

Promoting the Gospel with Diverse Gifts

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. The web page of the church located in Texas has this heading, Perpetual Gospel Memory to...

And then there's the name of someone provided. We'll just say Perpetual Gospel Memory to XYZ. And then a photograph of the person appears, their head, and flames come up around the head. And under the photo there's a caption. When I last checked it had XYZ has been in hell for 2,783 days.

This same church pickets the funerals of American soldiers killed in Iraq and the ones that are being buried in Texas.

The claim? Well, that the deaths of American soldiers are divine punishment for America allowing sexual promiscuity. And on the picketing placards, God has thanked for the explosives that have led to the deaths of the American soldiers.

[1 : 21] On this website, which I'm not putting up on the overhead, it's hardly edifying, there's a picket schedule. So, for example, yesterday there was a picket being held at a funeral for a soldier being buried at a local Baptist church.

And two more pickets are in fact planned for tomorrow, East Coast time, in the US. As well as all of that, the website has a hate message for the week, and that's what it's entitled.

Is this to be the witness of the church? Of followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you're visiting with us today, we're nearing the end of a series entitled Promoting the Gospel.

And each follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to promote the gospel, the good news, not to promote hate. The good news, simply that God the Father, in his extreme love, has sent his son, the Lord Jesus, to pay the price for our sins by dying on a cross.

If you were flicking through the age yesterday, you may have noticed on page 11, under the faith section, in fact, the gospel is well summarised, because 1 John 4.10 was printed there in black and white.

[2 : 43] In this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. You see, our sins can be eternally forgiven as we turn from our rebellion and trust in the Lord Jesus.

I mean, this is great news, and each follower of the Lord Jesus has the wonderful and privilege, indeed, the responsibility, to be involved in God's saving mission.

So we're called to be promoters of the gospel. Let's then just briefly review some of the points that we've looked at in previous weeks of the ways that we can be partners in the promotion of the gospel.

Firstly, we need to see the world through God's eyes, a world that's lost, a world that is in need of his salvation. We need to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into the harvest field, and that harvest field is just Doncaster, but it's also to the far-flung places of the globe.

And as we pray to the Lord of the harvest, we do it with an open heart, don't we? Because perhaps we may be part of the answer to our prayer. And we promote the gospel as we give financially to gospel ministry, as we show compassion and mercy to those around us who are hurting, who are suffering.

[4 : 11] And last week we looked at leading godly lives as part of the promotion of the gospel. You see, it's our display character, it's our behaviour, our actions, that are to adorn, to actually beautify the gospel.

The good lives of believers can enhance the gospel's appearance in the minds of those who hear it. And the gospel is heard by evangelists standing up and proclaiming the gospel.

And the gospel is heard as other Christians who aren't gifted as evangelists simply share in a gracious way in everyday conversations the reality of Jesus Christ and his life-transforming gospel. And this is what the Apostle Paul encourages the Colossian Christians. Tucked away in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, this is what he encourages them to do as he gets to the back end of his little letter.

So if you'd turn with me then to chapter 4 of Colossians, page 958. And we read there in verse 2, devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.

[5 : 27] You see, Paul's got this really big view on prayer because as you read Paul's letter, throughout them he regularly exhorts his readers to pray for themselves, to pray for their community, and to intercede, to intercede for him and to intercede for his gospel ministry.

Prayer is critically important for the Apostle. His own praying and other Christians praying. Our last parish prayer meeting last Tuesday, a week ago, was just a really encouraging night with the number of people that were there in corporate praise and prayer.

The next parish prayer meeting is June 20. Let me encourage you, put it in your diaries, plan on coming and being part of what is a vital part of promoting the gospel. Prayer.

Notice there in verse 2 that Paul exhorts, it's strong, he instructs the Christians to persevere in prayer. And the word that he's using there for prayer indicates that he's referring to intercession.

[6 : 37] So they're being called to persevere in prayer, praying for gospel ministry, praying for people to be saved, praying for God's kingdom to keep growing.

And as they intercede, we read there to keep alert. We're reminded perhaps of Jesus' words in the Garden of Gethsemane to the disciples, where he said, watch and pray.

