

August 7, 2011
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Brentview Baptist Church
Now That Smells Good

A fresh pot of coffee, chocolate chip cookies, streets after a rain, strawberries, fresh baked bread, popcorn with layered butter, a turkey cooking in the oven, a Christmas tree just brought home and unthawed, crayons and even play dough. So what do these all have in common...our enjoyment in smelling them?

Isn't it amazing the extent we will go as a human race to smell good ourselves. Just think about what we will put on in a typical morning? We wash our hair with an aroma enriched shampoo; we dose it again with a conditioner that is enhanced with a smell as well, and let's not forget the Irish Spring soap. We move to flavored toothpaste which freshens our mouths, rinse with peppermint mouthwash and then we add an underarm deodorant like Axe that according to the commercials carries its own consequences if you use it.

We add body lotions, perfume or cologne, gels and hairsprays and to top it all off we put on our clothes that have been washed in another fragrance to add to the conglomeration of smells that we are now emitting. Talk about a collage of smells...do we really need all of these...do we truly smell that bad oh natural? Well in actuality...

You think the financial debt ceiling is high in the US moving from 14 trillion to 16 or more? Do you realize your body is estimated to have over 100 trillion living microbes (which are tiny life forms) living on us and in us. As far as the microbes are concerned, we're one gigantic buffet. Their diet ranges from the compounds in saliva and sweat to the snowstorm of dead skin cells we shed daily; from the food particles lodged in our mouths to the conveyor-belt banquet that is our digestive system, many contributing to our aroma.

YES smell plays a very significant role in our lives friends, and that is why our noses are so important! Yet in reality, more of the work of smell actually takes place deeper within the caverns of our head than the nose itself, but hey they do hold up glasses quite well.

Now without going into too much detail, let's just say after a unique journey beginning at your nose, odors end up in cells that send signals to your brain. Does it smell bad or good...now that all depends on you and your sense of smell, and interestingly enough you're past experiences, or memories associated with these smells.

Take for example my goaltender equipment from when I played hockey every winter. Now every fall as the leaves begin to drop and the dusting of snow begins to cover our yards, I head to our garage attic and pull down my hockey duffle bag.

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Now as I begin to open this bag, which I might add most likely contains sweats and undershirts still not washed from the previous winter, and lets not forget a seasons worth of sweat stained leather...well lets just say a very strong aroma is released into the air.

An aroma I might add that my wife has actually band from the interior of our home at any given time, but an aroma that when my nose begins to inhale, stirs up years of incredible memories, friends, late nights, early mornings, great laughs and heroic TSN moments, according to my perspective anyways. Bottom line, as distasteful as this smell is to the average person, I love that smell!

Here is something else you might not have known...most of your sense of taste is really about your sense of smell. Seventy to seventy-five percent of what we perceive as taste actually comes from our sense of smell. Do you think that the pizza you're eating taste delicious? Much of the reason is because you like the smell, but if you hate the smell...not likely it's going to taste that great.

Now here is where it gets really interesting, and where advertisers and countless organizations take advantage of this whole process. When odors first enter your nose and our nasal cavity they end up in a place of our brains called the limbic system, where memory is used to recognize the odor. The limbic system is not only a memory storage area, but it also regulates mood and emotion, and since odors, emotions, and memories meet here, that is why smell elicits distinct memories and emotions.

So why all the info on smell?, because by mornings end, I am really hoping you grasp just how important it is that you smell, no not that you simply have the capacity to smell, but that in actuality you yourself emit a very specific aroma. In fact as we take a look at our text this morning you will discover this is actually something God expects of you and literally from you!

I want to begin by reading (2 Corinthians 2:12-17)☞ "Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me. I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing, to the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task."

The author of these words was the Apostle Paul, often referred to as one of the very first church planters. In other words he was very much into trying to get people to grasp the consequences of the existence of God in this world and the ensuing implications for their lives. It is during one of his journey's he finds himself in the city of Troas, where he discovers the people quite receptive to his ideas and thoughts, but his

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partner Titus had not yet arrived and Paul quite anxious to meet him, leaves Troas and crosses over into Macedonia hoping to intercept Titus on his way to Troas.

