

Imperfect Church - Perfect Saviour (6)

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- [0 : 0 0] So, we'll turn then to verses, mainly verses 14 to 16. And this is sort of, I'm trying to dovetail this into the following, what Colin has been doing, a perfect saviour, imperfect church.
- But I'm taking the line here that Christ always leads his witnesses to triumph and be a sweet fragrance to others.
- And I think this is a wonderful teaching in itself because we can easily forget the reality of it. And you might say, if you're absolutely straight as an arrow, we often forget this very thing.
- We don't think every day, right, I've got to be a sweet fragrance of Christ to other people. And yet we should.
- We should be looking for opportunity. The followers of Jesus, and I include myself in this, too often we forget that this is our business.
- [1 : 2 4] And Paul is here helping us to remember it by this very lovely and vivid imagery that we'll be looking at as we go along. And it's written here, he leads us in triumphal procession.
- That is Christ. And if we could grasp it and keep that before us every day, what a difference would make in our own spiritual lives.
- And I would like to think what a difference would make to other people, too. And so what we have here is Paul, in a way, is passing on what he learned for himself.
- And because he had it pretty hard, to say the least. And what happens is if we're not thinking along these lines, then when difficulties come to us and uncertainty, and we seem to be figuratively at sea in a storm, what happens is we slacken our pace.
- And we are not as strong in trusting the Lord for us to go forward. And here Paul helps us, as indeed he helped himself to under God, to refocus on Christ.
- [2 : 5 4] And to refocus on him not as the shepherd, although he's all of that, but also the leader. Now you'll know from your Bible background, the wonderful thing about the good shepherd, Jesus, is he didn't lead them from behind.
- He led them from the front. And he leads us still. Although we see him not, yet under his spirit we are led by him.
- And sometimes that is not straightforward. It can be difficult for us. Because when he's our leader, he comes first.
- Absolutely must be first. And yet you know, and I know, that our own interests, and I was really interested that the minister was touching this in the morning, because I didn't know he was going to speak on this, and he didn't know what I was going to speak on either.
- But he was just saying that no amount of standing, be it in the community, be it in our profession, be it in our learning, will do.
- [4 : 1 7] What we need is to be led by Christ. And that's what Paul is saying here. He leads, but thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

He leads us in the path of life. And in the context here of 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us how, actually how anxious he was.

He was in a bit of a quandary. I wonder, did you spot in the reading in Acts 16, and the reading that we had here, that he says, verse 12, when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened to me for the Lord, my spirit was not at rest.

Actually, what he told us in Acts 16, is he had a vision in the night, which tells us he was really in a quandary. He didn't know what to do for the best.

And there are times in our experience when that's the way it is. And we're tempted to look at this, maybe not with the mind of Christ in mind, but we look at things maybe, now what will be best here for me, rather than what does the Lord want me to do in this?

[5 : 51] And, of course, he was perplexed too, you see, about the state of the Corinthian church. Campbell was doing something the other week there on the Corinthian church, and it was pretty much in a mess.

And Paul had to rebuke them. They were getting caught up in the pseudo-apostles that had crept in, or they were being carried along by worldly philosophies.

And they were being taken away from Christ. And Paul says here in verse 13, he was restless, so he left through us and went to Macedonia looking for news from Titus.

And we read in the passage that Paul was calmed in the spirit by refocusing on Christ. And 14 to 16 here is about that very thing.

It's about him for us. I want us to think just on three things briefly, and just to draw some lessons.

[7 : 11] He says, first of all, he says, God be thanked for a witness led by Christ. And note, I think that's succinctly what it's about.

Thank God for our witness as a witness led by Christ. If it's not led by Christ, something's wrong.

Paul tells us in verse 12 there, when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even although a door was opened to me by the Lord, my spirit had no rest.

He wasn't comfortable in staying. That's surprising in a way. But then when he had the vision in the night that we read about in Acts, he was sure the Lord had focused his mind on the Macedonian call.

And that's the way he headed. As a true apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, he had experienced many open doors.

