

Antifragile

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[0 : 0 0] Father, thank you for words in your Holy Scripture that comfort us. And thank you, Father, that you speak gently to our heart.

Thank you, Father, that your grace is sufficient for us. And since you do not weigh our merits but pardon our offenses, that once we have put our faith and trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, you never give up on us.

You never leave us or forsake us. You never mock us. But your Holy Spirit continues to come and move within us time and time and time again, moving us, Father, to different ways of faithfulness and fitting us for heaven.

Father, this is all your work and all to your glory. And we give you thanks and praise. And we ask now that the Holy Spirit would speak gently but deeply to each one of our hearts. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen. Please be seated. There's a joke about two conspiracy theorists. And they die and they go to heaven.

[1 : 1 0] I guess even conspiracy theorists can go to heaven, I suppose. People who are really into it. So they die and go to heaven. And as they come to the gate of heaven, they don't meet St. Peter. They meet God himself.

And they ask God. They say, God, just before we go into heaven, we really just love to know who killed JFK. And God says, well, it was Oswald asking all by himself.

And then one conspiracy theorist turns to the other and says, see how high up the conspiracy goes. Sorry, nobody got that joke. Anyway, sorry. Maybe that's a bad precursor to the rest of the sermon.

But we're bringing the book of Colossians to a close. And we're going to spend most of our time in verses 2 to 6 of chapter 4.

We're really, we get to, in a sense, Paul's final words about the significance of grace and the posture that we need to have to be, have God's grace, do what only God's grace can do.

[2 : 1 5] Because, you see, the constant message of the Bible is that if it's not grace that's growing you, you're not growing. If it's not grace that's growing you, you're not growing. And there's lots and lots of ways in the world that we think that we're growing, but we're actually not.

Only grace grows us in a way that really fits us for heaven, fits us for what our true end and true purpose is, that we can once again be, you know, in a sense, unveiled face to face with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to be in the presence of that one God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to experience their love, the glory, the beauty, the goodness, the truth, which is God, and to be in that, and not to be unmade, but to just be changed from one degree of glory to another.

And that is the final destiny of every human being, the most, the true destiny of every human being. And human beings choose that destiny or choose, in a sense, to be gods themselves.

That's the choice of every human being. But God's desire, God's heart is that human beings would, in a sense, surrender, lay down their arms, and receive the grace that only God can give, and receive the growth that comes from grace.

That's the only growth worth having. And so Paul's going to say a little bit about that, some very important final words in verses 2 to 6. But I'm going to also read that little bit of the end of Colossians, which people often don't read and don't talk about.

[3 : 54] And I mentioned the last little bit, I'll just have a bit of a sideways sort of interest for some of us, in terms of what the average Canadian thinks they know about the Bible, which is that the average Canadian, they think they know about the Bible, is that basically there was this really mean emperor by the name of Constantine and the Roman Catholic Church that conspired to suppress whole parts of the Bible and exalt something that is their own.

In other words, there's this big conspiracy about how the Bible was formed. And so now we shouldn't really pay any attention to it, because it's just something corrupted as a result of a conspiracy.

And that's, I think, what a lot of Canadians would just think about the Bible, one of the many reasons why they think that knowing the Bible, reading the Bible, is completely and utterly unimportant and insignificant. And it's just that this last little bit, there's other ways that it encourages us, but it has a little interesting bit of a comment on that, what average Canadians think they know.

So if you open your Bibles, it's Colossians 4, verse 2, and we'll read. As I said, I'm going to circle back to speak more about verses 2 to 6, but we'll read the whole thing to see the end of Colossians.

Those of you who have been tracking with us, this is the 13th sermon on the book of Colossians, and so let's go. Continue steadfastly in prayer.

[5 : 23] Actually, probably, those words are sort of good. The fundamental idea here is being devoted, being devoted to prayer.

That's the fundamental idea, that if you're devoted to prayer, you'll be steadfast. But it's the call. Well, in fact, in these first three verses, there's three exhortations or three imperatives, and this is the first one.

Be devoted in prayer or to prayer. Being alert or watchful in it with thanksgiving. 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, that I may make it clear.

