

AM Psalm 90 & Colossians 4:2-6 The Clock Sermon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 August 2026

Preacher: Rev Robert Dale

[0:00] Let's hear now from the Word of God. And we have two readings. The first is from Psalm 90.

! In all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

You return man to dust and say, return, O children of men. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past.

Or as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning.

[1:12] In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers. For we are brought to an end by your anger.

By your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you. Our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath.

We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy. Or even by reason of strength eighty. Yet their span is but toil and trouble.

They are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days. That we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord.

[2:18] How long? Have pity on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. That we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us. And for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants.

And your glorious power to their children. Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us. And establish the work of our hands upon us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. Now we turn over to Colossians.

Whenever I've been preaching over the last couple of years. I've been going through the book of Colossians. And we're going to look today just at chapter 4 and verses 2 to 6.

[3:31] Continue steadfastly in prayer. Being 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. Which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders. Making the best use of the time.

Let your speech always be gracious. Seasoned with salt. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

We'll come back to those verses a little later. But let's now bow once again in prayer. Heavenly Father we thank you for your word.

[4:39] Thank you for all the riches of the scriptures. Inspired by the spirit of God. Both in the Old Testament and in the New. We thank you for that psalm that we read.

For the crushing truth. Of the brevity of life. For the reality that it is through the wrath of God against sin.

That our lives are so short. And yet for that wonderful note of hope. Looking upward.

That the favor of the Lord might be upon us. And that you would establish the work of our hands. We know that for Moses.

The coming of Christ was yet a long way off. And yet there were so many symbols and signs. That revealed to him.

[5 : 45] The glory that was to come. We thank you that even in the Old Testament. He stood firm in faith. Preferring to suffer affliction with the people of God.

Than to enjoy all the treasures. And riches of Egypt. We thank you too that in the New Testament. The glory of Christ and of salvation is revealed to us. So beautifully and so clearly. We thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ has indeed come.

The Son of God. The perfect image of God. The glory of God. And that he has laid down his life for sinners.

Thank you that his blood has been shed. As the perfect atonement for our sins. And thank you that you have raised him from the dead.

[6 : 49] Not only that he should live forevermore. But that we should live with him. Thank you that we today experience that favor of the Lord.

And even while we still live in this body. With its very limited span. Even though we are still in the midst of a troubled world. Yet glory shines from Emmanuel's land.

And indeed the daybreak has begun to appear even in our own lives. And we ourselves know something of the spirit of love and peace and joy.

We pray heavenly father. For each one of us here. That we may know the reality of that salvation. And that we may know the wisdom that is spoken of in that psalm. That we may number our days. And that we may use them.

[7 : 55] Making the best use of our time. Help each one of us to walk in the ways of Christ. And to glorify our saviour.

Help us likewise as a church. To continue in the work that you have given us to do. It's been a few years now that we've been without a regular minister.

We thank you for those who have visited us and preached here. We thank you for sustaining us through these years. But we pray that you will make the pathway plain for us.

And that the days will come when we will have a settled ministry once again. We pray for this town of Dumfries.

We thank you that there are occasional opportunities for us. In open air work and in the bookstore. And that we each have contacts from time to time amongst the people of this town.

[9 : 03] Grant that the gospel may spread in this area. We pray for your mercy upon Scotland. A land that once knew such blessing.

A land where Samuel Rutherford once preached and was respected and loved by multitudes. A land where now the church is generally in decline.

And multitudes of people know nothing of the gospel. Oh Lord have mercy upon us. That these things might change. We pray for the whole world in all of its distress.

And particularly for those areas of the world where there is warfare at this present time. Throughout the Middle East. And the Russia and Ukraine conflict.

And quite a number of other conflicts elsewhere in the world too. Lord grant that there might yet be peace in these areas.

[10 : 12] We commit to you. Those whom we ourselves know. From this congregation. We think particularly of Aubrey and Kirsty and Mary.

Praying for their comfort to come to them in their illness. And for one or two little ones too. Who we gather are not too well at the moment.

We pray Lord that you will look kindly upon each one. Pray that you will look kindly upon us now. And open up to us the word of God.

And grant that we may be refreshed through the word. And later through our fellowship together over coffee. Be present amongst us. Grant us to know the power of the Lord.

For we ask all with the forgiveness of all our sins. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well let's turn now to Colossians chapter 4.

[11 : 28] And those five verses we read. Verses 2 to 6. In the church where I began my ministry.

In the south of England. We had a large clock on the wall. With a very loud tick.

It's our custom to sit in silence. In meditation before the service. As we do here. And all you could hear was that clock.

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. I hated that clock. But in its own way.

It was preaching a sermon to us. Hence my title today. The clock sermon. Time is slipping away. [12 : 32] That was the message of that clock. Slipping away relentlessly. Use it well. Once it's gone. It's gone. And you will never be able to recover it.

