

For the past few weeks we have been studying the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians. A man by the name of Epaphras had apparently gone to that city some years earlier and by his evangelistic efforts, his teaching and leadership a group of people had formed a church.

According to chapter one, they had heard about God's grace - His willingness to forgive their sins and give them spiritual life - a relationship with God through Jesus.

They had become Christ-followers, Christians.

And now, some time later, the Apostle writes this letter to them.

A letter in which, as we have seen, he reminds them of the fundamentals, the basic dimensions of the good news about Jesus - who Jesus is.

In chapter two he describes a little more fully what this new relationship to Jesus Christ is like.

Then in chapter three he says, since you have this relationship to Jesus, God wants you to live differently than before.

God wants compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience to characterize your relationships with people.

Then, as we have seen the past three weeks, Paul has given direction as to how those attitudes are to be applied in our real-life relationships:

Marriage - 3:18-19

Family - 3:20-21

and Work - 3:22-25

But before giving final greetings to end his letter, the Apostle writes to these Christians about yet one more area of relationships wherein their attitudes will make a difference.

He writes to remind them of their relationship to those who don't know Jesus.

He doesn't write in any guilt-inducing way.

He writes in a straightforward recommissioning of these Christians to their Christ-given responsibility and calling.

Jesus had said to his disciples, "You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Of Paul, Jesus had specifically said, "he is my chosen instrument to carry my name to unbelievers."

In this very letter, Paul had written that his life's purpose was to proclaim Jesus.

And as the entire N.T. makes clear, this calling, this mission was not only given to the disciples and to Paul but it was given to every believing Christ-follower.

These Colossian Christians are no exception - and so Paul reminds them and us of that mission: READ 4:2-6

I want to use several different words to describe Paul's recommissioning of us to evangelism.

And my prayer is that as we think through these words we will desire, we will choose to actively seek opportunities this summer to introduce others to Jesus.

Look with me please at chapter 4:2.

I ask you to look at the text when I preach because I want you to thoughtfully evaluate whether what I am saying is from the Bible or not.

God said that people come to a saving knowledge of his Son through the Word - the Bible.

He further said that Christians grow in their knowledge of Jesus through the Word.

As preachers and teachers in the church, the only things we can communicate with authority and true spiritual power are those things which come from the Scriptures.

It is not enough that I or any preacher tell you God has said such and such.

It is only true if in fact God has said it.

And that you can only know by checking it out for yourself -

Is what the preacher is saying what the Bible is saying.

It is written in the book of Acts, of the people of the city of Berea, that as he was preaching the people would check the Bible to see if the things Paul was saying were true.

That's the kind of people I want you to be.

I want you, when I am preaching from a text, to engage that text.

I want you look, I want you to think carefully about what is written and what is said.

For only if I am reflecting what God's Spirit has written can these words be truth to your minds, life to your hearts, and strength to your spiritual bones.

I urge you to bring your Bibles to church, look at the text when I preach from it and see if it is God's word to you so that you may respond to Him, not just to the preacher.

In Colossians 4:2 Paul continues his instructions about real-life Christian living by urging them to pray.

While it is possible, grammatically, to take that verse and understand it as a general though impassioned call to prayer of all kinds, I think you would agree that the context, the verses that follow, suggest this is prayer of a particular kind Paul is urging on them.

And the particular kind of prayer is prayer for evangelism.

For in verse 3 he specifies the content of the prayer he has in mind.

I want you to pray that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim Christ...

I suggest to you then, that even from verse 2 the Apostle's instructions have to do with evangelism - Christ's commissioning of us to tell others about Him.

We will come back to the issue of prayer for evangelism but I want you now to see the two other words the Apostle uses in that 2nd verse: Watchful and thankful.

And because of the context, I think these two words, also, are dealing with evangelism.

Beginning at verse 3, Paul will tell the Christians specifically what to do in their evangelism, in other words, how to evangelize, but here in verse 2 he gives two motivating factors for evangelism - "why" we evangelize.

So the first of the several words I want you to think about today is this word "Watchful".

