

Mission through prayer and evangelism (Colossians 4:2-6)

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KingsWay Community Church

*Being in Christ looks like the church being on mission through prayer and evangelism*

### **Outline:**

1. God's Mission in Prayer (v.2-4)
2. God's Mission through Evangelism (v.5-6)

### **Prayer**

**Illustration** – Charles Spurgeon said that preachers ought to carry the newspaper in one hand the Scripture in the other. Today and this week we carry a heavy newspaper, the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary for 9/11, and the passing of Queen Elizabeth; but in the other hand, we hold God's timeless truth for us today.

#### **Illustration – Queen Elizabeth**

- Saw 15 prime ministers come and go
- Met with 13 of the last 14 sitting presidents
- In her 70 year reign, her rule is the majority of the country's living memory. A colossal figure who though not the head of government, was the head of state and a remarkable person.
- Mark Jones, a pastor and author, noted this regarding her passing:
  - o *"The Queen is now in the presence of the King of kings, where she now has more power and authority in heaven as one of his subjects than she ever had on earth."*
- In the news that is following her death, and this reality of the Queen being the only Monarch Great Britain has ever known, the question is being raised:
  - o **How will Great Britain respond to the Monarchy, and how will Great Britain behave on the world stage?**

**Here in Colossians, Paul has taught us that Christ is above all, and Paul, in the passage we are studying this morning, is addressing how the Church ought to respond to the reign and mission of Christ, and in light of this reign and mission, how the Church should respond to the world.**

The point of this passage that we study this morning is this:

***Christ being above all for the Christian looks like a life of prayer and evangelism.***  
That's the point (*Repeat*).

The way that we're going to see this unfold is by looking at these two commandments, being:

- 1. God's Mission in Prayer (v.2-4)**
- 2. God's Mission through Evangelism (v.5-6)**

### **God's Mission in Prayer (v.2-4)**

#### **Context**

We find ourselves verses away from the conclusion of this letter. These final commands come after a theologically rich section of the “put offs” and “put ons” of the Christian. Paul is telling the church, in light of Jesus Christ and how he is above all here is the backyard that we play in. Paul in this list of put offs and put on gives us a backyard with a fence to play in, clear places that we should not go in and places that we should thrive and enjoy and laugh with glee very much like a child playing in the backyard.

This section had a lot of specifics to say about what life is like and to look like within the rooms of our heart, the bounds of the church, the family, and our employment.

But now, with these two commands, Paul is moving away from specific lists to a broader optic of life.

With these last two commands Paul is lifting our eyes to not only look now but 10 miles down the road to the left and to the right but most importantly up to our Father in heaven.

What we are studying this morning are two commands that speak too the Christians lifestyle as it relates vertically to God and his mission on earth, and as it relates horizontally, to others outside of the Christian community.

#### **Setting**

The passage that we are looking at is not an explanation of what prayer is or why we pray, rather Paul is informing his Christian readers the lifestyle of prayerfulness that the Christian should have and the quality and flavor of those prayers. This command has a Christian theology of prayer already baked into it. So before we dig into the lifestyle of

prayer that Paul is prescribing it is important that we as readers of scripture come to scripture with a shared understanding of what prayer is.

I believe Tim Keller has a great definition of what prayer is from his book on prayer where he defines it as "the personal communicative response to the knowledge of God" (Prayer, p.45). The reason why this definition is so helpful is because it makes so much sense why Paul would be asking us to pray in light of everything he said in Colossians. In light of the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, our response to such knowledge should be an acknowledgment, Thanksgiving, and enjoyment of God through the means of prayer.

Rather than being an action, prayer I would humbly submit is a reaction. It is an action, but notice where the weight is being put. Let me say it another way, rather than us believing that "well Christians pray so let me *just* do that," Our paradigm for prayer should be that in light of who God is, what he has done, what he is doing, and going to do in eternity, my faith and trust in my Savior has stirred me to glorify and enjoy God through communication with God.

