

Showing Christ in the World

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[0 : 00] I trust you've been encouraged and challenged as we've been making our way through the book of Colossians together. The number of times where thankfulness and prayer kind of come together.

! Well, they're going to come together again for us this morning as we begin to study Colossians chapter 4, beginning in verse 2. It says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Again, thanks and prayer coming together. Last month we kind of celebrated a month of prayer. This month we're kind of carrying out a month of thanks, kind of devoting attention to thanksgiving. And part of thanksgiving has been our harvest offering that we want to continue to encourage you to contribute towards. We're asking for about \$40,000 for the sake of several of our missionaries. And kind of strategic initiatives that will help them to be more effective in the ministry that they're a part of. You can see that in your harvest offering brochure.

[1 : 07] But things like coming alongside some missionaries who are a part of teaching and training pastors and Christian leaders. Those who are doing church planting, a chance for us to kind of work on or think about ministry here at home with a soccer camp.

And also with the bus stop across the way. And maybe being able to help provide a kind of an enclosure, a shelter for people who are using the bus stop. Just a way for us to neighbor in a very tangible way.

But each time along this week we want to present you with a missionary. And this morning we're going to let you see and listen from the Bells who are serving our church.

Hi, hello, Maranatha. We are the Bells and we're coming to you from Cape Town, South Africa. Yeah, we just wanted to share a few testimonies of the Lord's faithfulness in our ministry over here. And yeah, many of you know that ministry can be really hard and full of unknowns and surprises. And so it's important to just reflect on the positive things and the way that the Lord has worked. Yeah, we're grateful to serve a faithful, constant God. And we have just continued to see those testimonies of a steadfast love and faithfulness to us.

[2 : 15] The church is growing. In fact, this Sunday we're bringing in another 10 members. And so we're grateful to see all of that. And also being able to invest all year in developing further leaders.

Helping to fill roles that we're currently filling as we hope to launch out in the next year or so from that church to plant. And in that vein, our home Bible study is one of those things that's been growing tremendously.

And we've had a good influx of folks from our community that have invested themselves in there. We've gotten to know them and they've gone on and gotten involved in the church. And so we're excited to see what the Lord's going to do in all these things.

But also in the last year, some other additional testimonies of his faithfulness is being able to open new doors for us. And being able to proclaim the gospel in new places from the campus of the University of the Western Cape to further opportunities to minister among Muslims.

To being able to teach a systematic theology class at a local film school, for example. But we appreciate your prayers. The Lord is continuing to be faithful and declaring his goodness and his grace.

[3 : 16] And we have an opportunity to help train some men to faithfully preach and proclaim the gospel in a gospel desert in Oates Wharton in December. And so ask specifically for your prayers that first weekend in December as we go out there and try to bring along some other men, some other brothers together and teach them to continue to proclaim this faithful God and the good news of his gospel.

So thank you for your partnership in doing so. And we'll be excited to be sharing soon even more. Thanks, Maranatha. Bye. Bye. So thank you for your partnership with our missionaries. Isn't it? It's really neat to be able to not only hear from our missionaries, but to just kind of get a taste of what God is doing through their lives and to be a part of that work through prayers and through financial contributions.

So thank you for the way that you are contributing to the needs of the saints and helping to build thanksgivings to God through your love for them in this way.

We're back in our study in Colossians and we're kind of wrapping up. We've got just two weeks to go. And of course, you would expect the Apostle Paul is going to end on the notes that he's begun. [4 : 28] This concept of thanksgiving, this idea of prayer that he wants to continue to bring back to the church and help them to understand and recognize the significance of what God has called them to.

We've been working through the gospel or the letter to the Colossians, and we've seen the significance of doctrine, the theology of who Christ is, and recognizing that theology isn't just something that's supposed to fill our heads, but theology is supposed to bury itself out in the way we live.

The doctrine that you have is a doctrine that's meant to be put to work. And so last week we got to see some gospel pictures, some theological pictures, that begin to press in to the lifeblood of families in particular.

The Apostle Paul encouraged submission of wives. He encouraged love of husbands. He encouraged obedience of children and of servants.

And all of that was, of course, to show this portrait of Christ. Who is Christ? Not just what he has communicated about himself theologically, but how does the doctrine of God play out in the way you live?

[5 : 48] Well, this morning we're going to see how that theology now plays out in how we live towards outsiders. Not just within a family, but now how it plays out in how we live in a watching world.