Now later in this letter we are given a clue that unlike Troas, Macedonia wasn't quite so receptive to Paul. We read in *(2 Corinthians 7:5)* "For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within".

Sound familiar; ever feel this way...I know I have! I've said it before, and I'll say it again, I love the Bible because it is saturated with reality. It doesn't soften the truth, it tells it as it is, with the unrest, harassment, conflicts, and with the fears, a very real part of the human experience. In other words (in keeping with my theme this morning) life can stink at times! At times it's rancid, it emits consequences that are toxic, they make your stomach turn and there very existence can clear a room because nobody relishes being in their presence.

In fact when we encounter these times in our lives we will try anything to cover the stench of their existence. In other words we attempt to "Febreze" our life's circumstances, finding that temporary fix, masking our feelings and circumstances. Did you know with Febreze the odor molecules actually still exist, but they are limited in their ability to stick to your odor receptors through the chemical concoction created in Febreze.

So what becomes our "Febreze", our emotional relief from the pains of life? Maybe you decided to spray your life with over activity, drinking, over working, medication or drugs of some type, experimenting with new relationships and sexual adventures, sports, the Internet, chat lines...anything that may provide that moment of relief from your present state, anything that we believe limits the hurt we feel through life, only to discover as my wife with my goal equipment, it is only a temporary fix! Now maybe you're not a prime candidate for the show "Intervention", you haven't gone to quite these extremes to face your issues, but something else may be happening, something that may be just as harmful, but considerably more deceptive...you have lost your ability to smell, to notice.

Do you find yourself negative towards life these days, words like apathetic, cynical, even critical are more descriptive of your character? Your personal energy seems to be a lacking, and hope is no longer a renewable resource for you. In fact you have even become critical to those who hold a more positive perspective because your reality has remained the same for so long, you have simply learned to live with it, without expecting anything better.

It's no different than when you enter a room with a strong odor, only to discover after fifteen minutes the smell is not nearly as offensive...that is until you leave the room and go outside only to reenter!

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Friends some of us need to leave the room and enter the presence of freshness, holiness and purity for a moment to understand just how bad things have gotten with our lives and our spiritual condition! That's why I love church services that are alive and fresh with God's truth.

They become like a breath of fresh air, we become refreshed with God's presence and regain a sense of hope and peace, we leave hopefully encouraged, feeling better than when we came, coming to a realization that there is so much more being offered for our lives than what we have become accustomed too!

A good dose of God's word is like a mountain blown front that drives through the valley of our lives giving us new smells, aromas and fresh air, a new perspective to an old way of life, and yes even to a life that includes painful experiences.

Jesus Himself stated in *(John 16:33)*, "*In this world you will have trouble...*" So I look at what the Apostle Paul faced, what countless other authors of the Scripture struggled with, what you and I encounter and literally every human being at some point in their lives deals with...and that is the inevitable presence of trouble, and I realize this is life, life on this side of the grave will stink at times!

But again as Jesus himself reiterates, we don't have to remain in this state, we can leave the room, there exists a reality, a truth that offers so much more, so Jesus finishes His statement with, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world." Isn't it true that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Ironically, adversity can be therapeutic. Biologists recognize this principle at work among plants and animals. This natural wonder is called 'the adversity principle'.

As strange as it seems, habitual well being is no advantage to any species. An existence without challenge takes its tolls on virtually every living thing. This may explain the astonishing results of a survey where 87% of people surveyed said 'a painful event, like a death, illness, breakups, natural disaster, caused them to find a more positive meaning in life. Now I say all this because this leads us to the therapeutic words Paul brings us in our text this morning in the context of his issues, his struggles, his present life conditions...