Prayer is so often posited in a place of asking God to heal my cat, to stop the pain of whatever circumstance I don't like in my life... But prayer is so much more than the once category of intercession. As Matthew said last week in the service, the Bible describes all sorts and manners of prayer. All of which center on a glorious response to the grace that God has shown towards us. Prayer is a reaction to who God is, and when we understand that it will change our lives. It is an action of our heart responding.

One of the pitfalls that we can come into when we read texts like this, is that when Paul says we need to be steadfast in prayer, the idea behind it is that we need to be something like a chiropractor for God. That we need to just ask God for things and help him realign to our perspective of the world.

- God, would you care for my unbelieving mom or dad or my coworker? Because, I love them and I think you should love them."
- Or "Lord, would you please care for that unreached people group in Papua New Guinea who doesn't have a copy of your word? Would you please start loving them and would you please raise up someone."
- "Lord, would you stop the cancer from spreading, I want to remind you to love me because I do not see your care."
- "Father, would you give me faith and perspective to see you as glorious? I think you might have forgotten to work in my life and so here is my reminder."

I don't think anyone here would say those prayers out loud. But we are guilty in our hearts for praying like this. As if we're realigning God's hip or foot or back in order for him to get better at being God. What we need to fundamentally understand as Christians is that prayer is not chiropractic's on God's heart and desire, but rather the reverse.

When we pray and we make a habit of prayer and our lifestyle is marked by a devotion to prayer it is God who is doing a work on us realigning our hearts and desires and affections and our wants and our outlook and perspective on life to what he sees as God almighty. So, prayer is motivated by who God is and his wonderful deeds, and it aligns us to who he is and what he is doing!

So, grounding our outlook on these two commands—in seeing that prayer is a personal communicative response to the knowledge of God that affects our perspective, wants, desires—let's look at the first instruction from Paul: *Continue steadfastly in prayer.*

### **“Be Steadfast in Prayer” (v.2)**

The command that Paul gives is to be steadfast in prayer. He's speaking about a lifestyle of prayer; that we would be marked by a prayer-filled life.

One thing that I appreciate about this command by Paul is that these couple verses on prayer (v.2-4) are a great biblical example of the “realness” of the world in which we are being addressed by God. This command is given to us on the backdrop that we are in a fallen world, that we live in a world filled with temptation and suffering, and that we are prone to wander in light of that.

We are encouraged to “continue,” *because we are tempted to not.* We are called to be steadfast, *because apart from the revelation of who God is and what he has done we will not be steadfast.*

Every one of us here can relate to this point. When we hear or experience the death of a loved one, when we're let go from our job because of budget cuts or for not giving into an unethical practice or for some other reason. When you get the news that you have cancer two days before Christmas and you're given three weeks to live and you have a wife and three kids under 5. When you incur an expected bill in a season of financial turmoil. Brothers and sisters, when the waves of this world come crashing on your boat, when you are choked by life...it is these times where we will want to ignore this command.

So, what does it look like to be steadfast? I argue the unspoken means of fulfilling this command is to rehearse the good news of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Note that he didn't put this command on the front end of the letter, but at the very end. Intending these commands to be informed by all that he wrote prior. Rehearse the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done and respond accordingly: Pray and see how God meets you and works on your heart.

Paul also gives the manner to fill this out on the back half of this verse 2: be watchful in it with thanksgiving

### **“Be Watchful in Prayer with Thanksgiving” (v.2)**

Paul furthers the command to be steadfast, by calling us to be watchful. This is very

similar to being steadfast but there is a subtle difference.

To be steadfast is to hold the course to be rooted and anchored, it's a call to **endurance**. To be watchful would surely include endurance but entails **attentiveness** as the defining quality. Christians need to have endurance and longevity in their lifestyle of prayer, but they are also to be attentive in that lifestyle of prayer.

This idea of watchfulness comes with it, this idea of defending the wall, looking out for intruders, keeping your eyes on the horizon. It's an important job to be a watchman, a courageous job, because in doing your job correctly you are securing the economy of your city. You are enabling your city to flourish.

