

The Supremacy of Christ and the Fruit of Gospel Hope
Gospel Urgency: Colossians 4:2-6
Sunday, August 16th, 2020

Scripture:

Colossians 4:2–6

[2] Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. [3] At 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—[4] that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

[5] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Let's Pray

Introduction:

If you have been joining us this summer either in-person or online, you know that we began a series in the book of Colossians back on June 7th called, “**The Supremacy of Christ and the Fruit of Gospel Hope.**” We gave it this name because we believe that there are the two overarching ideas that Paul is trying to communicate in this letter:

1. Is the Supremacy of Christ.

As Paul so masterfully wrote of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20:

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The second overarching idea is

2. Gospel Hope.

Look with me at Colossians 1:3-5:

*[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, [5] because of the **hope laid up for you in heaven**. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, **the gospel...***

Paul is reminding us that we have an eternal hope (the hope of a forever life with Christ) that came to us through the gospel of Christ. **We have a Gospel Hope.**

And when we have a right understanding of who Christ is as the supreme God and grasp the eternal hope that he has given us, **it will lead to fruit**, meaning that it will affect the way we live.

As it says in Colossians 1:9-10:

[9] And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul's prayer is that we would be transformed by our knowledge of Christ and his purposes so that we would live them out in a way that pleases him. Meaning, that we would live and work in ways that proclaim and build his kingdom.

So a right understanding of Christ's supremacy and our eternal hope in him will and should produce fruit.

The reason Paul is compelled to write these things to the Colossians is so they would continue to put their full trust and hope in Christ and his commands, even as they are faced with false teachers and teaching.

Teachers that are trying to convince the Colossians that true spirituality is found in something besides Christ. That real spiritual wisdom and fulfillment are found in things like visions, human philosophies, traditions, angel worship, and extreme legalistic behavior.

But Paul says of these things in Colossians 2:23:

[23] These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

In contrast to this, Paul goes on in Chapter 3 to show them where the real fruit that pleases Christ is found.

It's found when we seek after and set our minds on Christ's kingdom, and when we live in ways that are consistent with his kingdom.

And in Colossians 3:5-24 Paul unpacks what it looks like to seek and live out Christ's kingdom within our own lives, the church, and our homes. **And if you missed any of the messages on these verses, I would encourage you to go to the website and check out the last three sermons which cover all of chapter 3.**

But he doesn't stop there. Paul has already said that the gospel is bearing fruit in the whole world (Col. 1:6), that God is working to reconcile the world to himself (Col. 1:20), and that the goal of his ministry is to proclaim Christ so that he could present people to God as mature believers in Christ (Col. 1:24-29).

And in today's passage he picks these themes back up by giving us concrete instructions on how we are to join him in the ministry of proclaiming Christ. Or to say it another way he takes these few verses to show the Colossians and us how we are to live our lives in relation to those who don't know Christ. He calls us to do the following:

1. Pray Against temptation
2. Pray for Gospel Opportunities
3. Make the most of Gospel Opportunities

And he says these things with the understanding that though we are not apostles, our main mission is still the same, **to live and proclaim his kingdom, for his glory and pleasure, right where we are at.**

So this morning let's take a look at each of these and see how God wants to spur each one of us on to a greater gospel urgency both in prayer and in how we live.

1. Pray Against Temptation

[2] Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

If you are a cancer survivor, you know the importance of watching your lifestyle and your body so that you hopefully don't get cancer again, but if you do you will be able to get it treated early.

If you are a computer programmer, you know the importance of carefully reading and rereading your code so that your program will work properly.

And if you are a soldier you know the importance of being vigilante and attentive when you are on guard in a battle zone.

But do we understand that we are called to this same kind of vigilance, attentiveness, and alertness in our Christian lives?

You see, Paul has spent a lot of time in this letter showing the Colossians the greatness of Christ and the emptiness that exists in the false teachers and teachings. And because he has painstakingly laid out this argument, we might assume that Paul doesn't need to say anything else about it.

However, think about your own life. How many times has someone told you something and then you chose to do the exact opposite? **Hey, don't eat that pizza it's too hot! Mmm Pizza, Ah! I burned my tongue.**

Or on Halloween, you get all of that candy, and your parents say, now don't eat that all at once or you will make yourself sick. What do you do? You gorge yourself with candy and then you feel miserable.