"But thanks(in other words despite the tiredness, the harassment, the conflict and fears) thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him' (*2 Corinthians 2:14*). Let me share with you why these words are therapeutic and what I believe Paul had in his mind when he coined these words! Now due to the Roman occupation at that time, Paul would have been very familiar with Roman Triumphal processions. These were basically parades like our recent Stampede parade where Royalty was highlighted.

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Roman generals who won complete victories on foreign soil, in other words captured at least five thousand enemy soldiers, and obtained additional territory for the Roman Empire were entitled to a triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. The Emperor and thousands of grateful Romans would gather to cheer as the procession passed.

At the head of the procession came the magistrates and senators, representing the ruler. Behind these the booty, the spoils of war like gold and jewels and livestock, anything of value that could be carried away. Behind them came the prisoners.

The conquering general would ride on a gold-gilded chariot drawn by four horses. His face often was painted red and he was clothed like a king. In his hands he carried a scepter and an olive branch with his proud sons following behind his chariot.

Behind them were his soldiers wearing laurel wreaths and shouting "Behold the triumph." Roman pagan priests carried incense burners which filled Rome with a sweet fragrance. This fragrance symbolized the sweetness of the victory. Thus the procession made its way to the Circus Maximus, where the chief prisoner was executed and the other soldiers thrown into an arena of hungry wild beasts, leaving the Romans cheering as the beasts ate up the "fools" who dared to resist the Roman Emperor.

The conquerors of Rome had been celebrating triumphs for more than a thousand years. At least 320 triumphal processions took place since the beginning of Rome until the reign of Vespasian. If you recall with the story of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, reportedly she had to commit suicide with a poisonous snake bite in order not to be paraded in the triumph of Octavian Augustus Caesar.

So it is with these vivid images that Paul draws this comparison to his own life as difficult as it may have been at that moment, and Paul transposes this human practice to a spiritual reality with truths that had far reaching implications. You know what I think he was doing...stepping out of the room for a moment, getting a fresh perspective...he wants to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and Paul knows WHO that light is.

So what is Paul envisioning? A triumphal procession before Almighty God our Emperor, led by a victorious King - Jesus Christ, an olive branch in one hand a ruling scepter in another. Sweet incense fills the air everywhere, and Christ's children follow in celebration, with His enemies held captive. What was it that Paul said in (*Ephesians 5:2*) "*Be imitators of God therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God?*"

Christ's life and death was not only an incredible victory, but it was like a fragrant offering that was very pleasing to God. Paul would use this same imagery in (*Colossians 2:15*) when he wrote "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he

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made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." There is no doubt that Jesus overcame his foe, and has a right to a Triumphant victorious parade.

Again in (*Ephesians 4:8*) Paul quotes a prophetic word from the Psalmist when he restates this imagery, "This is why it says: 'When He ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'" You see you're either celebrating with Jesus, or cursing His name, you're either walking in freedom on God's terms or a prisoner being led to captivity. You either are full of hope, peace and security, or you are in captivity to life's restlessness, harassments, conflicts from without and fears from within.

Friends you will be in the parade...where exactly, is up to you and your choices in this lifetime. Fortunately for Paul, despite his circumstances, he was not going to be overcome by them and so he paints this incredible vision where he knows exactly where he will be in Christ's triumphal procession...as one of God's children following right behind the victor, celebrating with all those who are privy to the festivities.

Last week we heard from Pastor Doug that during these difficult moments in life we need to at times walk down memory lane and draw upon God's goodness in the past, God's activities in history, to remember His works not simply your present life's circumstances, and this is so true, but at times we may have to also look forward...to those events that await us!

You see when Paul is tired, he longs for the party, when he is harassed he recalls the triumphal procession, when he is facing conflicts, he reminds himself of the victory parade, when fear grips his life, he only has to look forward to see His victorious King and recalls the gifts Jesus so gladly bestows upon his own, and I'm sure he takes heart in recalling the words of Jesus when he said, yes, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart I HAVE OVERCOME the world." I have won!

