

"Freedom Sandwich"

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[0 : 00] deeper knowledge of the themes and the ideas that Paul is carefully working through as he writes a letter to the Corinthian church. I want you to know that back in the time of the New Testament, the Roman Empire ruled most of the world.

They, through military prowess, through superior technology and sheer ambition, had stretched out far from the Italian peninsula all the way to the British Isles in the west and all the way to Mesopotamia in the east.

The Romans were a proud people. They thought themselves greater than the other nations around them. They were a military people. They prized military might and strength as one of the greatest things.

They thought that one of the greatest things a person could do was to be a general leading armies to conquer more lands for the Roman Empire.

This pride and military focus led to the Roman practice of the triumph. A triumph is a military parade that would happen when a general returns to Rome after winning important battles.

[1 : 21] The whole city would gather into the streets as that victorious general returned home and there would be celebrations and feasting. The general and his army would march through the streets.

The general would be crowned with the laurel. He would wear a kingly toga of purple and gold and be put on high display for his accomplishments.

Before him would be a line of the captives that he had taken from the defeated army, especially their leaders and prominent members.

Following that would be the loot, the wealth, the treasures that he plundered, and then would be himself to show off his accomplishments and his glory.

Behind him, you would find the legions that marched with him, and they would be sprinkling incense and shouting along the way to call everyone to celebration of his great accomplishments.

[2 : 26] This is the Roman triumph. So keep that in mind as we turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 2. You'll find that on page 1776 in your pew bibles.

We're going to continue where we left off last week. We'll start in verse 12 and work our way down to verse 17. And keep this Roman triumph in your mind as you're reading this.

Because this would have been very familiar to the Corinthian church. And Paul is referencing it as he writes to them. 2 Corinthians chapter 2, starting in verse 12.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, a door was opened to me by the Lord. I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find Titus my brother.

But taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

[3 : 35] And through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To the one, we are an aroma of death leading to death. And to the other, the aroma of life leading to life.

Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God. But as sincerity.

But as of sincerity. But as of from God, we speak in the sight of God. In Christ. In this passage, Paul cuts off from talking about church discipline and the issues that had happened in the Corinthian church.

And he returns to sharing an account of the things that are going on recently in his life. If you remember earlier when we were studying in chapter 1, he shares with them saying, I do not want

you to be ignorant, my brothers, of the trouble that came to us in Asia.

[4 : 50] Then he uses that commentary of his troubles to discuss his hope in God, even when his life is threatened. From there, he reminds the Corinthians of his love for them and their partnership together with him.

And he defends his decision in the past where he canceled his plans to visit them. That he did it only for their good.

He defends his choices, showing that he made them out of a heart of overflowing love for the Corinthian church. After finishing that tangent, he circles back and mentions another recent event that happens in his life.

He talks about how he went to Troas to preach Christ's gospel. There were good opportunities there to do so that the Lord provided. And yet he had no rest because he did not find Titus.

There's some more details there that we could get into. But the main thing to take away from that section is that Paul uses a missed opportunity to point to how God is working good in every situation.

[6 : 06] He uses it as a springboard or a launching off point to discuss how God's glory is displayed in his weaknesses. So keep that in mind that what we are studying today and what we will be continuing to study will touch over and over again.

That God uses human weakness and sinfulness to bring him glory and to achieve his purposes.

That so often God's glory and purposes are not shown in the people who are greatest, but often in the people who are weakest or most easily discounted.

After that background, let's start working through. I'm going to have three points or three parts to the sermon that we're going to break this text up into to try to understand the truths that are here for us today.

So part one, God's triumph. We read in verse 14, Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph.

Here, this can only be an analogy to the Roman triumph. Paul is using this practice of the Roman triumph to create an image in the minds of his listeners.

[7 : 31] So throughout this sermon, we're going to be using images of the Roman triumph to help us understand the points that Paul is making.

In this triumph, God is the one being celebrated. After winning a victory and taking captives from his enemy, God is now going on a victory parade on his way home to celebrate his victory and to draw people near by showing off his glory.

And what this actually reveals to us is that the Christian life is part of God's victory parade. This is what our life is.

We are sitting in the midst of God's triumph right now. In Paul's day, he could see himself being led in God's triumph.

And we should see ourselves as being led in God's triumph today. So that is our first takeaway from this text. I want you to take away that this is that everything in your life is about God's glory.

[8 : 52] Our life is not about putting ourselves on display, about showing off our triumph, but it is God's triumph. This parade of our lives belongs to God and is there to celebrate his great victory.

It is not about making us look good. It would be crazy if a triumph was going on and the captives that were leading the way thought that the parade was about making them look good.

We'll get to it to that later. But the captives in the parade, that's a picture of us.

