

Restoring the Disheartened Pastor's Joy

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Code: 47-11

The Lord in His sovereign wisdom and providence has brought us, this morning, in our ongoing study of 2 Corinthians to a text which is absolutely appropriate to the Shepherds Conference. It is 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 12 through 17 and I would invite you to open your Bible and turn to that rich and wonderful Scripture.

I continue through the years to be startled and grateful at how the Lord seems to go ahead of us and prepare just the right word for just the right occasion, and this morning is certainly no exception to that. If I were to title the text of 2 Corinthians 2:12 to 17 I might title it, "Restoring the disheartened pastor's joy...Restoring the disheartened pastor's joy."

The call to ministry is certainly an invitation to blessing. It is certainly an invitation to unequalled privilege. But that is not all. The call to serve the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is also an invitation to discouragement, to difficulty, to sorrow, grief, pain, and even despair. What pastor among us, what pastor at all while understanding the privileges and the blessing of his calling has not also had his heart broken? We all have. There are times when we are disheartened and downcast and discouraged and despairing.

Let me read you a letter from a pastor to his beloved friend. "Dear Jim, I'm through. Yesterday I handed in my resignation to take effect at once. And this morning I began work for the Land Company. I shall not return to the pastorate. I think I can see into your heart as you read these words and behold not a little disappointment, if not disgust. I don't blame you at all, I'm somewhat disgusted with myself. Do you recall the days in the seminary when we talked of the future and painted pictures of what we were to do for the Kingdom of God? We saw the boundless need for an unselfish Christian service, and longed to be out among men doing our part toward the world's redemption. I shall never forget that last talk on the night before our graduation, you were to go to the foreign field and I to the church. We had brave dreams of usefulness and you have realized them. As I look back across twenty-five years I can see some lives that I have helped and some things which I have been permitted to do that are worthwhile. But sitting here tonight I am more than half convinced that God cannot use me as a minister. If He could, I'm not big enough and brave enough to pay the price. Even if it leads you to write me down as a coward, I'm going to tell you why I quit.

"Throughout these years I have found not a few earnest, unselfish, consecrated Christians. I do not believe that I am specially morbid or unfair in my estimate. So far as I know my own heart, I'm not

bitter. But through all these years a conviction has been growing within me that the average church member cares precious little about the Kingdom of God and its advancement or the welfare of his fellow man. He is a Christian in order that he may save a soul from hell, and for no other reason. He does as little as he can, lives as indifferently as he dares. If he thought he could gain heaven without even lifting his finger for others, he would jump at the chance. Never have I known more than a small minority of any church which I have served to be really interested in and unselfishly devoted to God's work. It took my whole time to pull and push and urge and persuade the reluctant members of my church to undertake a little something. They took a covenant to be faithful in attendance upon the services of the church and not one out of ten ever thought of attending a prayer meeting. A large percentage seldom attended church in the morning and a pitifully small number in the evening. It didn't seem to mean anything to them that they had dedicated themselves to the service of Christ.

"I'm tired. Tired of being the only one in the church from whom real sacrifice is expected. Tired of straining and tugging to get Christian people to live like Christians. Tired of planting work for my people and then being compelled to do it myself or see it left undone. Tired of dodging my creditors when I wouldn't need to if I had what is due me. Tired of the vision of a penny-less old age. I'm not leaving Christ, I love Him. I shall still try to serve Him. Judge me leniently, old friend, I can't bear to lose your friendship. Yours as of old, William."

How sad. That's a real letter. When a man called, gifted, leaves the ministry not because of sin, not because of self-centeredness, not because of indifference, but because of discouragement. We all face that temptation, even the most gifted and the most faithful.

As we approach our text this morning, it is in that very state of mind that we find the Apostle Paul. That's encouraging, isn't it? To know that no less than he was discouraged? To know that there's a certain fellowship in his sufferings? Paul knew deep penetrating, disheartening disappointment. In this case, over the Corinthian church. They had broken his heart by shallowness, by sin, by indifference, by outright rebellion. And the fact was the Corinthian church had greater potential than any other church in Europe. Their city which had been restored by Julius Caesar after being in ruins for a hundred years was sitting at the crossroads. It was more open to the gospel than the other cities of Europe. And the Apostle had great success in founding the church there and making even the resident Jews jealous. Over 18 months he had labored day in and day out in that evil city and he had built a church and he had built great affection and love for the people there. Because he loved them so profoundly, because he loved them so deeply, they had the potential to hurt him severely.

