

II Corinthians 2:12-17 (tx: 14-17)

GOD IS MARCHING ON

- I. A grateful praise is sent
- II. A grand vision is seen
- III. A gospel aroma is spread

INTRODUCTION

In 1858 Kimball, a Sunday School teacher, led a Boston shoe clerk to give his life to Jesus Christ.

- that clerk, Dwight L. Moody, became the evangelist who awakened the evangelistic zeal in the heart of F.B Meyer, the pastor of a small church.
 - Meyer, preaching on American college campuses, at 1 time brought to Christ a student named J. Wilber Chapman.
 - Chapman, engaged in YMCA work, employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to help with evangelistic meetings.
 - a group of local men were so enthusiastic about Billy Sunday's series of services in Charlotte, NC, that they planned another campaign with Mordicai F. Hamm as the preacher.
 - during these meetings, a young man, Billy Graham, heard the gospel and gave his life to Christ..
 - & Billy Graham...well you know the rest of the story—it goes on & one & on!
- well, we could ask ourselves the question: “Have I started something lately for the Lord?”
 - “Witnessed to another person who in turn is telling another about Jesus & so on?”

Now we see from that course of events God is on move in this world to save it

- He continues to forge links & a procession of Christian witnesses & workers who love & serve Him.
- Christians whose lives show God's saving grace.
 - & whose lips proclaim His good news around the globe.
 - from east to west, north to south, to bring people to Christ.

Well, Paul is kind of talking about that in the passage we read from **II Cor. 2.**

- here he praises & thanks God that He continues to move mightily through the world, defeating sin & Satan.
 - & establishing His Church & extending His Kingdom through the preaching & practicing of His saving Word everywhere.
- & he praises Lord that He is doing that despite events & experiences that go against us & hinder God's mission & ministry we have on earth.

Th'fore, as we face another new year of service for the Lord in His work of mercy & missions & evangelism for salvation of sinners,--

- I think it is only fitting that we allow IICor.2:14-17 to instruct & inspire & encourage us to go out & grow Jesus' Church in this new year, 2016.
- & our text does that with the tremendous truth that GOD IS MARCHING ON.
 - 1st, we notice a grateful praise is sent; 2nd, a grand vision is seen.
 - &, 3rd, a gospel aroma is spread.

I. A GRATEFUL PRAISE IS SENT

Now, in IICor.1&2 Paul explains why he didn't visit the Corinthian Church as he had planned & promised.

- he says it was because of the very serious, sinful situation among them, & to spare them anymore pain than what they were going through.

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- instead he went to Troas & sent Titus with a letter for them
 - & in the letter he wrote how they were to handle the problem so Satan wouldn't win.
 - & work of the gospel wouldn't be defeated, but be advanced.

But then Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, while he waited for Titus to return with news about their attitudes & actions toward him,--

- he became very anxious & terribly worried
- &, as the days went by & still there was no Titus showing up in Troas, Paul says he became so deeply troubled that left Troas, located in Asia Minor.
 - he even passed up a divinely opened door for mission work there.
 - & he went to Macedonia in Europe to be closer to Corinth so he could meet Titus sooner.

Finally, in Macedonia, probably in Philippi, Paul met Titus.

- & he got such a wonderful & favorable report that he doesn't even bother to pause to describe it for us.
- instead, with great relief & joy, he breaks out in IICor.2:14 with grateful praise to God.

For, you see, suddenly Paul saw the bigger picture.

- he saw, despite the difficulties in Corinth, Christ's saving cause triumphed over Satan & sin, & the spreading of gospel continued on.
- & he saw again that God & Jesus Christ were like a victorious general marching through the world with all Christians following behind them.
 - following Lord in 1 great, grand, glorious, triumphant procession.

No wonder, then, Paul exploded with praise & thanks.

- & he received new courage & confidence to go on proclaiming the gospel.
- for he realized the victory & success he gained in Corinth, as well as those gains he got before, & also by other Christians he would gain in the future, even in Troas,--

- he realized & attributed it all to God's powerful working in Jesus Christ.

And so **Paul** thanked Lord that the difficulty in the **Christian Corinthian Church**, & his leaving **Troas**, in no way stopped the victorious progress of Christ & His followers in the world.

- instead God had won, & will continue to win; sin was being overcome.
 - & the saving knowledge would continue to spread all over this planet.
- Jesus then & the gospel would continue to march on; His Church & Kingdom would continue to be established & extended everywhere.

Well, what an encouragement for you & me too as we face dilemmas & difficulties & doubts in our ministry for Jesus to win the whole world for Him.

- you see, how true it is, isn't it?, that doors open for opportunities to proclaim the gospel of salvation to some country or to parts of our country,--
 - or in our community, or at our work & social functions.
- yet we pass them by, & we even have to, for other concerns press upon us that must be done first.
- I can remember so vividly of doing this in the Philippines.
 - we were constantly being asked to have a Bible study in this village or in that village, in this home or in that home.
 - but we had to say no due to the lack of time or people, & all the work we already had.

