

Seeing the Possibilities

2 Corinthians 2: 12-17

As you read and study Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, you discover his ministry there was difficult at best. The church was situated in a city that was morally corrupt, and its influence was showing up in negative ways within the church. Paul's authority came into question among some within the church, and it seemed that he was forced to deal with one issue after another.

Facing such adversity and opposition, it would have been easy to have grown discouraged. Some would have been tempted to abandon the work altogether. However, Paul refused to give up on Corinth. He chose to focus on the possibilities for growth rather than the many obstacles the work there presented. Paul decided to consider the opportunities instead of the opposition.

Our situation is much different today, and yet there are similarities. Our world is rapidly changing, and yet we must continue to bear witness of the Gospel. Like Paul, we too must focus on the opportunities we have instead of the increasing opposition. Today we have entered another New Year. Ahead of us lie endless opportunities for Christ. I want to consider the [expectations](#) of Paul in our text as we think on the challenge of: [Seeing the Possibilities](#).

I. A Day of Opportunity (12-13) – Here Paul speaks of a previous season that wasn't exactly as he had planned, and yet he sought opportunity to serve the Lord. Consider:

A. The Provision (12) – [Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.](#) Paul speaks of arriving in Troas, a city in Asia Minor, east of Corinth on the opposite side of the Aegean Sea. He came with the intent of preaching the Gospel, and God was faithful to open a door for him to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul rejoiced for the fruitful ministry at Troas and the provision of God in providing opportunities to preach.

- As we approach the New Year, we need to do so with the commitment and desire of Paul. He did not sit and wait for an opportunity to present itself; he went to Troas, intending to share the Gospel. If we will determine in our hearts to serve the Lord and share our faith with others, God will be faithful to provide opportunities to do so!

B. The Problem (13a) – [I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother.](#) Most agree Paul had sent Titus to Corinth, bearing the first letter written to the church there, with the anticipation of meeting him again in Troas. When Paul arrived in Troas, Titus was not there. This caused great concern, troubling the spirit of Paul. He was anxious to hear a report from Titus

regarding the well-being of the church in Corinth. Clearly Paul is deeply burdened for the church and desired to know if things had improved.

- As you study the ministry of Paul, you discover numerous occasions where trouble and adversity abounded. Things did not always go as planned, and Paul was forced to deal with problems in ministry. Trouble is something we all have; we don't have to seek it, trouble will find us. The coming year will have its problems, but we must not allow adversity or unforeseen events to hinder our commitment to the Lord.

C. The Perseverance (13b) – *but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia*. The plan was to meet Titus in Troas, but Paul refused to allow this issue to hinder his focus in ministry. Having met the current need in Troas, he went on to Macedonia, to minister to the Philippian church. Paul refused to allow a momentary setback dictate his course of action. Although things had not gone as planned, he was determined to continue in ministry.

- Such perseverance requires faith and committed resolve, but it is necessary if we are to be fruitful for the Lord. When adversity comes, or plans change suddenly, we must adapt to the current situation and press on for the Lord. There is too much at stake to allow an inconvenience or personal setback hinder our labor for the Lord and the Gospel.

II. A Day of Optimism (14-16a) – Here we find that Paul remained optimistic about his ministry, even in the face of difficulty. His optimism was influenced by:

A. God's Favor (14a) – *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ*. There had been setbacks in Troas, and the church in Corinth was in turmoil. Paul had dealt with adversity, and yet he was not discouraged. He praised God for His favor, knowing he was always triumphant in Christ. (Regardless of what we face in life or ministry, we can always be optimistic in Christ. We are victorious through Him, even in the face of difficulty! He secured our victory over sin and death as He died to redeem us and rose again in resurrection life.)

B. God' Faithfulness (14b) – *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place*. Paul's plans may have changed, but the Lord remained faithful unto him. God provided opportunities for Paul to share the Gospel, and the good news of Jesus Christ was going forth unto those who had yet to hear. Paul rejoiced that God was not limited to a particular place or region; He could provide opportunities and bring about salvation wherever He pleased.