And they did...sin upon sin upon sin upon sin, spiritual disaster after spiritual disaster marked that church to the point where Paul could say, "I have been whipped, I have been beaten with rods, I have been stoned, I have been shipwrecked, nothing brings the grief that my heart feels over the concern for the church."

All of the lashes that went across his back, all of the stones that tried to crush out and effectively did so his own life didn't bring him the pain that he felt inside over the unrequited love that he was pouring out toward the Corinthians and over their spiritual defection. It was more difficult than any other kind of suffering. They possessed, you see, all the gifts. They came behind and no gift. And he had given them so much of himself and they were so well taught, but they were divided and they were selfish and they were disorderly and they were worldly. Sin stained the Lord's table. They fought with each other. They sued each other. They took sexual advantage of each other. And they were proud.

In fact, conditions in Corinth were so bad that the great preacher Apollos when asked by the Apostle Paul to go there, refused to go. He didn't want to be exposed to what was there. He didn't want to bother to even bring ministry. Though Paul urged him, please, to go.

Additionally, as if the sin and the spiritual scandals weren't enough, some false teachers came to Corinth and they managed to deceive members of the church into a mutiny against Paul himself...their desire being to destroy the credibility of Paul and then to take his place as the teachers and teaching damning lies. And sadly, there were many Corinthians who bought into the deception.

Paul's character was blasted. His controversy with Peter recorded in Galatians 2 was no doubt exploited and they were supposedly representatives of Peter and pitted themselves against Paul. Doctrinal issues arose, doctrinal issues all mixed with personalities and jealousies. They perverted the spiritual gifts so that someone would even stand up in a congregation and curse Jesus Christ in an unknown language and someone would think it was the work of the Spirit. They winked at incest. They abused their marriages. They were drunken at the Lord's table. They went to demon feasts. What a church. Certainly a church to bring grief to a pastor's heart.

It is that very grief that we feel in the text before us. Would he ever be welcome at Corinth again? Could he ever go back? He already planned a trip and then changed his mind in chapter 2 because he really didn't want to have another sad visit. He wasn't up to it. He couldn't take any more pain. The last brief visit that he had there was very short and very painful.

On top of all of this as we find the Apostle Paul, he has been in Ephesus and in Ephesus things weren't going very well either. Some think he may have had a serious, even potentially, fatal illness because he said, "We carry about in our body the dying of Jesus Christ." Others think it was just the relentless persecution. It all culminated when a riot started that could have taken his life in Ephesus, so things weren't going well where he was and they were certainly going terribly where his heart was.

It's not then hard to understand that there is some pathos in this letter, there's some grief in this letter. There's some ache in his heart as he writes. Let's read the text, verse 12: "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my

spirit, not finding Titus my brother, but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

The text divides itself very clearly into two sections. The first two verses are discouragement, the last four verses are encouragement. And in this text we see the disheartened preacher find his joy. We see his sadness turn to peace, tranquility, happiness. Let's look, first of all, at his discouragement and let's look a little deeper into what is burdening his heart.

Verse 12 notes, "Now when I came to Troas..." He left Ephesus on his way to Troas. Troas was to the north. You could go there by boat or you could go there by land. It was a seaport city on the Aegean Sea in western Asia Minor, right at the mouth of the Dardanelles. It had been founded in 300 B.C., it had been founded ten miles from the great ancient city that is famous throughout all of European history, the city of Troy. That's where it got its name Troas. The ancient Troy was only ten miles away. It was in a province known as Mysia, and Augustus had made it a Roman colony.

The Apostle Paul's departure was perhaps prompted by the riot and realizing that work as such was now done in Ephesus and not wanting to linger around until he did lose his life, he embarked on his way to Troas. But there was something beyond just the riot that drove him there and that was an intended rendezvous with Titus. They had arranged to meet in Troas.

Where was Titus? Titus was in Corinth. Paul had dispatched him there to find out the condition of the church because Paul had written to them two letters...1 Corinthians and the second letter which is not in the Bible, but it's known as the Severe Letter. In both of those letters he had confronted their sin and their iniquity and their defection and their deception and he was eagerly waiting for Titus to come back and tell him how they responded to those letters. Until he heard word from Titus, he thought the worst. And the grief of his heart was so totally oppressive that it debilitated him in any ministry, as we'll note in a moment.