There, the sense is not that you sort of can clear up the mystery, but that the mystery is clearly set forth, right? There's a very important distinction there that we'll return to.

It's not that Paul is saying, listen, I know the mystery of Christ is a bit unclear, so you guys got to make it clear. That's not what he's saying. He's saying you have to proclaim the mystery clearly, not clear up the mystery.

[6 : 33] That's a very important idea which we're going to return to. It's the source of a lot of confusion in the Christian life that we have to clear up the mystery rather than be clear about the mystery, which is how I ought to speak.

And just sort of pause there for a second. One of the things which I haven't talked about very much in all of these sermons is you'll notice here that it says that he's in prison, and I haven't talked about it much, but that's in fact what we have to understand is that, I mean, once again, I love saying this, but you can't say it too much, right?

People get a Bible, and this used to have sort of fancy gold stuff on the edge, and it has this fancy, expensive, my version does anyway, you know, expensive paper, and it looks like a special book.

It looks like a type of holy book, and there's nothing wrong with that. But what we have to understand is somewhere around the year 60 or 61, so somewhere 25 to 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, this man by the name of Paul is in jail in Rome.

And he's in jail in Rome because he's a Christian, fundamentally. We'll talk about this a little bit more in a moment. And he's writing this letter to a group of Christians in a place which we would now call Turkey.

[7 : 50] In a particular valley in Turkey, there's three sort of principal cities, and this was one of the three letters or two letters at least or three or four letters that he wrote, and that's where it comes out of jail.

Sort of very interesting. If you're going through the letter, you would never really think that much that Paul's in jail when he's writing it, but that's what happens. He's in jail. He's writing this letter to them. So what happens next?

The next is the second of the three commands or exhortations in the first little bit. The closing sort of part of the book, which is walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.

And that's really more a matter. It isn't calling you to be better at time management. It's calling you. It's connected to praying that God would open doors and you would recognize them.

So in other words, recognize opportunities when they come. But walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. And here's the final command of this last section.

[8 : 55] Let your speech always be gracious. And that, once again, is a fine translation, but it doesn't so much mean that I have to be very gracious in my speaking.

The fundamental idea is that my speech is full of grace. That my speech is full of grace. You see, what is going on here in the text, which is really important, and it's easy for us to lose, is that the text keeps pointing back to the power of God.

And it's easy for us to misread it as if it's about our power. But the text keeps pointing us back to the power of God. In fact, the fundamental human problem we have, and those of you who are watching who might be seekers or just sort of anthropologists, curious about the odd thing that Christians say, is I can share with you a secret, is that Christians constantly struggle with forgetting about the fact that it's God that's powerful.

And we have amnesia about it. And we keep trying to do everything as if it's all up to our power. And so even when we look at this text, in fact, that's often why we have problems, right?

We're not very good at being devoted to prayer because we're not very powerful. We have problems in walking in wisdom because we're not very wise. We have problems having gracious speech because the fact of the matter is a lot of us are ornery and anal.

[10 : 23] You all know who you are. We all know who we are. And so we have these problems that keep getting in the way. And then we figure out, try to think about how we can fix it with our power.

But all the way through this last little bit, it's actually emphasizing God's power because grace is, in fact, a power that comes from God. Right?

That's what grace is. Grace is a power. Grace is, in a sense, God's unmerited favor and kindness to change you for your true good, and it comes from him with power.

That's what grace is. It's God's unmerited favor and kindness, his love and mercy to change you for your true good, which comes to God to you with power, his power.

And so this isn't a little bit an ending thing to make us feel guilty or to gird up our loins so that we can be more powerful. It's a constant reminder that it's God's power.

[11 : 26] And that's actually partially illustrated by the fact that he's in jail. As we all know, generally speaking, I mean, if I was to write a little bit of a, you know, time management book about channeling your inner power, the first lesson wouldn't be get arrested and go to jail so you can become more powerful.

That would be viewed as something pretty stupid. So here it is. Paul's in jail. To the eyes of Romans, he's being dealt with by imperial power.

