

Wisdom and Salt

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Church of the Advent. If you are new here, we're so glad to have you. I'm the assistant pastor here, Dan Bielman. Our senior pastor, Tommy Henson, is away on sabbatical.

He has one week left, and I haven't heard anything about how a sabbatical is going until yesterday. I ran into him at the Maryland Renfest, and all I'm going to say is that his report was it's the best thing he and his family have ever done.

So, for all of you who have taken on extra responsibility because our pastor has been gone this summer, thank you so much. It was so worth it. So worth it. So, yeah. So, we've had a chance to hear from a number of different pastors this summer.

I've had a few opportunities to preach, and with my opportunities, we've been preaching through, thank you, Luke, through Luke chapter 4, no, excuse me, Colossians chapter 4, verses 2 to 6.

And the reason why we're in Colossians is because a while back we started Colossians, never quite finished. So, our goal this summer was to finally finish it. So, finally, yes. So, there are other verses in Colossians chapter 4 that we're not going to be discussing tonight, and that's because they're frankly hard to preach.

[1 : 17] There are a lot of greetings from Paul to different people in the Church of Colossa, and there's actually great stuff in there. So, if you'd like to, you can study, grab a commentary, and check it out on your own.

As for preaching, we've actually taken parts of those greetings and worked it into previous sermons. So, we're not going to preach that part of the chapter. Now, in June, we looked at verse 4, actually verse 2, and we explored what praying continually might look for us.

And I suggested that continuous prayer is akin to making ourselves present to God, making ourselves present to Him. In July, we noted how prayer comes from, leads into mission.

Paul asks for prayer as he preaches the gospel. So, we pause to define and explore the meaning of the word gospel. What is the gospel?

Well, concisely put, the gospel is the life-transforming message of salvation from sin and all its consequences through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 33] The gospel is both a declaration and a summons, announcing what has been done for us in Christ, and calling us to repentance, faith, and submission to His Lordship. And tonight, we're going to look at verses 5 and 6.

We're going to see that Paul extends the mission of proclaiming the gospel to the Colossians, the people in the church in this town of Colossa. And by extending it to Him, the spreading of the gospel, He extends it to us as well.

After unpacking the verses for a bit, we're going to talk about how to share the gospel by looking at Jesus' interaction with Samaritan woman in John chapter 4, which we heard Amy read for us tonight.

And by looking at that interaction, we're going to see the roles that vulnerability, listening, and testimony have when we share the gospel. Vulnerability, listening, and testimony, or story.

But before we begin, I'd like to say first that because we're talking about sharing the gospel, I'm speaking primarily to those here who are Christians.

[3 : 44] But that doesn't describe all of us, I understand. Some of us in this room are skeptical of the claims made by Christianity. And you're here because you're either visiting, or because a friend invited you, or because you've been attending for a while, because you find this to be your community, and yet you still have yet to fully accept the claims made by Christianity, all the things that this community believes.

If that describes you, then there's a chance that you'll be offended by some of the things I have to say tonight. So I would ask you just to withhold judgments until the very end.

Let me come around at the end and address some things that I think will ease your discomfort. In the meantime, we're glad you're here. Father, we wouldn't be Advent without you.

And we're grateful that you can be a part of this family discussion. So let's pray. Father, would you open our ears and our minds and our hearts to hear and receive your word?

Lord, and open up your word tonight to our ears and our eyes, our minds and hearts, that we might fully trust and believe in you and find you to be more beautiful at the end of this evening than at the beginning.

[5 : 20] Thank you for teaching to us through your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's look at some of Paul's exhortations to the Colossians.

Remember first that the book of Colossians is a letter. It's a letter written to a church. This church is in the little town of Colossa. It's a little town in what's now the Turkish Peninsula, what was once called Asia Minor.

And the issue that the church in Colossa had was they believed the gospel. And over time, they were being tempted by outsiders, outside teachers, to begin to accept other things as true.

Stuff from folk religion, stuff from Judaism. They started to mix it all in, and they were surrendering the riches of the gospel. Now, though Paul warns against influence from the outside, at the same time, he calls the Colossians to be a witness to those outside the church.

He tells them, in verse 5, to walk in wisdom towards outsiders. In the first three chapters, we see Paul explaining how our minds are renewed.

[6 : 41] And wisdom is the middle space between thoughts and actions. Wisdom enables us to determine just how our new way of thinking should be put into effect.

Don't adopt the worldview of outsiders, yet at the same time, stay engaged with your fellow citizens to win them to Christ. And be aware of how your actions color your testimony.