And so he goes to Troas perhaps under compulsion but as well to meet Titus who is coming back at a rendezvous point with word about the Corinthians' response to the letters that he had written. The letters, as you know, 1 Corinthians, very strong, very much an indictment, very confrontive, even sarcastic, they're so confrontive. And Paul was concerned about their response.

Now Paul had been to Troas before. Acts 16 records his first visit there in verses 8 to 11 and apparently on that occasion he did not found a church. It is also true that in Acts 20 and verses 6 to

12 we read that there is a church in Troas. There was not church there the first time he went. There was a church there in Acts 20. We assume then that the church was planted on this visit. It says, go back to verse 12, "I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ." To evangelize the city which was the way you started a church. He had come with a purpose of evangelization, not just to meet Titus.

Now he may have come early because of the pressure from Ephesus. Titus may have missed his boat. And so while he is there waiting for Titus, he purposely evangelizes. And then he adds in verse 12, notice the last phrase, "And when a door was opened for me in the Lord." Stop at that point for a moment before we finish that sentence.

He had commented about an opened door in Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 16:8 and 9. He loved opened doors. He said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 16:8 and 9, "I have to stay at Ephesus because there is an open door and even though there are many adversaries I have to stay because the door is open." Well it's the same thing, here's an open door in Troas. It wasn't opened by human ingenuity, will you notice verse 12, it was opened for me in the Lord...by the Lord, in the power and strength of the Lord. The Lord had given him a tremendous opportunity there.

Now in order to know that he must have already preached. He must have preached with great blessing and success. And many people must have come to hear and some believed and more interested. How else would he know the door was open unless he had tested it? So we can assume when he arrived he started to preach and people believed. But he really was preaching with a broken heart. He was a very distracted preacher. He was having a ministry in a place he didn't want to be. His heart was so overwrought and burdened by the Corinthian situation that he had a very difficult time pouring himself into a ministry that was wide open to him. It was the discontent of his own heart that cut him off from that opportunity.

In fact, he was looking at just the kind of marvelous situation every servant of God would long for and every indication was that Paul would literally pray for these kind of opportunities. These would fulfill the passion of his heart. But look what verse 13 says, "The door was opened but I had no rest for my spirit." He had no rest in his spirit. He was deeply troubled. Chapter 7 verse 5 says, "We were afflicted on every side, conflicts without, fears within. Our flesh had no rest." And in verse 6 he said we were depressed. Fears on the inside that all of his efforts at Corinth have gone to naught. He was depressed about it. He had no rest, this troubled, agitated, anxious heart.

Would the church ever embrace him again? Would they love him? Would they listen to him? Would they repent? Would they deal with the divisions, the incest, the quarrels, the confusion regarding marriage and divorce? Would they deal with the issue of idols, the Lord's supper, sexual sin? Would they discipline the man who boldly and shamelessly confronted and indicted Paul in public? Would they confront the false apostles? All the churning of all of that in his own heart created the anxiety that debilitated him. He didn't know the answer to the aching questions and he had no freedom to

minister. So he said I have no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus, my brother.

Without some kind of word from Titus, he was really useless he was so troubled. And I'm sure he imagined the worst. So here we find this marvelous man in the pits. "It's a dangerous hour for the preacher," writes A.T. Robertson, "his heart is in danger of rebellion. Then when the door is closed, the door that opened to large fields of usefulness, resentment can harden the heart. There was no happiness...writes Robertson...for Paul in Troas, he had lost his zest for work and idleness was despair. Everything seemed to have gone wrong. There was no joy anymore for Paul's restless spirit."

Then, writes Robertson, "One of the charges made against some ministers today is just this restlessness of spirit here shown by Paul. One is seized with a feverish desire to go elsewhere, to resign this field, to move on to pastures new. There comes a sense of drudgery in the tasks of every day life, the goal is at the end of the rainbow and here is only steady, plotting toil in a rather humdrum ministry. The temptation may even come to give up the ministry and enter some other calling. At such a time one is over sensitive and imagines all kinds of slights and insults. The real difficulties and problems of the ministry are magnified out of all proportion to the facts. In such a case a minister is in jeopardy. He's in danger of becoming bitter toward the world, jealous of other ministers, disgusted with his own task and thus he will lose his compass and drift out to sea," end quote.