He's not powerful at all. So it's not a call to our power. It's a call to remember grace. Grace being a type of power that comes from God that will change us for a true good.

And now we get into this last little bit, which is sort of just often people leave. It goes, Tychicus will tell you, I hope I pronounced that correctly. Don't, by the way, if you're watching this or you're here listening, don't take it that the way I pronounce these names is the correct way to pronounce their names.

I'll just try to do it confidently because they say when you're reading the Bible up front, it's better to be confident than correct. If you're unconfidently correct, it doesn't do anything.

[12 : 38] So, you know, say it with confidence. Anyway, Tychicus will tell you about my activities. He is a beloved brother and a faithful minister and a fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are, that he may encourage your hearts.

And with him, Anisimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you, they will tell you of everything that has taken place here. So this person, Tychicus, he shows up in several letters.

He's part of Paul's traveling companions. Paul went around with always a bit of a team. He wasn't a lone ranger. And he's here in jail and he's written a letter. In fact, we'll find out later he's written several letters.

And Tychicus is the letter carrier. And so Tychicus would have read it in public. And then he would have also maybe filled in a few blanks about other questions that people might have. Anisimus is significant for two reasons.

One is he's a slave. Those of you who saw my sermon or heard my sermon last week on slavery, Anisimus is a slave. And once again, it's very interesting because Anisimus, he calls Anisimus his brother.

[13 : 47] And given that one of the aspects of slavery is to deny personhood to slaves, for Paul to call this escaped slave his brother is one of those very significant things in the text.

I talked last week about how only the biblical gospel makes slavery morally unthinkable. Only the biblical gospel makes slavery morally unthinkable. And this is one of those ways that it makes it morally unthinkable.

The slave is his brother. Then it continues, verse 10. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions.

If he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus, who is called Justice, these are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

Just a couple of things which are interesting here is Mark is very interesting because he shows up in the book of Acts, and he might even show up in the Gospels.

[14 : 48] He is probably the fellow who wrote the Gospel of Mark. And those of you who are familiar with the Gospel of Mark, many people believe that there's... Mark's Gospel is the one that has that very, very funny aspect to it of a guy who's following along when Jesus gets arrested, and they go to grab him, and they grab his cloak, and he runs away naked.

And people think that little bit of a story was put in because that's sort of a bit of an embarrassing thing about Mark. And this is the same guy that's being mentioned here. He's the guy who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

And he's also a guy that Paul and Barnabas had a big disagreement on because Mark screwed up big time. Mark failed. He couldn't hack it.

He got frightened, and he left. And then later on, Barnabas wanted to give him another chance. Paul didn't want to. But here's one of the wonderful things.

It's just one of those small little things about this last part of the letter, which is really important, is that reconciliation and restoration are important to Christians. holding grudges isn't Christian.

[15 : 54] Having feuds isn't Christian. Remembering past hurts so they fester and make you continue to dislike or hate another person isn't what grace does in you.

You see, remember I said earlier, maybe some of you do, that if it's not grace growing you, it's not growth. The fact of the matter is, is that many of us struggle with grudges.

Many of us struggle with past wounds. Many of us struggle with terrible things that were done to us or terrible injustices because something that should have been done wasn't done.

Terrible times of being overlooked. And those things form us and change us. They really do. But that's not something that's growing you. Only grace is growing you with a growth that's worth, it can only be called growth if it's grace.

And so one of the things we hear, just as a bit of a side, Paul doesn't say how it is that he came to realize that he was wrong and how he was reconciled to Mark, but we just see if you go back and you read Acts sometime and you see the incident, and then you see here now Paul writing quite a few years afterwards, now Mark is one of his trusted companions again.

[17 : 11] And it's a surreal thing of hope. And, you know, one of the things, this is the ending sermon, it's a bit more of a, I don't know, it's like, you know, the letter, one of the things they say about sermons is that sermons should partially model and reflect the type of literary genre that you're reading.

Like, it wouldn't be right to preach on Job, which is all about suffering and make jokes all the time. That would be very inappropriate. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to preach on hell, clapping my hands and hooting and hollering because I'm really happy about it, you know.