Next, he says, in verse 5, make the best use of the time. Make the best use of this moment. Well, what moment is this? What's the time in between?

The already, but not yet. The time after Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God and his rule through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And that time when it will be fully consummated when he comes again. So we're in this in-between time, and it's not going to last forever. Wise living is using the short time God has given us to his best effect.

[7 : 44] Next, he says, let your speech always be gracious. Or let your words, *logos*, be full of grace, *charis*, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each other.

So that you may know how to answer each person. In other words, let your speech be winsome, not flat or insipid. You could say, let your speech be seasoned for each specific occasion.

Or as the apostle Peter writes elsewhere, always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect.

So to summarize, Paul is giving the Colossians instructions on how to have a public faith. Their faith wasn't meant to be private, constrained to an individual's own personal existence, not to be shared with anybody else, nor was it meant to be shared by this community.

The church is not to be a fortress, bracing itself against the forces of culture in that city. Rather, the church was to be an outpost of the kingdom of God, proclaiming the hope and liberation found in Christ.

[9 : 08] And as the Colossians share the gospel, they must act wisely with urgency, wisely with urgency and with winsome, gracious speech.

Well, what does this mean for us? How can we put into practice being winsome and gracious in our speech, seasoned with salt? Well, we're going to look at John chapter 4.

We're going to look at how Jesus shares himself with the Samaritan woman. And we're also going to look at her response and how she shared her story. So our gospel lesson was the beginning of John chapter 4, but we're going to look at the whole chapter.

It begins with Jesus traveling through Samaria. Now, Jews didn't travel through Samaria. It's just not something they did. And they didn't interact with Samaritans. There was a deep hatred for Samaritans.

A rabbi from the first century wrote, he who eats the bread of the Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of swine. What the rabbi is saying is that by nature of their race, a Samaritan can make you unclean.

[10:22] And yet Jesus passed through Samaria to seek out this one Samaritan woman. His visitation is like a reverse hospitality.

He invites her into a conversation and relationship, breaking through the divisions of race, religion, gender, and lifestyle.

And then he does something pretty great. He exposes his vulnerability. He's tired and he's thirsty, which is interesting, right?

He's the creator of the world. He created water. He could probably create some more. It took a lot of energy to create the world. I'm sure he could come up with more energy. And yet to the Samaritan woman, he presents himself as tired and thirsty and needy for her sake.

And this is our first lesson. Speaking with grace means making ourselves vulnerable. Imagine, if you would, a woman moves to the far side of the world to start a business in a country.

[11:36] It's a small nation state on an island, fairly well developed. There's a majority culture and a minority culture. The two cultures get along just fine, although the majority culture looks down on the minority culture.

The majority culture, they have this interesting way of dressing. And the woman decides, well, I'm going to start a business here. I'm going to present myself to this culture as the culture presents itself, which I'm going to dress like them, which means they wrap themselves, not unlike a mummy. But they don't look like mummies. The wrappings are beautiful. Many colors. They're scented wraps. They're gemmed.

I mean, they go all out with these wraps. And it's from toe to head, or head to toe, right? You know, she doesn't think anything of it.

She just does it. And she also observes the minority culture, which actually kind of look like us. They kind of dress like us.

[12:41] They don't wrap themselves. And then there's nothing to it. Now, over time, the woman starts to develop these nasty wounds all over her body.

And she's not quite sure why. But she knows that the minority culture doesn't. They don't wrap their bodies. And they don't have these wounds. And so she starts to do some research into the history of this culture.

Now, she learns that this minority culture, they're kind of given this nickname called the hairlings. And it used to be that everybody was like the hairlings.

They didn't wrap themselves like this. And there was a time when everybody ate this particular fruit called hair fruit.

And that's where the hairlings get their name. This is not a true story. You probably figured that out. The hair fruit looks disgusting. It looks like hairy brown fruit.

[13:44] There's nothing in its appearance that you would desire it. There's no beauty to it or smell. It just smells bad, looks bad. You wouldn't want to touch it. Although the hairlings have kept eating it.

And there's something in the fruit that prevents these wounds from forming. At some time in this island's history, a large group of people decided, we don't want to eat any more of this fruit. These wounds developed. And it's because there's something in the soil that's causing these wounds. But they say, well, we'd rather just wrap ourselves. And cover the wounds. Then eat this fruit. And then they began to make the wrappings more elaborate.

And so you have these two different cultures. Well, she thinks, like, why don't I just eat the fruit? And she does. And it actually tastes great. Even though it looks horrific. And so she goes around and realized everyone else has these wounds.