Christians are to be watchful - awake, alert, aware.

Alert and aware of the truth about God, life, death, and heaven and hell.

Much of the world lives in a spiritual coma - unaware of the truth.

If you were to look in your Bible at the other times this word "Watch" is used you too would find that most often it has to do with a mental alertness to the truth that Jesus is coming again.

Do you know what one of the great motivations to evangelism is?

There truly is a Jesus who is God who came to this earth, died for us, rose from the dead, ascended to His Father in heaven and is coming again!

Do you truly believe those things about Jesus?

If you actually do, it changes everything!

Christians don't live as if promotions, salaries, vacations, parties, and cars matter most in life.

We believe Jesus is coming again.

We are alert to that fact, expecting it to happen and investing our energies, our time and our money in the anticipation of His return.

So we invest in what will matter then.

Do we believe people will spend eternity either in heaven or hell?

Recently I saw a television program in which an eight year old boy, raised in a nominally Christian home, decided he wanted to adopt the Jewish religion.

His father asked him what it was about Judaism that attracted him.

He responded that he liked the Jewish emphasis on good deeds, on being kind and the fact that they didn't believe in hell.

To that his father said "Christianity also emphasizes good deeds and being kind." trying to convince him there was no real difference between the two faiths, requiring his conversion to Judaism.

But the little boy said, "Yes but in Christianity, there is still that hell to deal with."

He's right.

Jesus spoke much of hell.

He cared enough for people to warn them of the coming judgment.

He told them that apart from the gift of spiritual life which he offered they were condemned and would spend eternity in hell separated from God.

But as many as received Him, to them God gave the right to be His children - forever part of his family and in his presence.

Christians are watchful, alert to the truth of Jesus' coming again.

Aware that those who belong to him will inherit eternal life.

Christians are awake to the reality of heaven and hell.

What motivates us to evangelism is that Jesus is coming again and people will meet him either as saving-Lord or as judge.

But, in verse 2, not only are we to be watchful we are also to be "Thankful".

READ Col 1:21-22 AND Col 1:13-14

Christians are motivated to evangelism, to tell others about Jesus, because they know what Jesus has done in their own lives.

They are so thankful for what Jesus has done that they want Jesus to be honored and they want others to experience what they have.

I was talking very recently to a middle-aged woman of our church who was describing for me the family from which she comes.

She told me about her five brothers and sisters and the chaotic, abusive, addictive adult lives they live.

She described the tangled broken relationships and the pain they have inflicted on themselves and each other.

And then she described how God, years ago, reached into that mess and pulled her to himself.

By His grace he set her life on a whole different course than the rest of the family.

Her life has been radically different than the others and she knows it all by God's grace.

How many times have you, like me, been nearly overwhelmed with gratitude when you have considered how different your life would have been but for the grace of God.

We have been redeemed, loved, embraced, accepted, forgiven.

Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor on television, Margharnita Laski, one of England's best known secular humanist and novelist said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." Stott in [The contemporary Christian](#) cited in mid-June C.T. "Reflections"

We do! and we have been forgiven.

One of the things Paul has done in this letter to these Colossian Christians is remind them of the grace of God - I believe Paul knew that when they were filled with gratitude they would want tell others.

Genuine thankfulness motivates us to evangelism

Two things that move us to tell others about Jesus:

Watchfulness - An alertness to the truth that Jesus is coming again AND

Thankfulness - a heart full of gratitude.

With those two motivating factors restated, the Apostle Paul now returns to the issue with which he started this section - PRAYER

In their relationships to those who aren't Christians Paul calls these believers not only to watchfulness and thankfulness but also to prayer.

In fact, this is not just a command to pray but a command to persevere in prayer - "devote yourselves to it".

Adhere to it, persist in it.

This devotion to prayer is a determination to pray with a resolve not to give up.

William Carey was a highly successful missionary to India 100 years ago. He was known world-wide.

What was not known was that William Carey had an invalid sister who lived her whole adult life in a bed suffering greatly from disease.