And this is a bit of a ramby type of letter at the end, and so my sermon is going to be a little bit more ramby at the end, not going to have that tight laser focus because the text is rambling a little bit.

But this is a really hopeful thing for us, just to remember that we are called to try to be restored. We are called, even if the other person who's wronged us doesn't want to be restored, we are to pray in a sense time and time and time again that we can forgive and that that wound, that really bad thing that happened will no longer control and form us.

And part of the way we know that those things still have to be dealt with is if it creates within us, to be in the presence of the person or to be reminded of the situation or to hear about the person, if it feels us, if inside we start to feel anxious, if we can either feel within us the desire to fight or flight, to tower over them or to cower under them, if we feel any of these types of emotions, it means that there's something in there which hasn't been dealt with yet.

[18 : 59] And sometimes those of us who've been Christians for a long time, some of us know we can pray into that and God does a really great fast miracle where it just goes away.

But a lot of times God calls us to a long obedience in the same direction where we need to pray into that day in and day out for a long time. I remember there was one man who really did a whole series of bad things to me and I came under conviction.

I realized I had to pray for forgiveness. And by God's grace, I had to drive by his house regularly. And so it was one of those things regularly for him to pray about it.

And then about 10 years, and I knew that 8 or 9 years after, something would come up and his name would be mentioned and I could feel that, you know, that clenching that goes on.

And then about 2 or 3 years after that, he actually came to the church. And I was able to just say hi to him. And it was only then, about 10 to 12 years of prayer, that I realized that I had finally forgiven him.

[20 : 08] And that's what God calls us to. So we don't know here whether Paul and Mark had, what they had to do to be able to be restored, but we can see that they're restored.

And one of the other things which here is really, really cool about this, where was I with my reading? Verse 10, Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, and then Jesus and just the only men amongst the circumcision.

And one of the things which is going to be really cool about all of this is that we see that the early church is made up of, it's multi-ethnic, it's multi-racial. And that's one of the things that we should always pray for, not only that local congregations will be that way, but also that the church universal will be that way, that we're always praying that God will bring the gospel to new people groups.

Not only new people groups in the city, as people groups develop within the city, but also people groups to the very end of the age. That's part of the, it's part of the natural heart that's formed by grace, that we have that concern, that burden, that more and more people groups will hear the gospel.

This can be seen very powerfully here in the next little bit, verse 12. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

[21 : 37] For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea in Hierapolis. I just sort of pause here for a second. Here's, I don't have sermon notes today because it's a bit more of a rambling type of sermon.

You know, one of the really good things that we could pray for is that the day will come when one of our wardens is named Muhammad. That the day will come when one of our wardens is named Muhammad.

Not because Muslims have taken over the church, but because a man named Muhammad has become a Christian and now he's one of our wardens. And so I just want to, that's one of the things that came to me, it's making me emotional.

I never planned to get emotional, by the way. I'm a pretty unemotional guy. I'm getting emotional about it. But wouldn't that be a wonderful thing for us as a church to commit to, that the day would come that one of our wardens or one of our assistant pastors or that maybe the man who replaces me as pastor, he's named Muhammad, because the gospel has come to him and he's received Jesus.

Why? Epaphras is the short form for the name Epaphroditus. He was born a slave. Somewhere along the line, he became a freed man, but his name, he was, it says, he's named after the glory of the goddess Aphrodite.

[23 : 01] And this is the guy who planted the church. A man named after the goddess Aphrodite, who was born a slave, somehow or another gets his freedom.

He's the one who goes to Colossae and plants the church. And that's why I say, let's pray for the day that one of our wardens is called Muhammad. Then verse 14, these are all pagans.

These are all people who would have grown up worshiping the different gods and goddesses of Rome and Greece. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

And just sort of pause there. Here's one of the things about the text, which is very, very interesting, is, see, one of the things that Christians believe about the Bible isn't that the Bible writers were wise.

There's nothing special about Paul. And the fact that Paul's not wise is partially seen here, that he has no particular special powers, is that later on, at the end, a letter that he writes about four or five or six years after this, we discover that Demas has betrayed him.

