

Praying for Missions

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[0 : 00] So, open your Bibles, Colossians chapter 4, verse 3 and 4. We're almost done with Colossians.

We'll take up verse 5 and 6 next week, and the next week we'll take up verse 7 to the end. And then from there, well, we're going to go through the book of Leviticus next.

The one thing that people read that they go like, what? What is this? But we're going to go through the book of Leviticus next. So, buckle up is all I have to say.

Colossians 4, verses 3 and 4. This is the rest of sort of the section beginning in verse 1 or actually verse 2 where Paul is encouraging the church to pray and to pray for strength.

And then he comes and he says in verse 3, he says, Let's pray.

[1 : 12] Father, we do praise you for your word. We know that every scripture, every word is breathed out by you.

It is profitable for instruction, for training, for teaching, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And we pray, we pray that you would equip us now by your word that we might live in such a way that it pleases you. And we pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. In 1995, I had the opportunity to go to Sydney, Australia for a mission trip. Our director of missions called me and said, Hey, listen, I need somebody to go with us.

And I'd never been on a mission trip in my life and had no idea what to expect. But we went to Sydney, Australia. So, I had a little bit of a language barrier. And that's a joke.

[2 : 06] And so, we get there. And I had been a youth minister, music minister at the church that I was at. And so, I did a lot of the music.

And we also did a lot of things with students. And one of the things that they wanted me to do is they were going to have a night where the students gathered at somebody's house.

And while they were gathered, they were going to play some games. And then they wanted me to present like a gospel presentation. And so, I was like, well, sure. Okay. That'd be great.

Well, while that was going on, some of the adults in the church were gathered at the church. And they were praying for that gathering of those youth that night.

And one of the strangest things that's ever happened to me in ministry is that there's a living room full, a few adults who were working the food stuffs and the games and things.

[3 : 02] And then about 26 students, high school students, junior high students, sitting in this room. And I shared the gospel with them. It wasn't very fancy.

It wasn't anything, you know, terribly impressive. You know, it was nothing to write home about. You know, I wasn't going to record it or anything, but just presented the gospel.

And when I gave an opportunity for these kids to pray to receive Christ, you know, I'm a very careful person about that because various reasons.

So, I really want to err on the side of caution and not have people get just an emotional response and, you know, to really be mindful and serious about what they're doing.

And so, I asked the room. I said, how many of you, for the first time in your life tonight, prayed to receive Christ? And every one of those students raised their hands.

[4 : 04] And I was sitting there looking at this going like, I don't know what to do because my plan had been to let someone do another game and take the one or two or three kids and another adult or two and go to another part and just kind of have some counsel time with them.

You know, to really help them understand what's going on and be sure that the questions were answered, be sure that everything was clear. And I stood there and I remember Raymond Duncan, who was our director of missions.

I looked over at him and, of course, I'm like 22 years old, okay, 23 years old. And I look at Raymond. Raymond is probably 65 years old, been in the ministry for a long time, wise man. And I looked over at Raymond and I go like this. He said, just counsel all of them right here, right now. So, we spent the next hour answering questions, talking about the gospel in depth to all of these kids.

They had questions that they wanted to ask. I mean, it was a glorious time. But that would not, in my opinion, have ever happened had that group not gathered to be praying for those kids.

[5 : 13] I believe that it was Ian Bounds who said, prayer is not preparation for the work. Prayer is the work.

And it is the work of the church of the living God to be praying people. And in this passage, Paul gives this command. He wants them to pray for us, right?

When Paul says us, he's talking about himself and about nine other people who are with him. In verses 7 through the end of the chapter, we'll come back and look at that and look at these people. But a lot of those people are people that he's including in this us. Pray for us. And when he says pray for us, he then gives them two reasons or two things he wants them to pray about specifically. And you can see it in verse 3. You can see that he says, that God. And then in verse 4, he says, that I may. And these two that's, that is there for a reason.

[6 : 19] Right? And those that's help us to see the structure of the passage so that we can see these reasons, these purposes. And they become for us things that we ought to be praying for.

