

**Date:** September 30 - October 1, 2023

**Title:** Look Up - "Look Up for Wonder"

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

Let's pray together. God, we pray today as we're gathered in the Strip District, in Butler, Southpointe, Beaver, the chapel in Wexford, and the auditorium that you would speak to each of us, that my words would reflect your word in content and in tone and an emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago, we began a series through the book of Second Corinthians, and what we said was that the city of Corinth was a culture, that in many ways was confused. And by confused, what I mean was they did not follow the ways of the creator, the ways of God, but they were confusing what was good and right with what was evil. And they were living in those ways.

And then there was the church at Corinth, which we said was compromised. The apostle Paul wrote a letter which we have in our Bibles, First Corinthians, which is a letter of correction to the church. And then he writes another letter which we have in our Bibles, Second Corinthians, which was really a letter of encouragement to say in that context where the church has been compromised, where the culture is confused, and here's how I want you to be the church. Here's my heart for you as a church.

We began by talking about the idea that the church should be a place of comfort. The church in Corinth and the church over time, where you can find the comfort of God and extend the comfort of God to others. We talked about leadership and that role, and then last week we talked about restoration.

I had a chance to listen to several of the messages from last week, and each campus had its own message. And so, Russ was here in the Wexford Auditorium, Jake in the Chapel, Dan Brady, and Mike, and as I listened to each of them give just a little bit of their message on that, I realized that the heart of the church, to be a place of restoration, is really current. And here's why I say this. On my playlist this last week after I was listening to this, you know how if you have a playlist, you get the new songs or your release radar, if you're on Spotify. And so, I'm not sure what this says about me entirely. I'll let you decide. But one of the songs that was on my release radar was from an artist known as Jelly Roll. Jelly Roll and Chris Ryan have a song out called "I'm Scared to Go to Church." When a song comes up on my release radar called "I'm Scared to Go to Church" I have to listen.

And so, I listened to the song. And if you aren't familiar, Jelly Roll's deal is kind of, he lives hard and uses substances, he writes about it in his songs. So, I don't think I'm exaggerating, but he's very God-haunted. He knows that there's something different, something better. And here's what the song says. "I guess I'm just stuck in my ways. I know that my lifestyle don't look like the prayers that I pray. That's why I'm scared to go to church. I can't outrun these demons and all the people that I've hurt. I'm so broken inside. I don't know how much my soul could be worth."

I heard that in juxtaposition with the message of a church being a place of restoration. And I thought, how many people in our world say I know what I'm doing isn't working. Maybe there's an answer at church, but the church isn't the place. And Paul's heart, you heard it last week, Paul's heart was to say the church should be a place where no one's ever gone too far, where nobody is in a place where they can say, this isn't a place of hope for me.

And today we're going to look at something else. And this is what I'm going to say is wonder. The church should be a place of wonder. I don't know if you've ever been somewhere beautiful and been amazed at the scenery and the spectacular vistas that are around you. I was traveling with one of my sons a couple of years ago. We were out west at a national park, and it was just one of those places I hadn't been to. It was spectacular. I got into a conversation with one of the locals when I was getting some food. I said how do you like living here and not just find yourself staring at all the beauty all the time? And the person is like you get used to it. I don't even see it anymore.

I had one of those moments where I realized that the lack of wonder isn't just something that happens when you get used to a beautiful place and somebody comes along who sees it with fresh eyes and they say this is amazing, but it happens spiritually where you can say, I'm amazed at who God is. I'm amazed at the grace of God. I'm amazed at what God has done. And then as you live with the truths, they can settle into you in such a way that what was once amazing and wonderful becomes mundane. And for some of us, maybe more like Jelly Roll, we know there's something amazing, but we feel like it's hard to access.

Well, in Second Corinthians chapter two verses 12 through 17, I think Paul addresses the wonder. And here's why I say this in verse 14, he says, but thanks be to God. And when you hear that, I hear that what we might tend to think is, well, he says, thanks be to God. I mean, you know, it's just a generic phrase that's thrown around in the Bible all the time. But the word here in the original language, according to one of the lexicons that's celebrated, means grace and beauty. And it has in this context a sense because Paul was writing as one who is being criticized, writing to this church, writing as one who was suffering in many ways. And it's almost like he just breaks into this moment of wonder and says but thanks be to God. Then he tells us why he's thankful to God.

And what we're going to do today is just simply talk about two reasons that you can have wonder in what God has done and who God is. Maybe it's wonder that you rediscover. Maybe it's wonder that you discover for the first time. Here's the first reason we can have wonder because according to Second Corinthians chapter two, verse 14, we share in Christ's Triumphal Procession.

