

The Aroma of Christ & Transformation into His Likeness

2 Corinthians 2 & 3

Need

Why are we here? What's our purpose in the world?
Does what we do or don't do affect others? Does it affect how God deals with our nation?
Is September 11, a wake up call to our nation? to us???

Question: How did you do last week? What spiritual successes did you have? What spiritual failures?

Question: How did our last lesson affect the way you approached life over the past couple of weeks?

What can we do that will be more effective in helping you live life victoriously this week?

The Victory March: 2 Cor. 2:14

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ..."

The image here is the aftermath of a great battle. We are, in fact, in a battle, as Eph. 6:10-13 points out. But the exciting thing is that if our faith is in Christ, we've already won. In fact we are already being led in a great victory march.

In Paul's mind is the Roman *Triumph*, which was the highest honor that could be given a victorious Roman general. This typically was a once-in-a-life-time event. The procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order.

- State officials and the senate
- Trumpeters
- Men carrying the spoils taken from the conquered land
- Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships
- Then a white bull came that would be used for the sacrifice
- The captive princes, leaders and generals followed in chains, shortly to be cast into prison and in all probability almost immediately executed
- The lectors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres
- Priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them
- The general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses with a slave holding over his head the crown of Jupiter.
- After him rode his family
- Finally came the army, wearing all their decorations and shouting *Io triumphe!*

So Paul pictures this great procession marching throughout the world with Christ at the center and his faithful following victoriously.

Question: How do you feel about life? Do you awake each morning, ready to join the victory parade? Do you live life like you are in the parade?

Question: How do we develop this kind of approach to life? How can we live victoriously?

September 10, 1982, Timothy David Wilson entered into our family. He lived a short 16 months, half of which was confined to a hospital room. He was 2 ½ lb at birth and lost down to 2 lb before he began to grow. He fought for life every day of the 16 months God blessed us with him and his tired little body finally gave up in January of 1984. He taught us many lessons, but two of the most important for me were:

- Life is precious and must not be wasted. Timothy couldn't see real well, but his little eyes drank in everything he could see. There was almost an anxiousness to his being, as if he knew he wouldn't be here long and he was excited to see and experience all that life could offer. I think sometimes we get so caught up in the things of life we forget that life is nothing short of miraculous. God didn't mess up when He created the world. We need to rediscover our excitement about life. It truly is a gift. There is beauty and wonder everywhere we turn, even in the people who mess it up.
- The most important thing in life is other people. Forget climbing the ladder of success. Forget fancy cars, big houses, powerful social positions. As so many recently have found out, you can work all your life for all of these things, and suddenly something beyond your control happens and you lose everything. It's God's way of saying, "Look, this is not what you are here for. It's not important."

Now I tell you this story as the first step in a multi-step answer to that last question. I believe that God is up to two things in this world: preparing us to be Kingdom people and bringing others into relationship with Him. So, if God is preparing us in this life to be Kingdom people, we had better focus on the lessons He teaches us in life. Those lessons are a significant part of preparing us for the Kingdom. And, Oh by the way, if we are focused on the lessons, then the difficulty of the moment becomes just a bit easier to bear. If we believe that there is purpose even in the difficulty we are facing, then we can look with anticipation to the joy that God will set before us as we join Christ in the Kingdom.

The Aroma of Christ: 2 Cor. 2:15-16

"... 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?"

Now remember the triumph procession we described earlier. The priests swinging their censers filled with sweet-smelling incense followed only a short distance behind the captives and immediately preceded the victorious general, his family and troops. The fragrance of the incense undoubtedly could be smelled by both captives and troops. To the captives it was a reminder of defeat and the death sure to follow. To the troops it was a reminder of victory and life.

