

Christ in everyday life

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[0:00] Let's share in our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. To begin with, we should say that this passage we read this morning is about serving Jesus in our everyday lives. And our focus will be on how Jesus shapes our relationships, our prayer life, and our witness. And as with the whole of this book, as we have seen each week, the emphasis is on the supremacy of Jesus. That truth is the context and foundation for everything we think about this morning. And this is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the word Lord appears 14 times in the whole book of Colossians and 8 of them are in the passage we read this morning. That's a significant concentration and underlines, if it needs to be underlined, the point that the Lordship of Jesus is to be the key factor in every relationship. But it's possible that as we read the passage, you noticed a couple of verses in particular, which are these ones here. Colossians 3.18, wives submit to your husband as is fitting in the Lord. And then in chapter 3, verse 22, and in chapter 4, verse 1, slaves obey in everything those who are your earthly masters.

Masters treat your slaves fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. And these are two controversial topics, which if I'd read the book more closely before I decided to do this, I might have avoided it. But anyway, but it would be easy to allow ourselves to get caught up in these two topics at the expense of what Paul really wants us to learn.

One writer said that much sweat and ink has been spilled talking about these two subjects. So it might be good to talk a little bit about them and see, I hope, that Paul has a larger point in mind. Look first at verse 18. It should be understood within the broader context of mutual submission of both men and women to Jesus, remembering that the most important relationship, the one we enjoy with God, is not a relationship of equals.

[2:42] We relate to God as inferiors because he has no equals. We are his subjects and his servants. We call him Lord because he has a claim to our allegiance and obedience.

The idea of submission to God and to each other is found in plenty of places in the New Testament, like Ephesians 5, 20 and 21. Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And then in James 4, 7. Submit yourselves therefore to God. We also have examples of Jesus submitting to the will of the Father, as we see in John 8, 29.

He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. And of course we have this wonderful hymn in Philippians 2, where we read that Jesus emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Being subject to one another is part of the divine order within the Trinity, where Jesus, who is equal with the Father, is forever subject to him.

[3:58] So if the Son is at the same time equal and submissive to the Father, then equality and submissiveness can coexist in human relationships.

The submission that Paul is talking about in verse 18 is not subservience, nor does it place total dominance in the hands of the husband.

The social context in which Paul was writing was one where the male head of the household had complete control over the lives of his wife and children. They were his property and they had few rights.

There was no suggestion of mutual submission, only domination. Paul is reframing their understanding of these family relationships by reminding them that Christ is supreme, where he

says, as is fitting in the Lord.

And everything we do and all our relationships are informed by that and by his example of servanthood and sacrifice. The second controversial subject is that of slavery.

[5:02] It's estimated that at the height of the Roman Empire, up to 20% of the population of Italy were slaves and that up to 10 million people were enslaved across the whole Roman Empire.

It was a society that came to depend on slavery to function and so it was embedded in every level of their society. What we have here is not an affirmation of slavery from Paul, but just an acknowledgement that existed and was a reality in that Roman-dominated world.

In fact, neither Paul nor any other New Testament writer ever endorses slavery or encourages believers to own slaves. If we were to carry on in our service beyond this book of Colossians, the next natural step would be the letter to Philemon, which is closely associated with Colossians. In chapter 4, verse 9 of today's passage, we see a mention of someone called Onesimus. He was a slave of Philemon and Paul describes Onesimus as a faithful and beloved brother.

And Paul encourages Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a brother and fellow worker in Christ. If we read the whole of...

[6:18] Verse 22, there we go. It says, We can see that Paul's encouraging those people who are slaves and also believers to see their situation within the reality of their unity in Christ.

He's telling them that their conduct as slaves should be conduct that brings honour to God. Now, it might seem completely understandable that a person who's a slave might work hard when being watched over, but less so when their owner's back is turned.