[8 : 21] And that's why he needed a bit more from the Lord. And you find in Acts 18, I think it's verse 9, that he was told when he got to Corinth, Paul, don't be afraid to speak.

For I am with you, and it says, leading, because I have many people in this city.

And in a way, I'll say it's good to know, inverted commas, that somebody like the apostle Paul was like that.

He had his uncertainty, he had his anxieties, he was in quandaries, and he needed the Lord to give him clarity on how to go forward.

And he did when he went to Corinth. And so, the imagery that's used here, we'll look at this a bit more shortly, but the imagery is of, some of you will know this, but it will be a repetition.

[9 : 31] The imagery is of the Roman generals when they had victory, and they came back to the city they were based in.

And they came back, the general up front on his horse, the captives in the middle and the soldiers behind. And they were marching in triumphal procession.

And what Paul is showing us here is better by far to have Christ leading us.

As willing volunteers, these poor captives were forced into, they had no escape from it. The general and his inner circle were in front, and then the main soldier troop behind.

But we have been made willing volunteers. Christ leads us, he doesn't force us. He leads us, having made us willing.

[10 : 38] Remember in Psalm 110, your people shall be willing in the day of your power. Psalm 110, verse 3 it is.

And it's good for us to remember that, that when we become followers of Jesus, he has enabled us by his spirit to commit, to be willing.

You know as well as I do, that one of the great problems in the human heart is lack of will to do what the Lord says to do. And here we have Paul telling us that he, the imagery of Jesus leading his people is about them becoming willing volunteers in the day of his power.

And it's good for us to remember that, some of you will know lines from this we hymn. We are to rejoice in this, that he has made us his own.

His is the will that made the difference in our lives. He made us willing. And it was love, his love that sought us.

[12 : 03] It was his blood that bought us. And it was his grace that led us into the fold. And that's important in this.

Although he's using, Paul's using the imagery by the spirit. There's a distinction here to be made. That that is a, in a way, poor image compared with what Christ does.

And Christ saved us. And he saved us to serve him. And to be his witnesses, both to Jew and Gentile, as we heard Colin speaking about this morning.

Along the way of his sermon. And he who is the leader expects us to be willing to be led.

And that's important. Because, you know, if we think about our own tendencies to be stubborn and to want our own way.

[13 : 08] Then you can see that Christ wants us to be willing to be led in the way that he maps out for us.

And in the midst of life's trials and difficulties. Still to be led by him. And that's important to us.

But God, he says, be thanked for a witness led by Christ. Second thing we want to think about, just briefly, is what Christ's witnesses become.

And in short, we're told, those whose lives diffuse a sweet fragrance of Christ to others.

I wonder if you're like me and you can remember godly people a very long time ago in your experience. There's just something about them. You didn't have.

[14 : 13] I remember this when I was going to church. When I was made to go to church. And there was just something attractive about them.

And that's the word, isn't it? There was a fragrance about them. There was just that sweetness about them. And this is what Paul is talking about.

This is what Christ's witnesses become. They diffuse this sweet fragrance. And we can experience it.

And one looks back with great thankfulness. Could rattle off names I remember from my boyhood, yes, and very early teens. And that's lovely.

That that can happen to us. That we can go back. And we're remembering, yeah, that was the fragrance that Paul's talking about here. And this imagery that's before us here is of the general and his inner circle at the front.

[15 : 26] The captives in the middle and the soldiers at the back. But the sweet fragrance comes from the fact that it was customary that some people carried incense burners.

And they were fragrant. And they put the incense, the fragrant incense, on the petals. And then they threw it all at the general and at the soldiers as they were passing by.

And this is the imagery that Paul is using here. And Paul says here, Christ's witnesses are to be a sweet aroma of Christ.

To those not in the faith. As well as to those who are in the faith. Paul himself is an outstanding example of this.

Colin and I were speaking about Paul, really, and the sufferings he had for the sake of the gospel and for Christ.

[16 : 37] We were speaking about this just recently. And, you know, for example, when he said, I count all things but loss for Christ.

What a thing to say. Take it to yourself. You know, he was giving up everything for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes when we maybe worry about or are concerned to have a property, a house. Paul never had one.

