

# Stronger with You Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Are you known by your fragrance? Do you know the human fragrance market is worth a staggering 7.5 billion in the UK alone? The fact is that a fragrance is one they say of one of the most difficult commodities to market. That's why the fragrance advertisers sell us a lifestyle.

You know it's like wearing a designer label Chanel, Gucci, Armani. That's maybe why some of those names sponsor and buy into the fragrance market. It's like the advert at the beginning or the link that you might have seen at the the beginning of this service today for Hugo Boss. It invites you into an image and an identity. Success without integrity means nothing it says. Integrity is how you can behave when there is nothing to be gained. We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give. This all sounds very good doesn't it? Choose to strive for more for better every hour of every day. Be the man of today. Boss bottled. It sounds as though someone has written a new scripture to sell us a fragrance. They're certainly trying to sell us a better lifestyle. Integrity, behaviour, making a life by what you give. Choose to be better every hour of the day. Who wouldn't want that? Smells good. If only just by throwing on a fragrance it could change our character and attitude that easily. Perhaps that's what Paul is getting at. You know the aroma of Christ is being like Jesus.

It changes our character. It draws people's attention. You know ask any parent whose child suddenly discovers, certainly with boys, once they discover links, my goodness, it just absolutely chokes the household. It really changes the aroma of life. And fragrance and aroma is powerful. That's what Paul is talking about. It's powerful. I've known children who like to go to sleep cuddling one of their parents' jumpers because it smells of them. It's comforting. Likewise for those who are bereaved. A scarf or a jumper of a loved one can bring strong memories.

And our reading this morning, Paul talks about us as Christians being an aroma. William Barclay in his commentary on this scripture says that Paul draws heavily on the imagery that he would have seen in victorious processions that many would have witnessed where a victorious army marches back into their city with large incense-filled censers that are being swung in perfume, fills the air. For the victorious army, it was life.

[ 3 : 18 ] Yet for the large group of prisoners seized in the conflict and being paraded in chains as trophies of war, the smell meant an imminent execution.

As Paul says, 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. Are we doing that? Are we spreading the aroma of the knowledge of him, of Jesus everywhere? And what's that?

What's the fragrance and aroma of Jesus? You know, you certainly couldn't bottle it. And if we could, we couldn't sell it for profit. That's not our mission to profit ourselves. It's all for the kingdom. As Paul says, for we are to God, the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

[ 4 : 22 ] It's true. How do people see us as a people of God? Victorious, victorious in the hope that we have in Jesus. As triumphant as people who have much to share and celebrate in the power of the cross?

Or do they see us as slaves marching slowly to death, defeated by the enemy? You know, what fragrance are we to people? In the people that we seek to reach every day, the people that we mix with, that live alongside us in our lives.

I've been reading a book by Pete Hughes called All Things New. It's very apt for the time in which we are living at the moment, where the church and the national church finds itself, and the exciting opportunities we have to respond to our communities that will soon be looking to reshaping their

lives, many in a new way, not wanting or unable to return to the old ways, but asking, what do we do with this life now and make the most of it?

I remember many, many years ago, my first time I stepped into the fragrance section at Harrods. Oh gosh, it was an assault on the senses.

Wherever you looked, there was a person ready and waiting to introduce you to their fragrance. Are we there in that marketplace?

[ 5 : 57 ] Are we ready to introduce everyone who we meet to the aroma and fragrance of Jesus? Are we good ambassadors? Are we ready? Are we eager?

Are we willing to share the good news that he won on the cross for all people? Pete Hughes, in his book, says, the story you live in is the story you live out.

So true, isn't it? The story you live in is the story you live out. Our vision and mission for us at Christchurch, you and me, is clear. As we travel through Lent and then celebrate on Easter Day as a people who are saved through the resurrection of Jesus, how do we share that life-giving fragrance through the life and mission of our church, you and me?

Do you know the vision and mission of Christchurch? It's on the website. Please check it out. Learn it. Digest it. Live it. It defines our calling.

What part do you play or want to play in what God is asking of us in this small but important corner of his kingdom?

[ 7 : 12 ] Have we bought in financially? Have we bought in spiritually? Have we bought in wholeheartedly to all the things that God has and continues to ask of us as we share the good news of Jesus, that life-giving, life-saving message that brings life in all its fullness?

In the last 12 months, all of us have had time to reflect on our Christian life and discipleship and how we lived that out.

For times, it was reflected through acts of giving, kindness and generosity. For many, it was through pain and exhaustion and struggle. Unlike so many, we don't peddle the word of God for profit.

On the contrary, in Christ we speak about God with sincerity as those who have been sent by God. Talking of fragrance, at Christmas my daughter bought me a fragrance.

It's called Stronger With You. It's by Emperor Marnie, very posh. I pray that the fragrance and aroma of Christ in us and through us brings us and others into being stronger with you, Jesus.

[ 8 : 37 ] Maybe that's our prayer. May the fragrance of you, Lord, make us stronger with you. We're strong in hope, strong in joy, confidence, faith, generosity and love and ready to reach afresh to the communities we are called to serve.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we are stronger with you and through you in the power of your Holy Spirit.

May the aroma of you stretch out across this town and across our nation. May people be drawn to us, we pray.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Amen. Amen.