

Meeting Jesus: Walk and Word (Evening Service)

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- [0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we pray for an open door so that we would hear the gospel clearly tonight. Through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.
- Well, good evening, everyone. We're looking at Colossians 4, 2-6 tonight, which you just heard read.
- It's great if you can have your Bible open in front of you. My name's Jeremy Graham, and it's great to be with you. I'm one of the ministers on staff here. Love to meet you after the service if we haven't met before.
- So I'm a missionary kid, and years ago, my parents were missionaries in Asia. And before we went to Asia, before even I was born, actually, when they were training for cross-cultural missions, learning about evangelism, they were sent to do door-to-door cold-call evangelism in South Central Los Angeles.
- That was their training base. And that, I mean, that's like Olympic gold medal evangelism, right? And when I think about the idea of doing that, it terrifies me.
- [1 : 16] And when I hear stories about being a missionary like that, it terrifies me. I just, I have no interest in doing that. And so I end up feeling guilty.
- I end up feeling a little bit anxious about the idea of talking about my faith. And I feel, definitely feel inadequate. Because, you know, I'm not the super evangelist that I'm supposed to be.
- Well, this passage that you just heard read, it's a wonderful encouragement to us. If you have, if you share with me any of those kind of feelings, when we start to talk about sharing Jesus, it just kind of makes you feel a little bit edgy.
- Because we're asking tonight, what can an ordinary group of believers like you and I, what can we actually do to share Christ with outsiders? And Paul has for us two really clear and helpful commands.
- He says first that we need to pray. And then second he says we need to proclaim. Pray and proclaim. Because sharing Jesus is something that all Christians are called to do.
- [2 : 24] And it's something that God actually equips all of us to do. And so this passage, it divides really nicely into those two commands. If you just want to look at your Bible, you'll see that verse 2 to 4, Paul says, Pray.
- Continue steadfastly in prayer is how he puts it. That's his first command. And then in verse 5 and 6, the second half, Paul says, Proclaim. He says, Walk in wisdom towards outsiders.
- So let's look at the passage under those two headings. First, pray. Sharing Jesus begins with prayer. But you notice that it's not a vague idea of like, Hey, we should pray.
- It's actually very specific. And Paul has two specific things he asks the church in Colossae to pray for on his behalf. He says first, Pray for an open door for the gospel message.

Look at verse 3 with me. At the same time, he writes, Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word. An open door. Throughout Paul's letters, he uses this kind of idiom, this expression, to describe wherever God is making an opportunity for the gospel to go forward.

[3 : 33] So it's, in other words, it's God that opens the door, not a person. So when we are talking about evangelism, we don't go around bashing down doors.

We pray constantly, and we ask the Lord to open doors of new opportunity. And I wonder if you noticed, isn't it surprising that Paul would be asking that the door would be open for the gospel, when here he is in chains, in prison, and he's not asking that the door would be open on his own jail cell.

I mean, after all, wouldn't it be a lot more useful to evangelism if he could be set free from prison? Well, this is how he describes that same imprisonment when he writes to the church in Philippians.

He says, I want you to know brothers and sisters that what has happened to me, in other words, my imprisonment has really served to advance the gospel so that it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

I mean, how can you be chained up and it advances the gospel? It's because you can imagine this Paul sharing the gospel with those poor Roman soldiers who have no choice, but to stay beside him all day, right?

[4 : 51] Well, Acts actually tells us that Paul, it's not only the Roman soldiers who get to hear the gospel, Paul's in house arrest, so he can have visitors. And for two whole years, he's able to have people in his homes, he's teaching, he's preaching.

God uses that time. And he actually uses it to allow Paul to write the very letter that we're reading tonight. Because God is powerful to work in any circumstances.

But the question is, do we pray for an open door? Consider this for a moment. Here we are. St. John's, evening service. Are we praying regularly for an open door for the gospel here in Vancouver?

And if not, why not? And if not, will you start praying that with me? Will you start praying and commit to praying for one another that God would open the door?

But Paul's not finished because he wants to ask for a second thing. He says, would you, would you secondly, would you pray that when I get to speak, that the message will be declared clearly? This is how verse three continues.

