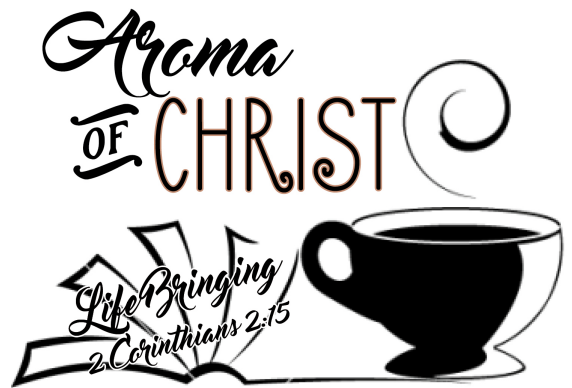


Our senses have a way of stirring up many memories. This is especially true when it comes to our sense of smell. And it seems that our nose does not have a way of filtering out the bad memories from the good. Many different emotions can occur from these memories. Seventy-five percent of our emotions are triggered by smell.¹

So depending on the scent, it may stir up some beautiful and wonderful thoughts – memories that you could sit and ponder on all day.

Or it may bring to mind terrible and ugly memories – sometimes ones that you have stuffed deep down that you had tried to forget even existed. The emotions that we carry with these memories can be very powerful!



Can you remember the last time a scent brought back a memory? Was the scent favorable or displeasing? Was this memory one that you'd like to sit and ponder on all day or rather immediately forget?

Can you think of instances in the Bible that mentions a certain fragrance or aroma?

Possible answers: Genesis 8:21 – the sacrifice of thanks given by Noah after the flood; Exodus 29:18 and Leviticus 3:16 – the sacrifices made by the high priests were “a pleasing aroma”; Ephesians 5:2 – Christ as a “fragrant offering”; Philippians 4:16-18 – gifts to Paul from the Philippians were a “fragrant offering”

Is there often a correlation between a sweet-smelling scent and a sweet and memorable event? Is the opposite true as well – horrible smell with a difficult time? Could a bad smell just as easily make you recall a good memory? Or a good smell a bad memory? Or maybe some mixed emotions? Example?

In this study, we will hear about a certain aroma. We learn from the apostle Paul what we are to God.

Background

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

1. What is the boasting that Paul talks about here?

He boasts in the Lord and his conscience is clear in the way that he has dealt with the Corinthians – “in holiness and sincerity” – with pure motives and motivated by God’s power and grace.

2. What does he emphasize in verse 12? Why?

God’s grace is the reason he can conduct himself the way he does.

Verses 12-14 seem to indicate that there is some tension between Paul and the Corinthians because he is defending his actions and in the words “I hope that...you will come to understand fully.” But in verse 15 he tells them he is confident that on the last day they will be able to boast about each other in the Lord as well.

3. Why did he not take the Corinthians feelings lightly?

People challenged his change of travel plans. Some people were trying to discredit his integrity. He did not want people to discredit his message just because he changed his plans. He wanted them to trust the message he gave them because it comes from God.

4. Paul wraps up this section pointing to God and his work in his people. What three reasons does Paul describe that make them (and us) stand firm in Christ?

God anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts.

For Reflection

How does verse 22 give you comfort?

Answers may vary.

This is God's promise to me. This makes me his own. This guarantees I will be in heaven with him in glory. We know that faith and salvation do not depend on the credibility of the messenger but on the credibility of the message.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

5. We see again how Paul changes his plans. What weighed on his heart to make him change his plans?

He was to meet Titus there and he could not find him. He was concerned about his friend, his brother in Christ.

For Reflection

Has there ever been a time that God opened a door to you and life's circumstances did not allow you to walk through and complete the task at hand? How did that make you feel?

We can then relate with Paul and understand how this must have affected him.

The Sweet Smell of the Gospel

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

“But” connects verse 14 to the previous verses. Paul was so concerned about finding Titus that he could not focus on the task at hand.