Now, that's not a phrase we use all the time, and Paul is saying that he shares in it and that the people in Corinth will share in it. And because it's recorded for us anybody who's a follower of Christ will ultimately share in this procession. And a triumphal procession is something that probably when you and I hear it, we don't think a lot about it. We don't have a picture in our minds about what this is. And if you read about this from just some different commentators, people who write, you'll read some different things. What would happen is that the Roman soldiers would go out and they would conquer other lands, and then they would come back to Rome generally, and they would be celebrated with the triumphal procession. And this is something that the people in the empire would have known would have understood. And

some historians say there were probably some 250 such victory celebrations over the period in which Paul is writing. And so, this would have been known.

Here's how Fritz Rienecker writes about this in his resource on the New Testament. He says, "The victorious Roman general marched into the city in a long procession, preceded by the city magistrates. They were followed by white oxen intended for sacrifice. Then the captives headed by the king of the conquered army, then the officials of the victorious army and last the general himself and his army."

Now, some others will put the order differently. And you might say, well, does that mean that this is not understood? And probably what it means is there were different parades that had different orders, just like there are in our day. And so, when people say, here's the order, there was some similarity, there was probably some distinction and some difference. And so, I want to show you this order, hopefully in a way that will help you.

Just think about this for a moment. And so, we have some volunteers who are going to help us. And so here comes Josh. The first person that would be or the first group would be the city magistrates, the officials, who would hold the signs that would basically either be pictures of the battle or signs of the conquered land. Now, if you are listening on the radio or you're not from around here, this is a sign for Soergel Orchards. Just a little geography of where we are, Orchard Hill sits between two orchards. Soergel's on one side and Kaelin's on the other. And it's on a hill, hence the name Orchard Hill. If we were to say that this signifies conquered land, what would happen is they would say we have now, as Orchard Hill, conquered the land of Soergel's. Okay. So, there would be a sign, and this would be the first group.

The second group would be the animals. And these are for sacrifice. And so, the animals would be led through, and they would be part of a sacrifice that was going to happen. So, we have the magistrates, then we have the animals, and then the people who would be captives would often come. And these are the people who were conquered. So, these would be the people who would have been living in this other land and they would be marched through the city streets, often in clothes that might signify that they are conquered, that they are really subjects now to the Roman Empire. And often these people would be killed after this procession in through the streets. So, this is a pretty graphic idea.

Then after this would come a group who would make a smell, an aroma, by having these scents, which we're going to say for our sake, candles. The way this works is they would light these and have these things burned which would put off a very strong aroma, a very strong smell. And so, what would happen is the people who would live there would smell this kind of permeating their entire town. And they would say, oh, there's a victory parade because they would have this smell associated with these celebrations.

After this would sometimes come the general or the ruler who would be celebrated. Some would put this person at the end. And he would be the person who was the conquering hero in that so coming back, saying we have won the victory for Rome. After this would come people who would be maybe coming back from the land that had been conquered. So, these would have been Roman citizens who had been conquered in another land, and now they're making their way back into the land. And then finally, there would be the soldiers who would come. This would be the triumphal procession.

So, when Paul says, thanks be to God, he always leads us in a triumphal procession. Who's he talking about of these people? Is it the city magistrates? Probably not. Is it the animals? Probably not. How about the conquered people? If you read the NIV, it says he leads us as captives in the triumphal procession. And this isn't to cut on the NIV. It's my favorite translation. I think it's an excellent translation. But the word captives doesn't actually appear in it. The only other place where this idea of a triumphal procession is listed is in Colossians two where there's a spiritual realm that's being led. Probably you could say, is it the king? Is it the people coming back? Is it the soldier?

But here it's probably those with the candles or the aroma, the scent. And here's why I say this. Here's what it says. "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. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." And so, it seems to me that what Paul is doing is he's saying, you are led in a triumphal procession as the ones who are here spreading the aroma, not the soldiers. You didn't help earn it, not merely the captives who are to death, because you're sharing in the victory. That's what I believe he's saying.

Now, what does this mean for you? For me? Why is this something that can produce wonder in your life? In my life today? Well, first, it means that God has a victory that is certain. Sometimes living in our day, our age, probably in any day, any age, it feels like evil is triumphing. There are things happening in our world where you look around and you say how is that happening? Maybe it's global. Maybe it's more personal. Maybe right now you're feeling something and you're saying where is God in this?

And the fact that Paul says he leads us in the triumphal procession, what it means is that there is a guaranteed victory. Whatever evil is around you or in your life, it is not the final word. God will have the final word and you and I get to participate in it if you're a follower of Jesus. Not only that, but this is something that you and I don't earn. We don't participate in. The aroma spreaders, if I've interpreted this right, are not people who went out and won the victory. They didn't do something to guarantee that they marched in the procession. They just were notified. They came out, and they carried their candle. They were in the procession.

