

<b>Series:</b> The Welcoming Church	<b>Reference:</b> Be the Blessing	<b>Title:</b> 2 Cor 2:14-16	<b>Date:</b> 09.15.2019
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
A conquering Roman General would lead his captives on display through city streets filled with incense. Paul uses that imagery concerning us, saying we are Christ's captives spreading everywhere the aroma of Jesus! Can we view ourselves in such a light being responsible with our calling?			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

A Roman military triumphal procession was one of the grandest spectacles of ancient times; granted to a conqueror only when He'd fully complied with certain conditions: (1) the victory had to be complete & decisive, (2) over a foreign foe, (3) at least five thousand of the enemy should be slain in a single battle, (4) the conquest should extend the territory of the state, and (5) it put an end to a war.

When the senate agreed all conditions had been met, a day was appointed for a pageant. People crowded the streets, temples were decorated with flowers & incense burned on every altar. Fragrant odors from burning spices were scattered through the temples & along the streets, filling the air with perfume.

In the procession were the senate & chief citizens of the state, who by their presence honored the conqueror. The richest spoils of war were carried in open view in the procession & the general would ride in a chariot drawn by four horses out front. His robe embroidered with gold & his tunic with flowers. In his right hand was a laurel bough, in his left, a scepter. On his brow there was a wreath of Delphic laurel. The shouts & applause of the populace would carry him through the streets to the temple of Jupiter, where sacrifices were offered, after which there was a public feast in the temple.

Close your eyes & imagine yourself as a Roman citizen. The wars been won. Your General's returned home. The whole city's turned out celebrating in the streets. The smell of incense fills the air, and as the parade comes by, the captives are all out front on display. The kingdom expanded, peace reigns again, people are joyous.

Paul uses this imagery in reference to God's conquering work of the Gospel over the spiritual powers & elements which keep people captive to sin.

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16**, *<sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession & uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved & those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?*

Unlike the captives of a Roman General, the captives of Christ have been freed from spiritual oppression, found freedom & celebrate along with the other citizens of heaven in joy. Some however, don't desire capture, rather to remain under their oppressor...

This imagery is also seen in Colossians 2:15: <sup>15</sup> *“And having disarmed the powers & authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

Unlike a Roman General, Jesus isn't conquering people in a militaristic manner. Rather He's sweeping back the spiritual powers which hold people captive by way of His own sacrifice on the Cross! The war's won, although battles still rage on. Christ has broken the back of the enemy & is calling people to freedom. A benevolent God, bringing the aroma of life to all peoples of the world.

**And, He's chosen to use us in this - **We are Christs Captives on display for others to see...****

God works through his people to bless others. We're put on display for others to see Jesus & His work in the world. In the plan of God, He chooses to use weak, unskilled, ordinary humans to draw the world back to Himself, and as we live in community, it's vital to remember the importance we play in God's mission to reach the world.

I'm currently reading through the Bible in a year. It's very apparent, God worked through very ordinary people, calling them out of very ordinary situations to be His witness to the world. He began with Abraham promising to make his name great, and that he would be a blessing to every people group of the world in Genesis 12:1-3...

*The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people & your father's household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*

A simple guy from the Ur of the Chaldeans, with a barren wife (Gen 11:30), a very unlikely candidate for building the people of God. Called out of everyday life to be the impetus for building God's kingdom on earth, and to set the stage for the coming Messiah!

It reminds us of Acts 4:13, referring to the onlookers & their impression of Peter & John, <sup>13</sup> *When they saw the courage of Peter & John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished & they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

The operative phrase there is, *these men had been with Jesus*. God can & will use you, as ordinary as you feel, in bringing others to Himself simply because you've been with Jesus! This means our actions, speech & communication matter greatly in helping others come to know Jesus which we addressed last week. It means owning our call, looking at every situation & conversation as divinely ordered. Jesus as present in every moment - everything's spiritual. His last command, becomes our first concern - the

Great Commission as seen in Matthew 28:18-20 which all of you I know have memorized by this point!...

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them & said, "All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

**Aroma's a powerful trigger...do you know how to get a teenage boy out of bed? There's a hard way & an easy way (VIDEO).**

Aroma can be a powerful draw, or a tremendous deterrent. We're the fragrant aroma of the knowledge of God drawing people in, reminding them of their divine worth in Jesus. God's using us to spread His knowledge in the world to believers & unbelievers alike. As such, we need to consistently spend time with people. Proximity's important. We don't seek *quality* time, we seek *quantity* time, given quality time with people can't be manufactured, we must have enough time around others for them to see our lives, hear our words & experience our prayers. Quality time comes out of a quantity of time spent with others, so even our fun is spiritual with others.

New guests coming to our church are looking for a church home & family, so what a great opportunity to put Christ's love on display by our words & actions.

Sometimes those are Christians looking for a new church home after moving here. They need a warm welcome & our care. Someone said to me this week they are a recovering Evangelical. That they've had some unsavory experiences in churches & are happy to be at a church in which they now feel safe & they can grow.