Now that's where Paul was. Anxious, burdened, overwhelmed, no heart for ministry, discouraged. And frankly, time lost in nourishing a broken heart is time lost for eternity. How many pastors have been so beset that they have become debilitated?

So he turned away from the open door. Verse 13, isn't it amazing, "But taking my leave of them..." Them? Who is them? The church that he had planted there, the baby infant church, the believers and those who eager...were eager yet to hear. "I turned my back on them and went on to Macedonia." You notice the absence of any prompting of the Holy Spirit here? You see, he knew the route that Titus would take, it was a five-day boat trip across the northeast corner of the Aegean Sea, he could leave Troas and be where he needed to be and then get on the trail. And in ancient times when people traveled they made sure that everyone knew their travel plans and they could be tracked and they sent word ahead and left word behind about their movements. Paul set out then on a gloomy journey trying to intersect Titus. He couldn't wait any longer. He had to know. He had to know.

So here's the dark side of the man's life. Whoever was leading this Corinthian conspiracy, he identifies in chapter 12 as a messenger from Satan who is like a stake driven through his flesh. Let me tell you something. Paul was on the edge. But he wasn't like our friend William who wrote the letter, he didn't quit. In chapter 4 verse 8 he says, "We're afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed." He

wasn't ready to cave in yet. It was a time of weakness but not the end. Discouraged but not defeated, still holding on to hope. And you really do see here, don't you, that the love that he had for the Corinthian church, how could they ever have questioned it? This isn't the heart attitude of a fake or a fraud or a self-serving profit seeker or a pleasure hungry man. This is a man who loved so deeply his heart is being cut in half by how they have acted.

So he's discouraged but he's not done. He's not finished. He could have turned the wrong way but he turned the right way. And we come to verse 14, which way did he look? You tell me. Up, right? "Thanks be to God." He wasn't going to be like Peter who trying to walk on the troubled sea looked down and almost drowned. He looked up. It is interesting to me that there's nothing between verse 13 and 14 and you might at first say...how do we get him out of the pit of verse 13 into the joy of 14 so quick? And somebody will say, "Titus came." That's true, Titus did come before the letter was written. It's true Titus came and chapter 7 says by the coming of Titus Paul was comforted because the news was generally good. People were sorrowful over what they had done. They did repent. They affirmed their love for Paul.

He doesn't mention that here because I don't really think that played into the...into the point of his joy here. The light did dawn when Titus came and there was joy in the morning. Titus did say some very encouraging things about the condition of the church there. A good report. But I don't think it was that report that was the key to his joy or he would have said that. He reserves the report for clear over in chapter 7. You see, he knew that no matter what good had happened due to the two letters and the visit of Titus, no matter what good had happened there was still a minority of people there who were buying into the deception. There were still a minority of detractors there and there were still the false apostles there and he also knew that there was still the tremendous impact of a wretched pagan vicious ungodly culture pounding in on that church. He further knew that the Corinthians having been fickle once could as well be fickle twice, right? And that the whole problem had been solved and Titus was coming to tell him it was all solved, then why would he have spent another thirteen chapters defending his integrity? Which he spends in the second letter written to them after the report from Titus. No. No, there was always still cause to worry and to be disheartened and to wonder, even in spite of the wonderful report of Titus. There was still reason to be concerned. If the problems were all solved, it would be hard to imagine why he would have written all this second letter.

No. While I think the report of Titus was a time of comfort, it was a moment of joy and respite and relief and he knew they were then on the right track and some of the people had responded appropriately, that really wasn't where he looked to find his comfort. You can always look in your church in the moment of the darkest hour and find some faithful folk, can't you? And they might even be, have you noticed, the majority? And you might even hear some repentance and you might even have some body come and say, "Pastor, we're really sorry, we do love you and for whatever grief we caused you, we ask your forgiveness." But down deep in your heart you know that the people can be fickle and that looming around the corner is the potential of another such disaster and you don't just

want to live on the ups and downs of the response of your people. You've got to go somewhere else to find your deep profound joy in the deepest hour of your pain and that's exactly what the Apostle did. Verse 14 says he turned to God. Instead of looking at the troubled sea and drowning in it, he lifted his eyes toward God and what turned him around was a thankful heart.