Now, certainly, in the New Testament, there is battle imagery. We talk about spiritual warfare in Ephesians six. And so, this doesn't mean that there's never a battle to be fought, but what it means is that the ultimate victory is Christ, and it's his alone. It's not something that we do. And here's what else we see, and that is in verse 12 when Paul starts talking about this, and he says, now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, that there's an indication here about what it means to embody. And I think this is part of the context that points to this aroma spreader.

Now, again, it's going to sound like I'm picking on the NIV today. The word preach doesn't appear in the original language either. And what the NIV is doing, by the way, is they're supplying some words and making some decisions so that it's clear for reading in English. The way this would read in the original language is, now when I went to Troas to Gospel of Christ. And so, you say, well, that doesn't make any sense in English. Probably what's going on is that he's saying, you're embodying this gospel.

Now, what is the gospel? If you're around church, you hear this word and sometimes people think that the gospel merely means that you believe something, and you have a future in heaven. And certainly, that's part of the gospel. But the idea of the gospel is that this is good news. That's what the word actually means. It's the announcement of victory. And so, Paul here says what? We're spreading the victory, and we get assured that we're part of this victory. And what he's saying is this is what we embody, we're living this gospel. And why I emphasize that the word preach doesn't actually appear is sometimes people think that the way that the gospel spreads is only through preaching, but it's actually through people living the reality of it. The gospel is good news that there's a future for those who don't deserve a future, that Jesus has given us a future because of His perfection and our belief and faith in it.

And it's also that the Kingdom of God is now. In Mark one it says that Jesus went about preaching there. The word preach is used. The good news, the gospel, and then it says of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom as a present reality. And here's what this means. And that is that the victory that's talked about here, the triumphal procession, isn't just something in the future where you say, well, one day I'll be able to live in the victory and the goodness of God. It means that there are elements of that kingdom that are present right now that you can experience. I do believe that the kingdom is already not yet. And it sounds like an oxymoron. But what I mean is there are parts of it that are seen, but it's not fully present. And so, some of us may be in a place where we're saying, I've been praying, hoping for God to deliver me from this, or to give me victory in this. And it hasn't happened. But the victory is certain. The timing is what might be in question. And so, there's wonder to be able to say we, you, I, can share in the triumphal procession.

But there's something else here. And that is I think there's a wonder here that we, according to this passage, can share in Christ's earthly mission. Here's what we see. This is verse 14 again. He says, "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." So, he uses us to spread the aroma, for we are to God, the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing to the one we are. The aroma that brings death to the other, and the aroma that brings life, and who is equal to such a task? Remember how I said some of the people were being marched through the city and were going to be killed? The aroma of death and to some it's the aroma of life. Our land has been victorious.

Now, you may say Paul's embracing a pretty barbaric image here in terms of Roman politics, and that's probably fair. But you know what he's simply doing? He's taking a known image and he's saying, I want you to see that if you are a follower of Christ, your aroma will either be to some people sweet, or it will be to other people an odious stench. In fact, there are two different Greek words used here for aroma. One is a word for a sweet smell, and one is one that's used for a stench. And he doesn't necessarily line them up. For which one? Because evidently, this aroma can go both ways.

I remember hearing a story once about Billy Graham, who was one of the great evangelists of the last century, and probably spoke to more people about Jesus in person than anybody ever. But Billy Graham once was invited to play golf with a couple of celebrities supposedly. And when he played golf with them and they got done, somebody asked one of the celebrities, they said, well, tell me, how was it to play golf with Billy Graham? And he said it

was awful. He just kept talking about God all the time. I couldn't concentrate on golf. And they asked one of the other people who played, how was it to play? Did Billy Graham talk about God? He said I don't think he mentioned God at all. What happened was just the presence of Billy Graham to the one person felt overwhelming because he was the aroma of something that he didn't want.

Don't be deceived into thinking that this aroma and that your place, if you're a follower of Jesus, can be celebrated in our culture. There was a time, maybe 30, 40, or 50 years ago when in America the culture was closer to Christianity than it is today. But today, if you believe what the Bible says, there will be a sense in which people will say, the aroma of your life is not the aroma that I like. But then there will be those who will hear and say this is sweet. This is the aroma of life.