Things that we ought to be praying for in relationship to Christian workers, to pastors, to missionaries, to people who are, you know, teaching a Sunday school class or whatever. People who have the opportunity to do the ministry of the Lord. These are the two things that we need to be praying for. And that's what I want us to look at this morning. The first one is for opportunity.

For opportunity. Paul says in the beginning of verse 3, pray for us also that God may open to us a door.

Now the word door and this idea of an open door is mentioned a few times in the New Testament. But we don't have to go to the parallel passages to get this. This is pretty clear. If a door is closed, it's a barrier.

[7 : 24] If a door is open, you can go through it. If you come to my house and my closet door is closed, that means stay out. But if you come to my house and I open up my closet door and say, come look, that means that I've opened a door for you.

I mean, that's just real simple, right? Paul is praying and asking them to pray that God would open a door for him. And it needs to be God who opens this door because we cannot open the door ourselves.

God is the sovereign king over all things. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. So the Lord must be the one to open the door for ministry or the door will never be opened.

The second thing is that it's a door to be open for the preaching of the gospel. He says in verse 3 again that open a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.

So he wants a door opened so that there's the possibility of the gospel being preached. In other words, Paul wants the barrier removed so that there is more opportunity for the gospel to be preached.

[8 : 42] Now, we've got to deal with maybe two little side issues here that I think are appropriate to deal here. One is going to be the idea of passivity. Passivity. There is this concept and this idea in some people's minds that prayer means that we pray and we just sort of wait around for God to do something.

Right? It's a little bit like the student who prays and asks God to help him pass his exam when they've never studied. Right?

There's some sort of passivity going on there that prays and then doesn't do anything. Paul asking for a door to be opened for the gospel doesn't mean that Paul just sat around and didn't try to see about knocking on some doors.

He's not going to open the doors. But he's certainly going to pursue what avenues that he could. We're not to be passive with our prayers. But instead, as we pray, then we are to be obedient to those things that God has called us to be obedient to.

The other thing, the other side issue we need to run to is the idea of sovereignty. And that is this. So if God is the one with the power to open doors and he's planning to open these doors, then what is the use in us praying?

[10:02] I hear people say this all the time about other things. That if God is sovereign and knows all things that are going to come to pass, then why is it that we should pray at all? Well, we have to understand that prayer is not about us getting God to do things that we think need to be done.

Let me say that again because you probably should say amen after this. Prayer is not us getting God to do things that we think need to be done.

Prayer is God allowing us to be involved in the things that he plans to do. Prayer is God allowing us to be involved in the things that he plans to do.

If you think of a toddler who walks up to his father with an empty plate and motions that he's hungry. The father was already in the kitchen making food. But he allows his toddler to ask for the food so that he will learn that he's involved in the process.

Because it's right and good for a child to ask the parents for something. It's right and good for the child to learn where their sustenance comes from. It's right and good for the child to learn who they're dependent upon.

[11:15] And as a good father, our father allows us to be involved in the things that he's planning to do. And therefore has given us prayer to be involved. And Paul's asking for this open door in spite of his present circumstances.

Notice verse 3 again. On account of this mystery. On account of which I am in prison.

Now we've not talked about this very much throughout the series here. Because this is where it really comes to light. But as Paul's writing this letter to the Colossians, he's in prison.

He's in prison because of what happened in Jerusalem. Now he's in Rome under house arrest. People can come see him.

He has to provide for his own house, for his own food, out of his own pocket. He must have Roman soldiers live with him. And what Paul wants is he wants an open door for the gospel.

[12:20] Not necessarily an open door for himself. Paul is not necessarily seeking to be set free from prison.

He is wanting a wider audience. Now, if that means being set free gives him that wider audience, he'll take it.

But if it means remaining in captivity to get that wider audience, he'll take it. Paul is not concerned or fixated on the circumstances of his own life.

He is concerned with the circumstances, the gospel, that it might spread far and wide. He's praying for opportunity.

And Christians, this is something we ought to understand. We ought to believe that it is our duty as Christians to pray for Christian workers, pastors, and missionaries.