He rented. You know, because he couldn't afford it. He gave up so much for the Savior.

And he didn't grudge doing that. And this is now what Colin and I were talking about. 2 Corinthians 11 from verse 21.

[17 : 41] Paul could have boasted in his learning. In his linguistic ability as well. But he didn't. He was totally and utterly committed.

That everything he did was focused in and around Christ. And that's why there was a fragrance in the apostle Paul too.

You know, he was ready to give up everything. And the more you read Paul. Actually, 2 Corinthians is Paul's most personal letter.

You get in under the skin of Paul in 2 Corinthians. You just get to know him better. And it's this whole willingness to be led by Christ, to give up everything for Christ.

I remember years ago when I was giving time to a mission to Jewish people. I used to go down some of the mission halls because they supported.

[18 : 56] I suppose they're thin on the ground now. I don't know. But they were going well back in the mid-90s. And one of their favorite choruses, and I'm using a bit of it.

All to Jesus I surrender. All to him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him in his presence.

Daily live. And then, of course, the chorus went on. I surrender all. I'm tempted to ask you, do you know it? I surrender all. And all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

And we shouldn't be afraid not only to say it but to experience it, to say it's true of us. Because this is what it's all about. We are led by him.

And it's all too easy, you see. And again, strangely enough, Colin was talking about this in the sermon. It's all too easy to focus on ourselves.

[20 : 10] What we have achieved. What is our standing. What is our means. How we're rated in the community and the church. It's all too easy to think like that.

But that's not what Paul is saying here. He made no account of himself. As indeed our Savior did. He wanted to win people to Christ.

And that fragrance was certainly upon him. And we want to say to the Lord, I need to know more of this. I need to be prepared to get real, if you like.

And to be more focused on Christ is all and in all. So that our witness will be a sweet fragrance.

Both to the people of God and others too. And that's where we finish. The outcome of the fragrance of the witness.

[21 : 17] The outcome of it. And this is important too. We notice that Paul says it's a sweet fragrance. A sweet aroma of Christ.

Godward. Verse 15. For we are the aroma of Christ to God in the first place. Among those who are being saved. And among those who are perishing.

That's almost startling. What Paul says there. Yes, I can understand.

That we're a sweet fragrance to one another. Who love Christ and know Christ. But he's saying. And to those who are perishing. And what we have here.

Is. A real. Concern. About the outcome. Of our witness. As a sweet fragrance to other people.

[22 : 22] They may have heard us. Many's a time. There's always another time. As long as there's a breath in them. And that's important. You see. We need to remind them.

Of. What he has done. And. We need to remind ourselves too. As I'm sure we. In a good measure do. The Savior.

The Savior bore. The wrath. And curse of God. For us. On the cross. And. And sealed. Our pardon. With his blood. And that witness.

And that witness. And that witness. Comes through. And that should be. Through. In our experience. We should feel it. We shouldn't just take it as heat knowledge.

We should take it as heart knowledge. We should. Feel moved by it. And if we're not. Feeling moved by it. Then. Something. Has just.

[23 : 20] Gone off. The true. How. We communicate. This witness. Of course. Obviously. You have the preached word. You have the written word.

You have Bible studies. As we're having. A missionary witness. And. The witness. Of Christians. Sharing. Their faith.

With the unconverted. And remember. Regardless. Of the outcome. We are. A sweet.

Fragrance. Of Christ. Yes. Godward. But manward. As well. Because. For a start. We're making.

Known. Christ. To people. Because. Christ. Made himself. Known. To us. There's something. Altogether. Fitting. About that.

[24 : 18] We're. Talking to people. Very often. Who are. Heading. Down. Broadway. To hell. And they're. Heedless. Of it. They have.

No. Sense. Of danger. Actually. This is. A true. Thing. I can. Remember. This. Exactly. Myself. We had.

A good. Minister. In my. Home. Village. The. County. Of Sutherland. Good. I'm. I'm. I'm. Saying. He was. Good. Because. I found out. Later.