Notice also in verse 12 that Paul was pursuing ministry in Troas but also Titus personally. And this is just maybe a little aside, but one of the words that we'll see in the coming weeks in Second Corinthians that keeps coming up is the word ministry. And the idea that I think Paul is going for is that the church at Corinth is full of people who should be about ministry. It's not just for the professionals. And so, what he's doing here is he's almost setting this up and talking about it. But notice what he does. He says I went to Troas. So, he was trying to have a broad ministry, a sense in which he was thinking organizationally and thinking about impact as a whole. But he was also looking for Titus, his ministry was incredibly personal. Ministry or engagement with our world is both corporate and personal. And if we just do corporate ministry where we just say, I gave some money, I did something that served and it's never personal, then we miss being engaged in people's lives directly. And if it's just about people's lives and it's never corporate, we limit our impact to only the number of people we can be with.

But the aroma, he says here, spreads everywhere. And then he talks about again this open and closed door and how he didn't have peace in his spirit about what he was going to do. The idea, I think here is this, and that is God will open doors for you. But every open door doesn't necessarily mean it's a calling and you should be responsive to where God's leading, but also sensitive to what God's doing in your spirit with things.

But notice also that the messenger and the message become at some point one. The aroma, you are the aroma. So, what is the aroma? It's your life, it's my life if you're a follower of Jesus. And what we are is not defined by what we do, but by our relationship with God. And here's what I mean. So many times, the way that we think about ourselves in this day and age is we think, well, I'm a teacher, I'm a lawyer, I'm a police officer, I'm in construction, I'm an artist, or I work in health care. I do these things. This defines me. But your real definition, if you're a follower of Jesus, is you are an aroma spreader of Jesus Christ cleverly disguised as whatever else it is that you do.

And when Paul comes to the end of this, notice what else he says here. He says we do this not as those who peddle for profit. He says, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God." So, he says that we're sent from God. We don't do it for profit. Now, clearly in other places, in the New Testament, there's a time when again Paul's writing, and he says a worker is worthy of his higher, talking about vocational, ministry people, saying you can pay them,

that's good. But here, what he's saying is that there can be a line where somebody peddles ministry for profit.

And here's what I think is germane in this. And that is that when you are doing ministry that's a direct pay, and I don't mean charging for material like a book or something like that, but a direct pay, you are only choosing to engage in ministry when you're paid. That's a ministry for profit. So, if you say be in this group, pay this amount of money, and then I'll be a group leader for you. That's a ministry for profit. And what he's saying is you can do ministry and be paid, but don't make it tied to the ministry that you give so that you aren't just doing it to get. Because I think what he's saying is ultimately ministry is something that you're called to do, whether you're paid or not. And if you're doing it only for pay, then you're not sincere. There's something wrong with that. What you want instead is to be able to say, I'm amazed that I'm on a mission from God. I'm sent by God. I'm the aroma of God.

There's an old movie. It was around years ago, and I asked somebody who's younger than me if they knew the movie. They said yes, so I'm going to use this illustration. And the movie I'm talking about is The Blues Brothers. Do any of you remember this thing? I guess it's a classic. But if you haven't seen it, the running joke is the Blues Brothers who were in jail and did everything wrong in their life, they get passionate about getting some money for this orphanage. And so, whenever they do something stupid, they say but we're on a mission from God, and they keep using that phrase throughout the movie. And the gag is, how could these guys be on a mission from God?

Do you know where wonder is? When you say how could I be on a mission from God? See, in your place of employment, on the youth soccer field, in your dorm, in your business, in your neighborhood, with your family, you are on a mission from God. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are the aroma that has a chance to point people to God. And you do it from a place of a shared triumphal procession. See, there's wonder in that.

And sometimes if you're around this kind of message, the message of grace that God does for us what we can't do, it can almost be like, oh, yeah, that's nice. Who's playing today at 1:00? What's for lunch? I need to go. Worship and wonder are when you're captivated by God and Jesus and what he does and what He invites you and me to be a part of. My hope is that you can either rediscover that or discover that and that it will mark the way that we do church.

See, Paul was writing to a church saying, here's how you can be church in a city that's confused. And even though you've been compromised, I'm inviting you to rediscover the wonder and live in it and see how I'll work, how God will work in your midst. And that's the invitation to you and to me today.

Let's pray together. And just before I close, I just want to say this, and that is if you're here today and this idea of a triumphal procession and your future is murky to you, by acknowledging your sin before God, the Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans three, and acknowledging that the gift of Jesus is eternal life, the triumphal procession that though the wages of our sin, we deserve death, but the gift of God is eternal life, that's Romans six, verse 23, that you can have eternal life, Romans ten, if you'll believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved.

Maybe today is just your day to say, God, I've been just living, existing, but I want to be part of your triumphal procession. I acknowledge my sin. I need Jesus as my Savior. And I believe today that you can know that the triumphal procession is part of your story and the call to earthly mission is part of your story.

God, I thank you that you invite us to something wonderful. And I pray for me and for each person who is part of Orchard Hill that we won't lose the wonder. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.