Her brother was a missionary for many years and during all those years his sister prayed for him for hours each day.

Years later another missionary was lamenting the passing of William Carey and those other missionaries with his commitment and perseverance in ministry.

He said, "They just don't make missionaries like William Carey anymore."

A friend heard that remark and with equal lament said, "Come to think of it, you know what, the real issue is, they just don't make people like Williams Carey's sister anymore."

Paul said, I want you to devote yourselves to prayer.

And then in verses 3 and 4 he adds what he desires they would specifically pray about: READ 4:3-4

First, he asks that they would pray that God would open a door for the message.

It is easy for us to complain that the people in our family, in our neighborhood, in our place of work are closed to the gospel - as if some are easier to lead to Christ than others.

That is only an appearance of truth - for we dare not forget accurate theology.

According to the Bible, no one is seeking after God.

Everyone is blind to the truth.

No one is better suited or more susceptible to the gospel.

Unless God's Holy Spirit open's a person's blind spiritual eyes they will never respond to the truth about Jesus.

For anyone to come to Christ we are first and foremost dependent upon God to open a door for the message.

Most of us, who are Christians, still sit in awe as we watch what happens at a Billy Graham crusade.

Mr. Graham will preach and when the invitation is given hundreds if not thousands pour out of the stands and respond to the message.

Sociologists and seminarians will study the sermon techniques, the invitation itself, the music, the ambiance, the setting, trying to determine what is the cause for such a response.

What Billy Graham and others in his organization will tell you, that is so unseen, are the thousands who commit to devoted prayer for months before a crusade - that God will open a door for the message.

And the Apostle Paul writes not only do I want you to pray that God will open a door for the message but I also ask you to pray that I may be able to proclaim the message of Christ clearly.

How many of us pray regularly for the effectiveness of the gospel, for open doors of opportunity, for ears to hear, minds to comprehend and hearts to respond?

We pray for buildings, expenses, health, ability to do our jobs, etc (and well we should) but do we pray for the advance of the gospel in specific people's lives?

And how long since we have asked someone to pray for us that when those opportunities come we would be able to clearly speak of our Lord?

In our relationships with unbelievers God calls us to be

Watchful

Thankful

Prayerful

AND in verse 5 to be "Thoughtful" READ 4:5a

We are to be thoughtful, full of thought, wise in our relationships with non-Christians.

Real wisdom is a knowledge of God's will.

Wisdom in my relationships with unbelievers is to know what God desires to do in their lives through me.

This is not unrealistic, do-goody-two-shoes kind of thinking.

This goes back to the watchfulness and thankfulness we talked about earlier and the prayerfulness that understands a total dependence upon God.

And with that in mind, this thoughtfulness seeks to understand how God wants to work through me into that unbeliever's life.

It is an understanding that I am Christ's ambassador to that person.

It means that with my Lord and their salvation in mind I respond differently to an inconsiderate neighbor, to a jealous and spiteful coworker, to a mean family member.

I respond differently than most would, because I have a different agenda.

Paul said it this way to the Philippians: "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless...without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars as you hold out the word of life..." (2:14-15)

The other day I was traveling East on Hampden where, because of construction, the road narrows to one lane.

Like everyone else I pulled to the right and got in line waiting my turn when I noticed in my rearview mirror that another driver wasn't as patient as the rest of us.

He was coming down the left lane thinking that he would pass all of us and duck into the line at the front.

Well, as he came up from behind, I pulled my car out into his lane effectively blocking him and forcing him to pull into line behind me.

I felt so righteous about stopping him from cheating all the rest of us.

And then I thought he's bound to be a fairly unhappy camper at this point, and his unhappiness would be directed mostly at me.

What if he pulls up alongside me, sees me clearly, and then next Sunday shows up in this church and sees that the preacher is the same person.

For the gain of one car length in a traffic line, I would jeopardize the message of the gospel.

Rightly or wrongly, in his thinking my credibility would be seriously compromised.

We are to be wise, - giving great thought to our actions and responses to those who don't know Jesus.

Always building bridges never tearing them down.