[5 : 52] To declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison. That I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Because it's great when the door bursts wide open, but then, what are you going to say?

Are you going to be tongue-tied? Or do you have something to declare? Paul says what he has to declare is the mystery of Christ. So what the heck is the mystery of Christ? Very simply, it's the message of the gospel.

It's the message revealed by God through and in his son, Jesus Christ. And actually, if you, if you, you can look at this on your own later, but back in chapter one of Colossians, Paul gives us a great summary of the gospel.

And if you're not a Christian and you're here tonight, I want you to listen to this, this summary of the gospel as a summary of what it is that Christians believe. Listen to these words.

For God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved son, Jesus, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- [6 : 57] I memorized that verse along with about a hundred kids and about 50 volunteers when I was doing Bible camp last summer with some of you. That was our memory verse for Bible camp.
- And if you, if you hear that verse for the first time tonight, know that that is the free gift that God offers to every one of us who, who puts our trust in Jesus.
- But again, we need to ask, are we praying regularly that when the gospel is proclaimed here at St. John's when it's proclaimed by our brothers and sisters, that it is declared clearly that there's clarity and not confusion in the proclamation of the gospel.
- Now, I want to stop and have a closer look at a very important little detail in the text that comes up here. And you can almost just overlook it because as Paul begins to speak, you notice that he was talking about us.
- And he's talking about himself and the other, the other sort of ministers that you can read about at the end of the letter that he greets, Epaphras and others. But then why does suddenly, Paul suddenly change from talking about us, Aaron and I, to suddenly just talking about I, myself.
- [8 : 12] Look at it. He says in the end of verse three, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Why the sudden change? I mean, why does he ask a church to open their mouths to prays?
- Why can't, why doesn't he just say, open your own mouths to declare this mystery? Well, this is actually a very important point. So I want, if you could pay attention, that would be fantastic.
- This is a great moment to pay attention because there's actually, the key to it is two times when Paul uses the word ought. And the first one is there. We already heard it, which is how I ought to speak.
- But did you spot the second one? It's right at the end, at the end of verse six, he says that, so that you may know how you ought to answer.
- You could also think of this as a, the word must, I must speak. You must answer. What's he talking about here? Well, Dick Lucas is helpful.
- [9 : 09] He says, Paul is distinguishing between two types, two forms of evangelism. He's talking about direct evangelism and responsive evangelism, direct and responsive evangelism.
- So what is direct evangelism? Basically it's what Paul is asking them to pray for. It's that he will have the opportunity to preach and teach the gospel, the content of the gospel clearly.
- And this can often be seen in a larger group set settings. Although it can also be a direct evangelism can definitely be one-on-one as well, but typically it's in a larger group context.
- Whereas responsive evangelism is like it sounds. It's responding to questions. It tends to be one-on-one and it tends to be in the context of relationship, which makes it very important.
- And I think this is actually where we get confused back to what I, what I started with that story about growing up. This is where we get confused about evangelism because when we, when we think of it, we think only of direct evangelism.
- [10 : 08] We think that sharing our faith means learning to be extroverted and learning, learning to have the courage to knock on doors like my parents did. And yes, some of us have that gift.
- Some of you have that gift for direct evangelism, for declaring the gospel. I mean, it's not just the job of clergy or church leaders. It's actually being done right now downstairs in the Sunday school, in kids church with our children.

It's done by youth leaders. It's done by many of you in community group settings. It takes place in one-on-one relationships with people who've never heard about Jesus. And it can even actually, this gift can be grown and cultivated through practice.

But, but Paul is talking about something else. And, and he's not saying that he just wants the church to stop reaching out and just pray for him to do it all.

It's not an excuse for some sort of being passive, some sort of passivity, but it does mean, Paul says, we have to be discerning. We have to be discerning because some of us actually need to learn to speak up.

[11 : 13] We need to learn to be more bold, to be less timid, to be more trusting and dependent that God will speak through us when we, when we have that chance to do direct evangelism.

Yet, yet, some of us need to learn to quiet down. Some of us need to learn to quiet down. We actually need to learn to listen.

We need to learn the vital skill of responsive evangelism. And, and it means that you know how to, you, how you ought, how you must answer. How does he put it?