- We need to be reminded of God's faithfulness to His Word and His commitment to the lost and perishing. Jesus died to save men from their sin. He is not limited to those placed specifically within our comfort zones or desired areas of service. If we are faithful to follow the direction of the Lord, wherever He leads, He will be faithful to equip us and provide the results He desires!

C. Our Fragrance (15-16a) – *For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:* ^[16] *To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.* Paul remained optimistic because he knew the sweet fragrance faithful service emitted. His commitment to the Lord provided a sweet fragrance to the Lord and to those with whom he came in contact. His life made an impact on others. This fragrance affected:

- **The Saved** – Paul's committed service would be noticed by others in the church. Although he faced challenges, his commitment would encourage others in the faith. His perseverance would allow him to be a blessing to the church, helping equip others for ministry. As we live our lives faithfully for Christ, we impact the lives of others. My life has been challenged and enriched by those who were committed to the Lord, regardless of circumstances.
- **The Sinner** – *To the one we are the savour of death unto death.* I know that sounds morbid, but it is true nonetheless. As we live our lives for Christ, among those who have yet to respond to the Gospel, we bear witness for the Lord, and of their need for Him. Our lives reveal resurrection life in Christ, and also bear witness of the dead condition of the unsaved. Our lives emit a fragrance that is noticed by the saved and the sinner, bearing witness of their spiritual condition.

III. A Day for Obedience (16b-17) – Finally Paul reveals the need for committed obedience while serving the Lord. Consider:

A. The Inquiry (16b) – *And who is sufficient for these things?* Paul posed a sobering question – who is sufficient to be a witness for Christ, literally producing a sweet fragrance for Him? Paul knew apart from Christ, none could provide an effective witness. Only those who were totally committed to the Lord, completely surrendered to His will for their lives, could produce such a fragrance. Paul wanted those in the church to ponder their lives and discern whether they produced such a fragrance. It was possible, but it required faith and commitment.

- The question remains today and begs to be answered. I am aware that each of our lives produce a fragrance noticed by others. Do we emit a sweet fragrance for the Lord, one that enriches the lives of believers and challenges the unbeliever to look to Christ for salvation? Are

we living in such a way that others notice our commitment to Christ? Are we making a positive impact for the Lord? If not, we should!

B. The Clarity (17a) – *For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God.* Many in Paul's day sought to corrupt the Word of God, living lives of deceit and spreading false doctrine. Their lives certainly made an impact, but it wasn't positive or fruitful. The church is called to a higher standard. We are different from the world and expected to maintain a positive witness for Christ, one that testifies of His grace and points others to Him. Even in the face of increased doubt and speculation regarding the Word, we must remain faithful to the Word and continue to present it unto a world that doesn't desire it, but desperately needs it!

C. The Sincerity (17b) – *For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.* Many had corrupted the Word, refusing to conform to its holy standard, while trying to pervert its doctrines to conform to the desires of men. Paul remained committed to the Word and refused to depart from it. He sought a life of purity and righteousness before the Lord, seeking to point men to Jesus Christ, the sole means of salvation. His heart was fixed on the Gospel, and he had no other message to share!

- As our world continues to change, opposition to the Gospel and our faith will increase. The pressures to conform to the dictates of society will continue to grow. Sadly, many will give in and abandon the truth of God's Word, seeking the approval and acceptance of men. We need those, like Paul, who are passionately committed to the truth of the Word. We must remain faithful to share the Gospel within our culture. Society is ruined by sin, and Jesus is the only hope for humanity. We must live pure lives among our peers, while standing firm upon the Word!

Conclusion: This has been a challenging passage that is relevant for our day. As we approach the New Year, we are facing Days of Opportunity, Days for Optimism, and Days that require Obedience. Are you committed to serving the Lord in an ever changing environment? What fragrance is your life emitting? Are you settled on the truth of the Word, and willing to abide in it? These days are not for the faint of heart, but we can make a difference for Christ.

If you have yet to receive Christ as your Savior, I pray you will heed the Gospel call and respond to the Lord by faith today. He is our only hope and our only help. Whatever the need may be, bring it to Jesus today!