At this moment it would have been very difficult for him to be thankful for the Corinthians, thankful for the difficulties. But there were some things he was thankful for. And he got lost in those things and they lifted him out of his despair. It is then in verse 14 that we move from discouragement to encouragement.

Now let me give you a little background. Paul draws this encouragement out of a very graphic historical event that occurred in his world. He uses that as a backdrop to what he is going to say. You see words there like "triumph, aroma, fragrance," those are all words that speak of a very unique event, particularly the word triumph. The Romans had what was called a Triumph. That's what they called it. A Triumph was when the Roman government and all of its people honored a great general.

The honor could be bestowed on a victorious Roman general only under certain conditions. Before he could win it he must have been the actual commander-in-chief of all the troops in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region completely pacified and the victorious troops brought home. At least 5,000 of the enemy must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of the territory of the kingdom must have been gained and not just a disaster retrieved or some attack repelled. A victory must have been won over a foreign foe and it could not be in a civil war. And now and then, maybe once in a life time a general might have that kind of Triumph given to him as his honor. In the actual Triumph there would be a procession through the streets of Rome to the capital where an offering would be made to the gods.

First there would come the state officials and there would come the senate in this great Triumph. Then there would come the trumpeters. Then there would come those carrying the spoils from the conquering, all the wealth and the treasures. Then there would come the white bull which was to be offered in a blood sacrifice to Jupiter. Then there would come the captives, the prisoners in chains who would be headed to prison and to death. Then there would come the priests. The priests would be swinging censers full of incense that was smoldering and smoking and the fragrance of the incense would fill the air all along the way. And in addition, women would line the street and throw garlands of flowers to be crushed under the hooves of the men on the horses and thus the fragrance would mount. In the homes of the people they might light incense lamps so that the fragrance would fill the entire city. Then there would come the general himself and he would be riding a chariot pulled by four horses and he would have a purple toga marked out with golden stars and over it he would have another purple robe, it would be embroidered with golden palm leaves. In his hand he would have an ivory scepter crowned with an eagle. And all the people would shout, "Triumph, triumph, triumph, triumph."

That's the picture in Paul's mind. And what a contrast it is to the gloom of his heart. He goes from the despair of what is happening in the Corinthian situation to the exhilaration of marching in a triumphal parade. And the truth of the matter is, from a human viewpoint he looks like he's been defeated, not like he's been the conquering hero. But it is when you turn from the vicissitudes and the failures and the difficulties of ministry in this life and you look at the triumphant calling and privilege to which you've been called that you get your perspective back. And he begins to give thanks.

First, he gives thanks for the privilege...for the privilege of being led by a sovereign God. He gives thanks for the privilege of being led by a sovereign God. Look at verse 14, "But thanks be to God who always leads us." there is never a time, there is never a moment, there is never an occasion when God is not leading. What a great confidence that is. He could well think that the whole plan had somehow gotten unraveled, that the whole operation in Corinth had been ripped out of the hands of God and now Satan was in charge. And so he affirms the great reality whatever may be happening in Corinth, whatever may be the gloom and despair of my heart, this one thing I now recognize and I affirm it again to my own troubled heart and that is this, that God the great victor, the great God of all gods is leading us at all times. That confidence in sovereignty is the undergirding strength of any ministry and anyone's joy.

The privilege of belonging to the ranks of the sovereign Lord, the privilege of marching behind the Commander-in-Chief in the parade as one of his lieutenants, the privilege of belonging to the victorious troops, the privilege of being under that kind of leadership, a leader who always leads to victory, the privilege of being chosen by God to be a soldier of Jesus Christ, to bear His name, to wear His uniform, to serve His cause, that's enough to bring back the joy no matter what may be happening. Paul says it was Christ Jesus our Lord in writing to Timothy chapter 1 who strengthened me. I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor and yet I was shown mercy. And not only that, Paul says I was the chief of sinners and He made me His minister. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever amen, and praise fills his heart.

Don't look at the circumstances. Don't look at the difficulties. If you want to turn your discouragement into joy, look at your privileges. And you have the privilege of being led by the sovereign God who is involved in every detail of your life and ministry. Just the contemplation of the privilege of being led by the greatest Commander-in-Chief and being associated with the Lord Jesus Christ and being in the ranks of others who have served Him through the years also under His sovereign leach...leadership should be enough to bring back the joy.