In other words the victory Jesus states is mine! We may wage wars in our lives; we may face disappointments along our journey, battles not going the way we envisioned, but the bottom line here folks...we are guaranteed ultimate victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!

It's what Paul spoke of in (*1 Corinthians 15*) when he lays out the gospel, the message for humanity...Jesus lived, He died, He was resurrected...and these truths have implications for our existences! (*1 Corinthians 14:24*)²⁴ *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.*²⁵ *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death."*

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Friends even the termination of our lives is not a bad thing, I know many of us consider this the end, the bottom line...but it's not, far from it, it's just the beginning! So...I'm thinking, the only folks who ultimately should fear death, are those who don't really accept what Christ has completed!

When I let life completely bring me down, when I can't get past my circumstances, I have forgotten what Jesus Christ accomplished, I have had my eyes diverted to my reality and have thrown out the window the truth and replaced it with my self-pity, and I have become comfortable in the stench that life on this earth can produce...and I desperately need to be reminded, as Paul was, of the victory party ahead!

Now I want to connect my tyrant on smell earlier this morning with another stark reality Paul discovers with this imagery. As any Roman might conclude as they watched this procession makes it way through town, maybe even drawn out of their home by that all too familiar sweet smell of incense, they might have drawn the conclusion at some point, as Paul did, that this same sweet smell they so thoroughly enjoyed for what it represented, surely was not being received by the prisoners in a similar fashion.

For though the sweet fragrance of incense was a sign of victory to all the Romans, it was also a sign of doom to the conquered...the enemy soldiers, and just as the Roman captives would not have appreciated the fragrance from the priests incense, because of the reality of the situation, Paul reminds us..."To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."

Friends from Paul's perspective, and all of God's children following in His victory, this is an incredible remarkable glorious moment; one that you anticipate and can actually fall back on, like Paul was doing, to bring you hope, the smell is sweet, but...for those who choose to fight God on this one...the smell has the opposite reaction.

The implications are serious, in fact Paul concludes this imagery with these words, "Who is equal to such a task?" It wouldn't be until Ch 3:5 where Paul finally answers his own question when he replies, "Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, (In other words we really didn't do anything to be in this parade, except be a child of our victorious leader) 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."

Despite today's politically correct culture where we hurt no one's feelings, we all need to get along, and that everybody wins, Scriptures are quite clear...there will be those celebrating life and there will be those facing misery, an existence after death without hope, without peace, without a celebration... without God.

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I want you to note Paul says without apology "...For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those perishing... There is a fragrance that needs to exist, an odor emitting from us signaling to people that we are no longer conformed to this world, no longer captives, no longer enemies of our King, no longer prisoners of our own demise, but we have been freed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. How do we emit such an aroma...the secret is found right there in the text "...fragrance that comes from knowing Him..."

It's what Paul alludes to when he states "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." Let me ask you a simple question...are you living? Now obviously your breathing, you're taking up space, but are you living...truly living...or are you simply existing?

While back I read a comment that has stuck with me, a comment that reflects more of an "existing" mentality versus a truly "living" mentality. The author suggested that in our pursuit of God, as we make our way on our spiritual journeys, as we do faith and religion...we fall into a trap, we fall into "a letter of the law influence versus the spirit of life influence..."

He notes how we have been conditioned by the times we live in...put another way...accustomed to the smell. That modernity has a way of distorting our understanding of God, especially what truly pulled at God's heart. Our drive for conquest and control, our dependency on technology, our passion for materialism and drive for consumerism, our need to be entertained in life versus being a service to others, have all played havoc with our spiritual lives and especially our understanding of God's heart. We say money can't buy happiness, but seldom do we live otherwise!