[13:24] Paul's wanting this church to do that. And I see no reason why it shouldn't be something that we ought to have as our duty, as an obligation, as a thing that says this is what we ought to be doing.

We ought to be praying for people who are Christian workers, missionaries, pastors. We should be praying for them that they have an opportunity for the gospel to go out. Now, this does not mean that we won't pray for their physical health, for their well-being.

But it means that our primary goal ought to be for the gospel to be spread throughout their audience. If they gain a wider audience.

It seems like over the years, churches have fallen into one of two ditches. Either all their prayer time is about someone who's ill, needing to be made well, or they never pray for someone to be well.

Right? It seems like there's just two ditches. These over here, praying for people to be made well, almost never pray for the gospel to go out. And these that pray for the gospel to go out, almost never pray for this.

[14:38] And so we don't want to go to either ditch. We want to bring them together. There's plenty of reason and room in scripture for us to pray for people's well-being. But there is also the primary goal of praying for the gospel to go out.

There was a lady that we knew, and she had been diagnosed with cancer. And one opportunity that I had to talk with her, she told me, she says, it's okay that you pray that the Lord would heal me.

That'd be fine with me if you want to pray that. She said, but it would be far better for me if you would pray that I could give solid testimony to my family about who Christ is. Because I would rather keep the cancer and be a witness than to lose the cancer and not be a witness. Beloved, when we think about praying for those who are working in the gospel, we want to pray that they get a wide audience for that gospel, opportunity to speak it. And this is what you should want for yourself. When you ask people to pray for you, when you're in the middle of maybe some sort of unexpected loss or some sort of health collapse or some sort of prodigal children, or you're in the midst of any kind of suffering that you are going through, be resolved to say that you want prayer so that you can have an opportunity for the gospel.

[16:13] Yes, we want the suffering to end if that's what the Lord wants, but we should want to see the gospel spread. Are you willing to pray more for the gospel to have an opportunity to spread than you are for well-being?

Again, it's not wrong to pray for well-being. It could be the very thing that opens the door for the gospel.

We have to keep our minds where it needs to be. And so what does this mean we ought to do? Well, let me give you a couple of things and then we'll move on. One is that you've got to have a commitment to the spread of the gospel.

You know, the passage that was on the screen a while ago, I'm just reminded of that passage because how can someone believe in Jesus if they never hear about Jesus?

The answer is they can't. And how can someone hear about Jesus unless someone tells them? They can't.

[17:17] And so you and I must be committed to the spread of the gospel, whether it's through our church, the missionaries that we support, through other avenues that we come in contact with, we must have that as our number one commitment.

Secondly, we need to pray such things for ourselves. Pray for yourself. As you pray for yourself on a daily basis, pray that God would give you opportunity for the gospel.

Third, pray for our missionaries, that they have an open door for the gospel to go forth. Pray for them. Pray that they can see those opportunities. Pray that they'll knock on those doors.

Pray that they have the doors open for them. And fourth, pray then for your lost family members. Now, this is a bit different. You have people in your family who are not believers, who are not Christians.

And here, the prayer is not so much that the gospel would go forth from them openly, but that you would have a wide hearing from them for the gospel.

[18:24] In other words, praying that they would hear you out about the gospel. Well, we need to pray for an opportunity.

The second thing we need to pray for is clarity. We need to pray for clarity. Paul says that he would make it clear. He says that I may make it clear.

Verse 4. We've got a couple of things we're going to have to deal with under this. The idea of making it clear. Paul wants prayer for making clear the gospel.

Does the gospel have to be clear in order for someone to be saved? Yes.

Yes. They must believe the gospel. And the gospel has certain very specific hair-splitting truths. So it has to be clear.

[19:28] Second question might be, well, why would we need to pray for the gospel to be made clear? Since obviously, as everybody tells us, it's as simple that a child can understand it.

You understand what I'm saying? All my life I've been told the gospel, don't confound it. Don't complicate it. It's simple. Even a child can understand it. Yet Paul is saying, pray for me that I make it clear. Here's the difference. The difference is, is that yes, the gospel is simple and can be understood, but the gospel is not simplistic.