Paul says something similar here. In verse 5. Where he says.

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders. Making the best use of time. time. The AV and the New King James version.

Have redeeming the time. And that is actually a literal translation of the Greek. Greek word. Exagorastō.

Means to buy something back. Which would otherwise be lost. It's the same word that is used of Christ redeeming us. He bought back.

[13 : 34] Lost sinners. We must buy back. Lost time. This is just one of Paul's concluding practical remarks in this letter.

Paul's letters usually have the same pattern. First the doctrinal part. And then the practical part. First what we are to believe.

And then what we are to do. In the light of that belief. The doctrinal part of Colossians. Is back in chapter 1.

And the beginning of chapter 2. Where Paul has presented to us. A magnificent portrait. Of Christ. As the image of the invisible God.

The firstborn of all creation. The Lord of heaven and earth. The redeemer of his people. And the source of all wisdom.

[14 : 38] The practical part starts in chapter 2. And verse 5. Therefore. In the light of all this.

As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord. So walk in him. And since then. He has been explaining. What that means.

These five verses are. The conclusion to that. Practical part. The rest of the chapter. Being greetings. We can divide them into two parts.

Praying to God. In verses 2 to 4. And living in the world. In verses 5 and 6. The first is private. The second is public. But the same idea lies behind both. To win the world. For the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 43] Let's begin with the private. Praying to God. Paul begins with a general command. Continue steadfastly in prayer.

Being watchful in it. With thanksgiving. And then he adds a personal prayer request. Concerning his own ministry. 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.

Which is how I ought to speak. I call this private. Because prayer is a private matter. Between us and God.

And it isn't normally observed by the world. But it includes not just personal prayer in secret. But also family prayer.

[16 : 43] And congregational prayer. First there's the general command. Continue steadfastly in prayer.

These Christians are already praying. That's what Christians do. How can you be a child of God. And not talk to your heavenly father.

But they need to continue praying. And they need to be steadfast. In prayer. Jesus says the same. In Luke 18. He told them a parable. To the effect that they ought. Always to pray. And not to lose heart. In that parable.

A widow keeps on. Pleading her cause. With an unjust judge. Until he finally hears her. How much more.

[17 : 46] Will a just. And loving God. Hear you. It's all too easy. To lose heart in prayer. We want instant answers.

And when nothing appears. To be happening. We give up. But Jesus teaches. And Paul teaches. That we should keep. On praying.

Paul adds. That we should be watchful. On the lookout. For danger. The enemy is always trying. To disrupt our prayers. Again. Jesus says the same.

Watch and pray. He said to his disciples. In the. Garden of Gethsemane. They actually fell asleep. During prayer. And let's be honest.

Sometimes we do. Either literally. Or metaphorically. And he says to be thankful. Thankful for all he has done. And all he will do.

[18 : 48] But then Paul adds this personal request. Pray also for us. That is himself. And his fellow. Workers. That God may open a door for us.

That is a door of opportunity. To preach. The gospel. Paul is in prison. In Rome. Remember. On account of the gospel.

He says so. In verse 3. Ideally. Perhaps. He would like the doors. Of the prison. Opened. So that he could go out. And continue. His missionary work. But even in prison.

He expects. Missionary opportunities. He can share the gospel. With the prison guards. He can share the gospel. With the many people. Who were coming to visit him.

Maybe he'll be able to share the gospel. At his trial. Paul's heart is. Overflowing. With Christ. And he wants to.

[19 : 47] Share with everyone. The mystery. Of Christ. Which has been revealed. To him. Paul has spoken of this.

Mystery. Earlier in the letter. Chapter 1. Verse 26. The mystery. Hidden from ages and generations. But now revealed to his saints. And what is that mystery?

Christ. In you. The hope of glory. What an extraordinary thing. That the son of God.

Can personally dwell. In your heart. What a gospel that is. Christ. In chapter 2. And verse 2.

He prays for them. To understand God's mystery. Which is Christ. In whom are hidden. All the treasures. Of wisdom. And knowledge.

[20 : 43] Pray for me. He says. That I might declare. That mystery. And that I might explain it. Clearly. That these are deep things. And he knows he will need.

The spirit of God. To help him. Now I wonder. Are you. Praying. Like this. Paul here.

Cries out for prayer. Every minister. In the world. Would echo. That request. Were you praying for me. Before this service.

Are you praying. For Jonathan Watson. When he comes next week. For many of us. Prayer. Is a weak point.

Isn't it? Once many years ago. When I worked in the Midland Bank. I was interviewed. For promotion. And a senior.

[21 : 40] Manager. Asked me. Not as I expected. What are your strengths? Why should we give you this job? But the opposite. What are your weaknesses?

Very astute question. If I were asked today. What is your greatest weakness? As a Christian. I would have to answer.

