trials, they're to become triumphs.

2:15-16 - *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?*

Here's the reality, we're going to be a fragrance, but are we ***the fragrance of Christ***? Are we pointing people to Jesus by how we live?

Whether a person is saved or perishing, we are to be that aroma of life in Jesus. We don't switch our fragrance based on who we're hanging out with. We're to be the fragrance of Christ to everybody.

And we cannot control how people respond to our scent (as long as it's not regarding your personal hygiene). When it comes to how we live for Christ, some are going to find our fragrance to be an ***aroma of life***, and to others the ***aroma of death***.

In the Roman triumph as their priests waved the incense burners, some people along the parade route knew that scent meant victory and life. To others that were the captives, that scent meant impending death for them.

- Some are going to take a whiff of you and be disturbed. Why? Because your life being lived for Jesus is going to convict them. They'll be confronted with their sin and the reality of their separation from God. If they don't want to repent, you'll be like that aroma of death to those who are perishing.

But to those who are searching, or are in Christ, your life becomes a life line, it's an aroma of life! People begin to be encouraged and strengthened. They begin to see the victory we enjoy in Christ.

- You know what it's like when you meet another Christian at work, or in your school. It brings such a life giving support and encouragement.

When I worked at Gescan as the church was starting, there were some electricians that came in that were believers and we just connected in a way that brought this blessing and joy to each other. It was this aroma of life.

As the *body of Christ*, let's make sure our B.O. is strong! How do we do that? Spend time with Jesus. You smell like what you've been around. Whether a campfire, a person with heavy perfume, a farm, you're going to naturally pick up the scent of where you are. May we be the fragrance of Christ and pass that on to others too.

And who is sufficient for these things? It's certainly not found in us, as Paul will clarify in 2 Corinthians 3:5. That's why we need to be filled with the Spirit. That's the real essential oil we need. It's only through the Spirit filling us and overflowing in us that we can be the fragrance of Christ.

Though Paul will say that his sufficiency is not of himself, he also distinguished himself from the false apostles at Corinth who were taking the word of God as a means for self-profit.

2:17 - For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Paul uses a term for peddling that is linked to that of a huckster. People were being deceptive, acting like they cared for others, but were only out for themselves. Paul says that he and the true apostles were acting in sincerity (without wax) and were speaking in a way knowing that God was seeing and knowing all. There was nothing to hide, and no need to hide because Paul was following Christ in great triumph in Him and for Him!

[***peddling*** = “The participle καπηλεύοντες (*kapēleuontes*) refers to those engaged in retail business, but with the negative connotations of deceptiveness and greed—“to peddle for profit,” “to huckster” (L&N 57.202). In the translation a noun form (“hucksters”) has been used in combination with the English verb “peddle ... for profit” to convey the negative connotations of this term.”^{3]}

³ Biblical Studies Press. (2005). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.