

2 Corinthians Ch2v14-Ch3v6 - Christ Centred Church

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians, which is where we'll be looking at today.! Thank you, Bob.

Thank you.

Thank you. We've been going through our series in 2 Corinthians. This morning we're going to be looking at chapter 2, verse 14, to chapter 3, verse 6.

So let's hear God's word. 2 Corinthians, chapter 2, starting at verse 14.

To the one, we are an aroma that brings death.

[2 : 10] To the other, an aroma that brings 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 as those sent from God.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

You yourselves are our letter. Written on our hearts. Known and read by everyone.

You show that you are a letter from Christ. You show that you are a letter from Christ. The result of our ministry. Written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God.

[3 : 13] Not on tablets of stone. Not on tablets of stone. But on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ before God.

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves. But our competence comes from God.

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant. Not of the letter, but of the spirit.

For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. Well, let's pray. Father, may the spirit of the living God take the words that we hear, your words, and write them afresh on our hearts today.

For us here as we gather in this room. And for the children as they gather next door. Father, do a work that brings life in us today.

[4 : 40] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I'm sure you're all familiar with the TV program, The Apprentice, where entrepreneurs make their pitch before Lord Sugar in the hope of becoming his business partner.

And without any embarrassment or shame whatsoever, they boast about their salary, the huge sums of money they've earned, the company endorsements of where they've worked, and their wide range of abilities that they have.

If you want the best, if you want your business to succeed, you need me. I'm your woman. I'm your woman. Or I'm your man.

Well, if you were to ask the members in the church at Corinth, what kind of people do we need for this church to grow?

For this church to take off? Well, it was simple. Their answer would be something like this. You need people who are successful, influential, and powerful.

[6 : 05] No room for the weak and fragile. Well, at the risk of causing great offence to you all, that rules us all out, doesn't it?

Please don't apply. You see, most of us feel inadequate and ineffective. We don't feel very impressive at all.

In fact, we're all far too conscious of our flaws and failures. Well, if that's how you're feeling this morning, we're in good company.

Because it seems Paul felt the same. He didn't have a great big salary. He wasn't terribly impressive.

Look at chapter 2, verse 17. Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. He wasn't in it for the money.

[7 : 09] He was no big name speaker. He didn't even have a list of influential endorsements. Chapter 3, verse 1. Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

No, he had no impressive credentials. And he wasn't a powerful personality. Look at chapter 3, verse 5. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves.

No great talent on display when Paul arrived. And looking at ourselves and as others look at us, we might feel the same.

We're not terribly successful. We're not very influential. And we're not very powerful. But we do have Christ.

And because of Christ, we who are weak and fragile have all that we need. That's what our theme is this morning.

[8 : 25] It's a summary of our text. You can read it on screen. We are not successful, influential, or powerful. But we do have Christ.

And because of Christ, we who are weak and fragile have all we need. So three things to encourage us that God is at work through people like us.

Here's the three things. We have the aroma of Christ. We have a letter from Christ. And we have confidence through Christ.

So our first encouragement this morning is we have the aroma of Christ. Look at verse 15.

Chapter 2, verse 15. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ. Now what does it mean for us today as we sit here to be the aroma of Christ?

[9 : 41] Well first, we need to step back a little bit and see that we have been conquered by Christ. Look at verse 14.

But thanks be to God who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession. Now victory parades were a familiar sight in the Roman world.

Trumpeteers celebrated as victorious generals marched back into their city after going to other nations and other places bringing their captives in tow.

It was a great big spectacle. And it's a striking image that Paul uses to explain who we are as Christians.

Because Christ is the victorious King who has come and conquered us. He has won us over from a kingdom of darkness and brought us into a kingdom of light.

[10 : 52] Through his death and through his resurrection he has overcome sin and Satan. Now we are his captives to serve Christ.

Not in a begrudging way but because he is our victorious champion. Now what great encouragement for us as a church that we are now part of Christ's triumphal procession.

As Christ marches as this victorious general through this world the church is Christ's victory parade.

A display to the world of Christ's power and greatness. You see we are not small or influential.

We are something wonderful. The results of God's work. Now not only were the sights were there sights of generals the sounds of trumpeteers but in these great festivals there were also smells.

[12 : 11] So second we are the aroma of Christ. Look at verse 14 again. But thanks be to God who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ. Now historians will tell you you can look this up on Google or wherever you go to get your information.