And she's wondering, why don't you eat the fruit? Well, we're not going to eat the fruit because we're not hairlings. Like, why would we want to do that? Like, well, you should actually eat the fruit. Well, you don't eat the fruit. Like, yes, I do. How do we know? Like, well, just trust me.

[14:44] Eat the fruit and the wounds will go away. Like, how do you know? So how does she show, like, the whole culture that you should eat the fruit? Well, she unwinds the bandages and reveals the scars that were once there because of the wounds.

She makes herself vulnerable so that she can tell everybody, taste and see that this fruit is good. It has healing power. Let me tell you a true story. It's about three men.

One of them is a good friend of mine. He's a pastor of a church. And my friend is all about excellence. His preaching is excellent. He wants the music in his church to be excellent.

The children's ministry to be excellent. The architecture to be excellent. Everything needs to be excellent. And so one day he decided we should have a missions conference and that needs to be excellent.

You realize he wants to be excellent because of his own ego, right? Yes. Because he wants to be viewed as excellent. But the church's motto is our church is about excellence because it attracts people to the beauty of Christ and inspires them.

[15:50] So they're going to have an excellent missions conference and they hire an excellent missions speaker, or at least I assume he is. And he's fairly well known in the, I guess, missions conference world.

At the time. And he's very excited. And at the last minute, the speaker has to bail out because he's really old. So he can't come. So the missions agency says, don't worry.

We have somebody else who can come. He's going to do all the speaking. And my friend is like freaking out. Like, it's not going to be good. This thing is not going to be excellent. It's going to be miserable.

And people are going to look and think bad of me, right? So the guest speaker comes and he's a missionary to Africa.

And you know what he does? He spends a half hour talking about how difficult it is to live in this part of the world. How hard it is to live in a mud hut with the poisonous snakes and how much of a chore it is.

[16:52] Just to get water. Just to get clean water and to cook food. I mean, they don't have any time for actual like missionary stuff.

And it's just a chore. And they have experienced disillusionment and wonder why we're even there. And then he sits down. He sits down.

And my friend is like, that is the worst missions conference, the most uninspiring missions conference speech I've ever heard. We're supposed to hear about thousands of souls being rescued. Let me tell you about the third man.

There's a man who was sitting on the front row and he'd been sitting on the front row Sunday after Sunday, listening to my friend's sermons. But his heart wasn't changing. He was an agnostic, committed agnostic.

You can't know if there really is a God. But he did admit, I will admit there might be a God. If I can meet one person who actually believes this stuff.

[17:53] And you know what happened at the end of that missions conference? This man put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time. Because he heard how hard it was for this person to live out his calling as a Christian, as a missionary.

And he put his faith in Christ. It's not our excellence that inspires people and attracts them to the beauty of Christ. Listen to Henry Nouwen.

He wrote in his book, *The Wounded Healer*, it is not the task of the Christian leader, and I'm just going to change it to Christian. It is not the task of the Christian to go around nervously trying to redeem people, to save them at the last minute, to put them on the right track.

The Christian is to make visible in daily events the fact that behind the dirty curtain of our painful symptoms, there is something great to be seen.

The face of him in whose image we are shaped. It's not our excellence that attracts people to the beauty of Christ. It's our brokenness.

[18:58] And through that, people see the beautiful, healing, saving power of our Lord Jesus. So the first thing was vulnerability.

The second thing that is to inform our sharing the gospel is the second thing we learn is listening. Gracious speaking begins with listening. Listening shapes what we say. Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman continues in verse 9.

It reads like this. The Samaritan woman said to him, How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?

It's a good question. From here, in verse 9 through verse 24, you can see Jesus doesn't seem to feel the need to share the whole gospel with Herod, to share the whole story of Israel, how God created everything and then from everything chose a family, a people, Israel, to fill and spread the blessings of God throughout the entire world.

[20 : 13] No. He only says those parts which address the issues that this particular woman is facing.

And that makes sense, right? Because he's interested in this person. He's interested in this person with very specific and very real concerns, those that arrive from her own day-to-day experiences in a particular time and place and culture.

And her questions stem from the tensions between her ethnicity and Jesus' her culture and his, her religion and his, specific things that she hopes for or feels deep shame about.

If our speech is to be seasoned with salt, we can expect to be the same way. Otherwise, we won't hear the other person and they become less than a person and more of a project.

And they'll pick that up right away, won't they? A friend of mine learned this lesson in the most difficult of ways. He was training to be a hospital chaplain, which I've heard about hard jobs.

