No Durians

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We recently had a two-night layover in Singapore. Boarding the train from the airport we saw a sign: ‘No Durians’. The only other things banned were smoking, flammable goods, and eating and drinking. I was intrigued. What was a Durian and why, of all things, should it not go on a train? As we continued to explore Singapore, we saw the sign frequently: ‘No Durians’. The picture on the sign looked like a horse chestnut, but when we finally found one in a market in China Town, we discovered a Durian is something much, much larger.



Durian Fruit

About rugby ball size, the Durian is called the king of fruit. It is said to have a flavour that combines garlic and mango, with hints of chocolate and a whiff of sulphur. The Durian, regarded as the national fruit of Singapore, is highly prized. This year one sold at auction for US$48,000. But it is loved and loathed in equal measure, mostly because of its smell. According to one website, 'Durians have a strong, rank smell that … lingers long after the fruit has been removed.' Earlier this year, the library at Canberra University was evacuated after people mistook the smell of a Durian for a gas leak. Hotels ban them because once a Durian has been in your room, the smell will linger for up to two days. This is why bringing them on public transport is also prohibited.

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If the Durian smelled only a little, no one would mind. Mangos smell, bananas smell, even apples and citrus smell. But none of these have been banned on the metro. Durian fruit doesn't just smell, it reeks. A fragrance so strong and so divisive. That got me thinking. We are called to have a fragrance too, and our fragrance is also divisive. '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 an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life.' (2 Corinthians 2:15-16 NIV)

The Aroma of Christ

First, we are the aroma of Christ to God. God loves when we smell of Jesus. God loves when whatever we do reflects the righteousness, love and compassion of His Son. He is our 'audience of One'. Our primary frame of reference for whether we have succeeded or failed should not be

‘Did our friends like it?’ but ‘Did God like it?’ God is the master we serve. As the fruit of His Spirit works in us, we are changed into His likeness. His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control grow in us and flow from us. And so, to God, and all those who serve Him, we smell of Jesus. He is leaking from our every pore, it is a beautiful thing.

But second, we are also the aroma of Christ to those around us. Unlike God’s predictable affection for the aroma of Christ, the reaction of the world will be a mixed bag. To some, because of their openness to God, we will be a fragrance of life. They will love our lives and respond to our message. These are those we can lead to Jesus and who will respond to His offer of salvation. We can be excited that we enjoy such favour with them. To others, though, we will be a fragrance of death. They will judge us for being bigoted, closed-minded, religious, old fashioned. They have rejected God and so they reject us.

In other words, not everyone is going to like you!

Being Disliked for Being Holy

When we discover we are disliked, the natural reaction is to change. If our friends don’t like our biblical morality, we might be tempted to be quiet about it or change our position to accommodate them. If our family don’t like how regularly we are in church, how generously we give or how we serve our church family, we might be tempted to dial it back a notch. But this is not what God requires. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. When it comes to our doctrine, lifestyle and ministry, He expects the same from us.

If people accuse you of being closed-minded, remember we are called to open our minds to truth and close our minds to lies and let God be the judge of which is which. It was G.K. Chesterton who said, “Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid. Otherwise, it could end up like a city sewer, rejecting nothing.”

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If you worry about how you will reach your unsaved friends while living set apart for the Lord, consider how you expect them to change if you are exactly like them? There needs to be in us an aroma different from the world. There needs to come from us a sweetness, pleasing to God. When you are with those unsaved friends, do you rub off on them or do they rub off on you? Do you compromise your holiness or do they compromise their sinfulness? Jesus hung out with sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors. He didn’t judge them but He didn’t join them. And many of

them changed to be like Him.

We need to be the salt and light Jesus has called us to be.

If the World Hates You

Right now, in Singapore, if you're a Durian, you're not allowed to travel on public transport because of your fragrance. Increasingly today, those who speak out in support of Christian doctrine and morality are finding themselves censored and cancelled, edged out of the public square. People are getting in trouble for speaking the truth of Scripture on social media. Sports stars are losing contracts. Doctors are losing their jobs. The world doesn't like the aroma of Christ. But don't be disheartened.

Jesus said, 'If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me first. If you were of the world, it would love you as its own. Instead, the world hates you, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.' (John 15:18,19)

It's not by being like the world that we witness to His holiness and goodness. It's not by being more like our friends or doing more of the things they do. Salt goes well on beef because it's not beef. You notice it because it is different. We are called to be salt, to be different, and to be noticed for being different.

'Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.' (1 Peter 2:12)