

Jonestown Bible Church

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But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

July 14, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, the Apostle Paul gives a metaphor of what spiritual effect we should be having on the world around us. For Jewish people, Paul's analogy of "the pleasing aroma of Christ" would present an immediate association. In the Old Testament, the scent of burnt offerings was described as "an aroma pleasing to the Lord," (Genesis 8:20-21; Leviticus 23:18; Numbers 28:27). For the Gentiles, this phrase would suggest the scent of incense being burned as an offering to the gods. However, Paul had a more specific picture in mind.

The apostle was speaking to the Corinthians about recent events in his ministry of evangelism. Despite all the difficulties and disappointments he'd faced while traveling from city to city spreading the gospel, Paul was able to reflect on God's goodness with thanksgiving. The apostle then compared this ministry of evangelism to the triumphal military parades that were common at that time in the Roman world.

Paul's metaphor would be readily understood by his audience, with the apostle and his co-laborers portrayed as victorious soldiers in a triumphal procession. During these Roman military parades, captives of war would be marched through the streets as garlands of flowers were carried and incense was burned to the gods. The aromatic perfumes wafted on the air as spectators and those in the procession breathed in their fragrance. At the parade's finale, many prisoners would be put to death. Thus, the aromas were pleasing and life-giving to the victors, but they were the smell of death to those who had been defeated.

In Paul's analogy, he separates humanity into two groups: those on the path of salvation and those on the road to destruction. The aroma spread everywhere by the ministry of evangelism was the knowledge of God as victor. Christians who spread the gospel are members of God's victorious army led by Jesus Christ. Believers are like the aroma or fragrance spread during the victory processions. Both the victors and those perishing smell the aroma; however, it has a different meaning for the two groups. For the victorious army and its peoples, the aroma would

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relate to the joy of triumph. But for the prisoners of war, the fragrance would be associated with defeat, slavery, and death.

This brilliant metaphor contrasts Christian and non-Christian responses to hearing the gospel. To non-Christians, those on the road to destruction, believers who preach the gospel spread the smell of death, as it were. To Christians, those on the path to salvation, they produce the fragrance of life.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Senior, was a doctor. As such he was very interested in the use of ether. In order to know how his patients felt under its influence, he once had a dose administered to himself.

As he was going under, in a dreamy state, a profound thought came to him. He believed that he had suddenly grasped the key to all the mysteries of the universe. When he regained consciousness, however, he was unable to remember what the insight was.

Because of the great importance this thought would be to mankind, Holmes arranged to have himself given ether again. This time he had a stenographer present to take down the great thought. The ether was administered, and sure enough, just before passing out the insight reappeared. He mumbled the words, the stenographer took them down, and he went to sleep confident in the knowledge that he had succeeded.

Upon awakening, he turned eagerly to the stenographer and asked her to read what he had uttered. This is what she read: "The entire universe is permeated with a strong odor of turpentine."

Holmes was denied the answer to the mysteries of the universe through ether but the greatest mystery has been revealed to us who are saved; Christ Jesus lives inside of us and desires to live through us. As Christ was a sweet aroma to God the Father when He gave Himself up to die on the cross for us, may we allow Christ to produce that same aroma in us to a dying world.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, and offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma,
Ephesians 5:1-2.

By His Grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Larry".

Pastor Larry