

The Aroma of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 October 2019

Preacher: Duncan MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Welcome to our morning service festival, welcome to any visitors with us today. And we have tea and coffee at the end of the service in the room next door. So please feel free to stay behind and join us for that.

The evening service at 6pm will be conducted by John McSween. The ladies Bible study meets tomorrow. And there's no little fishes this week due to the school holidays.

There will be a community pop-in lunch this Tuesday from 12 to 2. And donations if desired to go to Crossroads Harris. Road to Recovery meets on Tuesday at 8 and the prayer meeting is on Wednesday.

I'm seeing here it's got 7pm, it should be 7.30. I don't quite know how we got that misprint, but 7.30pm it is. The WFM AGM is on this Thursday at 7pm in the Scalpy Community Centre.

All ladies are welcome to attend that event. And just a forewarning that the Jam Club resumes on Friday the 1st of November from 1.30pm to 3.15pm for children of primary 1 to primary 4 age.

[1 : 1 5] And a separate club will start for older kids later on a Friday afternoon. And details of these to follow. These are all the intimations. So we can turn back to our reading in 2 Corinthians 2.

2 Corinthians 2. And I'll read again verses 14 to 16. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.

For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death, to the other the fragrance of life.

And who is equal to such a task? Paul, in opening this letter to Corinthians, writes in the 1st chapter, to some extent, about the troubles and the hardships through which he had passed.

To the point, he said in verse 8 of chapter 1, that they had even despaired of life itself. Paul, in his daily ministry, was very much a homeless wanderer.

[2 : 2 8] He would wander from one part of Asia to the next, preaching the gospel, founding churches. And once they were founded, he would move on and maybe come back some years later to encourage the brethren in each of those churches.

He had no particular money or possessions of his own. He had very few followers. While he was writing to these churches, they were not necessarily big places.

And for someone who was preaching the gospel of Christ and had come away from Judaism, you were just talking a small fraction of the Jews who had turned to follow Christ himself.

In the eyes of the world, he would be seen as someone who was a bit of a waster, particularly to the Jewish hierarchy whom he had left. They would have seen him as wasting all the talents he had in following Christ.

Other people in the world would have looked at Paul and said, that guy is just a loser. There's nothing about his life that is of any particular value to anyone who's around here.

[3 : 42] And in writing to the Corinthians and describing his troubles, perhaps Paul was thinking to himself, I bet maybe the Corinthians themselves will start wondering, what is the value in this if it is a life of toil and a life of trouble?

So he introduces this picture in verse 14. And he says, Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.

What he's saying to them is, in fact, what you can see in this world is very different from the reality of things as God actually sees them. And indeed, as things actually are.

He says, I'm not just an aimless wanderer going from one city to another, trying to get people to take my message on board. But in fact, when I wander from one city to another, I am part of a triumphal procession in Christ, being led by God.

So that is our first point, the triumph of God, and the fact that reality in this world is very different from what it seems most of the time.

[4 : 54] And the first thing we see there is that it is God himself who is leading believers in this triumphal procession. In conjuring up this picture, Paul is drawing very much from the Roman Empire and the fact that when a Roman general was honoured for winning a major battle, he would be given a triumph or a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome.

Very much like today, if a sporting team win a major world event or a European championship, they will get their open-top bus tour through the city and the crowds coming out to pay respect and honour and cheer them as they go by.

So he had this Roman general there leading his troops, being honoured for defeating the enemies of the kingdom, for keeping the barbarians outside of the gates of Rome and indeed outside the boundaries of the empire itself.

And the Romans and the general soldiers would follow on behind. The triumph was for the general himself, but his soldiers would go with him for those who had fought alongside him in the battle.

And they themselves would rejoice in the honour and the glory that was given to their general. They themselves enjoyed being part of that procession.

[6 : 22] And while they were in that procession, they looked constantly to their leader who was at the front. And so in this picture, we see there that Paul is saying quite clearly that God himself, in Christ, is leading his people in triumphal procession through the world.

We might not see that at times. Indeed, the world will never see that. But that is the reality of life for the believer. And beyond that, the crowds would surround the procession and they would be cheering them on and they would be burning spices and incense and that would go into the air so the air would smell sweet with all these spices as the soldiers and as the general walked through.

This is the continual reality of our life and it's the reality of ourselves today. Paul touches upon this in Hebrews 11 and Hebrews 12.