Being watchful to your prayer life is a perspective that you are susceptible to worldly temptation, to worldly thinking, and to temptation *even* on the sacred ground of prayer.

But notice with me that Paul doesn't just stop with being watchful, but he tells us that there is an attitude that we ought to have with our life of prayer: thankfulness. Christians are to have endurance, attentiveness, and thankfulness in prayer.

**How can we be watchful in prayer with thanksgiving?** Look with me at Col 3:15-16a, 17. How can we be watchful with thanksgiving? By being attentive to the rule of Christ in our hearts. That's the wall that we're watching. I will have endurance and attentiveness to the rule and reign of Christ in my life, reciting and rehearsing the good news of what Jesus has done for me. When I know who God is and who I am, and what Christ has done, prayer and thanksgiving are the result. (Different than happiness)

The economy of my heart I will ensure is protected from any invaders because right now it is flourishing under the rule and reign of Christ. When we are in awe of God and of the grace that he has bestowed on us in Christ we pray. We have a lifestyle of prayer.

*The Christian's theology of prayer is that we are responding to God, who first loved us while we were yet sinners.*

How can we have endurance and attentiveness in prayer thanksgiving? Stand in awe of the cross and enjoy communion with God because of Jesus.

Not only is prayer a response to who God is from a personal, salvific and spiritual discipline category, we learn from this passage that prayer also functions right in the middle of God's mission here on earth.

### **Prayer as God's "Sword" (v.3-4)**

One of my favorite passages in Scripture to illustrate this point is from Acts 12. In the first five verses of this chapter, we see that James is beheaded by Herod and that Peter is imprisoned; likely to incur the same fate as James. This is huge when it comes to the early church and I want you to think about this in the larger story of the Bible.

**How will they respond to this?** If this was Old Testament Israel and one of David's

mighty men was beheaded by the Philistines and another one was imprisoned, you would expect the narrative to follow that David and the armies of Israel would pick up their sword and go to war.

What we see in Acts 12 is the first occurrence of a political power fighting the church, where a disciple is beheaded, and another man is imprisoned. And the fascinating observation that we see is that the church doesn't pick up the sword but look with me in verse 5:

*“So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”*

Rather than picking up the sword, the church earnestly prayed. The “sword” of the Church is *prayer*.

Paul encourages them to continue in prayer and then he says in verse 3, “at the same time, pray also for us.” Paul is giving us another aspect of the Christian’s theology of prayer, which is that prayer is God’s divine means of accomplishing his will on earth. The coming of the Kingdom of God and the expansion of this Kingdom to every tribe tongue and people, God has ordained the prayer of the saints to be the means of this mission going forth.

Paul is in prison and asks for prayer in two ways: that an effective evangelism would take place in his circumstances and that the gospel would be made clear when he shares Christ in those opportunities.

When Paul prays for an “open door” he’s not asking for just an opportunity, he is asking for an opportunity with the result of salvation. So often we can fall in this trap that evangelism is just prayerful consideration of opportunities. I want to softly challenge that notion that we’re just praying for opportunities. Like Paul we ought to prayerfully petition the Lord and anticipate the answer of those prayers that opportunities would be given and that the last would be found.

As we can also see in this text, opportunities incur persecution. That is one reason why I think evangelism is scary: you are putting something on the line and there is a risk to sharing the gospel; Especially in America. We can be tempted to read stories of men and women who share their faith, or read the testimony of Paul in this passage, *and deduce that the benefits of evangelism are outweighed by the risks of failure and persecution.*

**Brothers and sisters, two things: God has ordained that *heaven* will be a place of no persecution and no suffering.**

**Secondly, and more importantly, God has ordained prayer as his divine means to create real, authentic, and effectual opportunities for the proclamation of the gospel to the lost.**

Prayer is God's means of sanctifying us, of changing our desires and thoughts of him. When done biblically, we behold the Lord for who he is and stand in awe in the face of all that he has done for us.

