

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had anyone ask you, “What’s that fragrance you’re wearing?” Of all of our five senses, smell can sometimes be the most sensitive. Let’s face it, there are great smells and there some awful smells. I once sent some flowers to my secretary on Secretary’s Day, but I wasn’t really thinking when I wrote these words on her card, “These flowers may lose their fragrance, but you will smell forever.”

What are some of your favorite smells? How many of you love the smell of bread baking? Or the smell of coffee brewing? Or the smell of bacon frying? Or the smell of popcorn popping? No wonder, we’re all so fat!

Seriously, as I thought about it, I love the smell of rain on hot pavement. I like the smell of Johnson and Johnson Baby Shampoo, especially when it’s in the hair of a giggly little girl. I love the smell of fresh cut grass. I love the salty smell of the ocean.

Actually, smell sells. How many times have you followed your nose to a cinnamon bun shop in a mall? And Wal-Mart is currently experimenting with DVDs that come with a smell wafer you can attach to your DVD player. In California, a gas station chain has added a dispenser at the pump that releases the smell of freshly brewed coffee hoping to lure customers inside to buy coffee. Ad companies plan on spending \$80 million this year on what they’re calling scent marketing. They’ve already got our eyes and ears, now they’re going after our noses!

As far back as the 1960s, film producers have been fascinated with the idea of adding odor to their movies. The first movie to use this Smell-O-Vision technique was the 1960 release of *Scent of Mystery* produced by Mike Todd. The film was shown in 30 theaters with smell effects added. It was a failure, because it took too long for some odors to reach parts of the theater, and then the odors lingered and mixed with other odors which created to some unpleasant aromas. For instance, in one scene the smell of smoking tobacco was released, and that mixed with the smell of a woman’s perfume, which then mixed with the odors from a scene in a horse stable! Movie goers also complained viewers were heard sniffing loudly, which distracted from the movie.

Today, we’re going to be talking about “the aroma of Christ.” If I asked you, “Are you wearing the aroma of Christ?” Would you know how to answer that? Did you know that there is a fragrance of death, and a fragrance of life—and that it can be the *same* fragrance? If all of this is new to you, let’s put our noses in God’s Word and see if we can sniff out the truth about this special fragrance.

Paul’s travel plans had fallen apart and his previous words indicate he had been dejected and frustrated, but from the depths of despair he breaks forth with an outburst of praise.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17. “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? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of

God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.”

In order to understand these words, let me review the background I discussed in the last message. The setting of these words is the description of a victory parade known as a Roman Triumph. To qualify for a Roman Triumph, a general had to kill at least 5,000 enemy soldiers and gain foreign territory for the Emperor. When a general qualified, he was welcomed back into Rome with a massive celebration. The focus of the parade was the victorious general riding in a magnificent chariot. Chained to the chariot of the general were the conquered leaders who had surrendered. Paul used this metaphor of the Christian life. Jesus Christ, our great Commander-in-Chief came to this foreign land (earth) and completely conquered the enemy, Satan, at the cross. He didn’t kill 5,000. Instead He has given life to millions. In this analogy Paul saw himself (and us) as the conquered enemies who are chained to His chariot. We have surrendered to Christ and He is leading us in His triumph. But Paul mixes his metaphors and compares us to the fragrance in the Roman Triumph. In a moment I’ll explain what that fragrance at the Roman Triumph means for us. But first, let’s learn some things about aroma of Christ.

1. GOD ENJOYS OUR DEVOTION AS A SWEET FRAGRANCE

Notice the words “we are to God the aroma of Christ.” The first question we’ve got to answer is, “Can God even smell?” Well, when the Bible compares the Living God to the idols of wood and stone we read, “man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.” (Deuteronomy 4:28) This verse and others imply God can do all of the above. We know the Bible says God sees, and He speaks, and He hears, but have you ever stopped to think that God smells?

Don’t be confused. The Bible often describes God in anthropomorphic terms. We read about the hands of God, the eyes of God, the ears of God, and even the nostrils of God. But don’t picture God as some old person with actual body parts. God is Spirit. But God has a personality and if He wants to smell, then He can certainly choose to smell!

As I was reading through the Bible tracing every reference to the word “fragrance” or “aroma,” I was surprised to discover just how many times the Bible speaks of making a sacrifice that contained an aroma pleasing to the Lord. For instance, the Bible says in Leviticus 6:15, “The priest is to take a handful of fine flour and oil, together with the incense on the grain offering, and burn the memorial portion on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord.” That phrase, “aroma pleasing to the Lord” appears 37 times in Leviticus and Numbers. That would certainly seem to prove God can smell, and that there are certain smells pleasing to Him.

In addition to the aroma of the incense, the Bible says the burning of the bulls and rams were an “aroma pleasing to the Lord.” We don’t know exactly what the incense smelled like, but from spending as much time cooking steaks on the grill as I have, I have a pretty good idea what the aroma of broiled beef was like. I agree with the Bible that’s it’s a pleasing aroma!