Turn with me, if you would, to Colossians chapter 4. We're going to begin in verse 2. And we're going to start, we're going to see five hallmarks, five activities that will be true of those who love Jesus, disciples of Christ, who want to show Christ.

What will they do? There are five things we're going to look at this morning. Let me read this for us, and then we'll jump into our passage. It says, 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'm in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom towards 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.

[7 : 01] How does a person who loved Jesus walk? How does a person who is a disciple of Christ begin to show Christ, show good, rich, true theology in their life?

Well, the Apostle Paul begins here by focusing and concentrating some attention on prayer that depends on God. Those who love God, those who trust God, those who want to please God, will demonstrate that dependence on God through prayer.

Prayer that depends on God. This command, continue steadfastly. It is this present imperative that expresses this everyday part of life, this constant present activity that should be true of every believer.

It's one word in the Greek, and it means to persist, or to keep, or to endure, to remain. It came to be used of a boat that was always kind of standing at the ready, kind of waiting for the individual who needed to be transported from one place to the other.

Kind of what we got to see a bit in the Gospel of Luke as the disciples were there on the shore, and their boat was at the ready to take Jesus out, out.

[8 : 19] Maybe a better example would be of a taxi. And those of you who have ever been in a big city, and I don't think Columbus really qualifies for that, but been maybe to a city of Los Angeles or to the city of New York, and have been in the airport, and you know how it usually works, where the taxis will line up as the people are unloading from the airport and needing to make their way to the various places across the city.

this readiness and this attentiveness of the taxi drivers who are standing at the ready, ready to respond and to whisk that person to the place of their destination.

And here again, we're reminded of readiness, a ready heart, ready to respond, continuing steadfastly in having a heart that persists, that's waiting, that's ready.

And here we're to respond in prayer. And we see this as a kind of a hallmark of a church that's devoted to God, continuing steadfastly in prayer. It's used throughout the book of Acts to describe the church.

We find it in Acts 1, verse 14. All of these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the brothers.

[9 : 46] Why were they devoted to prayer? Why were they at the ready? Why were they receptive in praying? Well, they were responding and praying with direction.

Their hearts were praying with intentionality. Their hearts were praying and following instruction.

They had received instruction from Jesus. You remember? That Jesus said, hey, I want you to wait in Jerusalem.

There's something that's going to happen there. You will receive power if you wait for me in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon you. And so in their ready hearts, in their receptive hearts, in their dependent hearts, they were demonstrating a prayer with direction.

They were praying for this Holy Spirit, praying according to the instructions they'd received from Christ Himself. They were also praying with devotion.

You remember that the disciples who prayed there, this group of 120 believers, as they prayed, the Holy Spirit did come. And as a result of His coming, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 56] And that because of their testimony, thousands of people came to faith in Christ. And as a result of this gospel witness, as a result of the work of God in their life, and kind of unifying now this church together, there was this prayer of devotion.

We see in Acts 2, verse 42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And those numbers of disciples increased. We find later on in Acts 2, verse 47, that day by day, God was adding to their number those who were being saved.

That God was doing a work. It was happening through the concentrated, united efforts of prayer. A devoted people, receptive to the instructions of the Lord, praying for God's power to be unleashed among them.

And so we find that those who heard the word believed and the church multiplied as a result. And because of this multiplication of God's work in answering prayer for them, now we see a need for praying with discernment.

[12 : 09] They needed to pray with discernment. The church grew. Wisdom was needed. How do you interact or how do you help to care for the needs of so many? And so Peter would speak up as one of the apostles there in the early church in Jerusalem.

In Acts 6, verse 4, he would say, We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. We find in verse 7, the word of God continued to increase in the number of disciples, multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

This devoted prayer, this receptive prayer. So what can we learn from their example? And by the way, in every case, this word devoted is used or continuing steadfastly in prayer is used.

It's always used in reference to prayer itself. So what can we learn from their example? Why should we continue in prayer this way? And of course, there are a number of reasons that we could work through, but just one that I want to focus on this morning, and that is, we pray in constant prayer because God answers prayer.

We pray to God in prayer because God answers prayer. And prayer unleashes God's power on the situation that we pray about as we're praying according to God's will.

[13 : 42] I love how P.T. Forsyth says this. He says, Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence. Have you thought about that?

That God responds to His people when they pray. That as God's people obey the instructions that God has put in place, that God delights in answering their prayers.

Much like what we see in John 14, verse 13, where Christ is telling the disciples, Whatever you ask in my name, I will do. Why?

Well, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. Prayer is that slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.

God has coupled Himself to carry out the will of God through those who are faithful to pray. Of course, God is sovereign.

