Speaking To & About God

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[0:00] So this is our last week in the book of Colossians, and it's just been a cracker of a book, hasn't it? You remember the big picture. So there was a small church in Colossae, and Paul is really excited about them, but he's also worried about them because there were these visitors who had turned up to the church, and they were muddying the gospel water, so to speak.

And what they were essentially saying is this. They were essentially saying, all the stuff you heard about Jesus, it's great. It's really good, but it isn't quite enough to be really spiritual.
That's basically what they were saying. So Paul spends the first part of the book telling them about how astonishing Christ is.
And then he pivots in the later chapters, and he becomes very practical. He talks about what this means for us in real life, at home, and at work, and in the marketplace. And now in this very last chapter, before a whole bunch of greetings and shout-outs, Paul talks about communication. Communication. Now we have the whole of chapter 4, but we're just going to zoom in on verses 2 to 6. If you have your Bibles open at 2 to 6, that would be really helpful. So these few scriptures are on communication, and it breaks down into two halves.
[1:21] The first section says, speak to God. Speak to God about people. And the second section says, speak to people about God. So the first section, speak to God about people.

And the second section, speak to people about God. So let's get into it, and we're going to start with speaking to God, which is? It's prayer, right? We're talking about prayer. Prayer, Paul encourages us to pray.
So prayer, it's just a conversation with God, a conversation that God started through His Word, through His creation, through Christ. And I mean, doesn't it sound wonderful?
What a tremendous privilege to talk to God. You'd think we'd be jumping at the chance, wouldn't you? Given what we're talking about, a conversation with the Creator of the universe, you'd think we'd jump at the chance.
But listen to how Paul describes it, verse 2. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. The way Paul talks about it, it sounds like something that doesn't actually come naturally to us.
[2:31] It sounds like something we have to work at a bit. And of course, that's true, isn't it? I mean, prayer is a standard feature of life, of the Christian life, but it can be really hard for many of us.

One scholar I read this week, and I think he was trying to sort of assuage the guilt we feel around our prayer lives. One scholar said, prayer is the last thing we learn as Christians.
I was encouraged by that. But because of all of this, because it doesn't seem to come naturally to us, Paul says, when it comes to prayer, be steadfast and be watchful.
This means be disciplined, be diligent, be committed. It was Remembrance Day this week.
So I want to tell you about Remembrance Day on, what day was it? Wednesday, Jeremy, wasn't it? Remembrance Day on Wednesday. So I want to tell you about my stepfather, a story of diligence and commitment.
[3:36] Bill Burge was his name, my stepfather's name. He was a World War II fighter pilot. The last conversation I had with him, I was sitting beside him. I was visiting him and my mum in Australia.

I was sitting beside him and I offered to get him a glass of wine. He said, I don't drink that much, Aaron. And I said, when did that start? And then he tells me this amazing story.
When Bill was made an officer at the beginning of World War II, the first time he walked into the officer's mess hall, he stood there and he didn't really know what to do or where to sit or where to

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go. An old officer came up to him, probably seeing that he was looking a bit awkward.
The older officer welcomed Bill and then said to Bill, he said, Bill, do you see those men laughing and drinking over there in the corner on that table? There was a group of fighter pilots there having a great time on one table.
The older gentleman said, Bill, none of those men will survive the war. You have to be disciplined and focused to get through this and they are not.
[4:37] Bill took that to heart. He pretty much never drank again and he became ultra focused at the task at hand. For example, you get to choose as a pilot, you get to choose your ground crew.

So they, you know, put fuel in your plane and they put all the bullets in your plane and the bombs in your plane. Most guys just choose their mates, people they get on with to do this, not Bill.
Bill chose for his ground crew, the two oddest, most pedantic men on base. These guys would load the plane with thousands of bullets and they would check every bullet with a micrometer to make sure it was exactly the right size so it wouldn't jam the guns.
It's an astonishing amount of focus. Bill finished the story by telling me those men drinking at the table in the officer's mess. Bill told me they were all dead by the end of the first year at war.
Bill survived the war. He became one of New Zealand's most decorated war heroes. He helped to liberate France by bombing German armories and in 1998, France awarded him with the highest military award they have.
[5:46] He was made a member of the Legion of Honour. It took France 65 years to track Bill down because he moved around a lot but they tracked him down, they gave him the medal. He died last year, aged 99.