[21 : 30] This is one of the hardest I've ever heard of. And he went in to visit a young man that was dying. He was around 19 or 20 years old. And there's no question he was going to die.

And so he thought it was his job to bring hope to this young man. So he shares him the whole gospel, how God created, and this is a great story. And it's a true story.

And it inspires me. And I think it inspires you too, how God created the world good and perfect. And he made man to flourish and to fill the earth.

And how man rebelled and rebelled against the lordship and kingship of God, which brought all kinds of trouble, which brought sin into the world and death and broke everything, the environment, our relationships with each other, our relationships with ourselves and our relationship with the Lord.

But God sent his own son to restore and renew and to redeem and to fix. If we put our hope and trust and faith in Jesus Christ, we'll be unified to him.

[22 : 37] And then in one day, like after we die, we'll get resurrection bodies and live eternally with God. And that's what he shared with him. And it's all true. But you know what this man's reaction was?

Get out. And he raised his voice much more than that. And his family joined him. Get out of this room. I don't want a resurrection body.

I want this body. I don't want to die. My friend was so locked into a method that he missed a very real issue that this person right in front of him was dealing with.

He was afraid to die. Listening frees us from a script, from our own agendas, from a project, and it helps us address the real fears that people have, real concerns, doubts, protests.

Now, if you ask anyone who has come to faith as an adult, who didn't grow up in the church, the majority of time, they'll tell you, I came to faith because I had a friendship or relationship with a Christian.

[23 : 54] That's how it works. People come to faith through relationships. And relationships are established through trust. And trust is built through listening. So we share the gospel through being vulnerable, by leading with our brokenness, not with our excellence.

We share the gospel by listening first and not feeling the need to share the whole gospel right away. The third way to have our speech be gracious is to have it be our story.

We learn this from the woman's reaction. I'll read starting in verse 28 of chapter 4. So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, come see a man who told me all that I ever did.

Can this be the Christ? They went out of the town and were coming to him. We learn from the Samaritan woman that our testimony isn't primarily a list of doctrines and propositions that we need to subscribe to.

It's a story about our encounter with a living person. In verse 39, many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

[25 : 17] He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for

ourselves.

And we know that this is indeed the savior of the world. Now a comforting thing about sharing our faith is that we're just making an introduction.

And that we don't necessarily have to convince someone with our intellect or wit or rhetorical flourish. Jesus does that for us. We're introducing a person to a person.

Verse 42, they said to the woman, it is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves from him. And we know that this is indeed the savior of the world.

Now I understand how difficult it is for many of us in Washington, D.C. to bear witness in our workplaces in particular.

[26 : 26] How do I know if I should bear witness? Will it cost me my job or reputation? How do I know what to say? How do I know when to say it? Well, the first thing to remember is that your work itself bears witness.

The way you conduct yourself in your job, doing good work, being honest, showing kindness in a harsh landscape, doing good work, not giving into gossip or backbiting, doing good work.

All of these things, especially doing good work, go a long way in bearing witness that there is something different about you. I mean, even Paul says, like even by not doing two things, do you stand out like stars in the universe?

Don't complain and don't argue. Do everything without complaining and disputing and you will shine like stars in the universe. Okay, so after I do good work, I still have to say something, right?

Like probably. And that is how people come to faith. It's through the word. It's through word. So how will you know what to say? How will you know what to say and when to say it?

[27 : 49] Well, just ask him. Just ask him. You feel nervous, right? Well, what do you do when you get nervous? I'll tell you what I do when I get nervous. As a musician, as a musician, if I'm nervous on the stage, well, I just rely on my training, rely on what I've learned and practiced, rely on some instinct, put my head down and just get the job done, right?

Well, I'm behaving like I don't have a father. I'm behaving like I don't have a father who's willing to hear and give anything I should ask for.

He is always there. I just have to make myself present to him. You know, maybe what God is primarily interested in when we share the gospel is that his children are completely dependent on him.

And so we end where we began in chapter 4, verse 2 of Colossians. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Okay, a couple postscripts. The first is this. Some of you enjoy sharing the gospel.

[29 : 04] You're just like naturally gifted at it. For some of you, it's very difficult. But I think most of us understand it is all of our responsibility to share the gospel.

Now, what if I told you that there's a demographic when they hear the gospel taught to them, 99 times out of 100, they'll believe what you say.

And they'll be joyful to hear it and accept it and believe it. What if there's a demographic that was like that? Would you share the gospel with them?