[14:45] God is sovereign. We know that. Psalm 115, verse 3 says this. Our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases. That's God's prerogative. He does what He pleases.

But at the same time, God has ordained that His will is worked out through the prayers of His people. Spurgeon has said this.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness. You have a willing God who delights in answering prayer. Augustine has said this.

He says, He, speaking of God, He inspires us to ask what He is preparing now to give. That God has ordained not only the ends of a thing, but He's ordained the means to accomplish those ends. God's purpose, God's will is accomplished through the means by which He has sanctioned those purposes to happen. And it happens through the coupling of prayer.

[15:50] Jonathan Edwards has said this. God has so constituted things that prayer is the expression of dependence which He delights to answer. God delights in answering prayer.

And God has given His Holy Spirit. And this is the beautiful thing we find in Romans chapter 8. We don't have time to read that. I don't want to get distracted by that. But I want you to understand that God has placed His Holy Spirit to help us understand how to pray in our weakness.

And it's the Holy Spirit who prays according to the will of God. It's the Holy Spirit who calls in your hearts to pray for the things that God wants to do.

And as you're faithful to pray for those things that the Spirit has laid on your heart, the Holy Spirit takes those requests to God and God delights to answer. You see, the miracle is not that we move God.

The miracle is that God moves us. He moves us to pray. God's sovereignty doesn't make prayer unnecessary. It makes prayer certain.

[16:59] So the more we pray according to God's will, the more we are depending on the Spirit's leading in our life. And the more we pray according to the Spirit, the more we'll see God work out His will, His purposes, in the situation.

So God has chosen the ends as well as the means. And as we couple ourselves to pray according to the will of God, we can be a part of God's sovereign plan of working those things out in life.

So pray. Pray according to the will of God. Be used of God to see God's purposes come to fruition. Prayer depends on God.

We see in the second part of this verse, verse 2, we see not only prayer that depends on God, we also see eyes that watch for God. Eyes that watch for God.

Notice, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in thanksgiving. This word for watchful is the word to stay awake, to be alert, to be vigilant.

[18:04] It's a word that expresses urgency. And every time watchfulness is used throughout the New Testament, it speaks of danger. Like a sentry or a night watchman, the Apostle Paul tells the church of Ephesus in Acts chapter 20, he says, be alert.

Watch out for the wolves. They're coming. There's danger to the church of Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 6, he says, so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Peter will say to the church that's scattered throughout the known world, be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Christ will say to the disciples in Matthew chapter 26, verse 38, watch and pray. That's our word. That you enter not into temptation.

And finally, Peter will say and kind of put these two together very similar to how Paul does it in 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 7, he says, but the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers.

[19:20] Pray with watchfulness. Pray with thankfulness. And maybe it would seem strange that Paul would put watchfulness and thankfulness together.

But maybe we can understand how watchfulness by itself will cause issues in our heart. As God is making us more aware of the dangers that are there, as God is helping us to be more aware of the problems that are coming and the decline, the moral decline in our society, it's really easy for us to

become paranoid, wouldn't you say?

It's really easy for us to give way to fear. It's easy for us to become suspicious and to wonder what's going to happen next. Who's around the corner? When's the next shoe going to drop?

Can I really trust the people that I'm around? And it's really easy for watchfulness, as good as watchfulness is, to lead us in to paranoia, to fear.

And that's what thanksgiving helps to balance out. It counterbalances fear and spurs within us hopefulness. And while there is a watchfulness, an alertness, not only for the negative things that are happening, but now to see and to have our eyes open to how God is overcoming, those negative struggles and troubles, and He's showing up to accomplish His purposes, thanksgiving helps to make us hopeful.

[20 : 54] In this way, we begin to interpret the world not through fear, but through grace, through God's power. We come to anticipate God's answers.

We come to believe even more that God is in control. And since He's in control, that He's working. He's accomplishing His purposes, even though I may not see what He's doing.

Imagine, prayer is a watchtower. Watchfulness that keeps us kind of scanning the horizon, seeing the movements not only of the approaching enemy, but also recognizing the power and the presence of God who is there.

that we see His advancements. So Thanksgiving is kind of that light that is burning in the watchtower, helping to illuminate our perspective so that we are not seeing through the lens of shadow and fear or suspicion, but we're seeing the lens through God's power that God is present. I think about the psalmist in Psalm 23, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Because you're with me. That watchfulness is seeing the reality of the hardships that are present, but it's illuminated by the light of who God is, and so a thankful heart decides to remain confident in the presence and power of God.