We know that in Hebrews 11 he speaks about great heroes of the faith and indeed many of them who had suffered for the faith. He writes of people such as Abel, of people such as Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and those prophets who had stood for Christ who like Daniel had shut the mouths of lions.

Others who had died for the faith. He describes all them in Hebrews 11 and then he goes on at the beginning of Hebrews 12 to say therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

[8 : 17] He's imagining a slightly different picture there being like athletes in an arena with all those who have gone before watching on and in his use of the triumphal procession here we have the symbol of the people who would be cheering and paying honour to this procession that goes on are in fact those who have gone before us those who themselves have known what it has been to follow Christ and to follow God's will throughout life.

The reality of life for the believer is in fact they are part of the triumph of God. I think far too often we think too much of the fact that Christ will return in triumph on the last day to wind things up on earth to bring his perfect judgment and to usher in his perfect future for his people but the reality is that that triumph is already underway.

Our second point is thinking about Christ himself and in verse 15 Paul talks of the aroma of Christ an aroma it's a beautiful phrase really thinking of the aroma of Christ an aroma is a smell that is very pleasant very attractive it's something that's pleasing it's pervading it spreads throughout the room in which it is or if it's outdoors it spreads a great distance and it's persistent it continues to hang in the air for some time if you think of a scented candle it puts a lovely scent out into the atmosphere and yet after you snuff out that candle there's a persistence to the smell and to the aroma within the atmosphere and I think talking of the aroma of Christ we can see there how the presence of Christians in our place and the presence of Christian values will continue sometime after the actual presence of the people themselves has gone and if we think in terms of the biblical use of that word aroma which might throw some light upon this idea of the aroma of Christ the first example of that comes up in

Genesis 8 verse 21 when Noah has just come out of the ark and the first thing he does is build an altar and he builds an altar to sacrifice to God and it's worth reading these verses just to get a sense of the aroma that comes from that verse 20 Noah built an altar to the Lord and taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds he sacrificed burnt offerings on it the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart never again will I curse the ground because of man even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done as long as the earth endures sea time and harvest cold and heat summer and winter day and night will never cease the aroma that came up from that sacrifice was pleasing to God and he said never again will I curse the ground we have there

Noah coming to God in the correct manner of worship Noah's worship being pleasing to God and God looking upon the fact that he had judged the earth for its evil and saying in mercy never again will I curse the ground as it was as I have done this time and we see there the linking of sacrifice with the turning away of God's anger in the commissioning of the priests in Exodus 29 and 18 there's the same sense there where the ram is burnt upon the altar and the aroma is something that is pleasing to the Lord and that had to be done before they were able to be acceptable in God's presence and all of that looks supremely to Christ himself so that Paul could say in this instance the aroma of Christ is the fragrance of life to those who are being saved the aroma of Christ is something that is wholly acceptable wholly pleasing to God the remarkable thing that

[13 : 20] Paul says here is in fact that believers are the aroma of Christ the knowledge of Christ is fragrant verse 14 uses that term the fragrance of the knowledge of him the fragrance spreads through his people and it's interesting that the fragrance there is directly linked to knowledge that knowledge comes through the word it comes through knowing the word and through understanding God's word so the more that a believer knows the knowledge of Christ has the knowledge of Christ in his heart the more that fragrance of Christ will be spread and in fact Paul just a few verses later I think touches upon that when he says in verse 2 of chapter 3 you yourselves are our letter written on our hearts known and read by everybody you show that you are a letter from Christ the result of our ministry written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts you see there God's word being blessed to them by the spirit and the people being greatly blessed and we have a sense of the people being the aroma of

Christ and yet that aroma of Christ provides and produces two very different reactions in people in verse 15 he describes it as being the smell of death to one group and the fragrance of life to another you really can't think of anything more opposite when we think of a fragrance we think of something that's beautiful and attractive and the smell of death is the absolute worst smell that we can come across anyone who's come across a dead sheep or a dead deer out on the hill soon knows about it and the first thing you'll do is move away from the source of that smell because it is so pungent and it is so revolting and here we have the two contrasts in responses to the message of Christ Paul illustrates that elsewhere using different terms in his first letter to

Corinthians in chapter 1 in verse 18 he said for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God on the one hand it is complete foolishness and on the other it is the power to save the very power of God himself Jesus himself provoked those reactions when his parents took him and presented him to the temple when he was only eight days old Simeon who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel came to Christ and said that this child will be the falling and the rising of many he would cause many to fall and many to rise two very different outcomes from the same person so we can see that there are two very strong and different outcomes not just in these verses but throughout the teaching of scripture so let us look a little bit closer at these two outcomes that we have first of all the smell of death and