Honestly. Prayer. When I look back. On my years. As a minister. I am. Very thankful. For the fruit. That there was.

But I often wonder. How much more. There might have been. Had I prayed more. Both for myself. And for others. And I think.

I am not alone. In that. Make it a resolution. Today. To pray more. And you will undoubtedly.

[22 : 40] See more blessing. But then secondly. We have. Our life in the world. In verses. Five and six.

And. I am going to divide that. Into three parts. First. The general command. Walk in wisdom. Towards outsiders. And then. Two ways in particular.

In which we need. To be wise. In our use of time. And in the way. In which we speak. First. First.

The general command. Walk in wisdom. Towards. Outsiders. Notice. The clear distinction.

That Paul makes here. Between. Insiders. And outsiders. Insiders. Are those who are. In Christ.

[23 : 34] Saved by grace. Part of the church. language. Outsiders. Outsiders. Are those who are. Out in the world. And still. Unsaved.

There are people today. Who object. To this kind of language. Being. In. Or out. We.

Invited. For lunch. A. Member. Of the church. Of Scotland. A few days ago. Who. Surprised me. When he said. Exactly this.

That he'd found it. Very off putting. Amongst evangelicals. That they seem to have. This idea. That you were either. In or out. And he didn't like that. We're all.

On a journey. So they say. No one's either. In or out. What? Well. Paul has no hesitation.

[24 : 36] He draws a sharp line. Between the two. You're either inside. Or outside. The kingdom. And it's important.

To know which. It's not just a matter. Of coming to church. It's a question. Of a genuine. Saving faith. In Christ.

It's a question. Of being born again. Of the spirit. Of God. And you alone know. If that's true. Of you. Jesus speaks.

Of going. Through. The gate. Matthew 6. Enter. By. The narrow. Gate. We are indeed. All on a journey. But that journey. Has two parts. There's a journey. To the gate. And then a journey. Beyond. The gate.

[25 : 31] The question is. Whether you have entered. Through the gate. Are you. In. The kingdom. Of God. That is what makes you. An insider. I remember.

A time. When I was. Outside. The gate. I was on my journey. Yes. I was seeking. The truth. But I hadn't yet. Found it. Christians. I met. We're all very friendly.

As I hope we are. But I knew. That I didn't have. What they had. And I wanted it. I was an outsider. But I bless God.

That I then. Came. Inside. Well. How should we. Behave. Towards. Outsiders.

Paul. Focuses. On. One thought. Walk. In wisdom. Wisdom. Wisdom. Was highly. Prized. In the. Ancient world. Greeks.

[26 : 31] Had their famous. Philosophers. Philosophy. Means. The love. Of wisdom. But the Bible. Offers. The one. True wisdom. Which is. Quite simply.

To walk. In the ways. Of the Lord. The fear. Of the Lord. Is the beginning. Of wisdom. And that wisdom. Paul says. Is in Christ. What does that wisdom.

Teach us. About the world. Well first. It teaches us. To be. Wary. Of the world. 1 John 2.

15. Do not love the world. Or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world. The love of the father. Is not. In him. Now that doesn't mean.

There's nothing. Good in the world. Or that we shouldn't. Enjoy the world. We all enjoy. The beauty of this world. We all enjoy. Great art. And great music.

[27 : 26] We enjoy. Family. We enjoy. Friendship. But we must not allow. These good things. To take over.

Our lives. Or to squeeze out. God. And we're certainly. Not to get entangled. With the bad things. Of this world.

The twisted ethics. The sins. That abound. To that extent. We are to be separate. From the world. Psalm 1 says. Blessed is the man. Who walks not in the counsel. Of the wicked. Nor stands in the way. Of sinners. Nor sits in the seat. Of scoffers. But his delight. Is in the law.

Of the Lord. And on his law. He meditates. Day. And night. Night. The wisdom of God. Teaches us. To expect. Opposition.

[28 : 20] From the world. Jesus says. In John 15. If you were of the world. The world would love you. As its own. But because you are not. Of the world. But I chose you.

Out of the world. Therefore. The world. Hates you. Paul had more reason. Than most. To know that. If we are insiders.

In the kingdom of God. Then we are outsiders. In the world. There is an ancient Christian writing. Called the epistle to Diognetus.

Which says. We are in the world. But not of it. But at the same time. The wisdom of God. Teaches us. To do good. In this world. Jesus says. In the sermon. On the mount. Let your light shine. Before others. So that they may see.

[29 : 14] Your good works. And give glory. To your father. Who is in heaven. Paul says. In Titus 2. Christ gave himself. For us. To purify. For himself.

A people. For his own possession. Zealous. For good works. James says. With. Beautiful balance. Religion. That is pure. And undefiled. Before God. And the father. Is this. To visit orphans. And widows. In their affliction. And. To keep oneself.

