

# "A Sweet Savour"

**Introduction.** The Bible frequently talks about us testing ourselves (Psalm 119:59; Lamentations 3:40; Matthew 7:5). It is an important task which we can do in a variety of ways. The Bible often uses our senses as an analogy to teach spiritual lessons: sight (James 1:25; John 8:51), hearing (Matthew 13:15), taste (1 Peter 2:1-3) and touch (2 Corinthians 6:17).

So the Bible uses our senses of sight, hearing, taste and touch to get its message across. However, it also uses another familiar sense: smell. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, Paul described the Christian's smell, and we are going to examine how we can be a "sweet savour."

## I. ***A Savour Of Victory***

- A. Paul represents himself as one of the victorious general's captives. To better understand this thought, we first must understand what is meant by the idea of a Triumph.
  1. A Triumph in the Roman world was a time of great rejoicing. When the Roman general would take out his army for war and defeat the enemy, they would enter the city of Rome in what was called a "triumphal entry" or the "triumphal procession."
  2. A Triumph was the highest honor that could be given to a victorious Roman general. To attain it he must satisfy certain conditions:
    - a) He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field.
    - b) The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home.
    - c) Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement.
    - d) A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster relieved or an attack repelled.
    - e) Victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war.
- B. Josephus (a Roman historian) wrote of this event, and said it was an unspeakable sight. The procession marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order.
  1. First came the state officials and the senate and then the trumpeters.
  2. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shewbread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome.
  3. Next came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships.

4. There next followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made.
  5. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed.
  6. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers filled with the sweet-smelling incense.
  7. After this came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at the top, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter.
  8. After him rode his family, and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *lo triumphe!* After all this, would follow great feasts and banquets.
- C. Sometimes a triumphal entry would last from dawn until nearly sunset. It was a tremendous day which might happen only once in a general's lifetime. Paul gladly considered himself one of Christ's captives being led in triumph to the glory of Christ. Christ always gives victory to those who are faithful in His army (John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 15:57-58; 1 John 5:4; Revelation 15:1-4).

## II. **A Savour Of Knowledge**

- A. Is it sweet for you and me to know God through Jesus Christ? Is it sweet for us to be filled with their word? How can we know God and Jesus?
1. The apostle John divinely answers this question for us (John 17:3; 1 John 2:3-5). We know God if we keep His commandments. Eternal life depends upon knowledge.
  2. In Philippians 3:8-11, Paul was willing for all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (cf. Hosea 6:6).
- B. It is shameful to see a lack of knowledge among God's people (Proverbs 1:28-30; Isaiah 5:13; Malachi 2:7-9). That is why Paul told the Corinthian brethren to be careful how they presented themselves to the world (1 Corinthians 15:34). Some simply have no knowledge of God, and that is a shame when Christians are living around them (cf., You Never Mentioned Him To Me). We should be bringing the sweet or fragrant aroma of God to those lost and dying in the world.

### III. ***A Savour Known To God***

- A. Our worship ought to go up to God as a sweet smell (Hebrews 13:15). Christians are to God the fragrance of Christ. This sacrifice of life is a sweet smell to God (Romans 12:1-2; cf. Philippians 4:18). Can you be described this way?
- B. In the Old Testament we find that Noah's sacrifice to God was a soothing aroma (Genesis 8:20-21). In Exodus 29:18 and Leviticus 1:9 we learn that a burnt offering when offered properly was a sweet aroma to the Lord.
- C. On the other hand, their worship could go up to God as a stench; a smell that was completely undesirable. In Isaiah 65:1-5, God spoke of those who would offer vain sacrifices to Him. These sacrifices were repugnant to God.
- D. When our worship goes up to God, how do you imagine it smells? What kind of sacrifice are we giving in our prayers, singing, partaking, imbibing and giving? Are you distracted or asleep? Is it like the sacrifices Noah and others like him made, a sweet smell to God which was given with the proper attitude, or is it a stench or smoke in the Lord's nostrils and like a fire that burns all day?

### IV. ***A Savour Known To Others***

- A. In John 12:1-8, Mary anointed Jesus and the oil which was used had a pleasing aroma. To Jesus, Mary's anointing was a pleasing aroma. However, to Judas, it was not a good smell, because he was covetous. It is just another example of how something can smell good to some, and bad to others who occupy their minds with sin.
- B. In the Triumphal Procession, after the parade and before the banquets, the captives were put to death. The fragrant aroma of the flowers and incense which wafted from place to place did not mean the same to the captives as it did the victors. To the captives it meant certain impending death. Christ and the gospel have the same dual effect on people (1 Peter 2:6-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).
- C. To those who reject the gospel, our obedience is an aroma of death. Our lives reflect the power of Christ and the condemnation of the gospel. The payment for rejection is spiritual death and an eternity in hell (Romans 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).
- D. On the other hand, to the Romans the incense was an aroma of life because the empire was secure from her enemies. To those who accept the gospel of Christ, our obedience is an aroma of life. We have life now and that life continues on into eternity. Who is worthy or adequate for this charge? Who can undertake it without trembling?

**Conclusion.** So what about you today? When hearing the gospel, do you see death that lies before you, or do you see life? Are you spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of God or do you smell like the world? Are you the sweet savour of Jesus Christ to God, or is your allegiance, worship and life a stench in God's nostrils?

What kind of servants should we be who preach the gospel which may prove fatal to those who come in contact with it? We need to speak the word of Christ from a pure heart (1 Timothy 1:5). God wants you to have life, the people here want you to have life, but only you can see to it that you get it.