And then Paul gave thanks for a second thing, gave thanks for the privilege of promised victory in Christ. Not only the privilege of being associated with Jesus Christ under the sovereign leadership of God but the privilege of promised victory with Jesus Christ. Look at it, verse 14, "God who always

leads us in His triumph in Christ." He's not only always leading us, but He's always leading us triumphantly. We're always marching in the great parade. We can never lose. We follow the conquering Hero in the victory parade through life, not as captives, not as prisoners headed to judgment, but as co-conquerors in the great triumph over sin and death and hell.

It's just wonderful to be a part of the triumphant parade, even if I just shot one guy over the corner and he was only barely wounded. It's just wonderful to be associated with the victory, isn't it? Jesus Christ is a conqueror and in Him we are more than conquerors and He came into the world and He conquered sin and death and hell and triumphantly He will march the redeemed troops into eternal glory and you and I will be behind Him in His train as those who were with Him in the battle. And the issue is not how many we got, the issue is the triumph and we're swept up in the victory parade, we're swept up in the glory moment. The triumphant soldiers bring the spoils of war, the souls of men and women chosen from eternity past and gathered out of time, are led out of Satan's kingdom into the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of light and here come those great souls behind those who fought the battle. Jesus Christ wins and we win. Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." And if you're with Him in His church building, you're a part of the triumph.

We don't have to win every little struggle along the way, it's enough to know that we'll be triumph in the end. It's enough to know that we'll be there as part of the marching army, part of the lieutenants of Christ in the day when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

And then Paul thinks of a third reason to be thankful as he has in his mind the image of this Triumph. In such a victory parade some would be carrying censers filled with strong fragrant incense, as I noted, and then there were women throwing flowers that were crushed and this became a smell, an aroma that just enveloped the city. Paul borrows from that imagery and says there's a third thing I'm thankful for, "I'm thankful for the privilege of influence for Christ...of influence for Jesus Christ." Not just the privilege of being led by Him, not just the privilege of triumph, but the privilege of influence. It is just a remarkable and inexplicable, an amazing reality that I, this human wicked sinful blaspheming violent aggressor against God and Christ could be so transformed and called as to be used by God to have some influence for His kingdom. That's what he says in verse 15. "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God."

But look back at verse 14 at the end, not only to God, but manifest is the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place...and here's the key phrase...through us. The key thought here is that God in wonderful condescending mercy has chosen to manifest the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Jesus Christ everywhere through us. He has, as someone said, desired to press the gospel through human voice...to put it another way, to use the human throat as the channel of salvation. Incredible. Through us...through us. Paul said, "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

How shall they preach except they be sent?" And then borrowing from Isaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news."

When God planned to manifest the knowledge of Christ in every place, and send forth the sweet aroma, the fragrance of the gospel, He planned to do it through us. Are we worthy? No. Do we deserve the honor? No. Paul never got over that. Neither should you or me. Then will you belittle it? Will you like our friend who wrote the letter say I don't like the results, I quit? Will you belittle that calling and that ability to be the very one through whom the fragrant aroma of the gospel moves to every place? Will you belittle that because you don't experience your own definition of success or your own definition of popularity or your own ambitions? Your own desire for reputation?

I hope not. It should be enough, it should be enough just to preach. It should be enough that you have an influence, however small, that you have an influence at all. Thanks, thank You, God, for the privilege of having an influence for Jesus Christ, I don't deserve it. Thank You for the privilege of being in the triumphant parade as You gather out Your redeemed from the kingdom of darkness, no matter how small my little part might be. Thank You for leading me sovereignly in every aspect of my life to do what You want me to do.

That's enough. You don't measure it by results. You measure it by privilege. The disheartened preacher is disheartened because he looks at people. The joyful preacher is joyful because he looks at God. The disheartened preacher considers the difficulty. The joyful preacher considers the privilege.

Fourthly, coming down into verse 15 and 16, he gives thanks for the privilege of pleasing God in Christ. We are a fragrance of Christ to God. Whoa... As I read that earlier just to plant it in your mind, we're not just a fragrance to men, the aroma of the gospel, but to God Himself. The great emperor seated on the high throne at the capital at the end of the parade would smell the wafting fragrance. It was not only sweet to the victorious troops who had been the means by which the smell of victory had come to pass, but it was very sweet to the emperor himself. And God is pictured as smelling the wafting fragrance.

