

God's Aromatherapy Sermon

April 22, 2018

Bob and Karen Tosterud own a unique candle company out of Illinois entitled, "**His Essence**". Their original candle has this label on it that reads: "*The inspiration for His Essence comes from the Holy Bible. Psalm 45:8 tells us when Jesus returns, the scent of His garments will be of myrrh, aloe and cassia. We carefully combine these ingredients in equal portions, and the result is a fragrance which serves as a reminder of His presence.*"

They also currently have 5 other candles to remind us of various aspects of Jesus' life.

1. **The Resurrection candle** (reminding us of the 75 pounds of spices that Nicodemus and Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in.
2. **A Servanthood candle** – reminding of Mary's anointing Jesus' body
3. **Adoration Candle** – a combination of frankincense and myrrh – the wise men presented to Jesus
4. **Forgiven Candle** – Hyssop and Henna reminding us of the forgiveness of sins we have
5. **The Last Supper Candle** – reminding us of when Jesus instituted the Last Supper in the Upper Room with his disciples.

The Tosteruds hope the candles will help those who light them "**Sense Jesus in a new way.**"

Seizing upon the **power of the scent** is a brilliant idea. Of the 5 senses most of us have, the sense of smell is often overlooked. However, it could be argued that it's the most powerful of all the senses. For of all our senses, the sense of smell is the most directly connected to the seat of our emotions. The area of our brains that process smell and emotion are as intertwined and codependent as any two regions of the brain could possibly be. It's quite possible that you might smell something and it could immediately trigger a memory and an emotional response to an event you experienced many years ago.

Often women have been known to **sleep in their husbands clothes** while they are out of town so that they can still sense their presence. And often I've heard people tell me that after a loved one has passed away and gone into the Lord's presence they can occasionally still smell their cologne long after they've gone. I remember several years ago, my daughter, Sara, shared that after her grandpa, Harland, had passed away she woke up one morning to the distinctive smell of his brand of coffee brewing, but when she went downstairs there was no coffee brewing anywhere in the

I read recently where a nurse in Minnesota invented a soft shirt that could easily be converted into a babies blanket. The idea is that a mom would wear the shirt next to her skin for a few hours before heading off to work and the baby, now wrapped in her scent, will be less hysterical when she steps out of the door.

The sense of smell can also be **very motivational**. Personally, I often struggle with getting out of bed early in the morning in order to work out. But fortunately for me, I live with a wife who loves to bake. And quite often in the morning, I'll be laying in bed feeling very unmotivated to work out, but when I smell **fresh baked chocolate chip cookies** it motivates me to at least get out of bed to grab a couple of cookies and then from there I have to decide if I'm going to work out or not. But at least I'm out of bed.

If you read through the Scriptures carefully, you'll discover that smell often plays an important role there as well.

It was when God smelled the sacrifice of **Noah** after the flood that motivated Him to promise that He would never wipe out mankind in this manner again.

Genesis 8:20-21 (NIV) *Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. 21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.*

When you read through God's instructions for the various sacrifices required, you'll notice a **reoccurring theme**. Over and over again you'll hear this phrase at the end of the various instructions:

Leviticus 1:9 (NIV) *It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.*

Leviticus 2:2 (NIV) *The priest shall take a handful of the flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.*

About **50 times** this phrase, "*an aroma pleasing to the Lord*" is repeated in describing the various sacrificial gifts and offerings required. In the original Hebrew language that the Old Testament was written in the phrase is literally, "*a sweet smelling savor to the Lord*". And the Hebrew word for "*sweet*" is the Hebrew word "*nihoah*" which actually means *restful, quieting, tranquilizing*". In other words, it's an expression that means, essentially, that as God looks at the sacrifice, which is offered in payment of debt owed to Him, He finds rest in that expression. Instead of executing His judgment against the person who has offended the throne of God, he rests, satisfied. The penalty for sin has been paid. Fast forward to Jesus' death on the cross and his last words were "*It is finished!*". And the completion of Jesus' payment for our sins produced a sweet smelling aroma to God that allowed Him to rest from His anger over our sins.

This is further explained in **Ephesians 5:1-2** where the apostle Paul wrote:

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV) *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

When Christ died on the cross it produced this wonderful fragrance up in heaven to God that gave Him great satisfaction and allowed Him to rest from His judgment upon our sins. As a result, we are no longer recipients of His judgments but we receive His grace and are now adopted in God's family and become his dearly loved children. And as God's children, we're called here to live similar lives of love, like Jesus did.

This is a fascinating Scripture on many levels. What is the "*way of love*" that it refers to here? It's the sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated on the cross. And as we live that type of life we will also produce a sweet smelling life constantly being lifted up to God.

Earlier in the verse when we're instructed to follow God's example the Greek word used there is the word "**mimetes**" from which we derive our word "**mime**". What does a mime do? He tries to communicate a message without the use of words. A mime exaggerates his message through his actions. Similarly, we're called to not just tell people about God's love expressed through Jesus, we're to demonstrate that love through real actions. Think of ways that you've seen God's love expressed to you or others in very practical ways. That's the type of lifestyle that Paul is instructing us to live every single day.

The word for "*children*" here is the Greek word **teknon**, which didn't communicate the age of a person so much as it emphasizes that they are the **offspring of someone** and hence bear the passed down characteristics of that person. And here, the characteristic we're passing down, or showing to others is the sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross for you and for me.