We have a cat by the name of Smokey. Smokey is a barn cat that has only one of his nine lives left. When he was only a couple of months old, he was kicked in the head by one of the horses at the barn. I saw it happen, and was absolutely convinced the blow had killed him. I had to leave for an appointment, but returned three hours later to bury him. Now this happened in December on a bitter cold, rainy day. When I returned, I was amazed to find his soaking wet little body still breathing – barely, but surely. I rushed him to the vet and incredibly enough he survived. The blow affected his balance and he would have never survived at the barn, so we suddenly had a new and unexpected addition to our household.

Now, all that to say this. Every time Cindy or I came home from the barn. Smokey would spend five minutes smelling our barn clothes. Why? Because he remembers the smell of the barn. And that's the smell he found on our barn clothes.

Why did I smell like the barn? Because I had been at the barn. If you stay around a place long enough, you smell like that place.

There is a story in Acts that has a similar message. Peter and John heal a crippled beggar and everyone is astonished. So much so that they are brought before the Sanhedrin the next day. Peter spoke boldly to them, not so much in defense but rather in proclaiming Jesus. You may remember verse 13,

*“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and **they took note that these men had been with Jesus.**”
(Acts 4:13)*

Question: Why did the Sanhedrin observe that Peter and John had been with Jesus?

They acted with uncharacteristic courage for men of their background and training.

Note: If you hang around Jesus long enough, you begin to smell like Him. Your life begins to take on the same characteristics as His life. You begin to see and react to life differently.

The point of verse 14 and 15 is that God uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Christ. Now that aroma certainly comes from our preaching and teaching but also from our life experiences and how we react to them and in fact from the very fabric of our lives. Again, if we hang around Jesus enough, we begin to see things like he does, we begin to react to life like he did – we begin to “smell” like Jesus. Other people will know it just from being around us. They will see it from the extraordinary way in which we do ordinary things.

----- NOTE: insert email from Seth Meyer about the aroma of Christ

There is no coincidence that the triumphal procession and being the aroma of Christ are mentioned in the same sentence. The triumphal procession is all about victorious living. Victorious living is first and foremost an attitude that says, “The victory is already won. And because I believe this, I will look at life differently.”

Life is no longer about winning or losing, but about preparing. Whatever life may bring – good or bad – there is first, a lesson to learn and second, an opportunity to serve. It is a lesson God wants me to learn so that I become more a Kingdom-person. And it is an opportunity to serve in a way that spreads the “aroma” of Christ. The two are absolutely connected. Without that victorious approach to life, our response to what life brings is not much different than that of the world.

Now notice chapter 3. Paul begins talking about the fact that the Corinthians were, in effect, a letter from Christ – one that everyone reads. Then in verse 6 and following Paul describes himself and us as ministers of the new covenant. Are you getting the message?

Victorious living → aroma of Christ/letter from Christ → Ministers of a new covenant

Or another way of looking at it is: **Victorious Living (Attitude) → Aroma of Christ (Mission)**

Question: What’s our purpose in this world? (Note Eph. 4:12-13)

Question: What effect do we have upon our neighbors, upon our nation?

According to Ephesians 4, the responsibility of the teacher/elder is to equip you (and me) – your responsibility is to serve.

As a teacher, I have a responsibility for more than just presenting knowledge. I am responsible for causing you to learn, for equipping you to serve. Now it’s true that there are factors out of my control, but my attitude is that I will do everything I can, including seeking out new ways, to cause you to learn.

In the same way each of us has a responsibility to cause change around us. No question that God is the active force. He is leading us throughout the world in the triumphal procession. However, if we are to be the aroma of Christ, there must be a change in our level of commitment.

What did you have for breakfast this morning. If you had a country breakfast you probably had ham and eggs. Let me ask you this. What’s the difference between the pig that produced the ham and the chicken that laid the egg? The difference is commitment! The pig was totally committed, the chicken wasn’t.

God calls us to be committed like the pig was. But we often are more like the chicken. We lay our egg and expect the world to make an omlet out of it.