But the verb that's used here even brings it into sharper focus, because the word is often used in the context of the expectation of Christ's return.

So the Colossian Christians are to devote themselves to prayer, if you like, your kingdom come. The time is short. And as they're interceding, they're also to be offering up thanksgiving to their heavenly Father.

And so this focus on prayer in verse 2, then it just flows right on into the first part of verse 3. Look with me. At the same time, pray for us as well, that God will open to us a door for the word.

[7 : 46] You see, while the Colossians are praying for the Lord's return, at the same time, they're to be continually interceding. Firstly, they intercede for Paul.

Secondly, they intercede for his gospel mission. And Paul is reminding the Christians at Colossae, and the Spirit is reminding us here gathered this morning, that we're to promote the gospel by our prayers.

What's the purpose of this intercessory prayer? We see there in the verse that God would open a door for the gospel. I mean, if you think about it, that's why we pray to the Lord of the harvest, isn't it?

He's the sovereign Lord, the only one who can open doors for evangelism, and open doors who hear the word, the hearts of people who hear the word, so that they'll receive it, repent, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice also, just at the end of that verse 3, that Paul is continuing his work as an evangelist, while he's in chains in prison.

[8 : 55] And he's declaring the mystery of Christ. What's the mystery of Christ? Simply that God is reconciling the world through Christ, and bringing, calling Gentiles in.

People just like you and me. So in the worst of circumstances, Paul continues to use his gifts for the promotion of the gospel.

And Paul requests, as we look at verse 4, that the Christians pray so that he might declare the mystery of Christ, God's great plan of salvation. He wants their prayers so that he can declare that clearly.

I wonder if you've noticed that this whole Christian church is involved in the ministry. You see, the Colossians are to persevere in prayer with their eyes fixed on the second coming, while at the same time they're interceding for Paul as Paul proclaims the gospel, as an evangelist.

You see, he declares the gospel in a very focused way according to his giftedness. Paul's also not directing the Colossian Christians for them all to be evangelists.

[10 : 11] But he is directing them all to be partners in the gospel, partners in the gospel as they pray. So let's pause for a moment and simply consider this question.

Are the Colossians, indeed, are we gathered here at Holy Trinity, are we never to open our mouths about the magnificence of God's plan of salvation and that Jesus is the Saviour and Lord?

Is that the case? The answer, I think, is a resounding no. Verse 5, conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time.

See, Paul is exhorting the Colossian Christians to be wise towards outsiders. That is, he's talking about those who are not followers of the Lord Jesus.

And the means by which they and us are to do so is by, the end of the verse, making the most of the time. The verb that's used here was commercial language used in the marketplace.

[11 : 23] So it's got the sense of snapping up every opportunity, accomplishing, if you like, as much spiritual good as we can in our relationships with the world.

It's a buying up. And the word's got an intensity about it. That's understandable, isn't it, when we think of that context from verse 2. The Lord is coming back.

So the challenge for me, perhaps the challenge for you, is not then just to drift along as Christians. We need to act wisely by making the most of the available time to promote the gospel.

Well, as we think about that, maybe a series of questions come into the mind as to how we should do that. For example, should we all strap on billboards and get ourselves down on every street corner with a text on them?

You will have seen it done. Should we be a little bit more creative, perhaps make sure there's some money in the budget and hire Vodafone Arena for a couple of months?

[12 : 30] And each one of us, we could just progressively work down through each row after row. And we could call each of us to go and give an evangelistic address, a bit like sort of sons and daughters of Billy Graham.

I don't think so. We're not all gifted as evangelists. But, but as well as praying, God does want all of us, all of us to do something.

And that instructions in verse six, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

You see, all believers have a responsibility to answer for the faith. And this verse six, it's directed to the whole congregation. It's directed to all of us gathered here this morning.

And I wonder if you can see already the comparison in this passage. You see, between on the one hand, Paul's own speech as a preaching apostle, verses three and four, and on the other hand, the everyday speech of believers generally.

[13 : 48] Don't miss the point here. It's critical in the text. What Paul's doing, he's elevating conversational answers to the status of missionary activity.

