

2 Corinthians 1:8-2-The Fragrance of Christ

Good morning and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 1?

SHOW PIC If you've ever ridden in a car with a brand new driver who's just learning, you know the feeling of speeding ahead, only to come to a screeching stop, just to lurch ahead, to stop again. Do you know what I'm talking about? **CLOSE PIC**

I bring this up because this sudden speeding up and slowing down is a good illustration of the pattern we'll be taking in 2nd Corinthians.

Last week we kinda crawled ahead in our study as we only made it through the first 7 verses of chapter 1, as we saw how suffering prepares us to comfort others.

But this morning we're gonna pick up speed, hit the pedal to the floor as we begin in verse 8 of chapter 1, and go through and finish all of chapter 2 as well as it all ties in together.

The title of this mornings message is The Fragrance of Christ
Let's pray

If you've ever read an insurance policy, not that I recommend it unless you're having a hard time sleeping. But if you've read one you've likely seen the phrase "an act of God". This refers to monumental disasters such as floods and earthquakes. But that's not really accurate. These are acts of Satan, who was given permission by mankind in the garden of Eden to wreak havoc upon the earth

Remember when the storm came upon the ships on the sea of galilee, all the boats went through the storm. The difference for the apostles was that they had Jesus with them.

And this is what Paul demonstrates for the Corinthians. Yes he'd been through the horrendous suffering and difficulties the likes we probably can't fathom, but God is faithful.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

Consider this, the great Apostle Paul, a hero of the faith, suffered from depression, and he didn't try to cover it up. He wasn't ashamed of his weakness. In fact, he wants to be sure the Corinthians know it can happen!

9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, Whatever this "sentence of death was..." Paul had reached the absolute end of himself. He was in dire straights
And verse 9 tells us the dark days Paul endured had a purpose: They caused Paul to rely solely on God.

Like Paul, the tendency for most of us is to try to solve our problems with our own strength and ingenuity. And when we face those problems with which we cannot solve, how often we end up frustrated.

But in reality, it's a freeing and powerful day when we finally come to the end of ourselves and realize, "I don't need to go to another

seminar or read some new hit book; I don't need to enroll in another program or come up with another creative idea. All I need is You, Lord. I'm going to cling to You. I'm going to depend on You." Because He's the only one that can raise the dead.

10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does[fn] deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, If on the cross, Jesus won for us such a great victory over death, why would we think He would watch us flounder in this life? "He will still deliver us..." God is faithful to the finish

God has delivered us in the past. He delivers us in the present. He will deliver us in the future.

I believe one of the biggest obstacles in our spiritual growth is our tendency to forget how the Lord sees us through all the times we think things could never work out.

V 10 reminds us that "because God has delivered us," He will deliver us."

11 you also helping together in prayer for us, Pause here- Paul tells the Corinthian church their prayers were part of the process God used to deliver them.

What a wonderful reminder of the power of prayer!

Let's read all of verse 11

11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our[fn] behalf for the gift granted to us through many. **SHOW PIC** The Greek terminology is describing a

picture of several people pulling together as a team to lift a heavy object. **CLOSE PIC** Paul reminds the Corinthians, and us, that we also work together in prayer.

Life is full of objects too heavy to lift, obstacles too stuck to move, and mountains too high to climb on our own! But by praying together we can join forces and overcome.

Now starting in verse 12, Paul's focus will shift to defending himself. It makes us wonder-why does he spend so much time doing this?

We'll think of the damage rumors can have in a church. Whole churches and ministries can be taken down by just one strategically placed rumor, because when it comes to christian ministry, everything depends on the integrity of the messenger.

Of all the trials we face in our christian life, few are more devastating than unfounded statements made against us, especially when rumors are crafted behind our backs with no opportunity to clear the air or defend ourselves.

Paul was the recipient of several of these character attacks from the false teachers lurking in the shadows at Corinth, who were spreading fake news in order to make disciples of themselves. This is what the rest of chapter 1 on into chapter 2 deals with, and this is where our pace will pick up...

12 For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly

sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. Paul is willing to give a defense of himself because his conscience is clear, he says he acted "in simplicity and godly sincerity."

Tragically, some Christians today serve God from a guilty conscience. They try to serve God in order to make up for not being what they think they ought to be, or doing what they're not supposed to do. We need to serve God from a clean conscience.

13 For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end Apparently, Paul had been accused of duplicity - of not saying what he meant... They said Paul was not a man of his word.

14 (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus. Despite all the problems in Corinth, Paul still loved them and rejoiced over them!

So often, we get stuck on the flaws we see in others. Paul didn't. Make no mistake he wasn't afraid to call out sin, but Paul saw people positionally in Christ. This is why he could say even to the Corinthians, "You are our rejoicing, a treasure to us."

Here's the uncomfortable question that I was forced to answer this week-do I focus on the flaws in people, or their position in Christ?