In this area of evangelism, our desire to see others come to know Christ, Paul says I want you to be

watchful,

thankful,

prayerful,

thoughtful AND v 5 CAREFUL - "Making the most of every opportunity".

A pastor friend of mine called me this week and was telling me about his experience at the Indianapolis Promise Keepers conference a couple of weeks ago - 62,500 men.

He said one of the speakers was Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ.

He said, as you know Bill is not an inspiring speaker and he preached one of his old stock sermons on being filled with the Spirit. It was a real vanilla presentation.

After the night's meetings, a man in the crowd asked to see Bill. It happened that the man was an agnostic who had only come out of curiosity and to satisfy a friend who had invited him.

That night in the lobby of his hotel, Bill Bright led that man to Christ.

My friend said, "That's why that organization is so effective, because the man at the top never stops - Forty years he's been doing it and he never misses an opportunity."

That's also why I wanted you to hear R.J. Pauley's story this morning -

I don't know how old you are R.J. but you're older than I am, and yet by God's grace there you were making the most of an opportunity.

Responding to an 8 year old's questions is one thing but when that girl's mother appeared and you gently asked if she was interested - you seized the opportunity.

I'm not talking about aggressive, invasive, obnoxious Bible-banging evangelism but I am talking about praying for God to open doors and then being available and willing and full of enough care to walk through them.

"Careful" - making the most of every opportunity.

The last word I want to use to describe evangelism, as Paul discusses it here, is the word, "tactful".

"Tact" is doing or saying just the right thing.

Here the issue is tact in your conversation with non-Christians.

READ 4:6

Paul is talking about our speech - what we say when we talk to those who don't yet know Jesus.

Our conversation is always to be "full of grace, seasoned with salt."

Yes, I think gracious words are to be kind and compassionate but with the description that follows "seasoned with salt", I do not think Paul is talking just about being pleasant.

To the Ephesian Christians he wrote, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

This talk that is gracious, like the word grace, is concerned for the other person.

And being concerned for the hearer, the talker wants his words to fit the situation.

Not only are the words to be gracious but they are to be "seasoned with salt"

When we think of "salty" language we might think of sailors or marines.  
And we have in mind those who use profane and vulgar language.

But what is in mind here is not profanity but color.

Language that is "salty" is colorful language, interesting language.

Paul is telling the Colossians and us that when we speak of our Lord we should do so in a way that fits the person we are talking to and that is interesting enough that others would want to listen.

Oh how well I can remember being taught some canned approach to the gospel and then inflicting my nearly memorized speech on some poor unsuspecting classmate or friend.

Do you know how you feel when you answer the phone and some telemarketer starts into their spill and doesn't even hear your responses.

They aren't interested in you - they're interested only in their message.

How many times have unbelievers been subjected to our insensitivity's.

When I was 17 years of age I went to a pastor friend late one night after a date.  
My girlfriend was a Christian and she and I had been talking that night about knowing whether we were truly Christians.

I went to that pastor because I was anxious, even fearful.

It was late at night and he could have so easily dismissed me until the morning.

But his speech was gracious and he dealt with me in my need.

He was not the pastor of my church - in fact, though evangelical, his theology was quite different than mine.

But he didn't dump his agenda on me.

He listened and he spoke to my need.

Gracious, seasoned with salt, tactful.

We live in a real world, and just as certainly as we have relationships in our marriages, in our homes and in our places of work, so we will also have relationships with unbelievers.

And our attitudes and actions affect those relationships.

Paul teaches us to be:

Watchful - alert to the truth that Jesus is coming again - it changes our priorities.

Thankful - a heart full of gratitude wants others to know Jesus.

Prayerful - actively dependent on God to open doors of opportunity.

Thoughtful - wise in our dealings with non-Christians that by our lives, the gospel will be attractive to them.

Careful - watching for opportunities

and Tactful - fitting our words to meet the needs of those we talk to.

Will you join me this summer in prayerfully seeking opportunities to tell others about Jesus?

It is our mission.

Prayer and BENEDICTION # 5