[22 : 25] That watchfulness coupled with thankfulness is so important. So prayer that depends on God, eyes that watch for God because God is working.

And then doors that open for God. We see that in verses 3 to 4. Doors that open for God. At the same time, pray for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I'm in prison that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Doors that open for God. Paul, on numerous occasions, says, pray for us. Pray for us. Why would he say pray for us? Well, in light of what we've just learned, that prayer is the way that God is unleashing his plan and purpose on the world.

The apostle Paul is inviting the church to participate in praying for God to do his will in the world. Like the model prayer that we find from Christ to his disciples.

It says, Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We want God's will to be done.

[23 : 37] We are invited by Christ and even his model prayer to pray for that will of God to unfold for us. Paul is pleading with the church to pray for him.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 25, simply, brothers, pray for us. And then in 2 Thessalonians 3, 1, he says, Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as has happened among you.

In Hebrews 13, 8, pray for us for we are sure that we have a clear conscience desiring to act honorably in all things. Romans 15, 30, I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.

You see, God is absolutely sovereign, but God has coupled the working of his will to the prayers of his people. So what does Paul want them to pray for?

Well, there are two things here. We see, they're joined together by the *hinna* clause or the *in order that* clause. First, that God may open a door and then second, that I might make it clear.

[24 : 52] Those are the two purposes. First, pray for an open door. Pray for opportunities. Pray that God would just burst open the door of gospel testimony and witness so that he can be magnified in the process.

Now, one might ask, well, Paul, you're in prison. How can a door of opportunity be opened to you? You're stuck in jail. And I think the danger for us and probably what's natural for us is to think when hard things happen that we've been sidelined and that God's will can't be accomplished because we're stuck in prison or we're stuck away.

That wasn't Paul's perspective. You see, Paul doesn't pray for open prison doors, but for open ministry doors.

He understands that ministry is not confined to prison. He knows that only God can create true gospel opportunities. And as the church of Philippi prayed, that's exactly, that's precisely what God did.

We find that in Philippians 1, verse 12. God answered prayer. Notice, I want you to know, brethren, the things which have happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

[26 : 14] So that has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest. My chains are in Christ. And most of the brethren in the Lord having become confident by my chains are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

God accomplished his purposes through the prayers of his people in ways they could never have imagined. not only in opening up opportunities for Paul to preach but emboldening a church to follow Paul's example and to see God work through them too.

The apostle Paul encouraging this church to pray for open doors. We find the summation of Paul's ministry still stuck in prison in Acts chapter 28, verse 30.

Notice what he says. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house. He received all who came to him preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence no one forbidding him.

Open doors. Gospel doors. The jail that was meant to silence the apostle Paul becomes a pulpit to the world. Pray for open doors.

[27 : 31] Next pray for a clear witness that I might make it clear how I ought to speak. This is a similar prayer to what Paul asked the church to pray for him in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 18 and 19.

He says, praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to the end keep alert with perseverance making supplication for the saints and also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

Pray that I not only speak for Christ pray that I speak boldly for Christ. There are many reasons why our gospel witness might be unclear.

Perhaps it's because we preach with the tongue of men and angels but we have not love so we become a sounding brass or a clanging gong. Maybe it's because we preach Christ with our mouth but our life is so out of step with the gospel that people can't hear our words because they are so distracted with our lives.

Maybe because we soften the truth to avoid trouble. Maybe because we love the ease more than its impact. Or maybe because our grumbling heart muffles the gospel of God.

[28 : 57] Or our harsh tones hide His holy truth. Our ignorance perhaps limits our clarity. We're not speaking clearly because we don't know the right things to express.

We cannot explain what we've not studied. We hide the gospel perhaps because we fear the opposition. There are so many reasons why our gospel might be hidden, might be concealed, might be unclear.

Oh may God help our speech be clear. May God open gospel doors and clarify our message.

So prayer that depends on God. Eyes that watch for God. Doors that open for God and feet that walk in wisdom. Colossians chapter 4 verse 5.

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders making the best use of time. What is Paul talking about? What is this wise walk? What is he referring to?

[30 : 03] How do we walk in wisdom? Is Paul simply talking about maximizing gospel opportunities, navigating this life so that we can build friendships?

relationships. I imagine that's part of what Paul has in his heart. But I think the apostle Paul is more interested in the seriousness of the situation.