Folks, when something is really important, we give it a really good go, don't we? We maximise, we minimise, sorry, minimise our distractions.
We become diligent. Prayer is a tremendous gift. It's where we encounter God but we have to be committed to it, steadfast, watchful and disciplined in our approach.
Folks, this is not the only thing to say about prayer but it's an important thing to say about prayer.
So Paul has just talked about our attitude towards prayer. Then he gives us something particular to pray for.
Verses 3 and 4. Pray also for us that God may open a door, open us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I'm in prison, that I may make clear which is how I ought to speak.
[6:49] Paul says, pray for me as I tell people about Jesus. And there are a couple of aspects to this particular prayer, his plea for prayer. He says, pray for open doors for the gospel.

Pray for open doors. Which is wonderfully humbling, isn't it? The guy's in prison. He's in prison and he prays for an open door. Not an open door for the prison, which is what we'd pray for, which is what I'd pray for.
He prays for an open door for the gospel. What a great thing to ask, isn't it? Let's do this. Let's pray for opportunities to speak to people about Jesus.
We should do that, but not just opportunities. We should pray for clarity of speech that we can make the gospel clear. Verse 4. That I may make it clear how I ought to speak.
It's a great prayer, isn't it? Open doors and clarity. Both are needed. What good is an open door if we don't have the courage or the right words? And what good is courage and clarity if we don't have opportunities?
[7:52] So all of that, that's under the heading of speaking to God about people. Speaking to God about people. Now, Paul says, he says, now speak to people about God.

Verses 5 and 6. 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.
What does all that mean? Walking in wisdom. That just means, look, walk Christianly towards outsiders. I remember years ago, I was on my way to lead like an Easter week service, and there was a driver.
I was driving to church. There was a driver behind me, and he was one of those drivers you come across who's a bully. He's tailgating me. He keeps trying to overtake me on corners really dangerously. Eventually, I just had enough.

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I stopped the car. I opened the door, and I started storming towards his car. I was just going to start yelling at him. Halfway towards his car, I realized I was wearing this.
[8:54] I'm wearing my collar. So by the time I got to his car, I was like, so, everything okay? I just wanted to check in. I just wanted to see how you're going. Do you need anything? I was so embarrassed.

Folks, walk with wisdom. Walk in a way that says something about the God you follow, making the best use of time. Isn't that a wonderful line from Paul? Paul, take the opportunity God gives us to talk to people about Jesus.
And when we have those opportunities, look what Paul says. He says, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt. Gracious and seasoned with salt.
The way we talk about Christ must be gracious and salty. We need both. Grace must be there. And we don't want to be boring, right? But we don't want to be boring.
We want to be filled with grace. We want to tell the gospel story. But we don't want to be boring, which is why we need spice. Our ideas must be savory and thoughtful and interesting.
[9:53] We want to talk about our faith, our life with Jesus in such a way that intrigues people. Salty literally means witty. Gracious and salty, that's the recipe.

I remember being at dinner party years ago. I was the only Christian there. And I started having this philosophical debate with a woman sitting across from me. And everyone started listening in.
I was thinking, what an opportunity. We're talking about morality. And she said that morality is just a social construct. And I said, really? And she said, yes. And I said, so you don't believe in absolutes? And she said, no. And I said, so no absolutes? She said, that's right. No absolutes? Really? No. I said, are you absolutely sure? And she said, yes.
Banging her hands on the table. There was a great silence in the room. Everyone recognized. Everyone saw it. I trapped her. Her saying no absolutes, there are absolutely no absolutes, was stating an absolute.
[10:56] Everyone around the table started laughing. She was humiliated. I'd won the argument. But she never wanted to engage with me again.

I was salty. But there was no grace. I did the cause of the gospel. No favors that day. Folks, let me finish quickly here with the last part of verse 6.
Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each person. Christians, I just want to encourage you. Speak to people about Jesus.
Don't let our culture tell you you don't get a voice. Don't let Satan tell you to keep quiet for the sake of dignity. Dignity.
Dignity? Paul wrote this book out of some rotten old stinky old prison cell. Speak to people about Jesus. We have Christ in us through the Holy Spirit.
[12:00] We have 2,000 years of robust intellectual thought behind us. Folks, we can hold our own in any situation. The market, shopping, work, watching a dinner party.

We can hold our own in these situations. So, let's speak and act in such a way that is attractive and intriguing enough that people will ask you about the hope that you have.
Listen to Paul again. So that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Do you see there? Paul's not talking about driving Jesus down people's throat.
He's not forcing conversations around to Jesus. No, he is saying you can conduct your life, your speech, your behaviour. You can conduct your life in such a way that people will ask you.
They will ask you questions. They will ask you why you live like you do. Folks, let's live our lives in a way that awakens an appetite for Jesus and others.
[13:01] And when the questions come, when the discussions come, we can step into those because we've been praying. We've been praying with diligence for these opportunities. We've been praying that we can speak with clarity and with spice.

We've been praying. We can step into these conversations with confidence. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.

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