A big one in American culture is overspending. We have been told for years that credit card debt is bad, but when something comes along that we really want, instead of saving up for it we choose to put it on the credit card because we want it now, even though we are unsure of when we will have the money to pay that card off.

In the same way, Paul understands that though he has said all these things to the Colossians they are still at risk of walking away from them. The false teachers and teaching still exist and if the Colossians are not careful, they will fall into the lie of finding fulfillment in something else besides Christ.

They will become ensnared or captivated by empty and deceitful philosophies and practices that can't save them. And not only will it affect them, but it will infiltrate the entire church, and it will impact their gospel witness in the world.

With this in mind, Paul calls tells the Colossians to be diligent or persistent in prayer and to be watchful in it. Meaning that they are to constantly pray and ask God to keep them from these temptations.

This is similar to what Jesus says to the disciples in Mark 14:38:

[38] Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We are no different. Temptations exist all around us. The temptation of consumerism, laziness, apathy, self-centeredness, and all sorts of indulgences are everywhere in our culture. And though we so badly have every good intention of not falling prey to them, we often do.

We often find ourselves in a place where Christ and his kingdom are not what thrill us. They are not what drive us, and we become apathetic to the things of God, forgetting the fullness of life, hope, power, and mercy that we have been given by him.

And when this happens it not only affects our personal lives, but it also affects the church, and our individual and corporate witness to the world. People will hear us talking about Christ, but they will see us living for less than Christ. And in the end, they may say of us “**We don’t want their Christ.**”

And so, Paul’s call us to diligence and watchfulness. A diligence in prayer, which includes an intentional focus on thanking God for who he is and all that he has done for us. And a watchfulness in prayer so that we would not fall into sin and be living for less than Christ and his kingdom purposes.

In fact, what Paul has in mind is very close to how Jesus told his disciples to pray in Matthew 6: 9-13:

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
[10] Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
[11] Give us this day our daily bread,
[12] and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
[13] And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

So if we are to have a kingdom focus and a gospel urgency we must first pray against temptation. Next Paul calls us to

2. Pray for Gospel Opportunities

Colossians 4:3-4

[3] At 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—[4] that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

I think most adults in this room have probably heard about the Great Awakening in the 1700’s. If you don’t know what it was the basics of it are that there was spiritual apathy or laziness in the early American colonies.

Many people attended church, because they were supposed to, but not many people really lived it out. **Sound familiar.**

But then something happened. Many preachers and pastor like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield started to preach the full orbbed message of Christ and a revival of genuine faith, repentance, and Christ-centered zeal broke out in these colonies.

In fact, many people credit Jonathan Edwards as the father of the Great Awakening. But there is also one thing that many Christian historians would also say was true of this movement.

That its true foundation was in prayer, as a small group of religious leaders and church members tirelessly prayed and sought God for revival in these colonies. One example of this comes from the life of the great evangelist George Whitfield who was said to have pray for hours and sometimes all night before an evangelistic rally.

Now, I don't think Paul is saying that we need to pray all night, though that wouldn't be a bad thing. But he is calling us to constant and diligent prayer. Prayer that not only prays against temptation, but prayer that passionately cries out to God that he would open doors in our culture and in the world so that the gospel would go forth and transform lives.

This was exactly what Paul was hoping for in his situation. He was asking the Colossians to pray diligently and fervently that God would open doors in Rome, even while Paul was in prison, so that he would be able to boldly and plainly share the truth of Christ.

Now be honest. If most of us were in that situation, what would we want prayer for? We would want people to pray and ask God to get us the heck out of prison, right?!

But instead of seeing prison as a hinderance to the gospel or even as a situation to escape from he sees it as an opportunity for the message of Christ crucified to go forth and bear fruit in the Roman empire.

You see what drove Paul was not his own desire for safety or to live a safe and happy life, but instead it was a deep-rooted desire to make Christ known.

He has tasted and experienced the Supreme and cosmic ruler of Colossians 1:15, has within him the deep and abiding gospel hope of Colossians 1:3-5, and he rightly understands that all true treasures, riches, and pleasures or found in Christ. As he says of Christ in Colossians 2:3:

*[3] in whom are hidden **all the treasures (all the riches and pleasures)** of wisdom and knowledge.*

Which means that he cares very little about his own physical safety so long as the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and bears fruit in the world. It was this driving desire which caused

him to ask the Colossians to pray that God would open the door for him and his associates to be able speak this message with boldness in Rome.