[24 : 17] And in fact, Demas has renounced the faith. If Paul was a special person, he'd know that. But the biblical claim isn't that God was looking around the world and he thought, ah, should I pick Brian to write the Bible?

Should I pick Owen? You know, should I pick Sana? Should I pick Sue? Should I pick Amy? Nah, nah, nah. There's these really special, very insightful people, prophetic people, named Paul and John and Mark, and I'm going to choose them.

No, that's not what it is. That's not how the Bible was written. You'll see here that Paul wrote other letters to other churches, and it's not that everything that Paul said had this prophetic power.

Paul doesn't know when he's writing this that Demas is going to betray him. But the God in his grace and in his mercy, we hear and we read the historic records of Jesus, that Jesus says that his words will never pass away, that he is going to guarantee that his words that need to be communicated to human beings, that he in a sense, that God in a sense, the Holy Spirit in a sense, will make sure that the words that are needed for people to know about Jesus, that they will be received and recognized and preserved.

That's the fundamental Christian hope. Not that the writers are specially brilliant. They're ordinary people like you and me. And so out of all of the words that Paul spoke, some of them are the ones that are now, God wanted the right things to be said, and he makes sure those things are recognized, that they're preserved, that they're spoken, they're recognized, and they're preserved.

[26 : 00] And that's what we have here in the book of Colossians. If we ever found one of those other letters, it would be curious, but we wouldn't put it in the Bible. And it's very interesting. This goes back to the early comment about conspiracy theories.

You know, I'm not a conspiracy theorist. You know, I think generally speaking, if you ever want to really read an interesting thing, read, I think, I can't remember what book it was about Charles Coulson.

Charles Coulson is too old for most of you to remember, but he was one of the guys involved in the great Watergate scandal that brought down President Nixon in the early 70s, almost 50 years ago now. And one of the things that he, one of the things that he shows about, one of the arguments that he has for the resurrection of Jesus is here you have these very, very, very, very powerful small group of men who do a conspiracy, conspire to do something wrong, immoral and illegal to help President Nixon.

And I think it might be in his book, Born Again. And he talks about exactly how long this conspiracy lasts. And I can't remember, but I think it's something like 36 hours.

Like it's not very long before the first person cracks. And, and he just goes on and says, if, if there's this big, if all these very, very powerful, high, highly connected, highly leveraged people can't keep a conspiracy going for longer than about 36 hours.

[27 : 26] And how is it that we can think that there was some conspiracy amongst the apostles to, to say that Jesus had actually risen from the dead?

See, this is one of the things which is so interesting. You know, if, if you're a, a non-Christian or the anthropologist trying to figure out what Christians believe, and you're, you've come to stumbling upon this video.

You see, the resurrection changes everything. The resurrection changes everything. And that, that's the heart of the Christian hope is that this man, Jesus really did die.

He died prophesying that he would die. He died a death that he couldn't have organized, organized or orchestrated, that he was embalmed, that he was in a tomb, that on the third day, just as he predicted, he rose from the dead.

And the grave clothes show it. And the tomb is empty. And they never found the body. And he appeared alive to many people. And one of the evidences for all of this is actually what I'm just reading to you right now.

[28 : 37] Because we all know that there's people who go to jail for causes. Many of us are cheering the very brave people in Hong Kong who have been laboring for quite a while to try to maintain some type of freedom and democracy in Hong Kong.

And many of those people, for the cause of democracy, have been willing to go to jail. And they have a type of courage that's, I hope if that time ever comes for me, that I will have that type of courage as well.

But Paul isn't in jail because of a cause. Paul is in jail for a very, very odd thing. He's in jail because of a fact.

So he's not in jail because he's launched some type of a moral movement that will make slavery morally unthinkable, although his writing contributes to making slavery morally unimaginable, unthinkable.

Paul, he's in jail purely and utterly because he said that Jesus is alive, that he rose from the dead. He's in jail because of a fact.

[29 : 50] And if you go on and read the rest of the New Testament, you come to 2 Timothy, which is the last thing that he wrote that we have a record of. And he knows that this time he's in jail in Rome for the second time.