And so it would be foolish for us to parade around our lives as if the point is about making us look good. So don't draw attention to yourself.

Don't be about your own glory, but be about his. He is the conquering general. He is the victorious one. We were on the wrong side.

[10 : 01] And this parade is about him. So the ultimate test of morality for us, the gauge which shows us right and wrong, is whether or not the actions that are being done bring glory to God.

The way you are to evaluate your life's decisions is first and foremost, do they bring God glory? Do they take part of this triumph that is circled around his victory?

I also want you to think about why this triumph exists in the first place. What is what is being celebrated?

What victory did God win to earn this triumph to make it fitting to have such a parade? Where did he get all these captives from?

And what did he do to earn such glory? To understand and to answer these questions, we must travel back from before the triumph to see the battlefield.

[11 : 12] Turn your mind's eye to that cross and witness the war and witness the victory.

That led to this triumph. The wounds of that battle are the wounds of Jesus's flesh.

The battlefield terrain is the mounds and the valleys of his own skin as it's torn by whips, as it's beaten with rods, and as it's nailed to a wooden cross.

And God was in Christ drawn up for battle against sin, death, and Satan.

There has never been a greater foe that anyone faced. And in this war, the father sent one man, his son, to face off against this mighty foe, like David against the great Goliath.

[12 : 16] So there on our cross is God waging a war against sin and being victorious. On that cross, the enemies of God were crushed, and it was proved that they could never have victory over him.

So that is what is being celebrated in this triumph, that God himself has defeated the great enemies of sin, death, and Satan.

This triumph is our life. We are in the parade right now. And that parade celebrates the good news that sin which opposed him and would have rightly destroyed us has been defeated and paid for by Jesus's death.

That is why we as Christians should always be about the gospel. That's what the whole parade is about.

So this is our second takeaway. Be about the gospel. Be about the good news. If you think back over the ten sermons that I've preached in 2 Corinthians, you should remember that in every one, we talked about the gospel.

[13 : 40] In every sermon, every text, every topic, we went back to that same idea that Jesus has died for sinners and sinners who trust in him may go free.

So this is because we should be about the gospel. That's the point of this parade. That's the point of this life, is the victory that God has won.

And so we never move past it as long as we're marching in that parade. Go back to it all the time.

When your heart is discouraged, think about this victory.

When you talk to other people, talk about this victory. When you look out at your life, rejoice more in this victory than in anything else.

Because nothing compares. Our life is part of God's triumph, is part of God's victory parade.

[14 : 45] Part two, our place, or our place in this triumph. If our life is part of God's triumph, then what is our place in the parade?

This is an important question. Ultimately, this question boils down to, what is our purpose in life? Now I want you to know that as we answer this question, we're going to be focusing on our weaknesses and on our sinfulness.

And there is more to the Christian life than just a focus on those things. If you are trusting in Christ, God loves you like he loves his own son.

Just as he says to his son, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. That is how the father looks at anyone who is trusting in Christ. But here, Paul uses the image of us as captives to highlight the weakness of man, to highlight the weakness of Christians and how God gains glory even in the midst of that weakness.

The word that is translated here into the phrase, leads us in triumph, refers to how a victorious army would have captives from the defeated army led before him in the parade.

[16 : 16] This word always refers to that circumstance of the captives being led forth. And that is what Paul attributes to us.

Not the position of the soldiers who have a right to share in the glory. Not a position of the triumphant general sitting in the chariot.

But of captives from the defeated army. That the leader, that the victor takes before him in the parade. So takeaway number three, you are a captive from the enemy army.

You don't naturally belong to the victorious army. You don't naturally have a share in the glory of the battle.

If you are a Christian, if you would be part of this celebration of the gospel, you must first remember that you were an enemy of God.

[17 : 23] The whole world belongs to this God. He has authority over it all. And so when we sin, we are rebelling against his authority.

We are rejecting his command. We are saying, that is not my king. And we are placing ourselves in revolution against the God who owns and has created the universe.

We place ourselves by our sin in the army that is drawn up against God's kingdom.

And we are not the righteous soldiers who helped God defeat sin. But we are sinners who have been spared when God destroyed the enemy.

Your place is not to stand tall and make everyone see how great you are. But rather, we must be humble when we realize we were part of the enemy army.

[18 : 28] That we were the ones who were defeated. It is not our victory, but it is Christ's victory. So reject self-righteousness.

Do not look down on others as if you are better than them because you are part of this triumph. You are part of this parade. But realize that you too were once an enemy of God.

And so you have no grounds to see yourself as better than others. Paul makes this point, bleak as it may seem, that we are our captives in the triumph.