Well, in such situations we are often torn emotionally by conflicting desires.

- by fears & frustrations & doubts.
- & we become worried & depressed when there seems to be so little success in our witnessing for Christ, & the work for Lord wasn't getting done.
 - & many, who needed the gospel, are heading for a Christless eternity.

So, like **Paul**, amid our confusions & conflicts, we need a fresh vision of Christ's victory march in the world.

- we must see again & again that, despite the strength of the enemies of evil & error, & the setbacks; despite lost opportunities & having to say no,--
- yet, even using setbacks, God & His saving work still move on over the earth & people are still being brought into His family.
 - & we must then believe & trust Lord.
 - & thank & praise Him that victory & success in our evangelistic & mission efforts & endeavors are & will continue to come through Him & from Him.

II. A GRAND VISION IS SEEN

Now then, what we must also see for continued confidence & courage to do God's work in the world, is the **GRAND VISION Paul** talks about in **II Cor. 2:14**.

- here he says: “God always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”
- & to understand the meaning of these words, we must know the custom of Paul's day that occurred after a Roman military conquest.

For in our text he is using a familiar picture of a grand victory parade & procession through the streets of Rome at the conclusion of a battle won by an army.

- the Roman general, who had defeated a formidable enemy & gained a large territory for the empire, was given the highest honors.
- he was to march through Rome's streets along with his soldiers & their captives behind them.
 - “[And] for a soldier nothing could compare with the honor of marching with his general in triumph through the city before 1000s of applauding people. That made all the conflicts & sufferings worthwhile.”

Well, Paul says in our text that's way is for Christ & His followers.

- through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, & His resurrection He won a great victory, the greatest all.
 - He has completely conquered the formidable foes of Satan & sin, death & hell.
 - & the results are they no longer have any power over Him & us believers.
- so, by His powerful grace & Word & H Spirit, Christ subdues sinners.
 - He brings us to God in faith & obedience to live eternally with Him.

Th'fore, because Christ has conquered & rules over all as Lord & King, He is the Victor who is powerfully & triumphantly marching across the world.

- & through the proclamation of the gospel by the words & works of those of us who have received Him as Lord & Savior, Christ is breaking down & defeating the forces of filth & falsehood.
- & He reclaiming & restoring people into God's family & fellowship.

Christ then is reconciling the world to God.

- He is establishing His kingdom & rule in the hearts & lives of people who turn to Him in repentance & faith & obedience.
- & through these believers Christ's victory continues on as His saving blood is applied & His saving influence & lordship are experienced everywhere on earth.
- that's being done by God's people living for Him in all areas & aspects of life.

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- & are standing for what is good & godly, & opposing all that is wicked & wrong in society.

Th'fore, those of us who believe & belong to Jesus,--

- who faithfully do His will & work,--
- we are like the soldiers of a victorious Roman general.

- we follow Christ, our victorious Leader, in His triumphant march through this world.

And so, though with the physical eye of doubt, we often see only the conflicts & temporary setbacks,--

- & there are those feelings of frustration in the face of all kinds opposition,--
- & often it seems the wrong is so strong & gaining the upper hand on this planet,--

Yet, with the eyes of faith, we see & know God is Ruler still.

- we see the bigger picture: Christ is still marching on in victory over this earth, & we Christians are marching with Him.
- the fragrant odor of the saving knowledge of God in Christ continues to spread.
- victories are being won by Lord through His gracious, powerful Word & Spirit as sinners are converted & changed for Him.
 - & as they bow before Him in faith & obedience.
 - & the Church continues to grow; the frontiers of God's Kingdom keep on enlarging.
 - & sin & untruth are confronted & challenged, & even stopped at times.

Now, you see, when we remember & realize those truths,--

- & we see beyond the conflicts & confusion & uncertainties, that there is victory, & there will be an ultimate victory,--
 - for God & His saving Word are marching on around the globe,--
- then we praise & thank Lord, & we receive new courage & confidence to move forward in our ministries of missions & mercy & evangelism for Christ.
 - & we are determined to continue in this year to be the means God uses to spread to everybody everywhere the fragrance of Jesus & His redeeming Word of eternal life.
- for we can't ever lose because we are in the army of the conquering Christ, the King & Lord of all, who is moving on all over this planet.

III. A GOSPEL AROMA IS SPREAD

Well then, Paul reminds us in vs.15&16, the 3rd truth of our text.

- that those in Christ's victorious army have a serious privilege & responsibility.
- he says: "We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved & to those who are perishing. To one we are the smell of death; & to the other the fragrance of life."

Now again Paul is using the picture of a victor's march through the streets of Rome.

- you see, in that procession 1st came the government officials, followed by the conquered enemy soldiers & officers chained to chariot wheels.
- then the pagan priests came, carrying bowls of burning incense in thanks to their gods.
- & finally there came the victorious general & his army.

And so the crowd shouted & applauded.

- the air was filled with the sweet aroma from the burning incense.
- & the victors smiled as the fragrance was the sweet smell of life & joy.