And we know this from history, that he does in fact die a martyr's death. And he dies a very, very painful martyr's death after spending much time in and out of jail, all because he maintains a particular fact that the man Jesus who died upon the cross, a slave's death, on the third day the grave was empty.

And he rose from the dead, just as he predicted, just as he said, and that he appeared alive. And the reason that Paul is in jail is that Paul is one of the men that Jesus appeared to alive.

He's in jail because of a fact. You see, friend, if this is true, that if Jesus really did die upon the cross and rise from the third day, that has to change everything in every person's life.

It means there is a way that death isn't final. It means that we're not alone in the universe. It means that in a world of 100,000 religions, there is in fact one way which is in fact true.

[31 : 10] It means that if in fact there is a God who can raise a man from the dead, it is not a very hard thing for him to cause what we now call the Bible to be written. And that's a very easy thing compared to raising a man from the dead.

And to understand that he didn't do it just to show that God has the power to do it, but he does it for you. It's done for grace. It's God's unmerited kindness and goodness and mercy.

God's, when I say unmerited, it's not that he's unmerited. It means that when God looks at George, George has done nothing to merit the kindness and mercy and gentleness and favor of God.

George has done nothing to merit this, but God has unmerited kindness and mercy and favor to me that God, the son of God, would take on human form and live the life that I could never live and die the death that would be my doom and rise from the dead all as a way that God does what I cannot do of my own, which is to provide all that is needed to make me right with him.

It is all God's grace. The action is an action of grace. The message is a message of grace. It comes when we tell this mystery of God, the son of God, dying upon a cross, living a human life, dying upon the cross, resurrected from the dead, and that it's done for you and for me, that for you and me, God not counting our merits, but pardoning our offenses, knowing what we're exactly like, has done all of this so that if an ordinary person like you and me, in a sense, just lay down our arms, and even though we can't, even of our own effort, turn towards him truly, and all we can say as we're running from God is, God, I want Jesus to be my savior.

[33 : 07] I can't even stop running from you. Have mercy upon me. I trust that he is my savior and Lord, that he is the only one. He is your provision to make me right with you.

And God hears that prayer. He takes you as his own. See, it's all grace. It's all grace. And the resurrection changes everything.

Just closing, and then we're going to round it up with the last little bit. Verse 15, give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Nympha is a woman, and she's obviously an important person, a patron of the church, a person of significance and weight in that local church and in the region. And when this letter, verse 16, has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea, and say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. So in other words, the whole letter is written by somebody else, and Paul is in chains, but he takes, for the last little bit of the manuscript, he takes the, wouldn't have been a pen, but the writing instrument, and he writes that last little verse so that people recognize that it came from him.

[34 : 27] And his final words, grace be with you. It's the final words. May God's unmerited favor and kindness to change you for your true good, which comes from him with power.

May that unmerited kindness of change and power be with you. Those are the final words that ring out. So the whole text, even as he ends, he just wants to remind them of their fact that they need this power that comes from God and not from themselves.

See, that's one of the important things for us as Christians. I'm such a slow learner. If you could continue to pray for me that my life will be in response to grace. I'm such a slow learner.

I have amnesia all the time. I walk out the door and I forget and think that it's all about my power. But it's not about my power. It's all about grace and responding to grace. I'm worthy as I am.

And so we just need to constantly remember the grace of God. You see, if you go back to that little bit when it says continue, verse 2, continue steadfastly in prayer, you know, being devoted to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving and at the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word.

[35 : 50] And that's the thing is the word. What has power? Not George. What has power? Not George's cleverness with words. What has power? It is the word which has power.

It is reading the word which has power. And that's emphasized in the text. And it's not just the word because all sorts of people can quote the word, but they quote the word in a way that points people away from Christ.

That's part of the great tragedy of churches. There are churches in the city that read the word on a Sunday morning and read it in such a way to point people away from Christ or away from grace towards their own effort, towards worldly power, towards worldly idols.

And the text is saying it's the word which has power and it's to declare the mystery of Christ. This mystery of Christ to proclaim that Jesus is God's provision to make you right with God.