Unstained. From the world. Do good. To the world. Without being corrupted. By the world. Above all.

We long. For the conversion. Of the world. We ourselves. Have been saved. Out of this world. And we want to see others. Saved too. We want to see.

[30 : 11] Outsiders. Become insiders. God doesn't want us. To be a holy huddle. Avoiding the world. He doesn't want us. To be Pharisees.

Looking down. On the world. He wants us. To go out. Into the world. To preach the gospel. So that they might come in. Go into all the world.

Jesus says. And proclaim the gospel. Walking in wisdom. Toward outsiders. Means not only. Negatively. Avoiding being corrupted.

By the world. But positively. Attracting people. To Christ. Christ. Paul ends with two ways. In particular.

In which we need to be wise. The first is our use of time. End of verse five. Making the best use of time. Time is a precious commodity.

[31:08] In short supply. Job laments. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. You ever seen an old fashioned weaver? The shuttle is thrown back and forth.

So as to weave together the threads in opposite directions. And a skilled weaver can throw that shuttle so fast you can hardly see it. That's how it is with time.

Psalms 90 contains a similar lament. The years of our life are 70. Or even by reason of strength 80. Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone.

And we fly away. And he goes on as we read. So teach us to number our days. That we may get a heart of wisdom. That's what Paul is saying here.

Use those precious moments wisely. Don't waste them. Says the same in Ephesians five. With an added note of urgency.

[32:12] Look carefully then how you walk. Not as unwise but as wise. Making the best use of time. Because the days are evil. Now this can be applied in many ways.

At a personal level. The top priority is to be saved. I once saw a clock tower with the words. It is time to seek the Lord.

After that any kind of spiritual improvement is a good use of time. Bible reading. Prayer. Coming to church.

The world may think you're wasting your time when you could be out enjoying yourself. But you know different. But Paul's focus is not on our own spiritual life.

But on our relationship with the world. Use your time wisely. Doing good in the world. Use your time wisely.

[33:10] Sharing the gospel. Seize every opportunity to speak of Christ. Don't let those opportunities slip away. You know it's all too easy to fritter away time.

I read recently that the average person in the UK spends up to seven hours a day on screens of one kind or another. TV.

Phones. Laptops. Games. Consoles. Just for entertainment. What a waste of time. The early Methodists made it a matter of conscience to account for every hour of the day.

They wrote in their diaries. Forenoon visited the sick. Afternoon spent two hours in prayer. And then prepared to preach.

And so it went on. Make sure that you use your time in the best possible way. It is a precious, precious gift from God.

[34:18] And who knows how little you may have. Use it well. Finally, Paul urges us to be wise in our speech. Verse 6. Let your speech always be gracious.

Seasoned with salt. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person. That might seem a very ordinary note on which to end. But words matter.

Jesus says, Matthew 12, 36, On the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak. So how should we speak? Always with grace.

Seasoned with salt. Jesus himself gives us the perfect example of this in his sermon in Nazareth in Luke 4.

Reading from Isaiah, he said, The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and so on.

[35:21] And he said, These things are fulfilled this day in me. Those are gracious words. And it says, All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

They liked that. But then he threw in some salt. He reminded them of the past. And of how God had often favored Gentiles rather than Jews.

Then they tried to kill him. Grace and salt. Both are necessary.

And in both we're following the example of Christ. But notice the proportions. Grace seasoned with salt, not salt seasoned with grace. That's true of all our conversation, including family and friends

and fellow believers.

But Paul's focus, remember, is on the outsider. He wants us to be gracious in our speech towards people out in the world with a seasoning of salt to challenge them.

[36 : 29] Jesus said, didn't he, you are the salt of the earth. Paul expects that people will ask questions. And he wants us to be ready to answer them.

Peter also says, be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in you. And he wants us to be ready to answer each one individually. Not just giving standard answers, but carefully considering what each person needs to hear.

I read another bit of research the other day, which said that on average we speak 11,900 words every day.

And let's be honest, most of them are wasted breath. Be wise in the use of your words. So Paul comes to the end of this practical part of the letter.

It's interesting that he ends by looking outward, both regarding his own ministry and ours. The Christian gospel is an outward looking gospel.

[37 : 40] Paul said back in chapter 1 that even then the gospel was spreading throughout all the world. And he wants it to continue. Jesus is Lord of all.

He's come to reconcile heaven and earth by his blood on the cross. He wants those outsiders to become insiders. And so do we.

But remember, that clock is still ticking. Time is vanishing for the world. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation.

And time is vanishing for us to share the gospel. Time is ticking down toward the end of our lives. Time is ticking down towards our Lord's return.

If you're still outside today, come inside. And if you're inside, see to it that your life and your words attract the outsider.

[38 : 50] So may Christ be glorified in us all. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.