But, to the defeated, that aroma was the smell of defeat & doomsday.

- th'fore they grimaced & groaned for they knew slavery or death awaited them at the end of the parade.
- so then theirs was a death march.

Now that's the way it is with Christ & we Christians on our victory march throughout the world.

- our mission for God is that we are His aroma of salvation & life to the dying.
- through us the knowledge of God & the Word of salvation & eternal life are emitted & spread & permeate everywhere like the smell of incense.

And the aroma of salvation & life from our witness for Christ must also include our being & behavior.

- our words & works, all our attitudes & actions, the whole manner of our living must emit Jesus Christ as the only true way to eternal life with Lord.

Now, when that fragrance of salvation & life from us spreads everywhere,--

- & it seeps into the hearts & lives & minds of people, then that results in only 2 kinds of responses.
- there is no neutrality.

Some find the fragrance of gospel & the knowledge of God in Christ for salvation, & those who bring it as sweet & wonderful.

- for it means life because they embrace the good news & Lord with faith & obedience.
- & they receive life with Him forevermore.

But others find Jesus & the gospel to be smelly & repulsive & offensive.

- they rebel against Him, reject His claims, refuse to obey gospel's command to repent & believe in Him as their only Lord & Savior to have eternal life.
- th'fore God's saving offer & we Christians, who bring it, we become the stench of death to them.
 - the gospel becomes the confirmation that without God they will die eternally.
 - & it guarantees their eternal condemnation because they refuse to believe & obey the divine call to salvation in Christ.

So, you see, **Christians**, what a great task we have!

- we possess the knowledge of God & the only way to be freed from sin & death & gain eternal life.
- th'fore, we are involved a serious matter of life & death, in people's eternal destinies.

- & we then have the grave responsibility to emit the aroma of Christ through our lips & lives.

No wonder then, Paul adds in our text: “Who is equal to such a task?”

- well, of course, no one is in & of themselves.
 - of their own efforts & energies no one is capable of being a life & death witness effectively.
- but it is only when we are totally surrendered to Jesus & His Word & will, & we are marching victoriously in His army with Him as General & Guide,--
 - only then do we have the presence & power of HSpirit to fill & control & strengthen us.
 - it is He who makes our often feeble words & less-than-perfect lives be the aroma of Christ & eternal life to people enslaved in sin.

And so, as Paul goes on to say in vs.17, we don't ever have to peddle God's saving Word for our own profit.

- we don't have to be like a newsboy on street corner hawking God's goods.
- neither do we have to twist or tone down the gospel to make it easier for people to accept it so that we gain in numbers & we look good.
- & we don't have to depend then entirely on clever techniques & super schemes & salesmanship, or on our money & manpower & programs to bring others to Savior.

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O, don't get me wrong, we must use all the legitimate things God gives us to proclaim the Christ of salvation & emit the fragrance of life everywhere.

- We need money & manpower & programs to carry out & get Lord's work of evangelism & missions & mercy done in the world.
- All to keep the victory march of Jesus going forward across the face of the earth.

But we must also realize it is God who is leading the way & us.

- It is He who brings success & victory to our words & works of witness.
- It is He who makes the words we speak, the lives we live, the money we give, the people we send to be His aroma of salvation & life to dying sinners.

CONCLUSION

Th'fore, God is marching on in victory spreading the fragrance of His knowledge & life through us Christians.

- & because He is, we then must labor on for Lord with confidence & courage.
- we must in words & works continue to confess Christ, confront evil & error, no matter how severe the opposition & devastating the disappointments.

For God is marching on, leading & strengthening us to spread His saving knowledge in all places of society.

- we see that in Africa where a woman missionary carried on a word & deed witness to Muslims so effectively that each year she saw men & women drawn to Christ.
 - & at the risk of persecution & death these Muslims turned from their old religion & way of life; they accepted baptism; & they were united with the Christian community.
 - observers say: She loves Muslims to Christ.”
- indeed her words & deeds were the sweet fragrance of Lord.

Another evidence of God's triumphant, saving march through the world is the fact that it is becoming more difficult for Western missionaries to serve in some countries anymore.

- but every year new mission agencies are formed by Christians in Asia, Africa, & Latin America who in turn are now sending out their own missionaries.
- th'fore a whole new army of missionaries is being formed.
 - the soldiers of Jesus Christ have never been more numerous & so multi-national than today.
- & so, you see, the aroma of Christ keeps spreading, & the sounds of His triumphal procession is heard all over the earth.

Th'fore, Christians, let us never give up in God's work.

- let us allow nothing to move us from our task.
- but let us stand fast & firm, & give ourselves fully & always to the work of Lord.
- & let us start being witnesses to Him where we are as individuals & families & congregation.

For who knows, our witness to others may just start something as they are turned to Jesus.

- & they in turn will witness for Him to others, & on & on & on.
- & God will go marching on in the world; His sweet fragrance will spread in every place & among all peoples; & many more will receive eternal life with Him.
 - & Lord's Church will be built & His Kingdom will be extended everywhere.

AMEN