Rom. 12:1-2 tells us to sell out for God – sacrifice all that we are. Verse 2 tells us what this means – a transformation that comes from a renewing of our mind (attitude change).

Please make no mistake about what I am saying. Only God can change hearts. But we must feel a sense of responsibility for those around us, for our nation, for this world.

Look at the Diagram and let's summarize what we've talked about so far – As we live our lives victoriously, we exert an influence upon those around us. Paul describes this influence as the aroma of Christ. This is a God-given, God-controlled influence, but we have a part in it that is directly determined by our attitude. If we really believe that God is in control and if we believe that God is preparing us to be kingdom people and if we are totally sold-out for God, then everything that happens to us in this life has lessons to learn and presents opportunities to influence others for God.

Eph 4:12 says that God is at work in many ways through many people to equip His people for works of service. We are here to serve. If you read the rest of Eph 4, you understand that this service is oriented toward our neighbors, our co-workers, and really everyone we come into contact with. And as we serve others, the Christ-like character of our lives signifies that we are different. Just like they did with Peter and John, people will take note that we have been with Jesus.

Victorious living is not wearing a plastic smile and offering platitudes about everything that happens. Victorious living is born out of a belief that everything that happens in life is either a lesson that will prepare us more for eternity or an opportunity to serve God and others. It is a willingness to live openly and transparently before the world but with a total dependence upon and commitment to God.

Question: Was September 11 a wake-up call to our nation? to us?

“if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chron 7:14)

“... and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.” God is all about redemption in this world. Just think – God wants to use YOUR life to reach someone who is headed the wrong way. The problem is, we often look like just about everyone else in the world. Our approach to life is the same. Our goals are the same. Our activities are the same. The way we talk is the same. We react to the difficulties of life the same.

Question: What can we do?

- Take life seriously (Eph. 5:15). “Be very careful, then how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”
- Live as servants, first to God, then to everyone God sets in our path. (Eph. 4:11-13)
- Approach life victoriously
- Smell like Jesus

Transformed into His Likeness: 2 Corinthians 3:18

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Now one final point. This is not the first time you’ve heard this message, nor will it be the last time in our four week study.

Paul says in verse 6 that we are ministers of a new covenant. Then he goes on to talk about Moses and the glory that manifested itself in a visible way upon his face after he had received the law upon Mount Sinai. In Ex. 34 we read that when Moses came down from the mountain, his face was radiant – so much so that the people were afraid to come near him. The radiance came from being in the presence of God and experiencing in such a direct way the glory of God. So that radiance represented the glory of God. But that radiance faded over time as Moses was away from God’s presence.

Now Paul goes on to describe the glory of the new covenant and the fact that this glory—this radiance will not fade. It will last. Why? Verse 18 gives us the answer.

You see, the radiance upon Moses face came from external exposure to the glory of God. Verse 18 says that we are transformed into Christ's likeness as we reflect His glory. There is an internal transformation that enables us to continually reflect the glory of God in Christ.

The Greek word for glory is *doxa* from the root word *dokea* which means "to seem". *Doxa* primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion. It is used (1) of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation and (2) of the character and ways of God as exhibited through Christ to and through believers.

Jesus was the perfect reflection of the glory of God because His character and lifestyle was a perfect representation, in human form, of the character and ways of God, resulting in honor to God.

What verse 18 tells us is that there is an internal transformation that happens in the life of one who is totally committed to God. That transformation produces a character and lifestyle continually more like Jesus, resulting in ever-increasing honor to God.

[Victorious Living \(Attitude\) → Aroma of Christ \(Mission\) → Transformed into His Likeness \(Results\) → Honor to God](#)

Next Week: 2 Corinthians 4

Do you feel helpless and inadequate every time you hear a sermon on the Great Commission?

How can we know enough to obey God's challenge to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel"?

Do you feel completely beaten down by life? Does God really care?

How can we find the "victory" in the "victorious life"?