The urgency of the opportunity. He's concerned about this church and preserving the integrity of their faith. Remember how the apostle Paul is speaking about wisdom throughout this letter and he's talking about don't let anyone defraud you.

don't let anyone delude you with heresies. Don't let anyone disqualify you. Don't let anyone pass judgment on you.

He's concerned about the integrity of the faith of this church. He said so much in his letter to the church of Galatia.

[31 : 02] He's worried about have I spent so much time with you that now you're wandering away from the truth. May that not be true of you.

May you hold to the integrity of faith. Walk in wisdom with insiders but also walk with wisdom with outsiders. Wisdom.

What does a life of wisdom look like? We don't have time this morning to review all the things we've learned in this letter of Colossae but in summary a life of wisdom is a life that looks like Christ.

That Christ is our life. That he's the one who's stamped his image on our hearts. That we're living with him. That he has accomplished things for us and he's created in us a new identity.

That's why he's called us with the Apostle Paul in chapter 3 verse 1 to set your minds your hearts on things above. That's where Christ is. So walking in wisdom in this world is walking in a way that looks like Jesus.

[32 : 09] That the more you love Jesus and you obey Jesus the more people see Jesus coming through. And of course when people see Jesus come through your life now there's danger.

Remember what Jesus says to the Apostles in the upper room? He says if they persecuted me they will also persecute you. don't be distracted.

Don't be those who are thinking it's going to work out well for you because if they treated me this way they're going to treat you this way as well.

And throughout throughout the Gospels and throughout especially 1 Peter I have a number of verses that I put there in your outline. There's danger from those who live like Christ.

And so there's wisdom that must be involved. We find from Peter's letter in chapter 2 verse 11 or verse 12 he says keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[33 : 29] Walk wisely he says in chapter 2 or chapter 3 even if you would suffer for righteousness sake you are blessed have no fear of them or be troubled but in your hearts honor Christ as Lord as holy and being prepared to make defense to everyone who asks you for the reason of the hope that's in you yet do it with gentleness and respect have a good conscience so that when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame for it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil walk in wisdom know the dangers but don't let those dangers keep you from being bold in your testimony cause them to press in to be obedient to God to depend on God to be courageous to speak in a way that God would speak Christ would speak with words that were full of truth and grace let your words be marked by wisdom by speaking in a way that Christ would speak your wisdom will now walk and the world will interpret your Christ by the way you live walk in a way that pleases him and finally in verse 6 lips that speak with grace lips that speak with grace let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person you know that our words are windows our words are a window to our heart as Jesus will say out of the heart the mouth speaks and so our words provide a clear picture of what we believe what we prioritize what we value how we feel and so the words that we speak should be gracious words because we have a gracious

God if you have experienced the grace of Christ your words should be marked by the grace of Christ to others what you believe about Christ will show up in the way that you speak and our words are not just windows our words are also a witness and that's why we're encouraged to bless those who curse you to bless and curse not what you believe about this gracious God shows up in your gracious words to others you bless instead of curse you're showing Christ in the way that you speak I love how Paul puts this how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news do you have beautiful feet do you have gracious lips our words either point people to Christ or they point people away from Christ faith filled words are gracious words because we have a God who is full of grace and truth our words should be marked by Christ gracious truthful tender

Paul is indicating not only the content of our words but also the manner in which our words are spoken speaking loving words in an unloving way I'm sure you've addressed your children or loved ones in that respect our heart needs to echo the words that we speak it needs to mimic the example of Christ and his grace that we've all enjoyed this should be a habitual pattern this graciousness this saltiness salt has three uses it could either sterilize food or it could season it could help preserve and so our words are meant to preserve preserve the kinds of life that we're seeking to accomplish in the world around us Paul will close in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 29 he includes this admonition let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear your words carry power the power of not only

exemplifying

Christ but the power of distributing the grace of God to others what power what a privilege that we have what a responsibility to make sure that our words are marked with gentleness!

Let me pray for us and as I pray I'm going to invite the deacons to come forward so we can take our communion Father thank you for the example that you've given to us of yourself and thank you for the encouragement for the picture that you've placed in front of us how to make theology more than just head knowledge but to play it out in our life and so Lord I pray that you would help us to be people who are devoted to prayer people who are dependent on you to accomplish your purposes help our eyes to watch for your working because you are working help us to see it and to be thankful for it Lord thank you for doors that are open and God I pray that you would open those gospel doors to us and that we with courage and boldness would walk through those doors regardless of the potential impact in our life help us to have feet that walk in wisdom in lips that speak with grace oh God may our lives be marked with Jesus through and through we pray in your name amen do