And why wouldn't they? They didn't choose that life and there's no reason for them to take pride in it. But this is what Paul is talking about when he tells them not to obey by way of eye service or when their master's eyes were on them.

Now that they are believers, their work is before the eyes of God and their conduct is a witness to their faith. Their master must see the difference being a follower of Jesus makes to them.

That's why he says fearing the Lord because a believer's first allegiance is to God and what he thinks rather than people. And we said earlier that much ink has been spilled writing about these subjects and they are addressed in other places in the New Testament.

[7:42] But hopefully these few quick thoughts have helped us see what Paul is saying in this particular passage. The larger context we mentioned earlier, which the controversial subjects can tend to dominate, is that Jesus wants to shape our relationships.

We've already seen that Paul wants to look at these two situations of marriage and slavery and guide the Colossian Christians to begin to think of them as relationships which are under Jesus' authority and not human authority.

And when that is the case, these relationships can flourish because Jesus as Lord is the defining principle governing their conduct. As we move on to chapter 4, we can see that Jesus wants to shape our prayer life.

Now I did a short talk here in church a very long time ago and a part of it was a quiz, of course. I like a quiz. This quiz was on text abbreviations that we would use on our phones.

You might remember some of these ones. This was in the pre-smartphone era when you had to press each button two or three times to get a letter depending on whatever character you wanted.

[8:55] So we used abbreviations like these just to speed up the process and make it a little bit quicker. At that time I asked who has no intention of ever getting a mobile phone and quite a lot of people put their hands up.

Now imagine there are quite a few people here now who, I should say, sorry, that there are few people here who don't have a mobile phone and almost certainly the one you do have is a smartphone.

Perhaps you might even grudgingly admit now that they are useful. How else can you find out when the supermarket's open or where you've seen that person on that TV show or even occasionally phone someone?

But we can all probably agree that if it's not turned on or if it's left in a drawer it's no use at all. We need to connect it to a network and turn it on to get any benefit from it.

And much like an out-of-the-way phone if we're not praying if we're not using prayer we're neglecting God's greatest gift to his people and trying to accomplish God's work without God's power.

[10:06] Paul opened the letter with his own prayer of thanksgiving and his prayer request for the Colossians. Now he concludes the letter with an appeal for them to pray and request that they pray for him.

And Paul highlights three characteristics of effective prayer persistence watchfulness and a mission focus as we see here in chapter 4 verses 2 to 4.

I mentioned the other day that I was up at Teen Ranch speaking to the staff and the campers and one day we were speaking to the staff on the subject of perseverance and faithfulness and prayer. They knew as you most likely know that establishing good habits of prayer is an essential part of walking with God. But what we focused on was the preparation as well as the perseverance. That is praying when it's easy when things are going well and you feel close to God and being steadfast at those times means it will be easier to be steadfast at the times when it's not easy when God does not feel close and when our prayers don't seem to be going anywhere.

[11:17] At the time he's writing this letter you might remember Paul is in prison in Rome as we read in many places in his letters about the hardships he faced for his Lord especially in 2 Corinthians 11 which is really an incredible list whipped, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, hungry, thirsty, cold and so on the list goes on.

So we can see when it comes to hardship Paul is speaking from experience here he is sharing his lived experience in hard times and good times perseverance and prayer sustained him.

There's much contained in the next characteristics of prayer which is watchfulness being watchful for Jesus' return being watchful for answers to our prayers or being watchful of temptation but most writers agree that Paul is probably concentrating on the return of Jesus partly because he alludes to Jesus coming in many places in his letters so this watchfulness is about living our lives as if the return of Jesus is imminent and acting accordingly.

If we know that an important deadline is approaching and we're not quite ready our pace picks up and a certain intensity enters into our activity.

When we moved from our old house to our current house we thought we were pretty much ready to go but the movement came got the vans loaded and so on and off they went with Tamden to the new house.