6. What is Paul's comfort?

God leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

7. What was a triumphal procession? How does this picture relate to us?

A general would lead his soldiers and captives in a victory procession through the streets. Paul thanks God that he leads us in triumphal procession in Christ. Those who proclaim the gospel are part of God's triumphal procession, made possible only through Christ's victory over death and the devil.

8. What is also our comfort when ministry opportunities don't go as planned or we feel like somehow we missed an opportunity in sharing God's Word altogether?

God is always leading us and through us continues to spread his message everywhere. God still accomplishes his will when and where he wants. Maybe someone else gets the opportunity and God uses it to his glory.

For Reflection

What were some recent missed opportunities in your own life? Witnessing opportunities? Ministry opportunities? Opportunities within your own home? You're your family? How did you work through that? How did God still work through you or work out the situation?

The Aroma of Christ

Paul now goes on to explain this fragrance of the gospel a bit more.

9. What kind of fragrances might have been in the air during a triumphal procession?

During such a procession there would often be the sweet-smelling fragrances of flowers strewn on the road or incense burning as part of the celebration.

10. What does Paul mean when he says "spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him"?

Paul continues to use this imagery of a triumphal procession. So Paul compares those who spread the gospel to the sweet fragrances of knowledge – and not just head knowledge, but heart knowledge too. We know Jesus! The gospel – what a sweet message!

11. What does Paul say we are to God? Among whom?

The aroma of Christ

Among those who are being saved AND those who are perishing

12. Why do you think Paul is specific to mention two groups of people? How is the aroma different to each group of people?

The aroma of Christ – those who proclaim the sweet-smelling gospel message – smells different to believers than unbelievers. To one it is the smell of death; to the other it is the fragrance of life. He is making the point that as far as God is concerned, when his messengers go out with the gospel, they and the gospel they bring are the aroma of Christ to God, not matter how it is received.

13. What does the “smell of death” and the “fragrance of life” mean?

As the gospel is shared in the world it is always sweet-smelling, but perceived differently.

To unbelievers, those who testify of Jesus have become the smell of death because they have rejected God’s live-giving grace, therefore choosing death for themselves.

Believers and their sweet-smelling testimony are always the fragrance of life to those who welcome the message of Christ!

14. Does this affect what we are to God? Why or why not?

No. Christians will always be the aroma of Christ to God. The message he gives us to share brings life and salvation through faith in Christ and will always remain!

15. We were once a bad smell to God. Why? How did God change us to a sweet-smelling aroma? Why?

We were born dead in sin, rejecting God. God gave us life through the Word and Sacraments because he loves us and wants us with him in heaven. He is a gracious and forgiving God.

For Reflection

What could you smell that make you think of life?

How do the words “the smell of death” affect your senses? What comes to mind?

Of our 5 senses, our sense of smell is the most sensitive. People can remember smells with 65% accuracy after one year.² When we smell something beautiful, it makes us feel wonderful. Our eyes glow, we take a deep breath, our faces light up – we want to smell it more! When we smell something terrible, we scrunch up our faces, turn away, and even feel ill. So this is some powerful imagery that Paul uses - death for unbelievers and life for believers – and all the smells, sights, tastes, sounds and feelings to go with it!

Paul's Confidence; Our Confidence

Let us not glance over the end of verse 16 of 2 Corinthians chapter 2 – “And who is equal to such a task?” We will answer that in this next section of Scripture.

16. Are there times you feel like you are not “equal to such a task” of living and sharing the gospel?

- At home
- With your spouse
- With your children
- At church
- At work
- In the community

Read 2 Corinthians 2:17 – 3:6.

17. What evidence does Paul give to prove he and God's people were “the aroma of Christ”?

*Paul was not in it for the money or self-gain, but he was sincere.
They were men sent by God.
They show through their lives that they have God in their hearts.*

For Reflection

Name 5 things from this section that, like Paul, comfort you and give you confidence to share the message of the sweet-smelling gospel of Christ.

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Closing Prayer

Sources:

The Holy Bible – NIV 1984

The People's Bible – 2 Corinthians. David J. Valleskey

¹ and ² – 20 Fascinating Facts About Our Sense of Smell. Alun Palmer.

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