They'll tell you that during these great big victory parades there would also be incense carriers. People who would carry incense along with these parades.

Presumably to add to the celebrations. All over the city as they marched through the centre would be this unmistakable aroma.

You could hear the trumpets you could see the generals and you could smell the victory. Well the church is the aroma of Christ.

[13 : 31] Where we go and where we walk we spread that victorious aroma. But how do we spread that aroma?

What does it look like? Well very simply we spread the aroma of Christ by proclaiming and talking about the gospel of Christ.

Did you see it there at the end of verse 14? He uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

You see it's as we share the gospel as we spread the knowledge of God so we release the aroma of Christ. The good news of Jesus his death on the cross for our sins his resurrecting power over death and the grave his gift of life his guarantee of an eternal kingdom to come it's aromatic there's that unmistakable smell of victory as the gospel is declared.

You see the church that is you and I gathered here just think about it when you're involved in the ministries like the rock that we were thinking about this morning or as you speak to a friend or as you speak to your children when you open God's word and begin to teach and explain so the gospel aroma of Christ is released and it begins to spread and its effects are undeniable.

[15 : 25] third the aroma brings both life and death verse 15 for we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ amongst those who are being saved and those who are perishing to the one we are an aroma that brings death to the other an aroma that brings life isn't that how we respond to the gospel of Christ can you smell it the smell of life or the smell of death as we listen to the word today do you get an aroma of life or are we receiving an aroma that's death it's like the incense sticks or the yankee candles that we have in our house they're everywhere

Kirsty buys them in bulk and I follow around after and remove them to one they are a beautiful scent to another they are a horrible stench and the gospel will always have that effect it will either draw people or repulse people to one Christ is joy and freedom and life to another Christ is foolish to be rejected and death what's your response to the gospel word as we hear it this morning can you smell that scent of victory of life of Jesus now before we move on we all have a question to answer did you see it the end of verse 16 and who is equal to such a task who is capable of all of us here today who is capable of being a pleasing aroma to

God well on our own we can't we're not up to the task but Christ our victorious champion is at work through people like us and because of him we can say yes I am up for the task you see it's not about us being successful or influential or powerful it's about God spreading the aroma of Christ as we open up his word and begin to speak and teach the gospel of Christ we spread that aroma so we are the aroma of Christ be encouraged today the second encouragement is we have a letter from Christ look at chapter 3 verse 3 you show that you are a letter from Christ now it's a strange metaphor he's jumping from the generals and the aroma metaphor and now he's talking about letters and things written on the letter so what does that mean well first there is the letter of recommendation do you see it there at the beginning of chapter 3 he says are we beginning to commend ourselves or do we need like some people letters of recommendation to you or from you

I have a book here it's called The Language of Rivers and Stars written by a friend of mine called Seth Lewis some of you know Seth some of you don't and you might say well why should I read that well when we open up at the first couple of pages there's some endorsements people like Alistair Begg well I've heard of him he's a good guy and Stephen Wellham well he teaches at Munster Bible College I mean if he's saying it's good it must be good there's a plug for Seth's book by the way well the same thing is going on here regarding Paul's ministry they're saying well what are your credentials Paul what are your endorsements who recommends you why should we listen to you well that's when Paul pulls out the letters from his briefcase and brings out all the big names

Paul a brilliant speaker a great crowd puller Paul guaranteed to up your collections every time he speaks well the problem was Paul had no letters of recommendation but he did have one letter an endorsement that could not be bettered and guess what we have that same letter as well it was a letter that came from Christ a letter from Christ look at verse 2 you yourselves that's right you the church you yourselves are our letter written on our hearts known and read by everyone you show that you are a letter from

[22 : 04] Christ the church is Paul's endorsement as Paul preached the gospel so the aroma of Christ began to spread and it brought life there were people in the city of Corinth who were changed and they became Christians verse 3 you show that you are a letter from Christ the result of our ministry Paul is saying you want a recommendation well you are my recommendation the fact that you are following Christ is proof that my message and my ministry is real and genuine now aren't there times that we wonder if we're having any effect we're not being talked about on social media we're not on 6-1 news making the headlines the online influencers aren't recommending us but guess what the gospel is at work and how do we know how can we be so sure well here you are start looking at the people around you you see the church is a letter from