It's not simplistic. It's not just a, hey, pray and ask Jesus to forgive you and that's all you've got to say to somebody. Right? We have to get the gospel right.

We have to speak the gospel and speak the truth the way it was meant to. I remember in my first pastorate that I would say something like this, that we need to get the gospel right. And I always had the same guy walk up to me after church and say, Pastor, the gospel is simple.

[20:40] Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Okay. Thank you so much. Like I, sometimes I didn't even know what he was saying, but I believe what he was trying to say is that everything contained

in those books is the gospel.

And I get that. But the problem is, is that when we say gospel, we're not talking about the gospel accounts, the accounts that tell us the story of Jesus. But what we're talking about is what truths must be believed in order for a person to be saved.

Can they just believe anything that they willy-nilly want to? Can they just believe whatever feels right? No, they must believe the gospel. They must believe certain truths about God, about Christ, about ourselves, in order to be believed.

There are certain truths that make the story that we need to tell someone. Because the gospel is not, the gospel is, I'm not sharing the gospel if I tell someone what God did in my life.

That's not the same thing. I'm not sharing the gospel when I share my personal testimony. That's not the same thing. I'm not sharing the gospel if I begin to tell someone how to be saved.

[22 : 01] That's a response to the gospel. It's necessary. It needs to be a part of things. But that's not the only thing. We don't just walk up to somebody and say, you know what, you just need to trust Jesus. Like, there's a lot more that needs to be said than just that.

Right? You're also not sharing the gospel if you talk about your church or your pastor. As great as your church is, your pastor's okay. That is not sharing the gospel.

That is not sharing the gospel at all. And the gospel message is not something that needs to be watered down. I've heard people say all kinds of things. Like, you know, God wants you to be rich, and that's to them the gospel message.

Or, you are the gospel, so go live it out. That's not really the truth. Or, God is love, and we're all okay as long as we trust Him. Or, God just wants us to try harder since He died for us.

Or, whatever it is, you might say, no, that is not the gospel. When Paul says, in verse 3, that it's the mystery of Christ, he is speaking that it is the life and death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ along with all of those truths that help us to understand it.

[23 : 09] So, let's just see if we can summarize the gospel then. Because I can't tell you, hey, we need to be sure that the gospel is clear. We need to pray for gospel clarity if I can't give to you a clear gospel.

So, here we go. Four words. God, man, Christ, response. Now, you say it with me. God, man, Christ, response.

One more time. God, man, man, Christ, response. This week, you see somebody at Keesus, you see somebody at the post office from the church today, you look at them and you say, give me the four words.

And then you're going to go, God, man, Christ, response. Now, that's a good outline to help you memorize the gospel.

So, here we go. Let's talk about it. God. God has revealed himself as the holy triune God whose law we have broken and have defamed his name.

[24 : 13] And anytime a law is broken, it violates his character because his law comes from whom he is. He's a holy God who will by no means let the guilty go unpunished.

Man. Man, we have broken God's law from the beginning. In Adam, we broke the law and inherited his guilt and corruption, but on our own, that deserves just punishment.

Christ. But God is also a God of love. And in his love, he sent his son to live a perfect life. When he was fasting in the wilderness, facing temptation by the devil, he was doing that on our behalf.

He was earning righteousness on our behalf. Okay, I'll stop preaching. I'll go back to this. God, in love, sent his son to live a perfect life, to die in our place, taking the punishment that we deserve as our substitute, paying off the wrath of God, satisfying the wrath of God, so that his death pleased his father.

And we know that because he raised him from the dead and he's now the rightful ruler of the world and can give new life to anyone he wants to. That's Christ.

[25 : 43] It's the story of what Christ has done. And response? He calls all people everywhere that when they hear this message to turn from their law-breaking, turn from being the boss of their own life and turn to Christ for forgiveness of sin.

That's the gospel. That, and that alone is the gospel. God, man, Christ, response.

We are to pray that the gospel is clear because this gospel clarity is the task of missions.

If you'll notice back in verse 4, Paul says he wants the gospel clear, which is how I ought to speak. In other words, he recognizes that he needs to speak with clarity when it comes to the gospel.