Paul tells us that it is the smell of death to those who are perishing why death itself if we go back to the picture that we had of this triumphal procession the general coming in with his soldiers behind him and all these spices being burnt in the air giving that sweet and pleasant aroma why should those sweet and pleasant spices be the smell of death certainly to those who are in that vanguard it was very much the smell of life and victory but coming behind them would be the captives from the battle from the war and they would be trailing in at the back and once the procession had finished those captives would be put to death as part of that triumph if they were very lucky the crowd might commute the sentence to slavery but certainly their future was no future in comparison to those who were with the victorious general and therefore even though the smell of spices was sweet in the air it was the smell of death to those who were captives who had lost in war and who are now captive to

Rome the gospel reminds each and every one of us of our mortality each and every one of us knows that death is coming and yet we live in a society where the one thing that people are desperate to hide from and not to face up to is death itself and the simple truth is that those who refuse Christ choose death for themselves Jesus said that he came to give us life and to give us that life in all its fullness and if any of us here today chooses to reject Christ then we are choosing to choose death itself another way of looking at this idea being the smell of death is Paul writing in Ephesians speaking about boasting about the gospel itself and boasting about Christ glorying in Christ he said glorying in nothing but the cross of Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world big contrast there on the one hand the world was on the cross before

[19 : 30] Paul and on the other the world was looking at Paul and seeing him as being crucified and what you have there is quite simply this when Paul was saved by Christ it was as if the world itself had been put onto a cross because he himself no longer wanted anything to do with the world because he could see that the world in all its rebellion was condemned by God and he had to flee from that on the other hand all those who were with him in the world will look to Paul and say we don't want anything more to do with Paul we want to get rid of him he now stands for values that are completely different from us and indeed the Jewish hierarchy tried many times to put Paul to death and I'm sure if they'd had the chance they would have crucified him as it was they managed to have him stoned on at least one occasion although he survived from that but the two things were completely opposite and it just shows the difference and reminds us of the difference between choosing a world which is rebellious and refusing to follow the ways of

Christ and choosing to follow Christ himself for each party on either side is as if the other one was being crucified as in I want nothing to do with that that is all about condemnation I need to escape and get away from this the smell of death what a tragedy that people should see the sacrifice of Christ and see the teaching of Christ as being nothing other than the smell of death it's the smell of death to those who are perishing on the other hand we have the fragrance of life and that fragrance is there to those who are being saved it's a wonderful thought that and any can come and be saved and experience the fragrance of Christ Ezekiel in Ezekiel 20 verse 41 was giving a prophecy from God to those who had been ejected from the state of

Israel and he was talking about bringing the people back in the future and God said to them I will accept you as fragrant incense he was saying to them although he was casting them out of the temple in the temple worship yet at some point in the future he was going to bring them back in and he was going to accept them like the fragrant incense that would come up and that fragrant incense would make God pleased and accepting of them Paul writes also in Ephesians 5 and 2 encouraging Ephesians live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God speaking again of that fragrant offering that sacrifice of Christ which brought great pleasure to God because it dealt with the problem of sin and enabled his people to be in eternal fellowship with him live a life of love we are told just as

Christ gave himself up for us and if we as believers live a life of love then that fragrance of Christ is there our verse tells us in fact that believers spread the fragrance of Christ as they go from one place to another carrying the word of God carrying the news of Jesus Christ they are spreading that fragrance with them and that spreads in the teaching and discipling of one another as they are built up in the word through the memorisation of God's word the psalmist wrote I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you it comes out in generous and spontaneous giving Paul was able to write to the Philippians after they gave him some gifts he said they are a fragrant offering an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God and what we see here in thinking of Christ the aroma of Christ being the fragrance of life is that Christ pervades every part of the believer's life it goes into his heart into his actions in life it goes into the thoughts and the attitudes that believers have goes into their pockets and makes them willing and delighting to give gifts to God's service and all of these things are seen as something fragrant and pleasing to God so we have the two different reactions the smell of death and the fragrance of life from that aroma of Christ