He makes it because the Corinthians are tempted to think that Christians are, the best Christians are the people who seem great. That if you want to look out and find the people who are really godly, those are the people with nice suits and jewelry who drive nice cars and have big houses.

The Corinthians are, are tempted as we may be, to think that the people who are most worthy of respect have a bunch of letters that come after their name or positions of power in companies and in governments.

[19 : 54] And because of that, they're tempted even to disregard Paul himself because he doesn't set, Paul doesn't set himself on display. And so they think, oh, he's not, he's not someone we should care about or pay attention to.

So Paul wants them to know that God chooses to get his glory by weak things. That often, the things God uses the most to bring him glory is not the stuff that looks great by a worldly sense, but things that look weak by worldly senses.

So that when I look at most Christians, I should say, the most wonderful thing working in their lives is God.

Not their jobs, not their, their degrees, not their clothing or their stuff. None of that is super attractive.

The most attractive thing is that I see God working in them. That they're weak people. God gets his glory through our weakness.

[21 : 07] When I can't do it, and so I have to rely on him, he gets glory. When I don't look good to others because I'm doing what he's called me to do, he gets glory.

When we are poor and don't live in as big houses as we could or have as nice cars because we give to the church, we give to the needy, and we give to missionaries, that doesn't look great in the world's eyes.

A run-down house isn't appealing to anyone. Yet God gets glory in that weakness. When up front here at Christ Baptist Church, you see people who don't have it all together, but people who have hard lives and harder pasts.

When you see former liars and former thieves, former drug addicts and former prostitutes, when you see lazy people, greedy people, prideful people, people who are tempted to so many sins and have these sins in their past, or people like me who have struggled for over a decade with depression, God gets glory because he works great things out of weak people right here.

When people are drawn to church, not because it has the best programs or looks the nicest, but because you see God working in those people, he gets more glory.

[22 : 48] The thing you win people over with is not flashy lights, fog machines, or really polished everything.

Some of those things are okay. It's nice to have comfy pews. We all appreciate that. But if you're winning people by that, you're not winning them to Christ.

Paul will go on later to say in verse 17, for we are not as so many peddling the word of God. There are people out there who try to sell the things that the Bible says to make themselves rich.

And what you'll find is that they cut out the truth for the sake of appeal. They preach man-centered gospels. They don't love to hear about how life is all about the glory of God.

And they draw people in not with how God works through weakness, but how, oh, these people look really great and look like they have easy lives and I want a part of that.

[23 : 55] God gets glory through our weakness. Understand also that the captives here and the captives in triumph are led to their execution.

They're not there because of mercy. They're there heading to a place where the victor is going to get glory executing them.

in the Christian life, you may be called to die for the glory of God. Count the cost.

All of Jesus's 13 apostles, save one, were murdered. Jesus himself was tortured and executed.

Paul, who writes here that he is a captive in God's triumph, will go on from here to be captured in a Roman prison and executed.

[25 : 02] your life is not for your own glory and you may even have to die for the sake of God's.

You must be ready to lay your life down just as he laid his life down for you. And do not forget even in the midst of that, as we read earlier in chapter one, that God has the power to raise the dead. Chapter one, verse nine, we have the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Or Galatians 2.20, which says, I have been crucified with Christ.

I'm dead already. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Our life is not our own, even if this triumph leads to our death because we are captives. It will be for God's glory and he will raise us on the final day.

[26 : 21] Paul uses another image from the triumph to show us what our place in this procession, in this victory parade is. I mentioned earlier that in the triumph they would use perfume and incense and light that along the way to draw people near and to fill the area with the presence of the celebration.

Then we see Paul take that same idea and apply it to us believers, that we are fragrance and incense in God's triumph. Look at verses 14 and 15.

Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place.

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. Takeaway number four, your place is to smell like Christ.

Your job, your role, your place in this parade of life is to spread the knowledge of Jesus everywhere you go. So read about your God in this book and learn how to be like him.

[27 : 48] be godly, love like Christ, forgive like the Father, comfort others like the Spirit, preach the truth like them all, make your life stink like this God and his gospel.

So it's all over you and it's all over the places you go. All around you, there are either people celebrating the triumph, those who are being saved, or those who are despairing at their defeat, those who are perishing.

Our place in their midst, our role in this parade through the city, is to smell like Christ, to smell like Christ to them all, living or dying, to smell like Christ in our actions, and in our words.

Do people smell Christ on you? Or do they smell sin? Do they smell worldliness, or godliness?

I wish I smelled more like Christ. I wish I was more like him. So often I am focused on showing myself off, but the world around me doesn't need Justin, it needs Jesus.

[29 : 24] Our place is as captives and incense in the midst of God's triumph, so we are to fill our spaces with him, and to do so with the humility of those who were once enemies.