Well, do you know who I'm talking about? Children. Our children. Our children. Now listen, the scriptures are entirely clear on this matter that if a family has children, this is like from the beginning in the Old Testament all the way to the end of the New, it is the responsibility of the family to impart the faith to the children.

Well, this is a family. This is a family. It's everyone's responsibility to proclaim the gospel to our children. But here's the great thing. They're going to believe you.

[30 : 14] They're going to believe you and they're going to accept it. So listen, Jane has had a really hard time finding people to teach our children at this hour, this coming fall.

A number of our longtime teachers have had to step down for various reasons. Now, perhaps you've been waiting on the sidelines and been wondering, what can I do to be a part of this church? How can I fit in? How can I help? Maybe you've been a member a long time and have been standing on the sidelines.

Maybe you've been coming for a long time. I would encourage you to talk to Jane. I'd implore you to talk to Jane because you're going to you're going to have success as a teacher of the gospel.

And yeah, please talk to Jane. So the second postscript is the thing I said at the beginning. There's some of us here that don't believe in the gospel. And perhaps some of this sharing of the gospel

sounds kind of insidious.

Wait, you're just like kind of forcing your beliefs on people? Shouldn't they be free to choose and decide for themselves? That sounds like aggrandizement at the best.

[31 : 24] Well, let me tell you if that's the way you feel or inclined to feel, why that doesn't quite work. And I'm indebted to Pastor Tim Keller for this.

It doesn't work for a number of reasons. The first, it doesn't work emotionally. It doesn't work emotionally for this reason. If you had a really nasty form of cancer and there was a rare cure that you discovered, would you not share it with as many people as you could?

Like, of course. Yes, emotionally you are, you have to. And you know what? There are atheists that agree with this very point.

You know Pendulet? He's a comedian. There was a video that a lot of Christians saw back in 2009. It's a video of himself.

I think he was like in his home. And he said this after encountering somebody on the street who was trying to evangelize him, he said, I've always said that I don't respect people who don't proselytize.

[32 : 36] I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward and atheists who think people shouldn't proselytize and who say just leave me alone and keep your religion to yourself, how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?

How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? So emotionally we're required to share the gospel.

That makes sense, right? Now let me tell you why it doesn't work intellectually. It's because of this. Like we all have our own views of the world, of truth, of reality, of life, of God, of faith.

And the view that says you shouldn't share your view of faith with another person is itself a view. So we're not talking about one person kind of dominating everybody with their viewpoint and trying to evangelize.

We're talking about two competing worldviews. And in saying like a Christian shouldn't share the gospel, well really what is being said like my worldview should prevail. Okay? So that's why intellectually it doesn't work.

[33 : 52] Let me give you a third reason to pause in judgment, to pause in being offended when people share the gospel with you. It's this.

It's probably because they love you. It's probably because they love you. Now some share the gospel not out of love. Some share out of greed or for some other reasons. But nine times out of ten I'm going to guess they share it because they love you.

And I learned this lesson personally from a Muslim. I learned it from a Muslim. When I lived in Vienna, Austria I was a part of a church who had an English conversation class or English conversation cafe and I got to befriend two guys.

One his name was Mohammed he was from Iran and the other his name was Wade he was from China. He really liked Dwayne Wade so he calls himself Wade. And the three of us had a really great friendship going for a while.

And I could tell that Mohammed was trying to convert me to Islam and I wasn't quite sure what to think. I guess flattered? I don't know. But you know Mohammed really loved Wade.

[35 : 06] And now you should know this about Wade he had like a deep ennui a sadness a depression he just looked at the world and felt hopelessness and Mohammed his heart broke for Wade and so he tells me Daniel well I'll just do it in American accent sorry Daniel I really love Wade I'm concerned for him and I want to do something for him but I think it's just too far to go from his worldview to Islam what if I could convert him to Christianity instead?

I think that'd be a much easier root to peace and happiness and so the three of us were together and Mohammed was just really hitting Wade hard like Wade I know you're set maybe you should start listening to Dan and maybe you should start listening to his pastor and believe the things they say about the Lord Jesus Christ thank you I have raised a lot of money and flown my family thousands of miles for you to do my job for me thank you Mohammed yeah but you know Mohammed was doing that out of love for me to be able to see that from a third person perspective yeah so again if someone tries to share the gospel with you it's probably because they love you and you know what they love you because they know that they are dearly loved loved by God and it's

demonstrated in this that Jesus gave his life for them that when we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we are reconciled with the Father he makes us one with Jesus he adopts us as his sons and daughters he gives us a seat at his table and we were promised life forevermore isn't that great that's the message that we share with the world let's pray for that please Lord you