I'll say just in closing to unbelievers consider this does Christ smell of death to you many of you will be denying in fact that you have any bad opinion of Christ and yet because you are rejecting that word it is as if he was dead and it is as if you want to run a hundred miles from him consider on the other hand how do you actually smell to God himself God smells that beautiful and fragrant sacrifice of Christ and accepts all his believers and welcomes him into his presence but if you don't come through that sacrifice he is not going to look on whatever you have to offer in a pleasing way to him it's you that is dead you are dead in your sins scripture tells us and if you are dead in your sins there is no way you will be acceptable to God the biggest thing that keeps people back from coming to Christ is one of inertia there's always that sense of tomorrow or next month or next year

[26 : 14] I will do that but there is never until God works in your life that desire to come close to him in any hurry I was listening to a podcast a couple of weeks ago and it was an incredible story thinking about London in about 1875 which isn't that long ago and the city then had no sanitation and people just dumped all the waste into the streets went into the gullies and then was washed into the river Thames and there was always this persistent horrible smell in the background but people just kind of coped with it although some were saying we need to do something about this and they actually had a plan to put in a sewage system but parliament refused to do anything about it because it was considered too expensive 14,000 people died of cholera in one outbreak and they did nothing sometime later there was a huge heat wave and it became not known as the great heat wave but as the great stink because as the river dried up and all the human waste was in it the smell was revolting the houses of parliament sit right on the side of the

Thames they soaked the curtains in chloride of lime in order to try and overcome the smell and that didn't work MPs sat at their business with hankies soaked in chemical over their nose and finally they decided they had to do something about this and in a record 18 days they passed legislation to permit the spending of the money that was required to sort the problem but they only did it when they absolutely had to and they had no other choice but think of all those people had died because of their inertia think of all the suffering that people went through simply because they were willing to put up with the conditions around them and that's just what it's like to live in sin you're willing to put up with all this in the background and not to think about your own salvation and that of others and at times God has to turn up the heat just to make us aware of our sin and make us flee from that sin and turn to Christ one day

Christ fragrance will fill the earth and therefore the question is will you remain looking upon Christ and seeing the smell of death or experiencing the smell of death or will you look upon Christ and see and experience the wonderful fragrance of life for believers it's important that each and every one of us sees the difference highlighted here between the world and Christ we can see from what Paul was writing there that on the outside things look very different but spiritually he was able to say here we are part of a triumphal procession in Christ through this world it might not look into the world but God knows what he is doing and he is leading us we're often tempted to compromise with the world in so many ways and instead of being fragrant we're just very weak and we're willing to have all sorts of deals with the world and with worldly attitudes and worldly actions remind ourselves we must remind ourselves constantly that in fact what we see and experience as the fragrance of Christ the world sees as the smell of death and in each of us as believers we need to be as fragrant as possible it is through believers that others come to know Christ it's quite a remarkable thought that that aroma of Christ comes through his people and when we are compromised in our lives when we are rebellious against

God and when we sin instead of being as strong and a powerful enticing aroma it's smothered with all sorts of other things so it can hardly be sensed and in many ways that is the age in which we live at other times people are so much more sensitive to spiritual things in times of revival people are longing to get right with God and Christians themselves are longing to be more like Christ Christ the more we are like Christ the more God's word tells us that we will be attractive to those outside of his kingdom and in order to do that we must look continually to Christ's sacrifice if our own thoughts move away from Christ's sacrifice it's moving away from that thing which is the sweet smelling fragrance before God the thing that is most acceptable to God so let us continually meditate upon

Christ's sacrifice upon the cross and let us say with Paul as he said at the end of those sentences who is equal to such a task that thought must have overwhelmed him at that point the very thought of him being the aroma of Christ that man who had sought to put Christ's church to death the one who hated Christ with all his heart at one point but the man who had been given a new heart by God so that he himself could spread that fragrance and that aroma to the world who is equal to such a task the reality is that none of us are but the Holy Spirit is more than capable and therefore let us pray that he will indeed usher in that day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas

[32 : 36] Amen let us pray Lord our God we thank you again for these words of the Apostle Paul which speak so clearly as to the nature of your kingdom and to the nature of salvation and to the beauty and majesty and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ Lord we pray that you would give us hearts that long after Christ that are attracted to him and that constantly want to spend more time in his presence and more time meditating upon that perfect sacrifice upon our cross Lord we pray that you would bless the truth of the cross to us and that Lord we would take the truth of the cross out into the world and we pray Lord God that for those to whom the aroma of Christ is the smell of death that Lord you would take away their hearts of stone replace them with hearts of flesh and indeed let them experience the fragrance of

Christ these things we ask in his name and for his sake and for his good Amen