Part three, the response. In the triumph, you have the victor, those with him, and those in the city who hear of the parade.

In the Christian life, you have the victory of God and his gospel, you have the believers led by him, and you have those who hear of this victory.

Now it's time to consider that last group, those who hear and how they respond. There are two responses to the triumph to this victory parade.

you can join in to the celebration, or you can stay away. Which will you choose? Will you join in celebrating God's victory over sin on the cross?

[30 : 39] Will you celebrate with Christ, or will you further dig in your trenches against his armies and his victory? victory. The victory has been won, and you have a chance to choose a side.

And it's all in how you respond to the aroma of Christ wafting out before you as the parade goes by. Look at verse 16.

To the one, we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other, the aroma of life leading to life. To some of you, the gospel will stink.

To some of you, you hear the truths of God, and you scoff at them, and your heart is hardened against them. If you scoff at this good news, you will push yourself closer to death and hell.

If this stinks to you, be scared. because it is an aroma of death leading to death, turn before it's too late.

[31 : 57] But if you're here, and by God's grace, you've been able to smell some of Christ in our midst, and you find that it has a pleasant aroma to you, that these things are sweet.

I love when someone's cooking, bacon's the best for this. You're in the other room, and that's where the good stuff is.

I want to be over there. I can't wait to have some of that. if Christ is that pleasant aroma to you, if you are realizing that there's something here that's desirable in Jesus, follow it, draw closer, join the celebration, and join the king's victory.

repent and believe in Christ. This verse about the response to the aroma of Christ has some important truths for believers to take away as well.

So, takeaway number five, you do not control the response. You cannot choose how people respond to what you say.

[33 : 26] You cannot make people respond one way or another. Notice that in verse 15, our place is laid out to smell like Christ, and then in verse 16, we have no say in the matter to some that's going to be pleasing and to others that's going to be terrible.

Have you ever smelled a dead body or a dead thing? It does not smell good. People aren't drawn near to it. Know that some people will smell Christ on you and be disgusted by it.

So, don't base what you do on how people respond. You're not only doing the right thing if you get positive responses. Do you think that if you speak about Jesus in the perfect way, that it will change someone's mind?

God will work whether it's life or death in that person's heart.

Consider how those who met Jesus himself responded. Did everyone who met him rejoice? No.

Some even plotted his death and mocked him and spit in his face.

[34 : 49] No one smells like Jesus more than Jesus does. No one's a better representation than the man himself. He prays on the cross, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

He shows his love and does that stop them from continuing? No. Yet even later they would go on to stab him or to mock him while he hangs up there for sinners.

Expect people to hate you for smelling like Jesus and for saying the things that he said. If that never happens, you're probably doing something wrong.

That shouldn't be the only response and we're not here to provoke animosity. But some people hate the light and even kindness will send them away.

But also expect people to hear about Jesus from you and to repent and trust in him. Expect that if you're an aroma of Christ that it will lead some to life.

[36 : 01] And be encouraged to go out and preach and be that aroma because it will actually lead some people to the Savior. And in everything, strive to be like the Savior.

To take away number six, this is too much for us. Paul looking at God and how he uses our weakness for his glory and Paul looking at our place for some of us even leading to death and looking at our place in either guiding others to like through our Christ likeness sending others towards death and sending others towards life.

And he marvels at how grand the task we're given is. Matters of life and death are in your hands.

They're in Paul's hands and he says in verse 16, who is sufficient for these things?

Who is enough to fill such a role? First, it is too much for us to accomplish. We are too weak to perfectly reflect Christ.

We are too weak to save anyone. We are too little and too small to make a difference. So let us pray to God and seek the Spirit that we might find strength to do the impossible.

[37 : 38] For with man it is impossible, but with God it is possible. And the second thing is, it is too much for us because it is more honor than we deserve.

Sometimes I'm asked to weigh in at work on matters that I have very little qualification to talk about. Or sometimes people come to me and they ask for advice on what's going on in their life and I'm like, who am I that I should have a position to say anything on this?

It's more honor than I've merited with my skills and my time. And this is the same thing with the calling to be the aroma of Christ, an aroma that might lead to death or lead to life for others. It is more honorable than we deserve. We are wrapped up in weighty things, things of deep significance. We are wrapped up in things that will decide people's eternities.

Psalm 139 verse 6, such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high and I cannot attain it. Takeaway number 6, these things are too wonderful for us or too much for us.

[39 : 09] In closing, I just want to say the words of Paul. Thanks be to God. He thanks God for this incredible circumstance.

thanks be to God who leads us as captives in his victory parade for his glory and in all of these things works through us and our weaknesses, even to bring sinners to life and repentance. And through us, despite our weaknesses and our shortcomings, spreads his knowledge and glory in every place. Amen.