Each person, each person. Now, what does that mean? It means that it's, it's personal and it's contextualized. It's relevant and sensitive to the particular questions that someone brings up.

And usually these are the hangups that they have about the gospel. And it's very, it's a very effective way to share Jesus in, in, in 2018. Because you are uniquely gifted by God and equipped by him to be the person, the very person who can share Jesus in that kind of context.

[12 : 23] Because you're the person that has been in relationship with that individual and who's building that friendship and that trust, breaking down that wall. So the open door is there. this is a, you know, this is, how many of you were at CCQ on Tuesday night?

The first CCQ. A number of you. Yeah. And, and this is actually the kind of ministry that we're teaching one another to do through CCQ. because CCQ is, is basically equipping us to be more intentional, prayerful, and, and articulate in our witness to Christ.

And so this kind of, it's, it's, it's, it's actually more about this second category, this response of evangelism that we're doing at CCQ. So that, so that, and it's in the context, which is wonderful, of prayer that we're doing on Tuesday nights.

So that, that's, that's, what Paul has to say about pray, prayer. But let's look a little bit at what he has to say when he says he commands us to proclaim in verses five and six.

Proclaim. Let's have a look. Walk in wisdom, verse five says, 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.

[13 : 41] So the command here is actually walk, walk in wisdom. And this, this verb walk, it means that as you go about your life, literally walking around town, that actually people will see you, and they will know by your actions and by your words, what kind of person you are.

And Paul is saying that when you walk, as a Christian with a different, with a noticeably different lifestyle and behavior, that it actually invites a response.

But if you are, if you walk hypocritically, or undistinguishable from anyone around you, you know, the worst thing is that it will invite ridicule and mockery, but at best, it will just get ignored, because you're no different than anyone else.

But when we walk in wisdom towards outsiders, this is what opens up that door of opportunity to share Jesus. And notice that Paul says, when we get the chance, not if we get the chance, but when.

Too often we kind of think, you know, I might get one shot in a million, like once every 10 years, I get this great chance for evangelism, and I got to nail it. Paul says, this is actually, this is actually something that God desires to do daily, weekly, monthly in our life, when we're praying for it.

[14 : 56] But this, this, this, these last two verses are also very practical, because Paul says something about our speech. He says two things. He wants it, he urges it to be balanced, and he, he says it has to be balanced in, he gives it two pairs, two sets of balancing, one in verse five, and one in verse six.

So this is what verse five, the first one is. He says, I want you to be balanced between being wise, and being opportunistic, wise and opportunistic.

Wisdom, Paul says, is knowing when to speak and when to listen. Wisdom is knowing the right question to ask in the right moment. And wisdom, wisdom actually comes with experience, comes with maturity in Christ, growing up into Christ, practice.

And if you've been a Christian for a long time, you're probably growing in wisdom. But, you can also find that you're growing more and more cautious. That when you've been a Christian for a long time, you lose that urgency and that zeal that, that was the, the character, the quality of a new believer.

And you forget that the stakes are so high. And this is where that balance comes in. That on the one hand, yes, you want to be wise, but you also have to make the best use of the time. So what does that mean? It's a market, it's a marketplace term.

[16 : 16] It literally means you got to buy up every opportunity. And so you can imagine that, uh, Apple computers, apples is fine. Apple is finally having a sale after all these years and you get wind of it.

And you just, you, you camp out all night because you want to be the first one in there. And you just, you just say, I'll take one of everything. You buy the whole store up because you are going to take advantage of that opportunity, that one day opportunity.

And so Paul's not saying, Hey, just look busy. But he is saying that you got to see the value of the chances that you have. Make the most of them. And so friends ask yourself, I mean, when each of us, when the door opens for us, are you somebody who tends to be wise, but a little too cautious?

Or, or are you the type of person that's really quite, uh, quite reckless and a go getter, but, but so you're urgent and to the point, but you, uh, but you kind of come in like a, like a wrecking ball.

I mean, the goal is not that it's either, or it's not like you move from one to the other. Paul's actually saying a balance. He's saying, pray to God that he will grow in you a balance between wisdom and urgency in your witness.