But it is also the bedrock for God's mission! It is the means of changing the world. And what we see in v.3-4 is that prayer is how we can participate here and now in the gospel effectively reaching those who are dead in their sin, who know nothing of our risen Lord.

Prayers in Richmond, VA, impact gospel mission in Bolivia. The prayers of the saints at KingsWay Community Church impact the gospel being proclaimed in Africa, to unreached people in Asia, to the lost in Midlothian, Richmond, your family, your lost child.

Be captivated by prayer, for it is God who we lay hold of! Have endurance, attentiveness, and thanksgiving in it, for God is already on the move, God is already at work and prayer is the means by which we are made aware of it and through it, He changes lives!

That is why we as a church are having a prayer meeting this month. We earnestly pray because we want God to rule our hearts and for his mission to go forth.

Just how we participate with God in mission through prayer, we also participate in God's mission through evangelism. Which brings us to point 2: "Be Wise in Your Evangelism" (v.5-6)

### **"God's Mission through Evangelism" (v.5-6)**

#### *Walk in Wisdom*

Let's first look at the command itself, the very first phrase of verse 5: "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders." For us to understand what this phrase means we need to remember the context of what Paul argues wisdom to be. Paul has argued that Christians should not be entangled with worldly wisdom or with vain philosophies, but rather wisdom that comes from above.

What is wise, according to Paul, is centered on Christ. What we as Christians find wise, the world finds foolishness.

So, when Paul says walk wisely with outsiders, what he is not prescribing is the right tactic with street evangelism but rather what we studied in 3:16:

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom..."*

To walk wisely is to put this other command into practice. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you and walk accordingly. The emphasis though that we find in this passage is to do so not so much in the context of *the church* but in the context of *the world*.

*Making the best use of the time - “Buy Back” the Time*

The next phrase that Paul uses after this command is to make the best use of the time. The idea behind this phrase, more specifically the verb being used here in the original, is that of buying back the time. The word is used in several places in the New Testament in the context of redemption. When we read Galatians 4 and how God sent forth his son to redeem those under the law. That word redeem is the same word being used here.

How that informs us today is that we live in a world that will have an end. There will be a time in the future where life as we know it and life on earth will not be like this. There will be a day where God will vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked.

In view of that, we want to redeem the minutes the Lord has given us with those who do not know him and a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

For us that means that we lean into opportunities praying that the Lord would make effective gospel proclamation. In light of the spiritual wisdom of who Christ is, his rule and reign, let us redeem the time. Let us make the best use of the time.

How do we make the best use of the time? Paul gives us a category to consider: Our speech

*Answer the Outsider Well*

Look with me at verse 6 again notice what Paul says:

**<sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.**

Notice how verse 6 is very much connected to what Paul says in verse 4. Paul requested prayer that there might be opportunities and that he might share the gospel effectively and clearly in the way that he talks. And here we are, in verse 6, and Paul is telling us to watch our words in evangelism.

Notice the connection between (1) God’s sovereignty and prayer, and (2) our fervent wise efforts in evangelism. There’s not an unhealthy tension between the two. God is sovereign, God is the one that invincibly executes effective evangelism, and it is man who joyfully and earnestly participates through his actions.

Paul just finished imploring us to pray for him so that God would save people, AND here he is in verse 5 and 6 telling us to be wise, to be intentional with the minutes we have with unbelievers, to be gracious and winsome in our evangelism so that we will know how to *rightly* answer unbelievers.

*“Well Caleb I love the first part of that, the second part sounds a little legalistic.”*

Brothers and sisters, the grace of God motivates us to act in response to that grace. It is because God is glorious, because of his love for us, because he has commissioned us



to make disciples, and my love for my lost neighbor that I strive to be most excellent in my witness to a dying world.

No earning of salvation here, no striving in the flesh. This is a faith-filled, God-ordained mission as an ambassador of Christ to reach the nations.

And Church, we can go with Confidence because the God whom we pray to, the God who commissions us to go is seated on the throne!

So, therefore: Be wise in your dealings with the lost, redeem the time with your neighbor for time is not on their side.