Others who come in contact with us through neighborhood, Six:Eight kingdom opportunities, or work relationships, aren't Christ-followers, but they're drawn in nonetheless. They come belonging before they believe; that's great! They also need our warm welcome & care. They need a place to be near Jesus as well.

Remember, your actions matter to guests & new people in our church, as well as the people you come in contact with in daily life. You're a captive of Christ spreading the aroma of Jesus everywhere you go!

**We're free to allow people to choose to participate in our church or not.**

We don't need to coerce people towards Jesus. That's not our job. Some of us had that discussion in our community group this week concerning some of the people we love & to whom we seek to witness. We've realized, although we need to be responsible & proactive in our words & actions towards them, this business of turning a heart towards Jesus is about the transformative power of the Word & Spirit of God. So, for every 1 conversation we have with them, we should be prayerfully interceding 4 or 5 times for them. Our prayer, coupled with our witness & word, affects them much more than

simple logical arguments, since people are complicated - arguments are rarely helpful & typically drive wedges in relationship. People are often not driven by logic but by the emotional weeds growing out of past experience, hurt & faulty teaching - pickled in a culture contrary to life in Christ.

As Christians, we naturally seek to live our lives differently - since we're called higher in Christ to purity & holiness reflective of the faithfulness & fidelity of God to His church. Jesus calls to be reflective of His pure & holy character & nature.

Sometimes people will reject us because of this different lifestyle & belief-set, and our good deeds & faithful service will be perceived incorrectly. The sad fact is that your words & actions can easily be misinterpreted. A pastor's life is filled with this. Inevitably you get someone saying, "You said X 6 months ago in a sermon, how could you say that?" And it's not at all what you meant to convey 6 months prior, but this person's been harboring this wound & governing their life from it for that long!

You sometimes have little control as to whether you will be perceived as the aroma of life, or the smell of death - but again, their heart reaction isn't up to you. Your responsibility ends with staying in close proximity to Jesus, reflecting Him as best you can in word, action & attitude (as we say here at Six:Eight: we are the Hands, Feet & Voice of Jesus on the Eastern Main Line & beyond).

As we follow Jesus & live out of His grace, this frees us from the need to pressure others into following Him. Some will accept Him, some will reject Him, and others are still deciding. We sometimes need to be faithful in listening to the Spirit in our witness towards others. At times we need to move on as it says in Matthew 10:14...<sup>14</sup> *If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town & shake the dust off your feet.*

At other times we need to remain faithful to people realizing they're in process. So we pull our view of them from 2' away, looking at their life from 10k' above. Realizing, God may be moving in their hearts over a long period of time, and He needs us to stay in proximity, exuding the aroma of Christ in their lives over years - but that's a leading of the Spirit which takes practice in life.

It's natural to have opposition to the Gospel, so we don't have the need to coerce someone into becoming a Christian because ultimately it's Jesus who does the work. As it says in 1 Cor 2:13-14... <sup>13</sup> *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.* <sup>14</sup> *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.*

Mature Christians develop a spidey-sense to hearing the Holy Spirit's direction. We don't simply rely on human arguments & Socratic methods of discourse. Rather, we're prayerful people who listen to the Spirit's leading, asking for direction in our witness to

others. I've been in many a situation where I've listened to someone speak of one thing in a highly emotional way, and the Spirit says, "Ask them this question, \_\_\_\_\_?" And it stops a person in their tracks. Suddenly you find yourself, not in a contest of issue or intellect, but in a spiritual triage session for a person's heart. We address the spiritual malady of the soul, which is sometimes buried under veneer of issues, fear & anger, hurt & pain, which the Spirit has to lead us through to get to what's really driving a person's reactions.

Jesus said in Mark 9:37, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Honestly, do you feel grown up? We're all hurt children internally, in need of love, acceptance, healthy community & reconciliation with God. We invite people to join us on this journey of faith no matter their starting point - it's why we say, come as you are, but leave transformed by Jesus.

Our job, as members of a local congregation, is to be welcoming to all people, and especially those who are exploring faith or membership in a church body. As we welcome people, Jesus will do the work in their heart to convict & draw them into His Church in His timing. Remember, Jesus said in John 12:32 - <sup>32</sup> *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*

Some people simply have not seen Jesus lifted up for them, nor the need for it. A missionary friend of mine reacted to a recent Barna pole which says that a large majority of Christians today have not even heard of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, let alone what it calls the church to - although it is central to who we are in Christ. Take a look at this video from Penn Jillette of comedy duo, *Penn & Teller* ([VIDEO](#)).

That's good witness, and I do not think it was ineffective. If our focus is one degree off of Jesus, there's a growing gap in relation to Him. In losing our proximity to Jesus, our divine aroma dissipates. Indignation & self-righteousness set in, and we become just another shouting voice in the cacophony of society. All of us must be deeply committed to our own spiritual formation - that's why we've developed a team of people who've gone through spiritual mentor training. We need resources & to be personally walking this out within discipleship community. Since it's easy to replace Jesus even with very noble issues - but that's called idolatry, and as a result, we forfeit our influence.

God's blessing to us & the world means that we can display his love to guests without putting pressure on them to respond. **So...be the blessing of Jesus to others, lift Him up in all ways & pray people will be drawn to Him as a result!**