He was. Good. But. When I was. Listening. To him. At funerals. He used. To take. Opportunity. At funerals. When he had. A. Gathering. Of. Fellas. Like. Me.

Who. Were. Utterly. Careless. About. What. He did. And. What. The. Gospel. Was. And. I remember. One. Day. Saying.

[25 : 14] To. A colleague. Of mine. A work. Colleague. He was. Really. Hitting. Us. With. Hell. And. I. Said. To him. I wish. He would. Shut up. And.

Go away. We've. Hard enough. And. That's. The way. Multitudes. Are. They. Hear. It. They. Don't. Like. It.

Keep. It. From. Me. But. You. See. You. Never. Know. Otherwise. I wouldn't. Be. Here. You. Never.

Know. The moment. The Lord. Works. The outcome. Is. His. The future.

About that person. You witness. To. Is not. Used to see. You may. Later on. See it. But you're not. Sharing. The truth. Because.

[26 : 09] You want. An instant. Response. That very. Seldom. Happens. And. I discovered. I discovered. Of course. About that minister. He was a very faithful minister.

That's why he was. That's why he was saying. What he was saying. Like it or not. From us. He was a faithful minister. He was a sweet.

Fragrance. To the Lord's people. And to us. The rest of us. Who were there. At that occasion. Many another occasion. Too. He was.

Doing. What he. The Lord. Called him. To do. And of course. In the fullness. Of time. The Lord. Worked in me. And. The rest.

In a sense. Is history. But I'm using it. As an illustration. Because. I was. Diametrically. Opposed. To what he was saying. And he knew. I needed to hear it.

[27 : 07] So did the rest. We couldn't keep our heads down. We couldn't walk away. From the funeral gathering. So we were kind of a captive audience. But.

The outcome. Was the Lord's. To see to. Not ours. And. Jesus came. To save.

And the fragrance. Of the witness. Of the Lord's people. To one another. And to the unsaved. Is our business.

To engage in. The outcome. Is his business. And we pray. That he will do. His business. And that what we're doing.

Might be blessed. And. And you see. In. In a real sense. As we close.

[28 : 06] It is true. It is true. It is sadly true. And I've seen it. I've looked. Into the eyes. Of people. Who were dying.

And I knew them. And I witnessed. To them. And I prayed for them. And wept for them. And they were dying. Without Christ.

Without a hope. And that's not. An easy thing. To have to say. It's.

A true thing. But. They. Stubbornly. Rejected. The terms of peace. With God. And. One had to say.

Then. And say it now. With a heavy heart. They died. The death. That leads. To eternal death.

[29 : 02] And. What Paul is saying. Here is. We were still. A fragrance. Even to them. He says. A fragrance. Of life.

Into life. And a fragrance. Of death. Into death. To those. Who believe. Not. And. In a way. We're not to let.

We're not to let. The outcome. Or the potential outcome. Distract us. From doing. What's right. It's.

It's. It's very difficult. For example. To talk to family members. Who are not converted. Because. They know. Where you're coming from. And they're. They're getting into their bunker.

In there. And. And. They. They will distract you. If you've done. If you've witnessed a lot. You'll know this is absolutely true.

[29 : 57] The. Talk about. The. The skill. An unconverted. Person has. In deflecting you. From. What they know is coming.

It's almost uncanny. But. Our business. Is to take. On board. What Paul is saying here. And to.

Be. A fragrance. Of Christ. Towards. God. Towards. His people. And. Towards. Those.

Who are unsaved. And. We are. We will be blessed. In the doing. It's our business. Whether it's. A family member. Whether it's a work colleague.

Whether they're retired or not. They were one time a colleague. Whether it's. People you meet. In. The supermarket. Or somewhere like that. If the opportunity comes up.

[30 : 54] It's our business. To be in there. And. Let us see. What Paul is saying here. We don't want to end up.

With a guilty silence. As. Some poor soul. Leaves this world. And say. Oh well. They weren't elect. That's a horrid. Approach.

Our business. Is to do our utmost. While there's life in them. And understanding. And to be a fragrance. Of Christ.

To them. Amen.