### *Be Gracious in your Speech*

Paul tells us in these last verses to let your speech always be gracious. The idea behind this is that we are to be building others up with our words (carrying a similar idea as Eph 4:29), but also that in view of God's mercy towards you and all that Jesus is, act accordingly. If you want to know how your heart is doing, look at your speech.

*Those that rehearse the gospel in their heart will bear fruits in their speech.*

### *Seasoned with Salt*

Paul describes our gracious speech as being seasoned with salt. **Shout out to Seasoned Saints.**

When we hear Paul say "salt" we think of the sermon on the mount and how salt is a preservative. That can be in play when it comes to this phrase, but I think it's something a little more than that.

Salt also carries this idea of being winsome and attractive. And making your food taste good and I think that is more the angle of what Paul is getting at here in this phrase. That our speech would be informed by the grace of God and that our testimony would make God beautiful, attractive, desirable.

We all know what it's like to talk to somebody about their hobby horse, or that thing that they love, their soapbox moment. That person's face lights up and it beams with joy and happiness. And if they're a winsome person you often find yourself wanting to do whatever they're doing.

If you talked to Josh Kruger about fishing and he would talk about the manliest version of fishing I think there is. About these crazy all nighters he does or of these expeditions in the middle of nowhere Minnesota where they drop you off to fish and fight grizzly bears. They hand you a pole, a can of spam, an ax and a flannel shirt and say "see you in a month! Hope you live!"

But after hearing him talk about the joy of it, the foolishness from my perspective becomes attractiveness, the attractiveness of it becomes desire, and soon,

before you know it, I am saying “sign me up!”

Christian, when we are affected by grace, when we find God desirable, attractive, beautiful, when we see Christ as glorious, *that* is seasoning your words with salt.

This isn't an apologetics text where we are the **lawyers** of God defending metaphysical realities or effectively answering questions on the problem of evil. We are **witnesses** to the gloriousness of Christ and of the cross that saved our life.

### **“Safe” Evangelism**

My worry for us, is that we have bought into this idea that character evangelism is the only evangelism we should pursue...with the exception of an unbeliever crawling through our window asking “what must I do to be saved?”

There is a reality in the American Church that evangelism is only being a good person who raises a family and on occasion tells people they go to church or that they are a Christian. We need character evangelism, don't stop doing that.

What I am saying is that, saying that you are a Christian, or that you pray, *is not evangelism. That's an introduction.*

Evangelism is sharing the good news that all people are dead in their sin and that God has made a way in the person and work of Jesus and that if you repent of your sins and turn to Christ with a simple faith, bringing nothing to the table but the sin that requires your salvation, you, my friend can be saved and enjoy eternal communion with God.

When we share the faith, could that person come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

I want my neighbors to know I am a Christian, that I have a Christian family, that I am a praying man, that I am a good man that they can borrow tools from...**But I want my neighbors to know Christ and him crucified.**

Church, let us pray for successful evangelism AND let us wisely share the whole gospel!

### **Mothers and Evangelism**

Now, mothers, a special word of encouragement and application for you specifically. You hold one of the most important jobs and hardest jobs in all the world. And you are sharing the gospel faithfully in your home raising up the next generation of Christians. Do not hear what I'm saying and let guilt flood your heart that you are not doing enough.

Being a mom is the role that God has ordained for you and it is a glorious job with a heavenly reward and those children hear the gospel in your home day in and day out. You are some of the most effective evangelists regarding opportunities taken that our church has.

## **Colossians 4 and the Great Commandment**

Having walked through these two commands together I have one observation that is a means to tie the bow on this wonderful text. I want you to look again at the subject matter of these two commands:

**The first one is of the Church's relationship to God, and the second, the Church's relationship to her neighbor.**

Nearing the close of Paul's letter, after all that he has told us about the gospel, these commands very simply summarize a manner to live out the Great Commandments Jesus gave us in the Gospels: Love God, love neighbor.

And it bears repeating, these commands are at the end, not the beginning, of the letter. The gospel informs our actions, not the reverse.