The point is that God is honored when we show our love to Him employing as many of our senses as possible. Fragrant worship wasn’t confined to the Old Testament only. I love the scene

described in John 12:3. "Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Don't miss the point that this took place in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. This was a place where just a few days earlier Lazarus had been resuscitated from death. He had been dead four days and Martha had said, "Lord, He stinks!" So, if there still was a lingering smell of death in that house, it was replaced with the fragrant scent of Mary's act of worship. She poured out all of her perfume, but when she left the room, she carried on her hair and her skin the fragrance of her devotion to Jesus. That leads us perfectly to our next truth:

2. WE SPREAD A HEAVENLY FRAGRANCE WHEREVER WE GO

Like Mary, when we've spent time with Jesus, we carry with us the fragrance of knowledge of Him. People can often tell what you've been doing by how you smell. If you've just exercised for an hour or so, there's a certain aroma about you. When you've just eaten a meal with a lot of garlic, it's usually pretty obvious to everyone. And when I was a teenager, my mom would always wait up until I came home and make sure she hugged me and got close enough to smell my breath before I went to bed! Smells can indicate where you've been and what you've been doing!

This passage is teaching us that wherever we go and whomever we meet, we should be a living advertisement about what it means to know Jesus. Ray Stedman says it better than I can. He writes: "Most men have had the experience of being in a room when a beautiful woman wearing perfume enters. As she passes through the room, she leaves behind a lingering fragrance. Consciously or unconsciously, all the males in the room are affected by that fragrance. Weeks later, they may catch a wisp of that fragrance again—and immediately, the image of that beautiful woman flashes into their minds. The fragrance has made her unforgettable. That is the picture Paul gives here. There is something about authentic Christianity that leaves an unforgettable impression when it is encountered. The Christian who has discovered this secret makes an enduring impact."

When you put on cologne or perfume, you really don't have to do anything except walk near a person for them to catch a whiff of your fragrance. When you've spend time with Jesus in personal worship and devotion, people will just sense there is something different about you. It's like you're wearing the fragrance of Jesus Christ.

St. Frances of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times; use words if necessary." When you are wearing the fragrance of Christ, people will know you're a follower of Jesus without you even having to say, "I'm a Christian." The fragrance of Christ is simply the personality of Christ revealed in your life by the Holy Spirit. When you are full of the Spirit of Jesus, then He will display the sweet-smelling fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness and self-control in your life.

3. THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST IRRITATES THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING

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

Let's face it, some things really stink. For some people who have allergic reactions, even perfume or aftershave be irritating. By the way, that's why our Celebration Choir is a fragrance-free zone. You can join the choir and not worry about someone's perfume or after shave affecting you!

When I was in college, one of my friends played a terrible wedding prank on another one of our friends. As the wedding car sat out in front of the little church, this prankster removed the hubcaps and put about ½ pound of raw shrimp inside each hubcap and then replaced them. As you can imagine, after a couple of days, the newlyweds were complaining about a terrible odor in the car. They removed the car mats, looked under the seats, looked in the trunk, and even raised the hood and looked in the engine area, but they didn't find the source of the vile smell. It wasn't until they got back from the honeymoon that a mechanic put the car on a lift and after walking around found the decayed shrimp in the hubcaps! When they discovered the culprit, that friend became an ex-friend!

We're all familiar with bad smells. But this passage teaches that the same fragrance that gives life to some, smells like death to others. How can that be? In order to understand it, let's return to our image of the Roman victory parade. I mentioned last week that the burning of a certain kind of incense accompanied every victory parade. On the morning of the parade the Roman priests would burn massive amounts of the incense in bonfires lit on the seven hills surrounding Rome. So when a Roman citizen awoke and caught that scent, they knew it was a day for a victory parade. During the parade itself, the priests would lead the parade swinging censures burning more of the incense. For the victorious army and the happy citizens, it was an aroma of life—victory. But to the defeated army that same smell was the smell of death. The defeated soldiers knew they were being led to their death, or at best to a life of slavery. It was the same smell, but some people hated and others loved it!

In the same way, the fragrance of Christ affects people in two different ways. To some it is the aroma of life, but to others, the message of how to know God just stinks to them. They just don't get it. You probably know some people who think you're crazy for gathering several times a week and singing songs and offering prayers to One we can't see or touch. But to us, this is wonderful—it's the fragrance of worship. But you could drop some unbelievers in here and they would say this whole "church business" just stinks.

They actually use that terminology even though they are unaware of this passage! I was looking on the Yahoo Answers website recently and there was a question posted: "Why are some people so resistant to the message of Jesus Christ?" Several answers were posted, but one person actually wrote: "Because I think evangelical Christianity stinks! I'm going to do ANYTHING that will display my own distaste for it. It is the embodiment of wickedness." (quoted from www.yahooanswers.com)

The Bible says those who think our message stinks are perishing. It doesn't say they WILL perish. They are in the process of perishing now. This truth is confirmed in John 3:36. Notice the tense of the verbs. "Whoever believes in the Son HAS eternal life [not "will have"], but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." It doesn't say that those who

reject Jesus *will have* God’ wrath on them—it’s there already. They are already perishing.