This idea is talked about in 2 Peter where it says that we have the amazing privilege of sharing in God's nature.

2 Peter 1:4 (NIV) *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

But not only does this aroma go up to God as we live our lives – but it also **spreads out into the world** in which we live constantly. The apostle Paul describes this dynamic in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 (NIV) *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. 15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?*

What Paul is describing here would have been quite familiar to the recipients of his letter. This **triumphal procession** was a well know practice whenever one countries army conquered another countries army. After they were conquered they would have a big parade back in the home city.

1. At the head of the line would be the **state officials and the senate**
2. Next in line would be the **trumpeters** setting the victorious tone for the parade
3. Next would be various **representative spoils** taken from the conquered country. For instance when Rome conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD, they displayed various items taken from the Temple in Jerusalem.
4. Then would come **artists rendering** of the conquered land or **models of the city** or land.
5. A **white bull** for the sacrifice to be made to their god or gods.
6. The **captive leaders** of the conquered land.
7. The **lectors** would come next. These were both bodyguards for the ruling officials and executioners
8. **Musicians** with their lyres
9. **Priests** swinging their censers with **sweet smelling incense** that was burning
10. Right behind the sweet smelling incense was the **conquering general**.
11. After the general was **his own family**
12. Lastly was the **army** shouting "*Triumph! Triumph! Triumph!*"

So Paul, here in 2 Corinthians 2 is recounting that conquering parade and he says that we are led by Christ as conquering captives. But rather than being imprisoned or executed we're set free to be representatives and the family of the conquering general to the world around us every day. And for those individuals that see our life of radical love being lived out and want to find out more and come into a saving relationship with Christ, they are set free from their sinful bondage and become part of God's family and they begin to live a life of radical love as members of God's family and that sweet incense keeps being lifted up to God.

But sadly, for those who see out radical life of love being lived out but decide instead to continue living their own self centered life, we become an aroma of death to them. We become repulsive to them because we challenge their lives lived for themselves alone. God's judgment upon their sin remains and the sweet aroma of a saving sacrifice never gets lifted up from them. They still live under God's judgment.

At the end Paul asks, "*And who is equal for such a task?*" Can you live this type of life on your own? No, this is what's so absolutely radical about this plan. You can't do it – so, God chooses to equip you to do it through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. It's through God's equipping power that you are able to live this radical life of love – despite increasing opposition from an increasingly hostile culture to Christianity.

If you study early church history and this sense of a pleasing aroma being lifted up to God you'll discover a fascinating phenomena. When Christians began to be persecuted in the first couple of centuries after Christ one of the primary determining factors used to prove that you actually were no longer a Christians was to require a person to offer a sacrifice to a false god. Because it was believed that a real Christians would never do that. **Apostates**, or those who turned their back on Christ became known as "**incense burners**."

However, around the year 156 A.D. an elderly bishop by name of Polycarp was martyred by being burned to death in the public square because he refused to recount Christ. After his execution, Christians who watched it wrote a letter to other Christians undergoing persecution in the hopes to encourage them in their faith. In this letter they wrote what they observed when Polycarp died. He asked the soldiers carrying out his sentence if he could first offer up a prayer to God before they lit the fire. They agreed to that and he looked up to heaven and said, *“O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise you for all these things, I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you, with him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen.”*

Then the fire was lit, and the flame blazed furiously. We who were privileged to witness it saw a great miracle, and this is why we have been preserved, to tell the story. The fire shaped itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, and formed a circle around the body of the martyr. Inside it, he looked not like flesh that is burnt, but like bread that is baked, or gold and silver glowing in a furnace. And we smelt a sweet scent, like frankincense or some such precious spices.

And Polycarp is not the only Christian martyr who experienced this phenomena. Other witnesses reported similar experiences of at their death this sweet smell of bread baking. Apparently at their death, these faithful servants of God emitted a sweet aroma to God just like Jesus did and just like the sacrifices did prior to that.

One last note before we close this morning.

So, our lives are a sweet smelling sacrifice to God. But Scripture also records that our prayers also produce a sweet aroma to God as well. We see that as the hope of David in the Old Testament.

Psalms 141:1-2 (NIV) *I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. 2 May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

And we see David's hope fulfilled in John's glimpse into heaven in Revelation where our prayers become a sweet smelling incense to our Heavenly Father (**Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4**). It's like an earthly father who loves to hear from his children.

Summary:

The takeaway from this sermon would be that each of us is called to live a sacrificial life of love and as we do that, our lives and prayers are constantly lifting up a sweet smelling aroma to the nostrils of God Himself. And God loves that and finds great rest and satisfaction in that.

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How has the sense of smell been motivational in your life?

What smells bring back past memories to you?

When God smelled Noah's sacrifice what did He commit to?

What's the reoccurring phrase used to describe the sacrifices?

It is an _____ to the Lord"

The Hebrew word for "sweet" means _____

Ephesians 5:1-2

What is the "way of love"?

What is the word used to describe following God's example mean?

The word for "children" communicates what?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

To whom are we a sweet smelling aroma and how do we do that?

To whom are we the aroma of death and why?

What were early apostates of the church called: _____

What unique experience happened at Polycarp's death.

What else in our lives produces a sweet aroma to God?

How can you be a sweet aroma to those around you this week?

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