[17 : 35] And what's the second balance? That's in verse six, a balance between gracious speech and salty speech, gracious speech and salty speech. Here's how it reads. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.

So this, this, this first category, gracious speech, it's courteous, it's kind, it's winsome. Uh, it's a direct reflection actually of the grace that we receive from God, filling us up, transforming us.

And then it's out of that grace, the grace that we've received, that we are able to be gracious to others. And it's particularly important when we're responding to ungracious folks who are making comments, who are, uh, who become aggressive whenever the topic of Jesus comes up.

maybe you've met one of these types of people. And, uh, and, uh, and in those cases, that gracious speech is very valuable. However, our speech, Paul says, must also be seasoned with salt, salty speech.

What is this? It's, uh, it's not salty like a sailor full of cursing. It's, it's salty in the sense of being witty. It's interesting. It gets people's attention and it's memorable.

[18 : 46] Uh, if, if you're too gracious, in other words, then you run the risk of get, just getting run over in any debate. But, but, I mean, you risk, you risk being dull and boring and, uh, and you, someone asks a really good question and you just, you just come out flat.

But if we're too salty, then the message actually becomes about me. Because I'm so witty. Look at me. Aren't I clever? Don't I impress you with my wit? And we can actually cover up the gospel with that.

So, so Paul says, you got to balance these two. And when you do, it invites a deeper conversation. It actually opens up people's hearts to hear the mystery of Christ in a convicting and life-changing way. So a quick story.

I was thinking about, um, the, the first time I ever grew a beard. I was 21 and it was a scraggly little thing. Um, and I was working at a grocery store at the time.

And my, my supervisor was Hispanic and he knew I was a Christian. And when I started growing this beard, he decided to give me a new nickname. He started calling me Jesus, uh, which I don't think he meant it as a compliment actually.

[19 : 59] Uh, and he's my boss, right? So what am I going to do? Well, I try to be gracious. I try to kind of go along with the joke and, and, uh, you know, but, but it was interesting that because he knew I was a Christian and because he was making fun of me, it actually opened up a door for us to have a conversation about it over those weeks, whatever it was that I, uh, my wife stomached me having that beard.

A couple of weeks, you know, and I would say to him, Oh, Hey, what do you know about this guy? Hey, Zeus. And we would, you know, we'd have a little conversation. I mean, it wasn't like a big dramatic thing, but if he, the point is also that if he did not even know I was a Christian, there wouldn't even be that opportunity, right?

If people don't know you're a Christian, I hope, I hope that's obvious. Then you're these, this whole conversation doesn't even start. Well, let's conclude. If you love, if you love Jesus, you're, you're going to want to share Jesus.

Am I right? And, and Paul assumes that the Colossians, that they are actually walking day by day with outsiders, with these, with these non-believers, that their, their work in their workplace, even in their homes, they're surrounded by folks that don't know Jesus.

And what a gift it can be when God answers our prayers for open doors. But for some of us, you know, that our social networks, maybe we've been Christian for a while and our social networks start to shrink.

[21 : 25] And we actually start looking around and we realize that this can happen even more easily when you're really involved with the church. You look around and you suddenly realize everybody you're talking to all week is a Christian.

Your whole entire world is, is, is just inside the church. And so ask yourself, where are you right now? Where do you have the opportunity to cultivate a friendship with an outsider, as Paul puts it?

And not so that you can pounce on them with the gospel, you know, bang, but, but so actually so that you can listen and be a blessing in that friendship and then respond with the words of hope and life when the opportunity, opportunity presents itself.

And Paul is giving us two commands here about that opportunity. He's saying, we got to pray and we have to proclaim. We need to ask, are we praying for open doors?

And are we praying for clarity to declare that message? And then we need to be willing to put ourselves out there and proclaim. You can't, you can't just wing it. You have to be prepared.

[22 : 28] So that when you, when you proclaim, are you, are you trying to balance this, this speaking wisely and this being opportunistic? And are you trying to balance this gracious speech with this salty speech?

So I want to invite Brenda to come up and she's going to lead us in prayer. And as she does so, I wonder how Jesus is convicting you tonight and how he's calling you to enter into prayer in this area.

And as she leads us, would you join me in praying for these things that Paul shares with us? Let's pray. Let's pray.