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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

## “SMELLING LIKE JESUS”

First Peter 4:1-11

Imagine that you or I are the only Christ Follower with whom an individual is personally acquainted.

? *What is their image of Jesus based on our words and deeds? What is their impression of his Gospel? What is their opinion of his Church?*

{2 Co 2:15} **“We are... the ...aroma of Christ.”** Do we smell like him?

{Ro 8:29} We are being **“conformed to the image of”** Christ. Is the resemblance clear to see?

{Mt 5:14} We **“are the light of the world.”** Does the light of Christ shine brightly in our response to suffering and our relationships within the Church?

▣ 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:1-6 speaks of our response to suffering.

■ In verse 1 the apostle Peter (or rather the H.S. speaking through him) implores, **“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.”**

◇ {Jn 16:33} **“In this world [we] will have trouble.”** We can prepare for it by arming ourselves with Messiah’s attitude. *What was his attitude?*

{Php 2:6-8} **“He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”**

★ His attitude was one of self-denial and humility.

{Jn 12:27-28} A few days before his Passion Jesus declared: **“Shall I say... ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”**

★ His attitude was one of resolve and worship.

{Mt 26} In Gethsemane Jesus pleaded three times, **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”** Then, each time, he completed the thought with, **“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”**

★ His attitude was one of submission.

{1 P 2:23} When his enemies **“hurled...insults”** Jesus **“didn’t retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats ...he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”**

★ His attitude was one of peace and trust.

■ Self-denial, humility, resolve, worship, submission, peace and trust in God: **“arm yourself also with [this]... attitude, because those who have suffered in their bodies are done with sin”** (v 1b).

We are not made sinless by suffering for Christ. But as we endure suffering with his attitude we share in his victory of innocent suffering.

📖 As an adjective the **“innocent”** in **“innocent suffering”** describes a situation of suffering that is undeserved (suffering that occurs even though the sufferer does not deserve it).

Peter deals head on with this throughout this epistle: **“If you suffer for doing good”** (2:20); **“If you should suffer for what is right”** (3:14); they **“speak maliciously against your good behavior”** (3:16); **“It**

**is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good”** (3:17). And so forth.

📖 As an adverb **“innocent”** (or more properly, **“innocently”**) describes suffering in a blameless manner (suffering without being provoked to sin against God or neighbor). Peter addresses this, too:

- **“If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable”** (2:20) (endurance is more than mere survival; it is perseverance without sinning);
- **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**

**“He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”**

**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats** (2:21-23);

- **“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult... repay evil with blessing”** (3:9). And so on.

Some of us *might* be called to undeserved suffering for following Jesus. All of us are *definitely* called to suffer innocently if he is our Lord.

{Mt 5:14, 39, 44; 16:24} He commands: **“forgive others [who] sin against you”**; **“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also”**; **“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** That is blameless suffering!

Raise your hand if you were *born* with an attitude of self-denial and humility, resolve and worship, submission,

peace and trust. Lift it high if innocence is your *default setting* in suffering. Anyone?

{Eph 4:22-24} Yet when Messiah enters into us, and we into him, he empowers us **“to put off [our] old self... be made new in the attitude of [our] minds; and ...put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

When we exercise this power Christ’s fragrance emanates from us, his light shines in us, and his image shows through us. If the people who know Beverly Covenant Church reject Jesus, it won’t be because we have given the wrong impression!

▣ First Peter 4:7-11 speaks of our relationships within the Church.

■ 4:7: **“The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.”**

Peter is not talking about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. **“The end”** refers to the last stage of God’s redemptive plan that was initiated by the kingdom ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Whether the Lord returns today or in a thousand years, the end is underway.

**“Therefore”** – because **“the end of all things is near”** – **“be alert and of sober mind.”**

📖 To be alert is to be attentive to what God is doing to bring to a close history as we know it. Alertness inspires purity, courage, and evangelism. It protects us from compromise and immorality.

📖 To be sober is to be attentive to what God is doing in his Kingdom here and now. Mental sobriety inspires responsibility, humility, and ministries of peace

and justice. It protects us from spiritual isolationism, indifference to the world, and End Times mania.

Ever alert, Messiah resisted temptation, embraced the cross (both as a singular event and an ongoing lifestyle), and prioritized his cosmic mission. Ever sober, he served the lowly, tackled greed and injustice as well as religious hypocrisy, and lived in the present.

■ 4:8: **“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”**

Ἀγάπη [agapē] is self-giving love that does not depend on the recipient’s worth, the giver’s feelings, or any other natural factor. It inspires good words and practical acts of care.

{Col 3:12-13; Mt 25:35-36; Jas 1:26; Ro 12:15} Ἀγάπη energizes us for **“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”** It stirs us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners. It equips us to **“bear with each other”** and **“keep a tight rein on [our] tongues.”** It helps us **“rejoice with those who rejoice”** when we are in pain, and **“mourn with those who mourn”** when we are happy.

**“Love covers a multitude of sins.”** We are not sinless. Still, love nips a lot of sin in the bud here at Beverly Covenant, *and* it often breaks the cycle of escalating sin and retribution, *and* it restores the fallen.

Everything Messiah did – even confronting his enemies – he did in love.

■ 4:9: **“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”**

On the surface, **“hospitality”** is simply welcoming a guest. Underneath that, **“hospitality”** is a concrete expression of openness, generosity, and warmth.

Even if all we have to offer is a glass of water, hospitality facilitates fellowship. It creates a place in which to share our time, stories, needs, and gifts. In hospitality we get to know each other, learn to understand each other, and discover ways of helping each other.

Messiah made the space around him a haven for others. He had alone time with his Father; but when he was with people, he was *with* them. He warmly received broken sinners. He ate with his disciples, tax collectors, Pharisees and Sadducees. He fed the physically hungry and nourished those whose souls were starving.

■ 4:10-11a: **“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength God provides.”**

Everyone has natural aptitudes and personal strengths. In addition, the Holy Spirit bestows at least one spiritual gift on each Christian. These are not **“given”** for private edification or personal gain but **“for the common good.”** Whatever we do in the Church should be done in obedience to God, in the strength of God, to the benefit of our brothers and sisters.

{Jn 1:14, 16; 12:49; 5:19} Messiah came “**full of grace and truth**” and “**Out of his fullness we have...received grace [upon] grace.**” He “**did not speak on [his] own**”; he said what “**the Father... commanded [him] to say.**” He never acted on his own; he did “**what he [saw] his Father doing.**”

When we are alert and sober, when we practice *αγαπη* love, and offer hospitality, and use our gifts to multiply God’s mercy and kindness in this body, then Christ’s fragrance emanates from us, his light shines in us, and his image shows through us. If the people who know Beverly Covenant Church reject Jesus, it won’t be because we have given the wrong impression!

Do we smell like Christ?

Is our resemblance to Christ clear to see?

Does the light of Christ shine brightly in our response to suffering and our relationships within the Church?