And if you we are wondering whether or not these prayers were affective, we only have to turn to the book of Philippians for the answer. Paul rights about his imprisonment in Philippians 1:12-14:

*[12] I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served **to advance the gospel**, [13] so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. [14] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

Through diligent and fervent prayer the gospel was advanced.

How about each one of us? Do we believe that God will powerfully work through our prayers to advance his kingdom? Do we believe that the prayers that we pray today will open doors for the gospel where we live and across the globe tomorrow? Do we even desire that?

Most of you already know this, but this fall and throughout this next year we will be focusing on prayer. In fact, this has been the thing that Pastor Dan has been working on while he has been on sabbatical. And I want you to know that these are the kinds of prayers that we as your leaders are going to be praying and that will be calling on each of you to pray.

Prayers that not only increase our hearts desire for Christ and his kingdom, but bold prayers that ask God to open the gospel flood gates in our space and time, and across the globe.

But let's not wait until then. Let us begin to diligently and constantly pray that the gospel of Jesus Christ will take root and bear abundant fruit in our own hearts and that it will transform our church, our city, this region, and the world just as it did Rome and the early American colonies.

Lastly, a gospel urgency should cause us to:

3. Make the most of Gospel Opportunities

Colossians 4:5-6

[5] Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. [6] Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Americans spent an average of roughly 5.25 hours a day on leisure type activities in 2019. Now there are a lot of fascinating break downs within this statistic, but I will spare you all the details.

The point is that we as Americans love our leisure, which of course isn't all bad. But the thing about Paul's words to us in Colossians 4:5 is that they cause us to pause and ask ourselves, **are we making the best use of our time?**

Now you might ask, how do we know what the best use of our time is? Well, Paul gives us that answer in the beginning of verse 5 and he then expounds on it in verse 6.

We make the best use of our time by walking in wisdom toward non-believers or those outside the church.

This means that we are to live our lives within our workplaces, communities, and cities in such a way that they would see the reality of Christ manifested in how we live, and as verse 6 makes clear, in how we speak.

Our actions, words, and time should be oriented around living and proclaiming the message of Christ. **And every other leisure and activity though good, must orbit around that primary reality.**

Peter communicates something similar in 1 Peter 2:12 when he writes:

[12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Peter isn't merely saying be a good person, but he is telling this church to live in a way that causes the Gentiles to believe in Christ or glorify God when he returns.

They are to make the best use of every opportunity.

Now I want to make it clear neither Paul nor Peter are diminishing the importance of God's people gathering in the local church. In fact, Paul's words in Colossians 3 shows us the importance of gathering, encouraging, and admonishing one another.

But I believe that what Paul is saying in Colossians 4:5-6 are meant to be an extension of how we live together as a body of believers. As we see in Acts 2:42-47:

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

As we live our lives together inside and outside of these walls, we are meant to be witnesses to the greatness of who Christ is.

So Paul's imperative or call to us is this: Be looking for opportunities to reflect the supernatural reality of Christ is in how we live and in how we speak, so that we may be boldly and winsomely proclaiming Christ and his finished work the lost that they would be saved.

This is not optional, and is meant to be the focus of every believer in their homes, work places, and communities.

This is why we, as your elders, came back from our elder retreat in December convinced, as we still are, that God was calling us to plant Christ-centered local churches. **Because we believe that the call of the gospel should compel us to band together, right where we live, so that Christ and his kingdom would be proclaimed within our communities not only in word, but also in deed.**

Conclusion:

So we must fervently and diligently pray. We pray against temptation of sin and the temptation to put our hope in something besides Christ. And we must pray that through our lives and the lives of Christians around the globe that doors for the gospel and revival will be open. And lastly, my hope and prayer for each one of us is that we will take seriously the call to live out, both in word and in action the gospel of Jesus Christ right where God has placed you us. With the desire of Paul that the lost would be saved and as he says in Colossians 1:28: **"...that we may present everyone mature in Christ."**

May this be the driving passion and joy of our lives.

Let's pray