[12:47] There were just a few things to put in our car before the deadline came to hand over the house to the new owners but a few things turned out to be quite a lot of things and I was rushing about right to the last second trying to get everything out and into an increasingly packed car.

Thankfully the new owners were very nice people and they gave me a little bit of extra time to get organised! But the deadline concentrated my mind on what I had to do.

Paul once introduced this element of watchfulness and expectation while we carry out the tasks that Jesus left us. And that leads us to the last characteristics of prayer that Paul mentioned in verse 2 which is mission focus.

Paul is asking for their prayers so that God would open a door for them. There's a little bit of discussion over whether Paul is making a pun here by using the language of an open door while he's in prison.

But he's not asking them to pray for his release. He said elsewhere that he's content wherever he is and what he's asking for is an opportunity to share the message of God's love even from within prison.

[13:56] In many ways Paul stands among Christians as a great teacher, theologian and ambassador. After Jesus he's probably the most well known New Testament character and we rightly look up to him and afford him this particular honour.

But here he is just like us asking others to pray for him so that he can fulfil his calling. The famous evangelist C.H. Virgin was once asked why his ministry had been so successful over such a long time and his answer was it's because my people pray for me.

No ministry however well known or modest can be sustained without prayer and none of us can carry out Jesus' commands to go everywhere and tell everyone about him without the support and prayer of our fellow believers.

A minister Gordon is something like a third of his way through his year serving as moderator. He's sustained in his ministry by our prayers and as he encourages the church to proclaim Jesus wherever he goes.

Prayer is the deep roots of the tree that ensures survival in lean times and flourishing growth in seasons of growth. And the more we pray and persevere and watch with thanks the stronger these roots will be.

[15:13] our final and brief section covers Jesus' lordship over our witness to those who don't know Jesus. He encourages them in verse 5 to walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the time.

Walking in wisdom is going about our lives with the knowledge of God's saving purpose in Jesus for ourselves and for the world. and that purpose is what guides us as we walk and as we talk and share about the hope we have in Jesus.

So then we live in such a way that draws people to Jesus and reflects his character and points to him. Making the best use of the time is when we look for the best ways to talk about him.

Now that can seem an instruction not to waste a minute but in fact Paul is talking about making the best use of opportunities as they arise and not artificially manufacturing them like the stereotype of the youth worker who no matter what the young people are saying always responds with that reminds me of Jesus.

There are times when building and maintaining relationships is just as important as anything we say about our faith so that when questions do arise we are in the trusted position of being there to answer them and to be making the best use of time.

[16:34] I wonder if there's ever been a time when this verse in chapter 4 has been more relevant. Let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Public discourse here and all around the world is characterised by hostility, ridicule and a desire to defeat opponents rather than understand them.

We are called to be different. Our word should be marked by respect, self-control and a genuine concern for others even in disagreement.

Speech that's gracious does not compromise the truth but presents it in a way that builds up rather than tears down. In the age of outrage and division faithful Christian witness requires conversation that reflect both the truth and the love of Christ.

Christ. The final verses of chapter 4 are really a joy to read. There's quite a lot of them so I've not put them on the screen but clearly Paul has a close relationship with the people he mentions.

[17:40] They are more than just co-workers or colleagues. They are friends, people who have stood with him and suffered with him and remained faithful. We don't have time this morning to go over them all but I would encourage you to read through this list and reflect on how Paul describes them.

These people with Jesus as their supreme Lord are working towards one goal of bringing Jesus to the world. For them this is what the supremacy of Christ is about and their fellowship under that banner is the result.

Throughout this book I hope we've seen that Christ is not merely part of the gospel but its very centre. Supreme in creation, supreme in salvation, supreme in the church and worthy of supreme devotion in every area of our lives.

Let's live with him at the centre of all we are and all we do, giving him the honour, obedience and devotion that he alone deserves. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we want to live for you and to give you your rightful place in our lives. You are supreme. Help us to live that truth in all we do. In your name we pray.

[18:54] Amen. may