

THE AROMA OF CHRIST



***But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph,
and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.***

***For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those
who are being saved and among those who are perishing,***

***to one a fragrance from death to death,
to the other a fragrance from life to life.***

Who is sufficient for these things?

II Corinthians 2:14-16

You remember how from the beginning of their exodus from Egypt the presence of God with the people of Israel was manifested by a strange cloud which hovered over them and led the way. In the darkness of the night the cloud became a pillar of fire. When they arrived at Mt. Sinai and God wanted to give them the law, the cloud came down upon the mountain. To receive the law Moses went up the mountain into the cloud. When the tabernacle was completed the cloud came down into the tabernacle.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would go onward; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not go onward till the day that it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the House of Israel.

Exodus 40:34-38

Time and again that cloud made its appearance in the dealings of God with Israel. On the day Solomon dedicated the temple the cloud appeared again.

And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

I Kings 8:10-11

In Isaiah's call we see it again.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

***"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."
And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.***

Isaiah 6:1-4

We see it again on the Mount of Transfiguration.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun; and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

Matthew 17:1-7

We see it again at the Ascension.

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking to heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Act 1:9-11

We see it again in Revelation.

After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended.

Revelation 15:5-8

And we will see it with these eyes at the hour of Christ's return.

The cloud represents the atmosphere of the holy, living, burning presence of God. And while it is only visible as a cloud at certain times, it is often present in the invisible. There are times when the atmosphere of an assembly of believers, or the atmosphere of a room where you may be praying, or even a street down which you may be walking is thick with the presence of God.

The disciples only saw the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration and when Jesus ascended. But the atmosphere of God's presence was in and around Jesus from the day of his baptism.

Jesus was himself the tabernacle filled with the cloud.

Jesus was the temple thick with the presence of God.

And it was this atmosphere of God's holy, merciful presence pervading this ordinary, down-to-earth man, which drew the multitudes, attracted troubled sinners, awakened hope for healing in the crippled, the sick, and the blind.

Jesus didn't need any gimmicks to attract people.

The aroma of God rose from his very body and rode on the sound of his voice.



The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.

And that aroma had the effect of attracting the broken ones and repelling the proud.

But there were times when the cloud of the presence of God was withdrawn from the temple. It had become a habitation of people whose hearts were no longer fixed on God but on things unclean. So now the atmosphere of the temple, in spite of all its beautiful appointments and solemn rites, was the atmosphere of death.

The cloud of God was replaced, you could say, with the cloud of Satan. There was a heaviness, an uncleanness, a spirit of covetousness and lust and deceit and blasphemous pride. Troubled sinners got no help there any more. It was difficult to pray within those walls. It's not unfair to say that the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day carried that cloud around with them ... the cloud of religious flesh, spiritual death, which inspired in those who came under it a spirit of fear, suspicion, despair and cynical pride.

Notice that once the temple became corrupt it carried an atmosphere far more negative and death-dealing than any tavern or brothel. And once a person has been exposed to the mercy of God he or she carries around in their life either an atmosphere of divine mercy or an atmosphere of spiritual death. Which is to say that once we have come under that cloud of the divine presence we can never again be neutral pagans.

From this point on our lives are lived either under the cloud of God or the cloud of spiritual death.

And the cloud we live under is the atmosphere we spread.



For instance, it is so easy for professing Christians who seem to be correct in every respect to bring an atmosphere which is doctrinally sound but spiritually death-dealing.

We say the right things.

We profess faith in Jesus.

We say, "Praise the Lord."

We mouth magnificent prayers.

And yet the atmosphere that goes forth from us is not the atmosphere of the living God... his peace, his forgiveness, his healing, his mercy.... but the atmosphere of self.

Leslie Faber, a psychiatrist, wrote a book called THE WAYS OF THE WILL. In the last chapter he describes how schizophrenics have a way of filling the room with their presence. Even when they aren't talking they seem to have such a charged atmosphere about them that the room is filled with it. Faber goes on to say that psychiatrists who spend most of their time with schizophrenic patients soon acquire the same traits.

What Faber says about schizophrenics could be said of many Christians.

We fill the room.