Yes, it is a mystery because, you know, at the end of the day there are so many things which are a mystery. Evil is a mystery. It can't be reduced. We can't reduce evil to upbringing or socioeconomic status, cultural Marxists.

[37 : 01] You can't reduce evil to some type of process or anything. At the end of the day there is this profound mystery mystery as to why is it that I would choose evil.

Why is it that any human being chooses evil? There's this mystery. But at the same time there is this other mystery, the mystery of love and the mystery of God's love and the mystery that at the end of the day if God's love for you and me is truly unmerited there is a fundamental mystery to that that all you can proclaim is that the God that truly exists is a God who is love but from all eternity the Father has loved the Son and the Son has loved the Father and the Holy Spirit has loved the Father and the Son that there's this mystery of love from all eternity which continues to exist and out of this mystery of love not out of a love because he needs other God didn't need to create you he didn't need to love you because from all eternity the Father has loved the Son and the Son has loved the Holy Spirit and out of this mystery of love it is of the very nature of love that it would expand that it would create and that even when creation has fallen, there's a very nature of love that love didn't give up, that love desired the restoration and reconciliation and return and restoring of fallen human beings that were in complete and utter rebellion and enmity against God.

And at the end of the day, you can't reduce that to anything. It is a fundamental mystery, the mystery of love, the mystery of goodness, of beauty, of delight.

Irreducible things that are a mystery but are real. And I have no authority to say a single thing other than the fact that Jesus loves you.

I have no authority, nor would it help any of you to say anything other than that Jesus loves you. This I know, for the Bible, tells me so. Not because I tell me so, but because the Bible tells me so.

[39 : 14] Our posture. You know, one of the things, if we understand that all grace is a type of power that comes from God and that even as it's ending, God in his word through Paul is reminding us of grace, then what we need to constantly remind each other of, and this is why we need to come to church, this is why we need to celebrate the Lord's Supper, this is why we need to have small groups, this is why we need to have Christian friends, this is why we need to have mentors, this is why we need to have spiritual friendships, because we have amnesia and we so quickly and utterly forget.

But I come to the beginning of my day and I think to myself, I don't have time to pray. I'm too busy to pray. I need to get this done and this done and this done and this done and this done and this done and this done and this done.

And I go look at my long list of things to do and I get depressed and I get tired. So I roll up my sleeves and I get to work at it and I try to knock these things off and I think to myself, because it has to be me getting all these things done from God, for God, that at the end of the day, if I have enough time, I can fit in a little bit of prayer or maybe as I'm going from one thing to another, I can fit in a little bit of prayer.

But if we understand that the power to change comes from God, then what God is asking for us is a posture of obedience that makes ourselves available to his word because only he can do what only he can do and I need what only he can do.

And it is very, very hard. I'm just sharing this with you, friends. You can pray for me. It's hard to be devoted to prayer. It's hard to think, I am so busy today that I need to pray.

[41 : 13] I am so busy today. I have so much anxiety. I have so much stress. I have so much responsibility. There are so many things depending upon me that I need to pray.

And then your flesh says, George, don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. Come on. George, it makes no sense that if you waste 20 minutes in reading God's word and praying that you're going to get more things done.

You're going to have more time. George, do math. You know, 10 hours minus 20 minutes gives you less time, not more. Time at the end of the day.

But you see, this call to be devoted to prayer isn't a call for us to white-knuckle it and depend upon our own power. It's saying, George, remember, one of the very first things I talked about with the means of grace is when the very first miracle that Jesus performed, which is chaining the water into wine.

And Jesus asked the servants to put water into the stone buckets and deliver them. That's all he asked them to do. And he was the one who turned it into wine.

[42 : 26] And that's how all, that's why devoted to prayer means, George, will you trust me that my grace is going to work in you? Will you trust me?

And George, if you trust me, then here's what you've got to do. You've got to be devoted to prayer. And the other thing you have to do is when it comes to outsiders, you've got to be open and look for opportunities to tell them about Jesus.

Yeah, yeah, George, I know that in Canada that means you won't get invited to parties and people will think you're weird and it won't get you promotions. I know all that. Like, I know all of those things. I'm not asking you to be clever.