15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— 16 to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Paul had written in 1 Corinthians 16 of his plan to visit Corinth, but he qualified it, if the Lord permits."

Paul made plans. There's nothing wrong with a Christian planning- but as we plan, we must be open to God's course corrections.

Like a GPS, God sometimes wants to recalibrate our paths. This is what happened to Paul. Though he wanted to visit Corinth en route to Macedonia, God redirected him.

And Paul's critics used these change of plans against him. They said Paul couldn't be trusted. They used his flexibility to moves of the HS to question his credibility.

17 Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? 18 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. " It wasn't that he couldn't make up his mind! Paul wasn't the kinda guy who said one thing one day, and the opposite thing the next day. His yes was yes, and his no was no! And Paul points to his own preaching as proof!

19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. There was never a hesitancy in Paul's voice. He never spoke with hesitancy, or a lack of clarity in his message. Paul was firm in the truths that he preached.

20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. In the old covenant, we read over and over again, “If you do this, then you will be blessed.” But in Christ Jesus and the new covenant, it’s not a matter of “if and then” but “yes and Amen!” Isn’t God’s grace wonderful?

21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Notice the trinity, or the Godhead mentioned here. God the Father, the Son and the HS all playing a part.

Here Paul draws on a familiar scene that his audience was intimately familiar with. A waxed seal on a scroll was its possessor’s proof of ownership. And in a similar way the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is God’s seal - it’s His proof-of-purchase! The HS proves we belong to God!

23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Paul was happy he didn’t visit Corinth when he planned to because he was upset with their immaturity. If he had visited when he wanted, it would’ve been an unpleasant visit and Paul probably would’ve been too harsh with them.

24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. Paul would never bully or dominate other believers. Jesus is Lord of His Church, not Paul or anyone else.

There are many people, including many pastors today that want to have dominion over the people. "You better not go to another fellowship, or don't you dare do this or that." But there's freedom and liberty in Christ!

Paul had no intention of being a burden on the Corinthian congregation. Rather, his goal was to be a blessing to them.

Chapter 2 continues this thought...

1 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. 2 For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

Paul knew that a face to face, confrontational visit would not be good for him or the Corinthians. The constant conflict could really damage his relationship with them.

It seems that Paul thought it best to give the Corinthian Christians a little room, give them space to repent and get their act together. He didn't want to rebuke and admonish them all the time. There's great wisdom in this.

3 And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. Paul wisely understood that considering all the circumstances, a letter was better than a personal visit. A letter could show his heart, without allowing his emotion to overcome him.

Paul describes his emotions in verse 4...

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you. Paul didn't relish or take great joy in calling out the Corinthian Christians sin. It was hard for him to do it, and he did it with many tears. But he was compelled to do it out of love.

But truth is that it's hard to receive correction isn't it? Often times our first reaction when receiving correction is for us to think a person is at the very least against us, and at the worst an enemy.

But usually others bring correction because they love us, just like Paul loved the Corinthian Christians. His goal was not to grieve them, but to love them.

Now we're about to take a small detour, as Paul goes from defending himself, to defending another believer—look carefully...5-7

5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. What is Paul talking about?

Well to understand what's happening we have to go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 5, so would you please turn in your bibles there.

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named[fn] among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! Paul expresses his shock—a young man in the church was having sex with his stepmom. **SHOW PIC** This was something you'd see on Jerry Springer, not at church. And Paul was appalled... **CLOSE PIC** Even as wicked and sinful as the culture of Corinth was, the entire city was abuzz about the member of the Corinthian church who was living in immorality with his stepmother.

Even today, the world loves to see Christians involved in immorality don't they? They lick their chops when Christians become entangled in some salacious sin because it eases their conscience and justifies their own immoral lifestyle.

Because of the effect a Christian's fall has on those around them, one of Satan's favorite tactics is to get Christians involved in immorality. Satan runs the same plays over and over again because they're so effective.

Tragically, lots of Christians think they are immune from falling into sexual immorality. **1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. Paul's not only upset about this man's despicable sin, he's grieved at the church's response to the sin.

The Corinthian Christian's weren't only tolerating this awful immorality, they were proud of their tolerance of it!

You can almost hear the Corinthians boast, 'Jesus said judge not lest you be judged! Far be it from us to tell someone else what's right and wrong. We teach grace!'

And this is the mistaken attitude of many Christians in America today.

3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ” Notice, Paul isn’t afraid of judging! And he never spoke to this fellow personally - or heard this mans heart. Without even listening to the man’s rationalization for his sin, Paul calls the man out on the carpet.

This man was clearly and willfully engaged in sin. It wasn’t an issue about culture or personal preference. This is not a gray matter. God is clear here about His will regarding sexual sin, so Paul is emphatic.

Like you, I can hear the critic’s: ‘hey Jesus said not to judge.’

And that is right. Where the Bible already judges a sin; then our condemnation of it, is not our judgment, but God’s judgment.