We don't really preach to men, do we? Although we give them the gospel it is God who is our most important audience. We offer spiritual sacrifices unto God, don't we? Wherever the preacher's mission advances, wherever the preacher is faithful and allows the manifestation of the knowledge of Christ to come through him as a sweet aroma, that sweet aroma ascends to the very throne of God and it pleases Him. It pleases Him.

That was the passion of Paul's heart, 2 Corinthians 5:9, we have as our ambition to be pleasing to Him. That's all he ever wanted. I just want to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be pleasing to Him. That's all. He said to the Galatians, "Do I sound like a man pleaser?" As we preach

the knowledge of Christ is spread like sweet fragrance along the way and men can smell it and then it rises to God as well. It is not results and numbers and popularity and fame and the size of the church, it is that God is to be pleased with the fragrance of the message because it is true and it is pure and is faithfully proclaimed.

Paul says it is a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. That's interesting. Those who are being saved, present participle, those who are headed for full and final glorification. Those who are perishing refers to those who are headed toward damnation. And here is another dimension of this fragrance. The smell of victory in that procession, in that parade would come to those who were entering into the triumph. But the same smell to the prisoners headed to prison and execution would be a smell of death, wouldn't it? When you preach the gospel, when you preach the truth, when you preach the Word, as John Calvin said, "The force of the gospel is such that it is never preached in vain, it is effectual leading either to life or to death."

Paul further explains it in verse 16, "To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." And he borrows there from the usage of Hebrew superlatives to emphasize the effect of the preacher's preaching. It is an aroma of death to death to those who reject the message and are headed for doom and destruction. It is a message of life to life to those who believe. It's very much like 1 Peter 2, to those who believe Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone and to those who reject He is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. The same aroma, the same sweet truth, the same gospel brings life and death.

And may I be so bold as to say to you both please God, for He is pleased with the expression of His mercy and He is pleased with the expression of His justice. Sometimes we don't get the results that we think we should get. Sometimes our messages aren't as often an aroma of life unto life as we wish. But even when they fail to be an aroma of life unto life, they please God by being an aroma of death unto death. And what if God willing to demonstrate Himself chooses to punish sinners? Can we question that? That too is part of His nature. He has no pleasure in it and yet it expresses who He is.

I don't think we very often think of it that way and we might evaluate our ministry on how many people to come to Christ and God might be evaluating it simply on the dual criteria of life unto life and death unto death, the Word of God, Isaiah said, going forth always accomplishes...what?...the purpose to which God sent it.

What a privilege it is to preach the truth and please God. To those who hear believe, it is a life unto life aroma. To those who hear rejected, is a death unto death aroma. The Jews in the ancient times wrote of the Torah, the Law, as a bee reserves her honey for her owner and her sting for others, so the words of the Torah are an elixir of life, som hiem(??) and a deadly poison, som homoweth(??). The sun shining on a tree brings life to some branches and death to others. If a branch is vitally

connected to the tree and the tree is grounded and rooted in the soil, the sun will bring life. On the other hand, if the branch has been cut off, the sun will burn it, wither it, scorch it to death. The sun is a savor of life unto life, and a savor of death unto death. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.

Every time we preach these two things are occurring. Every time we preach there is life unto life and death unto death taking place. God is at work and God is pleased.

What a privilege, what a privilege to live a life that renders a duty that pleases God, to render a duty that influences others for Christ, that is a sweet aroma of saving truth. What a privilege to know that we triumph in Christ, we are always victorious, more than conquerors. What a privilege to be associated with the King of Kings and always led by Him. What a privilege to those of us who are utterly unworthy.

And then lastly, in turning from the discouragement of his heart to find his joy, Paul gives thanks for the privilege of power in Christ Jesus...for the privilege of power in Christ Jesus. The end of verse 16 he said, "And who is adequate for these things?" Who is hikanos, competent, capable? Who has sufficient human ability? Who has what it takes in himself to render service to the almighty God? Who has what it takes to influence the world for eternity? Who has what it takes to be triumphant? Who? Nobody. Nobody in his own strength, absolutely nobody.

