

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

"The Aroma of Christ"

Imago Dei Church | 2/14/21 | Sunday AM

INTRODUCTION

Opening Question: Have you ever been tasked to do something you were entirely unqualified for?

Paul has been through the ringer with the Corinthian church. It's been an up-and-down relationship, and he's had to say some hard things.

And one of the obstacles he's run into is the fact that, **for all his strong words, they don't seem to be that impressed with him**. He speaks boldly, but he's unimpressive. He's underqualified.

And as we'll see in this text...he knows it. But he's convinced that **he had been captivated and commissioned by God to present Christ to them as "the aroma of Christ."**

In the text before us today, Paul picks back up with his narrative (from 2:1-4). Now, just a quick refresher on what's been going on:

Paul had made a "painful visit" to the Corinthians in order to correct some of their errors and rebuke some people. During that visit, he was opposed by at least 1 member, and Paul left without things being entirely settled.

He went back to Ephesus, which was his home base and wrote a heartfelt letter calling for their full repentance.

Now in this text [v.13] we see that Titus is probably the one who delivered that letter, and Paul was eager to meet Titus to hear how the letter was received.

So Paul left Ephesus and traveled up to Troas, where he hoped to meet him. When Titus didn't show up on the last ship in before the winter, Paul assumed that Titus, if he was going to make his way back to Paul, was going to have to travel by land through Macedonia. So Paul sets off to meet him along the way.

What's interesting here is, the narrative *drops off completely* right there and doesn't pick back up until chapter 7:

2 Corinthians 7:5–9

[5] For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. [6] But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, [7] and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. [8] For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. [9] As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

So we see that Titus did, in fact, deliver good news of the Corinthians' reception and repentance. And although not everything was hunky dory in Corinth, things were looking up.

But the question still remains—Why does Paul take time to have this *giant* parenthetical discussion between 2:14-7:4?

When we look at the content of that section we see that **Paul took this space to give an extended defense of WHY he had acted towards them as he did.** Specifically, why he had acted so boldly despite his own inherent weakness and un-impressiveness.

Answer: Paul had been captivated and commissioned by God to present Christ to them, and he wasn't going to give up.

And although Paul's ministry was unique as an apostle, the language he uses is true of all believers. We, like Paul, are called to be the **"aroma of Christ"** to all people.

3 Encouragements as we embody the **"Aroma of Christ"**:

1. LOVE GOD'S PEOPLE (12-13)

[12] When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, [13] my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

Paul's sense of God's calling to be the aroma of Christ instilled in him a deep love for the people of God.

We don't know much about this stop in Troas. It's not even mentioned by name in Acts (20:1). It just says Paul went through Macedonia to Greece.

A few verses later (Acts 20:7ff) we see that Paul stopped back by Troas on his way home and there were some believers there (Eutychus!), so obviously his time was fruitful. And that's what he tells us here.

But Paul—the apostle, the evangelist, the church planter—was unsettled. Why? Because Titus wasn't there with news of Corinth.

Paul's call was holistic—he had already evangelized the Corinthians. He had already rebuked the Corinthians. How easy would it have been in the face of their stubbornness and opposition and criticism to simply say, *"You know what? I'm done with you guys. My work here is done. Someone else can deal with it."*

But he couldn't. Why? His love for them overrode even his missionary impulse in Troas.

(APP) Does your love for the people of God lead you great personal and even ministry sacrifice, so that they might be presented mature in Christ?

Keep in mind, this is a discipleship issue that Paul is dealing with.

We often talk and dream (rightly!) of the sacrifices required to take the gospel to the nations. But does your love for the people of God compel you to make those same sacrifice to see your brothers and sisters matured?

The aroma of Christ to God --> Love God's People.

2. PROCLAIM GOD'S GOSPEL

(14-16A)

In verse 14 Paul begins to interpret, theologically, the role and relationship he has had with the Corinthians.

This interpretation begins with a somewhat confusing metaphor, tho:

[14] But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession,

The image of the “triumphal procession” is of a conquering king or general who returns to his home with the spoils of his victory. Often in these ceremonies, those captured in battle or the people who had been conquered would be paraded through the streets.

Paul is saying that he sees himself and his ministry as one who has been captured in order to testify to God’s victory in Christ.

He’s not saying he follows Jesus unwillingly or begrudgingly (cf. “**thanks be to God**”), but that he is fundamentally a servant being used as God sees fit.

In addition, the image reflects the fact that **sinners are truly enemies against God**, hating him and rebelling against him. The good news of the gospel is that God overcomes our rebellion with his grace. He conquers us, in a sense.

And Paul is saying he has mercifully been conquered—his sins paid for and his rebellion crushed.

And now, the conquering king is using him for his purposes of proclaiming that same gospel to all people:

and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

Verses 15-16 elaborate on this work and even begins to explain why things haven't been just super smooth in Corinth: As we preach the gospel, the gospel divides. It makes distinctions.

[15] For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, [16] to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

As we preach the gospel, we ought not be surprised by the extreme responses.

To some, we preach Christ and it is received as a message of life that leads to life. These are "those who are being saved."

To others, we preach Christ and it is received as a message of death that leads to death. These are "those who are perishing."

What's very clear to Paul is, we don't change the message.

Just like Paul, we are the aroma of Jesus everywhere, spreading the knowledge of him. We don't discriminate, because we don't determine the outcome. We preach Christ.

Some will receive; some will reject. We just preach.

(APP) **Brothers and sisters**—are you prepared & willing to preach Christ in this way?

Note: this doesn't mean be a jerk.

(APP) **Unbeliever**—I don't know why you're here or watching online this morning, but we want you to know that we hold out to you the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, the conquering

king who is able to rescue you from your own sin and rebellion and offer LIFE. We plead with you, receive the gift of his grace.

But we also warn you. Jesus divides. No one is neutral towards him. We all will find in him either life or death. Forgiveness or judgment. Your response to his gospel makes all the difference, and we'd love nothing more than to talk with you about knowing and walking with him as a loving Savior.

Love God's People
Preach God's Gospel

3. DEPEND ON GOD'S GRACE (16B-17)

Reflecting on the weightiness of preaching this message of eternal consequence, Paul has the only appropriate response: **marvel** and a **sense of inadequacy**.

Who is sufficient for these things?

(APP) Christian, do you marvel at God's grace in bringing you into his work?

Paul wants the Corinthians to know that it's not HIM whom they are quarreling with. He's NOTHING.

It's only by the grace and kindness of God that any of us have the privilege to enter into his service.

And that's what it is: service. Gracious service:

[17] For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Others have a "ministry" that is supposedly "Christian" but is fundamentally a vanity exercise about themselves and for their own personal gain. BEWARE THESE FALSE TEACHERS AND LEADERS.

Paul says that in contrast to them, we have a posture of humility and sincerity, having received a commission by the grace of God and accountable to God's sight.

So when we speak, we speak "in Christ"—recipients of his grace, clothed in his character, faithful to his message.

CONCLUSION

Colossians 1:28–29

[28] Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

[29] For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

To the Corinthians he's basically saying the same thing. We love you. We are concerned for you. And because of that we will not back down from preaching Christ to you, as God has called us to do.

Brothers and sisters, let's embody this aroma of Christ to God.

Let's love one another.

Let's proclaim his gospel.

And let's do it all in his name, dependent on his grace and unto his glory.