See the point in the text? He's saying, your conversational answers are an integral part of missionary activity, just as an evangelist standing up and proclaiming the gospel.

And the word that's used there that we've got simply translated as answer is actually quite broad in its meaning. It covers any statement that we might offer to a query, perhaps replying to a comment made or a question raised from a non-believer.

And if you think about the sorts of comments or questions that can be directed to us, they're just multiple, aren't they? In recent weeks, these are some of the ones that just simply have come past my doorstep, if you like.

One's like, well, Rob, what do you make of the Da Vinci Code statement that Jesus is only a good man? One I often interact with, come across, if you like, is something like this.

[15 : 01] Well, Rob, you know, we live in a multicultural society. It's just not appropriate to say Jesus is the only way to God.

And in our lives, we've often had a question like this put to us. how is it that you still trust in God given everything that's happened in your lives? And we could just go on, and I'm sure as you sit there, you will already know of questions and comments that have just been passed to you, been interacting with you just in recent days or weeks.

Friends, we are to interact with the world as we live our lives in this great community of Melbourne, as we seek to live godly lives before our friends, our neighbours, our school and work colleagues, before our leisure club associates.

And in all of those interactions, we need to respond graciously. The sense is full of grace when speaking about our Christian faith. And one way to say that is the salt that we add to our speech is grace.

Maybe as we just think on that, meditate on that, it's good to remind ourselves from scripture as to why the gospel tastes good.

[16:27] The gospel is a gracious gift from a loving and gracious God. And often the manner of our replies, the way we respond says as much about the God who we serve and worship as the content of our reply.

You see, our so-called church in Texas is the extreme opposite of the way that the Holy Spirit instructs us to live and to speak.

Their hate message of the week I find mind-boggling. Friends, our modus operandi, the way day in and day out that we interact with the world is to be one full of grace.

Well, let's then quickly digest what God is saying to us in this passage. Be constantly prayerful, anticipating, waiting for Christ's return.

Secondly, be promoters of the gospel by being prayer partners in gospel ministry. Thirdly, the reality is you may not be gifted as an evangelist.

[17:42] That's no problem. In that case, then, pray for both those who are proclaiming the good news and pray that doors would be opened for the gospel people's hearts to be opened.

And fourthly, again, you may not be gifted as an evangelist. However, be ready to graciously respond as opportunities present themselves. Make the most of the time because we've all actually got the same time.

The challenge is to use it well for the promotion of the gospel. And as we respond to those who aren't followers of the Lord Jesus in our everyday lives, we need to do it graciously and we need to do it appropriately.

You see, the sense of the last part of verse six, if you just look at that, is to take careful consideration of where the other person is at. Each person is different, each situation is different, but what's the same?

The gospel is the same, Christ is the same, but there are countless ways to serve the meal. People. So, listen carefully to the other person, ask the Lord for wisdom as to what we should be saying, the things that we shouldn't be saying.

[19:08] Be open-ended in our conversations, don't close off conversations, let them flow, be engaging. I guess the other thought that's come to my mind as I've reflected on this is of the importance of not being robotic.

That is, we just don't present the four spiritual laws straight up to everyone or anyone that we meet. We must, if you like, not allow the reality that time is short, that we do need to seize the opportunity, that people do need the gospel.

We must allow any of those realities to in a sense self-justify an ungracious response. So we're to seize opportunities, we're to do that wisely, graciously, and appropriately.

And as we do that, then the gospel words will not be tarnished. I like the words of John Piper, I often do, the American pastor.

He writes, the best way to prepare to be an advertisement for the satisfying taste of Jesus is to enjoy him yourself. The best way to prepare to be an advertisement for the satisfying taste of Jesus is to enjoy him yourself.

[20:35] The reality is the Lord presents each of us with just one opportunity after another, doesn't he, to be involved in his missionary work. Just two weeks ago, in my RE class, at the end of the class, one of the students came up to me at the end and asked how our son Brendan was going.

For those who were visiting our youngest son at the time, was very sick in hospital. And I gave her a quick update, and then what she wanted to do was, if you like, go straight on and tell me about her very sick mum.