I'm not asking you to be silent about everything until you get into a position of power and then you can tell people about it. No, no, I'm just, do you trust me? And if you trust me, you put yourself in a posture of obedience.

And how is grace going to grow you? Well, you take that time for prayer. You be an out Christian and let people know about Jesus.

[43 : 28] That's what you do. I'm just asking you to carry the water in a stone jar. You keep thinking, George, you can make the wine, but you can never make the wine, George.

You can never make the wine. So stop trying to think of how to make wine. Just carry the water in the stone jars. Take the time for prayer.

Take the risk of sharing the faith. I'll make the wine. And the promise is that when we do this, we become anti-fragile.

And I shared this a couple of months ago. It's a secular idea. A secular thinker came to realize that there's things in life, there's no English word for something which is really important.

And just very briefly, if I knock this cup over, it stays the same. If I knock a glass over it, it breaks. But there's no word in English for things that actually require stress to grow.

[44 : 36] And he uses the example in the book of, in fact, if you took a baby, a brand new baby that was born, and you put it in a perfect environment with absolutely no viruses or germs, and then at the age of 18, you let it out into the world, it would actually not be a strong child but a weak child.

Because, in fact, immune systems need to be stressed to grow. Ironically, the other kid who played in the sand and ate dirt would be stronger.

And the one who got sick with lots of colds would be stronger than the one that was in the safe environment. And so God's saying, here's how the grace works. Your grace needs, your life needs to be stressed.

You need to have that stress of sacrificing some of your time to pray. You need to be stressed by taking those times to share the gospel. Because, you see, the way I've designed you to grow is I'm making you anti-fragile.

As you just trust me in a posture of obedience, knowing that the power comes from me. And you do these obedient things.

[45 : 52] I'm the one who changes you and changes you and changes you. And always remember that the end of the story of grace is that we will see God face to face and we will see Jesus face to face and we will be like him.

That is the end of the story for those in Jesus. You will be like him. Not because of your own doing or my, but because of him.

You will be like Jesus is the end of your story when you trust in him. I invite you to stand. Thank you. Let's just bow our heads in prayer.

Father, we are so, so, so, so thankful that you know us perfectly and still you love us. We are so thankful that you know all the different masks we have, you know our dreams, you know our fears, you know our shames, you know our grudges, you know the things that we do really well and the things we really can't do well and still you love us.

And, and we give you thanks and praise, Father, that you choose to use ordinary people like us. You choose to use our prayers, Father. You choose to use our prayers for others.

[47 : 24] You choose to use, Father, unlikely, incompetent people like us to tell another person about Jesus and then you do this, these spectacular, miraculous things of bringing that word into that person's life in a way that they will receive Jesus.

That, that you do things of changing the world when we, Father, are willing just to, to keep remembering that it's all grace and, and grace is the only growth and the only good that's worth growing out of.

It's just, only grace is what needs to grow us and it's all power that comes from you and that you just ask us in our daily life to be like those servants who filled the water pots and took them to the next person and you do the wine making.

And so, Father, we ask that you help, help me, help each of us, help us to pray for each other that we will understand the Christian life is like those servants taking this, the stone jars of water that you make the wine.

So, Father, help us to take that great risk of losing some time in a day in prayer. That you will help us take that great risk of trusting your word. You will help us take that great risk of being willing to let another person know about Jesus.

[48 : 40] That you will help us to take that great risk of not being ashamed of the gospel or the whole counsel of God even when things in the Bible disagree with things in the word. But you will help us, Father, to take that great risk.

And we thank you so much, Father, that as your grace works in our lives, it doesn't shatter us, doesn't leave us unchanged, but that your desire is to make us anti-fragile.

That we grow in obedience. And we thank you so much, Father. Thank you so much that the end of the story for each of us who have put our faith and trust in Jesus is that we will be like Jesus.

That that is the final word about each one of us. Even though some of us are poor, some of us are weak, some of us are old, most of us are unimportant, but that in Jesus the final word about us will be welcome and we will be like him.

And that for all eternity. It is not only the end of our lives but the beginning of our lives. And it's all grace. And all God's people said, Amen.

[49 : 53] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.