Christ and each person who believes the gospel is the written endorsement from God the church is a result of your faithfulness your witness and your work the church is a letter saying your work has taken effect and if you have any doubts whatsoever look what he says about this letter they are a letter written by the spirit verse three you show that you are a letter from Christ the result of our ministry written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts

God now I think that's a beautiful picture of what happens as you faithfully teach the gospel and share the gospel with your friends and family parents as you open up the word of God to your children whether it's happening on college campus or in school at the CU or when you go to work when you share the gospel the spirit of the living God takes that word and writes it on people's hearts guaranteeing salvation you see the work of the spirit cannot be erased or removed his work is permanent and eternal picture it like this as God works through you so you begin to spread the aroma of Christ and lives are changed each transformed life is to be read as a letter from Christ written by the spirit and given to his church to encourage you it's saying look around you look at all these letters written from

Christ to you a mark of God's work in their life each one of us is so precious so we can say with Paul verse 2 you yourselves are our letter written on our hearts at home in my study I have a big black box and in it I don't know if Kirsty knows this or not are letters from Kirsty from when we are dating it was called dating then going out whatever it's called now and we wrote letters we didn't send texts and every so often I open up that box and I read one of those love letters from Kirsty do you want to hear some I'm

I'm not going to read it but re-reading those letters remind me of our relationship of our love but we need to re-read the letters from Christ that are before us to look at the church and see the work that God has been doing amongst us to hear the stories afresh of what God has done in our lives you see you us together are evidence and proof to one another that God is building his church it's not about us being successful or influential or powerful it's about God's endorsement his recommendation a letter from Christ the work of the spirit in our life proving the results of our ministry

[28 : 05] God is at work be encouraged and don't forget so we are the aroma of Christ a letter from Christ and third encouragement we have confidence through Christ look at verse 4 such confidence we have through Christ before God Christ gives us confidence today to continue in your ministry you mightn't feel up to it but here is bucket loads shovel loads of confidence but first we must know that we are not competent verse 5 not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves by ourselves we're nothing we have no ability or power within ourselves to change ourselves never mind thinking of changing anybody else we're inadequate we're ineffective we're weak and fragile and the truth is we are all too conscious of our flaws and failures how can

I possibly serve in the church what do I have to offer well by ourselves we have nothing we have absolutely nothing to offer we are not competent but but we have a confidence and a competence that comes from God look at verse 5 not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves but our competence comes from God yes we're fragile let's face it we have hidden flaws and we know our failures but that's not a disqualification in fact admitting to our weaknesses that is what qualifies us it's not about my ability or being successful or influential or powerful it's coming to God and saying

God I can't I have nothing but you can our competence comes from God can you see how upside down it is to how the world thinks to get anywhere in life we have to prove our ability show off our performance boast and brag about all the things we have done no thankfully our competence doesn't come from within us it comes as a gift from God and enables us and equips us to do what he calls us to do have confidence competence in our ministry verse 6 he has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant not of the letter but of the spirit for the letter kills but the spirit gives life

Paul is contrasting here the old covenant and the new covenant under the old covenant you remember when Moses went up Mount Sinai and God gave him the written law on stone it was good law it showed God's people how they should live except for there was one problem with the law it never changed people's hearts it's a bit like the speed signs that we see when we're driving along the road they tell you how fast you should drive some of them even have little smiley faces or sad faces if you go over the speed limit you see they can't make you keep to the limit but we're living in the age of the new covenant the age of the spirit and the spirit of God changes people's hearts changes us eternally look at the end of verse six the letter kills by itself the law will kill it will only condemn but the spirit gives life you see our competence doesn't come from ourselves it's not about our ability or cleverness our competence comes by the power of the spirit working through us that gives life to change people you see it's not about us being successful or influential or powerful it's about

God giving us confidence through Christ so that we can continue to serve the church left to ourselves we're not impressive but we do have Christ and because of Christ we who are weak and fragile have all that we need we are the aroma of Christ we are a letter from Christ and we are competent through Christ be encouraged as we go out into a new week and we meet a mad and frightening world who say you have nothing to bring we are the aroma of Christ let's pray father we thank you for your church your people for the work you have done in our lives we thank you for the gifts and abilities that you have given to us and we pray that we may use them for your glory father give us strength and encouragement to go on doing all that you have called us to do we love you and we thank you help us then as we start into this new week that we would go in confidence because we have

[35 : 30] Christ in Jesus name we pray amen