There’s a lesson here for us to learn. You may have family members or friends who don’t know the Lord. You’ve shared with them and tried to show them the Christian life. You’ve allowed the fragrance of Christ in your life to envelope them in the things you do and say. And yet, they still haven’t come to faith in Christ. They hold their noses and say, “No thanks!” You need to remember they aren’t rejecting you, they are rejecting Jesus. When you expose them to the beautiful aroma of Christ through your life and your lips, then you’ve done what God has expected of you. So don’t be discouraged. Don’t stop. Keep on loving them. Keep on sharing Christ with them.

4. THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST INSPIRES THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED

“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing...to the other the fragrance of life.”

Isn’t it great to have Christian brothers and sisters who smell like we do? That’s what believers do when we move to a new town, or take a new job, or go to a new school. We sorta’ sniff out the other Christians. Oh, we don’t actually raise our noses and follow a scent. It’s just good to discover other people who wear the aroma of Jesus Christ, because it is the fragrance of life to us.

And there’s even more good news. The smell of death can change to the smell of life! There are thousands who once thought the message of Christ stunk until they started believing, and suddenly their sense of smell changed! Paul thought the Christian message stunk so much, he was active in having Christians put to death. But after he met Jesus, the odor didn’t change, but Paul’s appreciation of it changed!

Both my parents grew up in Panama City, Florida. For many years there was a huge paper mill there, and my PawPaw was the foreman of the pulpwood yard. I had uncles and cousins that worked there as well. If you’ve ever been around a paper mill, you have to admit the odor isn’t exactly the kind you would name a perfume after. (Like Midnight at the Paper Mill would never sell!) But the first time I complained to PawPaw, I held my nose and said, “Pee-yew! What’s that stinky smell?” My grandad smiled and sniffed deeply and said, “Son, that doesn’t stink! Why, it smells like money to me!” What he meant was that when you could smell the paper mill, it meant that people were working, money was being earned and food was going on the tables of the workers. Through the years, every time I got a fragrant whiff of the paper mill, I’d smile and say, “It smells like money!” Actually, I came to like that smell, because it meant that there would be food on MeMa’s table, and, boy, could she cook!

In the same way, I know hundreds of people who used to turn up their noses at the fragrance of the gospel, but now, they take a deep whiff and say, “Smells like LIFE to me!”

CONCLUSION

The question each of us needs to ask ourselves is, “What kind of fragrance am I leaving when I

encounter people? Am I spreading the beautiful fragrance of Christ wherever I go?” Even though we know it will irritate some we should never do anything to mask or cover up that fragrance of Christ. Let me conclude by telling you about a woman who left an amazing fragrance of the life of Jesus wherever she went.

Dr. Martha Myers was an obstetrician who had surrendered her life to missions from the time she was a young girl in Montgomery, Alabama. After graduating from my Alma Mater, Samford University, she got her medical degrees from the UAB Medical School in Birmingham. For the next 25 years she devoted her life to serving poor women as a Southern Baptist missionary doctor in Yemen, a Muslim country. She delivered thousands of babies, and performed difficult surgeries without charge, all in the name of Jesus. She didn’t have to preach the gospel with words, she demonstrated it by the way she loved and cared for her patients in the name of Jesus. That fragrance attracted many of her patients, but to some her life created a foul stench.

On December 30, 2002, the husband of one of Dr. Myers’ patients, Ali Abdul Razek, walked into the Baptist Hospital in Jibla, Yemen. He was concealing a rifle under his coat as if he was cradling a baby. Ali pulled the gun out from under his coat and killed Dr. Martha Myers along with two other Southern Baptist missionaries who worked at the hospital.

The shooter was later arrested and asked why he killed the Americans. He said that his wife was a patient of Dr. Myers and she had told him Dr. Myers showed her love beyond anything she’d ever experienced in her life. This convinced Ali, who was a member of an Islamic Jihad group, that she had to die. Notice carefully the next words he spoke to explain why he killed her, “Such love could turn all my people from Islam to Jesus Christ.” He’s right. So, he thought by killing Dr. Myers he could kill that love. He thought he could blot out her fragrance of Christ, but he was wrong. Dr. Myers requested to be buried in Yemen instead of Alabama, so even her grave could be a testimony of her faith.

Our missionaries in Yemen report that in the last four years since Dr. Myer’s death, thousands of people in Yemen have come to Christ because of her life and death. Just this last January, thousands of Yemeni Christians gathered near Dr. Myers’ grave and sang in Arabic, “He is Lord. He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!” Just as the fragrance of perfume lingers in a room when a woman leaves, so Dr. Myers fragrance lingers long after her death.

(Sniff) I think I can still smell it today as her fragrance of Christ inspires the rest of us to have a greater influence for Christ. Say, “What’s that fragrance you’re wearing?”

OUTLINE

1. GOD ENJOYS OUR DEVOTION AS A SWEET FRAGRANCE

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ."

2. WE SPREAD A HEAVENLY FRAGRANCE WHEREVER WE GO

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

3. THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST IRRITATES THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING

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

4. THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST INSPIRES THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing...to the other the fragrance of life."



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes