



SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 4:2-6

RECAP:

Introduction

One of my favorite classes in seminary was a course called Personal Evangelism. It focused on how to share the gospel faithfully. The teacher was one of my favorites, too, Dr. Tim Beougher. One thing Dr. Beougher was adamant about is that all Christians are called to be witnesses for Christ. Evangelism isn't for the super-Christians. It's something we're all called to do.

One week, the seminary invited a guest speaker to preach in chapel. During his sermon, this visiting pastor told the student body that evangelism was a spiritual gift that not every believer received and that it wasn't the responsibility of every Christian to share the gospel. You can imagine what my professor was thinking!

It just so happened that Dr. Beougher was the one responsible to take this man out to lunch and make sure he got back to the airport safely. During lunch Dr. Beougher asked the man what his schedule looked like in the near future. The pastor was excited and began to get his calendar out thinking he was going to be asked back to the seminary to preach. Dr. Beougher then said, I'd like to schedule a time to come to your church and teach you and your congregation about the personal responsibility every Christian has to be an evangelist and witness for Christ. The pastor sunk down in chair and began to back pedal on what he said.

Some people may be more gifted at sharing their faith than others, but we are all commanded to make disciples for Christ. Jesus calls every believer to be His witness both near and far.

We need to be reminded of this because the spirit of the age says, don't push your religion on other people. It's rude if you go around trying to proselytize; especially if someone already has a religion, who are you to try to change their beliefs?

But friends, if you believe the gospel, and if you understand man's hopeless condition because of his sin, then you know the stakes are too high for us to be silent. You know that Jesus Christ is our only hope in life and death.

I also hope you'd agree with John Piper who said, "Christianity is a converting religion. It is evangelistic. It is persuasive and expansive and missionary. Christianity is a soul-winning, out-reaching, mind-persuading, heart-entreating, rescuing, missionary faith, or it is not true Christianity." If your version of Christianity isn't focused on seeing souls won to Christ, then it is not the Christianity of the Bible. The Bible places a heavy emphasis on the church's job to be witnesses for Christ, and that's Paul's focus in the opening verses of Colossians chapter four.

Context

Pastor Erik said last week that most of Paul's letter are divided into two parts—doctrine and application. The first part of Colossians focused of theology. The second part focuses on the application of that theology. He has taught us about the saving power of the gospel and the mystery of Christ. Now, he wants the church to take what they've learned and share that message with the outside world.

Our text this morning is broken into two parts. Verses 2-4 focus on prayer. Verses 5-6 focus on action, and it's all in the context of the church's task of sharing the gospel with the lost world.

Two points

1. Spreading the gospel requires our prayers.
2. Spreading the gospel requires our participation.

Point #1-Spreading the Gospel Requires our Prayers (V.2-4)

If we are to share the gospel effectively and with the blessings of God, prayer must precede our efforts. In fact, you could say, prayer fuels the great commission. Without it, we're like a car without gas.

In verses 2-4, Paul is going to tell us how to pray and what to pray.

How to pray (V.2)

Be Faithful

Verse 2 says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer.” Some translations say, “Devote yourself to prayer.” The idea is that Christians should be faithful and consistent in their prayer lives. We don’t just pray before meals and when we come to church; rather, our lives are defined by and filled with prayer. Elsewhere Paul says, we should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). In the book of Acts, Luke tells us that the early believers were “joined together constantly by prayer” (Acts 1:14). It’s almost as if our everyday lives should be marked by ongoing conversation with God.

Why wouldn’t we? We have access into the throne room to speak with the King. Our Father in Heaven delights to hear from us and He will answer our every request. Jesus said, you have not because you ask not.

In the context of evangelism, prayer shows a humility and dependency on God to save sinners. Perhaps, sometimes we think our strategies and clever tactics are sufficient to bring men savingly to Christ, but our prayers remind us that is God alone who has the power to change a man’s heart.

So, we need to be faithful in prayer. Secondly Paul tells us to be alert.

Be Alert

Verse 2 again, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it.” By watchful Paul is saying we need to be aware and attentive. Be on watch and keep an eye on what’s going on.

The question is: what are we supposed to watch out for? Paul doesn’t tell us here, but I think we get a clue in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. In verse 18, he says we should be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance.” What’s interesting is the context of Ephesians 6 is spiritual warfare. In verse 11 he said, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” It seems, then, that Paul is telling us to be alert in our prayer life to Satan’s schemes. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation” (Mark 14:38). Satan loves to assault us in our prayer time, especially if we’re praying for unbelievers to be saved. He doesn’t want to lose one soul.

How does Satan attack us? Let me give you some help so you can know how your enemy fights against you in prayer. Three D's.

1. Distraction. Satan loves to distract us when we're praying. Your mind wanders. You start thinking about stuff you have to do. You start worrying about things of the world. Next thing you know, you're not praying anymore because the enemy has distracted you.
2. Doubt. God is not listening to you. Why would He? You're too sinful. You haven't made up for what you did. He's not going to save that person anyways. And that leads to the last one.
3. Discouragement. Because he's good at distractions and because he implants doubt, we get discouraged. What's the use? My prayers aren't heard anyways.

Be alert to his schemes, Christians, and combat his tactics with the promises of God. The Lord said, "Call to me and I will answer you" (Jeremiah 33:3).

Be faithful and alert in prayer. Finally:

Be Thankful

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." This should be obvious, but believers need to be reminded that gratitude is essential Christian characteristic. An ungrateful Christian is a contradiction in terms. We above all people on the planet, should be the most thankful. God has chosen and redeemed us in Christ. He sealed us with Spirit, and we have the promise of eternal life. Christians, we have so much to be thankful for, and our gratitude should be reflected in our prayers.

So, in your prayer life—be faithful, be alert and be thankful. That's how we should pray. Let's shift gears and talk about what we should pray.

What to pray (V.3-4)

³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison

There are three things here I want you to notice.

Pray for your leaders

Paul says, “At the same time” meaning, as you pray in general, “pray also for us.” The “us” Paul is referring to here is himself and his ministry companions. This includes the men he’s already mentioned such as Timothy and Epaphras as well people we will talk about next week like Tychicus, Aristarchus, Mark, Luke and Demas. Paul is asking prayer for an open door for more gospel ministry, which we will talk about in a minute, but I want to take a moment to say a word on praying for your leaders.

Unfortunately, in many churches, it’s all too common for Christians to criticize their leaders. But the Bible tells us we should pray for our leaders. Christians, pray that the leaders here at TJC would be faithful, that our efforts and attention would remain focused on the Great Commission. Especially as our church grows, our leaders need prayers for wisdom and guidance more than ever. Pray that we should stay strong, faithful, and encouraged.

Pray for open doors

You will notice back in verse 3, Paul is specifically asking for prayer that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.” Paul says, pray that God would open a door for the word. Meaning, pray that God would give us opportunities to share the gospel.

I just got back from a short-term trip to the Philippines. While there, our goal was to find one place where we could invest our time. The island of Bucas Grande is divided into 13-14 villages called Barangays. Our plan was to go door to door talking with people hoping to find reception into their lives and homes. The first village we entered, God opened a door. The captain (who oversees the village) gave us permission to go door to door as we pleased, and the people received us into their homes. Every day that week we went to that same village, morning and night, and people received us into their homes where we shared the gospel. God opened a door.

Christians, you can do this in your own life. Pray that God would open a door for you to share the gospel in your homes, with your friends and at your jobs. Pray that you would have opportunities to share the gospel with those far from Christ.

That’s Paul’s goal, and when that door opens, he wants “to declare the mystery of Christ.” “He wants an opportunity to tell people about the glorious person and work of Jesus.

During our in the Philippines, we visited a man who said he belonged to a church that didn't teach that Jesus is God. He asked us to show him where in the Bible it says that Jesus is God. So, we showed him, and he got mad, because the Scripture is abundantly clear on the deity of Christ. But he still wasn't sure. So, he set up a meeting between our group and his church's minister, who essentially is a cult leader because he denies that Jesus is God. The next day we met with this "minister" inside this man's house and for 90 minutes, our mission's group declared to this man and his followers the mystery of Christ. We showed from the OT and NT that Jesus is not only the promised Messiah, but that He is God in the flesh and that the whole Bible is about Him.

Friends, that's our goal. You and I can't convert anyone. That's not our job. Our job is to declare the incomparably glorious person and worth of Jesus Christ.

Pray that God would open doors for you to do that.

Pray for gospel clarity

Verse 4, "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." Paul says, pray for opportunities to share the gospel, but also pray that when I do share the gospel that I make it clear. The last thing I want to do is be confusing.

I often have the privilege of teaching the guys on our staff about theology and preaching. They write papers. We go over sermons and how to preach. You can ask those guys: what do I emphasize more than anything? Clarity! Be clear in what you say. The most important rule in business is location, location, location. Even more important is this rule in gospel communication—clarity, clarity, clarity.

We must make the gospel clear. With clarity must come accuracy. Pray that when you share the gospel you do so with precision. You don't want people to wonder what you're talking about.

I think sometimes we think we have to be clever. We want to tell people something interesting and catchy—something they've never heard before. Friends, the bare bones gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Telling people they have sinned against the Lord, that they deserve His judgment, but our God has provided the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient. Tell them Christ died for sinners. Show them that Jesus paid it all—all to Him we owe. Declare to them that He is risen from the dead and now reigns in Heaven as the One with all power an authority.

Christians, tell them the gospel and do so with clarity! That brings us to our next point.

Point #2-Spreading the Gospel Requires our Participation (V.5-6)

Prayer is important, but it is not enough. We must be directly involved in the lives of unbelievers. Every Christian is called to be a witness for Jesus (Acts 1:8), but we must be mindful of some things before we approach the task of evangelism.

In verses 5-6 Paul addresses two things—our behavior and our speech.

Behavior (V.5)

Walk with wisdom

In verse 5, Paul says, “walk in wisdom toward outsiders.” When Paul says, “walk” he’s referring to how we live our lives, how we conduct ourselves. “Outsiders” refers to non-Christians. They’re outsiders to the church, and really, they’re outsiders to God.

By the way...if you are here today and you’re not a Christian, you’re on the outside with God. Because of your sin, you are separated from His love and blessings. I don’t say that to be mean. I say that so you will be saved. I say that so you will turn to Jesus Christ and His cross for the forgiveness of your sins.

So, Paul says we should conduct with wisdom towards unbelievers. What does he mean by that? I think he means live lives that commend the gospel. This whole section is about winning the lost to Christ. It would be unwise if we told people about Jesus with our mouths but not with our lives.

When my wife and I first got married, we were attending a church and considering becoming members. We went to a new members class to learn more about the church and the man running the class was a guy I played basketball with. On the court, he was arrogant and outspoken. Now he’s running a membership class? I was really put off by that. And listen, I was a Christian thinking these things. I knew Christians weren’t perfect. My point is what do you think non-Christians think about Christians when they talk about Jesus but behave like the world? It’s no wonder Gandhi said, “I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” You can decide whether really said or whether not he even really understood Jesus. But the point stands. Sometimes Christians don’t represent their Savior well.

Christians, you may not realize this, but people are watching your life. They’re trying to decide if you behave like the Jesus you profess. Ask yourself this, if someone followed

you around with a camera for a week, besides the time you go to church, would we know you're a Christian when we watch the video?

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders.

Use your time wisely

Verse 5 says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time."

The text literally reads, "the time redeeming" or "redeem the time." God redeemed us in Christ. When we were in our sinful, filthy condition, He purchased with the blood of His Son. He reclaimed us and now uses us for His purposes. Paul says do the same with your time, because, as he says in Ephesians, "the days are evil." The idea is that we need to reclaim our time for Christ. We need to use our time wisely for the sake of serving Jesus.

We waste a lot of time, and that's sad. Think of it this way. Imagine a rich man agreed to give you \$1440 per day to spend, but there's a catch. You have to spend every dollar each day or you lose what you don't spend. You can't save a cent. Every day you will get the same amount and at the end of every day you have to give an account of how you spent the money. Did you squander it? Did you spend it on worthless things? What's the point, Pastor? God gives you 1440 minutes every day. You have to spend it. You can't save one second. And at the end of your life, you and will give an account for how we spend our time.

Are you redeeming the time? Or are you wasting time? In Psalm 90:12, Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Make that your prayer. God help me use my time wisely for Christ. Help me not to waste time on trivial things.

Christians act wisely towards non-Christians and use your time wisely. Our behavior is important, but so is our speech. In this section, Paul isn't focused on so much on what to say but how to say it.

Speech (V.6)

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

I used to be one of these guys who said, just tell them the gospel. If they don't like it, that's too bad. It's my job to speak the truth, nothing else. I've calmed down a little bit since my 20's. I've also come to realize that approach isn't biblical. It's true we're supposed to speak the truth, but we're also called to speak the truth in a certain way. The

Bible tells us to speak the truth in love, and I think Paul fleshes that out here by giving us three ways we should speak the truth.

Be gracious

Verse 6, “Let your speech always be gracious.” In other words, make sure you show non-Christians the same grace God has shown you. Be patient when they don’t understand or believe what you’re saying. You were once lost too. Our words are like nitroglycerin. They can be used to heal hearts and blow up bridges. Make sure words are full of kindness and love.

Sometimes Christians use “truth telling” as an excuse to be jerks. I am not saying we should water down the truth. I am also not saying we shouldn’t call sin what it is. But, Christians, we need to remember that our gospel is offensive enough. Our gospel already says that man is a sinner destined for hell apart from Christ. We’re already telling every other religion that they’re wrong. We’re telling every man he’s far worse, morally speaking, than he could ever dream. Our gospel is already offensive enough, we don’t need to add unnecessary offense.

So be gracious in your speech.

Be Winsome

This is similar to being gracious but there is a distinction. “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” In Paul’s day, salt had two primary purposes. One, since they didn’t have refrigeration, salt was used to preserve food. Secondly, salt was used to flavor bland food. We do the same thing today. Salt makes plain food more acceptable to our taste buds.

That’s what Paul is telling us to do with the gospel. Make sure when you speak the gospel, you season your words with salt. Make sure your words are acceptable and winsome.

When you tell someone about the God you love, do so with joy in your tone. Some of you speak with more joy about your dog than you do Jesus. When you have to tell people tactfully. I had a guy tell me one time, tact is the ability to tell someone to get lost and they can’t wait to get started. We have a much more offensive message than that. We’re

telling sinners about judgment and Hell. We should do so with tears in our eyes. When we speak of the cross, gratitude should overwhelm the conversation.

Make sure your words are winsome. Finally,

Be thoughtful

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Be thoughtful about the person you're speaking to. The gospel must be contextualized to each person. Every man and woman need to hear the basic facts of sin, judgment and salvation. But each person is different and will need different aspects of the gospel emphasized.

Maybe you're dealing with a woman whose father left when she was little and she needs to hear that in Christ she has a Father in Heaven who will never or forsake her. Or maybe you're dealing with that father who abandoned his family. He needs to hear that his sins can be forgiven, and his guilt can be removed through the shed blood of Christ. Addicts need to hear about the transformational power of the gospel. Those who are depressed need to learn about the unshakable joy we have in Jesus. I could go on and on about each person needs the gospel contextualized to their situation. So be thoughtful about who you are speaking with.

Exhortation

Now, I realize as I have been speaking about evangelistic methods, I've made the assumption that you are regularly sharing your faith. However, I am sure that many of you in here rarely do so at all. If that is you, let me give you a word from Spurgeon.

"You all remember...the story that we had about the doctor at one of our hospitals, a year or two ago. He healed a dog's broken leg and the grateful animal brought other dogs to have their broken legs healed. That was a good dog. Some of you are not half as good as that dog! You believe that Christ is blessing you, yet you never try to bring others to Him to be saved! That must not be the case any longer. We must excel that dog in our love for our species and it must be our intense desire that if Christ has healed us, He should heal our wife, our children, our friends, our neighbors; and we should never rest until others are brought to Him!"—1892, Sermon 2260

Christians, we must share our faith. It's not a suggestion. It's a command. So, before we close, we are a few practical take aways to help you spread the gospel.

Take aways

1. Tell people what you do know. The most common excuse I hear about why Christians don't share the gospel is they don't know enough. My response to them is, just tell people what you do know. The Lord doesn't expect every believer to be a seasoned apologist. He knows your limitations. But He does expect you to tell people about the gospel you believe. You know God is the Creator and Judge of the Earth. You know we've sinned and deserve His judgment. And you know that Christ died and rose again to save sinners. Tell people what you know!
2. The Gospel is sufficient. You don't need clever tricks and gimmicks. You don't need manipulations and wise tactics. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. The most effective evangelist is the one who shares the gospel with love for sinner. Do that and God will be pleased.
3. No one is beyond the reach of saving grace. Maybe you have been sitting this morning thinking about that one person who is lost and beyond reach. You're discouraged because you think they will never be saved. Never forget that God is able to save even the most hardened man or woman. No one is beyond the reach of His saving grace.

Conclusion

Several years ago, a woman in my congregation called to tell me that both her parents had been diagnosed with terminal cancer in the same week and asked if I would visit them. To this woman, her mother was a saint. She was always there for her and her sisters growing up. But their father was the exact opposite. He walked out on the family when the kids were young. He was a drunk and not a good man.

I visited the mother and father on the same day. They had been divorced a long time and were in different hospitals. When I talked with the mother, I shared the gospel with her. Her response was, that's nice, but I have never really sinned before. I was shocked.

After that visit, I went to see the father. He too was on his death bed. When I got to the room, we had a little small talk but he knew why I was there. He began to tell me he wasn't a good man. He hadn't been there for his family. I told him the gospel as well and

asked him if he wanted to receive Christ and have his sins forgiven. With tears in his eyes, he said yes and we prayed.

Less than a month later, I performed both their funerals in the same week. I am not very confident that I will see that woman in heaven. But I do think I will see the man. I have hope his sins were forgiven and he was given eternal life.

Friends, we're not playing games when it comes to the gospel. We're dealing with the souls of real people. Real people who will one day soon face a real God for real judgement. And you and I may be the only thing standing in between them and eternity. So, go, make disciples. Share your faith and be witnesses for Christ.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What did you think of the first story Pastor Brandon shared about the guest speaker speaking at the university and him saying that not everyone is called to evangelize because not everyone has the gift of evangelism?
- 2) Go back through Colossians 4:2-4. Why is Paul emphasizing the importance of prayer? Why is it important in sharing the gospel?
- 3) Are we faithful to share the gospel as if it up to us or the Lord who saves this person?
- 4) Ask the question. What does faithful sharing look like in our group? Are we being faithfully obedient to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those that God has put in our path?
- 5) Read vs. 5-6. What is Paul inferring in these verses? How is he guiding the people as witnesses of Jesus Christ?
- 6) Today's text has been very direct. What's does faithful, joyful-obedience look like for you today in light of God's truth in Colossians 4:2-6?