Down in chapter 3 verse 5 he follows that thought up by saying, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God who also made us adequate." Who is adequate? Not us. First Corinthians 15:10 he says, "I am what I am by the grace of God." It is the grace of God with me, so I preach and so you believe. He says in Colossians 1:29, "I labor but it is the power of God working in me." Paul is not adequate, he doesn't claim to be adequate. He is not adequate. He is utterly and totally dependent upon the power and the enabling grace of God. He knows all that power comes from God. Repeatedly he alludes to that or says it directly in his epistles...Ephesians 1, Ephesians 3, Philippians 2. The power all belongs to God, Galatians 2. And wanting to make this divine adequacy a strong point, look what he says in the last verse, verse 17, "For we are not like hoi polloi(??), the majority, the many." What does he mean by that? False teachers, "Peddling the word of God."

We are not peddlers of the Word of God, it's from a Greek verb kapeleu which means to corrupt. It came to refer to a con man, a street hawker, a pitch man, somebody selling by his ingenuity and his cleverness and his deception and his trickery a product that was a cheap imitation of the real thing. A kapelos was a huckster, making a profit at the buyer's expense. The most common ones were those who sold watered-down wine...although wine was generally diluted in those times, they diluted it down far more than it should have been diluted and people paid a high price on the sheer power of their selling cleverness and bought an inferior and useless product.

You say, "What's the point here? How does it connect with the end of verse 16?" Just this, when men operate in their own inadequacy they become corrupters of the Word of God. He says we're not like the hoi polloi, we're not like the majority, we're not coming in our own human wisdom as he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. We're not coming with cleverness of speech and human brilliance. We're not coming with some deceptive talk like the false apostles who are there. That's the best they can do is just peddle a watered-down degraded adulterated product, mixing a little bit of divine truth with Judaistic tradition and paganism to get people to pad their pockets. Dishonest men seeking personal profit at the expense of divine things and the souls of men, fraudulent, adulterators of God's Word.

We still have them. The liberals and the cheap gospeleers and the prosperity, health, wealth preachers and the sacramentalists and the legalists and the pragmatists and the manipulators of people. We're not doing that, he says. That's what happens when you operate in your own strength. That's what happens when you operate in your own power and your own flesh. But verse 17, we're not like many, we're not like the majority. We come preaching a word for which we are not adequate so we come as from sincerity as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

Sincere, eilikrinia, not by human cleverness, oratory educational brilliance, not deceptively, we come with sincerity, we come real. Look at us, examine us, hold us up to the light. It means to judge by the sun. Hold us up and see if there's a pot that's cracked and we've covered it over with wax that will melt the first time you use it. Look, and look in the sun and see if there's something wrong. And you'll find that we're real, and that we're genuine and we come from God who is the single source of our message, unmixed and unadulterated and who is the single source of our power. And we speak in Christ in His person and in His power and we speak also knowing that we are in the sight of God. We are very much aware of His all knowing sovereign scrutiny. Paul is saying you don't have to suspect me, you need to suspect them of the chicanery of which they're guilty. Anybody can preach a whittled down gospel, anybody can preach some kind of a deal where you take a little dab of biblical truth and slap it together with human wisdom and contaminate it with your own cleverness and your own views. But if you do that, you are a hawker and a huckster. Any man is adequate for that, but the man who preaches unmixed divine truth pure and clean can only do that in power that is given from on high.

So Paul found his way out of the gloom, didn't he? Out of the gloom of a broken heart and he found his way back to thanksgiving, began to focus on God and realize that he had to go back to the privileges and not to the problems. The privilege of being associated with the King of Kings and have Him as a leader, the privilege of a promised triumph, all through his life he's victorious. The privilege of influencing men and women for eternity. The privilege of being pleasing to God. The privilege, the great privilege of having power in proclaiming the truth.

You never measure a man's ministry by earthly measurements. William Carey(?) in India for thirty-five years and only then did he see a convert. Would anyone question the virtue of his life? Let God be the judge. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a blessing it is to crawl into the very heart of the Apostle Paul this morning and feel what he felt. We're so sad about the man who wrote the letter and said he was through, who never made it through the crossroads cause he put his eyes on the people and not the privilege. We are engaged in an exalted privilege of which we are not worthy. We're not even worthy to do it let alone have it accomplish anything, but it does for eternity. We thank You that our ministry however small and however humble when it is faithful and true to Your Word and unadulterated and unmixed will be an aroma of life to life and death to death, not only to men and women but to You and You'll be pleased. Thus do we render You our spiritual service with joy and thank You for the honor in Christ's name. Amen.

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