And so she said to me this, she said, Rod, that's what the kids call me, Rod, I've been praying every day to God. You see, Rod, I've been finding school really hard, and at home there's just me, my little brother, and my mum.

So we just had a lovely time, it was very short, and I just spoke to her of God's love, and God's concern for us, for her, for her family, and encouraged her to keep praying.

Where will this girl be in three years time, or five years time, I have no idea, but God knows. And my privilege, indeed, my responsibility, is to seize the opportunity, to speak some words, albeit brief words, into her life, and to do it graciously.

[22 : 05] well, there's just such a multitude of ways in which we interact with the world about our faith. For example, some of my non-Christian friends have been interacting with me about the Christian faith over what seems like just a very extended, long period of time.

We have small conversations about it, other times not. That's one case. But I've also had many interactions on air flights that have been far more condensed in time, but even though condensed in time, they've actually been far more extensive in the breadth of the gospel discussion.

In years past, I travelled interstate probably about once every fortnight, and I made it my practice while I was flying to simply read the Bible. And this was just amazing.

More often than not, the passenger sitting next to me would be the one who would initiate the conversation. And typically it would be something like this, I see you reading the Bible, I mean, gee, wow, you kind of don't see that very often.

Like, what do you get out of it? Seizing the opportunity, buying up the time, might look quite different in that situation compared to, if you like, the now and then interactions and conversations with a next door neighbour.

[23 : 31] But even if you're only going to be with someone for an hour or two, on an aeroplane, for example, we still need to be gracious in our responses.

We need to take the time to try and understand where the person is at, what's their world view, has there been any past contact with the church and or scripture. and we need to be in constant dependence on the spirit and just seeking to point the person towards the person of Christ.

See, friends, we don't have to be gifted evangelists in order to interact with others about the faith.

Paul attaches missionary significance, missionary significance to the Christian's daily answers, verses 5 and 6, just as he does to his own evangelistic proclamations in verses 3 and 4.

Someone once asked Winston Churchill, what most prepared you to lead Great Britain through World War II? Churchill responded, well, it was the time I repeated a class in grade school.

[24 : 51] You mean you flunked a grade? I never flunked him a life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right. Friends, in my experience, people are not looking for us to have every answer to every one of their questions.

But they are looking for authenticity. perhaps you feel inadequate. Perhaps you reflect back on times and say, oh, gee, wow, I wish I'd given a different response in that situation.

Well, we don't have to go back and repeat grades like Churchill. God has a mission heart. And the Lord will honour, he'll bless our promotion of the gospel as we live in moment-by-moment dependence on the Spirit, notwithstanding how we might feel about our efforts.

The Holy Spirit, you can be sure, will take our bumbling words and use them for God's glory. So what is God's word for each follower of the Lord Jesus Christ who's gathered here this morning, if you like, for the saints of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, that actually incidentally happens to meet here.

This is God's word to each of us. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for those at Holy Trinity Doncaster who proclaim the gospel, that God will open to them a door for the word, that they may declare the mystery of Christ, that they may reveal it clearly, as they should.

[26 : 39] All of you are to conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.

Father, we thank you that in your great love you sent the Lord Jesus into this world to die on the cross for our sins. Lord, we thank you for just the great truth that our sins can be eternally forgiven as we return in repentance and put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as we cling to him, as we take refuge in him.

Lord, we thank you that by your spirit you sovereignly and graciously gift every member of the body of Christ, every believer. Lord, we praise you that in that gifting you raise up some to be evangelists.

Lord, we pray that we as a body would pray for them in their ministry, pray that you, sovereign Lord, would open doors for the gospel and open people's hearts to receive the gospel message.

And Lord, we recognise that many, if not most, are not gifted as an evangelist. Lord, help us this day and from now on to see the great privilege, indeed, the great responsibility of simply interacting with the world around us about the Christian faith.

[28 : 24] And Lord, as we do that, may we do it graciously, may we do it appropriately, may we do it in dependence on the spirit and not on ourselves. Lord, indeed, may you be gloried and may the gospel be promoted as we graciously respond to those around us.

We ask this for Christ's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.