Paul isn’t afraid to take a stand where God takes a stand, and to speak up where God has clearly spoken.

Today’s church should follow Paul’s example. We weaken our witness when we tolerate immorality.

And here in 1 Cor Paul is about to tell the Corinthians to do something that is never easy.

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.[fn]

Now its critical to remember that what’s taking place here isn’t a struggling believer trying to straighten out their life and get victory over sin. We help the person who wants to overcome.

Rather, this was a Christian who has deliberately ignored God's commandments and is living in open rebellion and flaunting their defiance. That type of attitude isn't to be allowed in the church.

You've heard of the right hand of fellowship, but there's also the left foot of disfellowship. This is speaking of church discipline.

Church discipline is the removing of a non repentant believer from a fellowship, in order for them to see the error of their ways, repent, and return to fellowship.

But notice the goal at each stage of the discipline process is to bring the unrepentant Christian to repentance. Even when he's kicked out of God's family, it's said in verse 5 he's being "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."

The idea is to let them taste the full consequences of their rebellion - without the safety net of the Christian community. Hopefully, that'll convince him or her of the error of their ways. The point of it all is repentance!

When a person is part of a church certain protections are inherent. He or she is surrounded by support, encouragement, and resources. To a degree the church is sheltering that person from the magnitude of his sin.

Church discipline is letting them learn the hard way how much they need to humble themselves and submit to God's way.

The Church always does a disservice when we keep a rebellious person from reaping the full brunt of what they sow.

We studied this more in depth a few months ago...

So in 1st Corinthians 5-Paul exhorted them to expel this sinning brother. Now in 2 Corinthians 2, apparently, that man received this punishment and afterward he repented. But there was a problem. The Corinthian Christians wouldn't receive him back!

Now, Paul must tell the Corinthian Christians to restore the repentant man.

2 Cor 2-6-8

6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. Their harsh stance towards this man had a real danger: By withholding restoration and forgiveness from the man they risked ruining him, causing him to be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Since the man responded to the correction and repented, it was time for reconciliation! They needed to reaffirm their love to him.

9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Paul was clear about the discipline needed in 1 Corinthians 5, and the Corinthian Christians met the test by doing what Paul said to do. Now he puts them to the test again, instructing them to show love to the repentant brother.

10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one^[fn] for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. Paul was so concerned about this situation because Satan looks to take advantage of our mistakes, especially when it comes to the treatment of others.

The phrase 'take advantage' is the ancient Greek word *pleonekteo*, and is used only four other times in the New

Testament. And each time it has the idea of cheating someone out of something that belongs to them.

When we are ignorant of Satan's strategies, he is able to take things from us that belong to us in Jesus, things like peace, joy, fellowship, and the freedom that comes from forgiveness.

12-13

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 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. A wonderful opportunity for ministry was opened to Paul in Troas. Yet because Titus failed to meet him there with news of how the church at Corinth was doing, Paul left Troas to find Titus.

Here, we see an interesting side of Paul not often seen in other places. That is, he left a wide-open door in Troas because he cared about one man, Titus, who was to inform him about an individual church—the church at Corinth.

14 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. Why was Paul so easily able to praise God even in hard times? Because trials don't make or break a person—they simply reveal the contents of their heart.

This explains why Paul and Silas could sing in prison **Acts 16:24**
Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

They weren't praising God in order that He might set them free, for they had no idea their praise would open their prison door. Paul's praise in prison as well as here in this Epistle was simply the overflow of the praise already in his heart.

Look at the beginning of 14

14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph... The Greek word translated "triumph" is linked to the Roman triumphal march. When a Roman general went into battle and secured new territory for Rome, upon his return, he rode in a chariot, followed by his soldiers marching in all of their glory.

Behind the soldiers were the men who had been taken captive. Alongside the procession, priests would walk, swinging their incense pots to create a sweet smell of victory as the entire procession made its way through the main thoroughfare to the Circus Maximus, where, for the entertainment of the crowd, the captives would do battle against wild beasts.

So, too, we are in a victory march as well. General Jesus, our Leader, our King left His empire in heaven, and conquered the enemy on a hill called Calvary.

15-16

15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? To the enemies of the Cross, our praise and our witness, and our testimony all stink. But to those who are headed for heaven, the aroma is wonderful.

At the end of verse 16 Paul when Paul thinks of the greatness of God's plan, he wonders who is sufficient to march behind Jesus, to carry the fragrance of Him, to be used by Him? Paul will answer this question in the next chapter when he says our sufficiency is of God (verse 5)

Think about it, if we were God, would we choose us? I bet not!

17 For we are not, as so many,^[fn] peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ. The word peddling has the idea of "adulterating" or "watering down" for gain. It describes a wine seller who watered down the wine for bigger profits. And just like 2,000 years ago, people today peddle the word of God. But that wasn't Paul-he gave the word of God out of sincerity.