When missionaries and ministers preach and teach and spread the gospel, they need to make sure that on their part, it's clear. And we need to line out responsibilities in this because we have a responsibility as the human instruments.

[26 : 53] It's our responsibility to make sure we understand and know the gospel and that we make it clear. And there are definitely some hair-splitting theologies and doctrines in these things that are necessary for us to understand.

But it requires for us to understand how to communicate that gospel to other people. When you go to another culture, it's not right for you to try to make them American or British just so you can preach the gospel to them.

Instead, no, you need to understand their culture, understand their words, understand their language so that you can translate it for them properly. But the Lord has the responsibility then to make the gospel clear.

In other words, He has the responsibility for helping us to learn the gospel, helping us to speak the gospel, helping us to keep the gospel clear, and helping the gospel be clear to the person who is listening.

He is the sovereign king over all the universe. It is not my responsibility for that person to believe. It's my responsibility to share the truth. It is God's responsibility for that person to believe.

[28 : 06] We are obligated to share the gospel with other people, and God has the responsibility to persuade and to change hearts so that they believe.

How do we know this? Romans 1, verse 16. Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it, it is the power of God.

The it is the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Without the gospel, there is no salvation, but with the gospel, the Holy Spirit has all the power necessary to save to the uttermost.

So, Christians, we should long for the gospel to be clear, crystal clear. In the preaching from this pulpit, as the gospel is preached, you need to hold accountable the pulpit to making sure the gospel is clear and doesn't get muddled.

I say that with fear and trepidation because I know what a weak instrument I am and I want to be sure that this pulpit never, never, never makes the gospel muddy.

[29 : 24] So, you've got to listen and you've got to discern and you've got to know so that whoever stands here, you hold them accountable to getting the gospel correct.

And anything that we might do from tracks that we hand out to other people that we invite in, we need to make sure that they're preaching the gospel clearly.

This is of absolute importance. Here's what Paul says about the clarity of the gospel. He says in Galatians chapter 1, he says, I am astonished that you're so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there's some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we are, what?

An angel. You mean that you might get a vision about something? You mean that there might be some sort of spiritual heavenly being that could drop out of the sky and say something to you?

[30 : 30] Yeah, he's probably brought a false gospel. Even if we are an angel. Lost my place. From heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one that we preach to you.

Let him be accursed. That word accursed means damned. That's what that means. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you receive, let him be accursed.

beloved Paul is very serious under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is very serious about the clarity of the gospel. And so we need to be praying for those that we know, Christian workers that we know.

Praying for the missionaries that we support. Praying for your pastor. Praying for those that teach small groups or Wednesday night or a youth group or whatever. Praying that the gospel is made clear.

That they won't water it down or muddy it. And then, as we pray for that, one of the things about this whole passage is that he's talking to them as a group.

[31 : 47] It's not just about what happens in my own personal private prayer time, but it's about us praying together. prayer. And we should be together to pray physically.

Physically together to pray, even as much as we pray apart. Now, as we come to the end of this, I just want to say I know and recognize the possibility that there are some who, as they live their life, they think that because there's blessings in their lives that they've asked for that maybe God is satisfied with them, but the truth is they've never trusted Christ for salvation.

Blessings in a life is not proof of God's being pleased with you. It says, Jesus says in the Gospels that the Lord sends the rain on the just and the unjust so that their crops grow.

In other words, he's kind to lost people. Because Romans tells us that it's his kindness that leads to repentance. And I can't tell you the number of people who have a spiritual mindset about them, but they've never trusted Christ.

Who think that because of all the blessings in their life that they're okay exactly the way they are. And the truth of the matter is this. One day you're going to stand before God. And it's going to be the judgment seat.

[33 : 23] And he's not going to ask you how many spiritual blessings you had. And he's not going to ask you how many times you read your Bible. And he's not going to ask you how many times you gave your tithe or attended worship.

He's going to ask you, did you trust in the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? That's what matters.

That's what has to be clear. That's what we need to be praying for. Both opportunity and clarity. Let's pray together.