We are trained to expect and desire a nice framework for our lives, our budgets; our jobs; our families, our life's goals, our churches, even our own spirituality and understanding of God, and when anything disrupts that framework, were thrown into turmoil. When "trouble" shows up we can't even reconcile God and life at that moment. God's very own children love to package our theology, to organize it to a point we can either agree or disagree with it, why do you think so many denominations exist in this world! We want to find those that think somewhat like us, but even among those that typically agree with each other, we find ourselves arguing over logistics. You stand I sit, you raise your hand I close my eyes, you want history I want contemporary, you want King James, I want NIV or the Message, you want dark and contemplative, I want bright and alive.

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Friends can God fit into any box we create? We want faith, religion, spirituality, but we want it on our terms. It's often about our needs, my comfort, my feelings, my preferences. We say our religion is a private matter, but Scriptures teach otherwise. As churches or denominations we begin to withdraw from culture, isolate ourselves, create our own subculture, our own language, but is that what Jesus modeled and taught?

As I read it He wanted to send His people into the culture with a mission, not to simply condemn it, but redeem it for a much higher agenda, God's agenda. Jesus didn't come to drive the culture from the people, but rather drive the sin from the culture. But even sin and our view of it, we want to make everything simple, universal, uniform, black and white, but life isn't that simple. Sin isn't that simple.

I find far too many people satisfied in just condemning others, casting judgment, and somehow forgetting that Jesus said, lay the stones down and reach out to those in need. Instead of simply criticizing everything and remaining a part of the problem we need to start working toward a solution. I love what Jesus said, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand...in other words it's not just for later when we are a part of that glorious victory parade, but it's about right now, right here. It's not just about after you die; it's about how you live.

One author wrote, "We are becoming on this side of the door of death the kind of people we will be on the other side." And for that reason life on this side is full of reminders, even the reality of death itself, which gives us an incredible gift everyday; it reminds us that we can't keep putting off the work of becoming. It tells us to prepare now, to meet and know God through a relationship with him now.

And as we get to know Him...our lives will change! Our smell will change...our perspective will change. You will feel unsatisfied with simply existing in this world...your spirituality will not be mechanical but alive and fresh through the Holy Spirit...and people will know just by walking with you.

When Paul said the letter kills but the Spirit gives life, he wasn't throwing out Scripture or the Bible, or the laws and covenants, Jesus Himself said I came to fulfill the law. But we need to live life driven not simply by our agendas, our structures, a life regulated by our rules, our laws, but in the new covenant we should be driven by the Holy Spirit, a gift from God. Do you recall the verse I read earlier, "This is why it says: 'When He ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'

We have been given the gift of the very presence of God in our lives and His influence through us. Spiritual gifts to be used to build up encourage and unite the children of God to make a difference in this trouble filled world, driven by a passion for God, not simply a passion to be seen as right, while others are wrong!

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Let us be that fragrance of life God gives us through getting to know Him. Let us put away the old way and splash on a little "Passion" or a little dash of "Obsession?" Think about it, God loves us, God accepts us, the real question is, are we ready to accept this acceptance and live in reconciliation with God, or are we still going to do our own thing?

I want to close with this final true story of a Southern Baptist missionary in the Middle East. She was a pediatrician who worked with Arabic women in a hospital. She was truly a loving and caring individual that emitted the fragrance of God where ever she went. In fact this in the end was her downfall. You see one of those Arabic women came home and shared with her family how she herself had never experienced love as she had from this Christian woman. In other words, she never smelt anything that good before!

The next day this Arabic women's husband walked into that hospital, walked up to this lady and shot her dead. In court this man's testimony revealed that his fear was that such love could turn all the people to Jesus Christ. At her funeral thousands turned up as they sang the song "He is Lord" in Arabic. Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord! You see, one day whether your one of God's children, or one of His captives you will come to the realization of this truth...He is Lord, King of Kings...and by the way when you do...you will be on your knees!

Paul uses the illustration of aroma, because some things you can't simply explain, you have to experience them. Aroma invokes an emotional response, good or bad, and the reality is the way you and I choose to live our lives also evokes a response. My hope and prayer for each of us, is that our lives can be a sweet fragrant offering to God, used by God to all within smelling distance!