We somehow make people know we're there... ..sometimes without a word.

We give off the aroma of self – contagious deceptions that seem to intimidate everyone into withdrawing behind a mask.

We so often exude an atmosphere of criticism, discouragement, condemnation, fear.

And all the while we think we're playing the Elijah role – making straight the way of the Lord, shaking people up.

Then one day it dawns on us that nothing we touch seems to receive any life.

We look back over our trail and see discouragement and death and confusion and division in the Body everywhere we've been. When we become aware of this happening in our lives it's time for us to ask ourselves which cloud we are under. What kind of smoke fills the temple of our hearts?

The atmosphere in which we dwell will be the atmosphere we spread.



Am I dwelling under the cloud of God?

Am I really living in the atmosphere of his mercy?

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

What is that aroma?

That atmosphere?

It is the aroma of a life offered up.

When the smoke fills the temple it's the smoke of an offering mingling with the cloud of God.

Whether it's a burnt offering or incense, it's something given to God. When the aroma of the nard filled the house it was the aroma of Mary's life offered in all purity to God the Son.

The aroma of Christ is the atmosphere of giving, just as the aroma of Satan is the atmosphere of taking, stealing, cheating.

We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing...

.... when we are daily abandoning our lives to the worship of the Lamb,
.... presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice,
.... our minds to the cloud of God's presence,
.... and giving ourselves to the doing of his mercy...

....as the smoke of the incense gives itself to heaven.



When we do this, people around us begin to experience God whether they realize it or not.

They have come under the cloud of his presence in several ways....

Aroma of Reality

When we daily abandon ourselves to Jesus Christ, we become the aroma of reality. In the presence of this aroma people feel free to come out from behind their masks and be what they are.

***There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.
Matthew 10:26***

People came to Jesus as they were. And if we are living before Jesus without affectation or pretense people near us will feel free to come out from behind their masks.

Aroma of Kingdom Welcome

When we daily abandon ourselves to Jesus we become the aroma of kingdom welcome a joyful call to repentance. In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus was glad to repent of his old life. The prodigal was glad to rise up and go to his father. The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears was weeping for joy. If we're the aroma of Christ, somehow God-hungry people around us are encouraged to turn and come into the Kingdom.

They're glad to sell what they have and buy the field with the treasure.



Aroma of Forgiveness

When we daily abandon ourselves to Jesus we become the aroma of forgiveness. Those who long for it can almost smell God's forgiveness. They are drawn to it.

Guilty consciences draw near for peace.

Sick minds come near for healing.

Victims of depression and despair find hope.

We are the broken bread and the poured-out wine.

We are the sacrament, the mercy of God for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Aroma of Peace

When we daily abandon ourselves to the worship of the Lamb we become the aroma of peace.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit...."

John 20:19-22

And that peace isn't just the absence of conflict....

It's alive. It's an atmosphere. It's palpable.

It spreads life over the troubled waters and calms them like a mother's hand quiets the brow of a sick child.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

If we are living under the cloud of God we will never have to advertise what we have to offer.

That cloud will so fill us that the atmosphere of God's mercy will be wherever we are.

May the Lamb of God help us to so live our daily lives to the worship of his name that we may ever be under the cloud of his presence and convey his reality to all who draw near.

***But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph,
and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.***

***For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those
who are being saved and among those who are perishing,
to one a fragrance from death to death,
to the other a fragrance from life to life.***

Who is sufficient for these things?



Message: Richard E. Bieber 1978

Featured Artist: Gwen Meharg

Prayer- Dear Lamb of God, we admit that without you we are not sufficient to give off this aroma of life. Oh, draw us close until we are surrounded by the cloud of your presence, so we are covered in the atmosphere of your mercy. Forgive us, rescue us when we begin to surround ourselves with the atmosphere of self... emitting spiritual death to those around us. We give up anything that reeks of death. We offer ourselves to you. Take us, make us a sweet aroma of your wonderful presence... So that people will feel free to be themselves, needing no masks, so that they can sense how sweet you are and desire you themselves, so they crave forgiveness and the same atmosphere of peace, mercy, love arising from our own lives. Amen.

Maranatha Mirror