

Where Do We Go From Here?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2023

[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 4 verse 2, we read there in verse 2, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. And then in verse 5, conduct yourselves wisely, or another version would say, walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.

How many times have we come to a point in our lives where we may ask ourselves, where do we go from here? Some of us will have gone through that experience perhaps many times in our lives. Others perhaps are going through that experience at this very moment. Depending what's coming our way, there can be many different times where we ask that question, where do we go from here? Sometimes it's related to very practical decisions that we make in our lives, leaving school or looking for a workplace to go to. Where do we go from here?

Perhaps for others, it's related to coming into retirement. Where do we go from here? What are we going to do? But perhaps more so in our walk with God, there are many times we come across experiences in our lives, which make us ask the question, where do I go from here? It can be emotional situations we find ourselves in, times of loss and bereavement. It can be times when we've got decisions to make, even in our walk with God.

Where do we go from here? There's all kinds of situations that we find ourselves in, and we have that question on our minds. And in the two passages that we've read together this evening, both in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus chapter 14, and also here as we read in chapter 4 of Colossians, that's the kind of situation that people are in. It's perhaps more clear in the book of Exodus, because we see there the children of Israel have come out of Egypt.

[2 : 10] They've got the Egyptian army and Pharaoh chasing after them, behind them. Ahead of them, they've got the Red Sea. They can't see which way they're going to go, and they start grumbling towards Moses.

Why have you brought us here? The question they're asking there is, where do we go from here? And what we see is that even though they can't see the way forward, that God has a plan.

And that even as they cry out to him, they do so. But God has a plan behind that. But they have to be courageous. They have to go forward, trusting in him.

And that has remarkable results there. The passage we're looking at here in Colossians, it's maybe not so obvious in the sense of the walk that they're on, but it's more related to their spiritual walk with God.

And we think of verse 5 there, it's talking about walking in wisdom, going on in wisdom. And really, the question is, for the church, for the people at Colossae, is where do we go from here?

[3 : 24] Where Paul is coming to the end of the letter, he's given them a wonderful insight in the previous chapters throughout the letter of the wonder of Jesus Christ, the wonder of salvation in him, and the challenges in which they live, in the world in which they are living then, and the purpose for which Christ came.

They have been told about their faith and the difference it is to the false teachers who are all around them, who are opposing the teachings of Christ.

They've been given instructions as to how to live as a church, as a community, as families. They've been given all of these things. Another question they have is, where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here? We have all this great teaching. We have all this great wisdom from God, but where do we go with it in our walk with God?

So you see, in both situations, both in Exodus and here in Colossae, they are at this point in their experience where they're asking, where do we go from here?

[4 : 31] Although the situations are quite different, the way forward is very similar, both in the response that God gives to the people through Moses and Exodus, and also through what Paul says to the church of Colossae here.

The response is very similar. Paul's advice in verse 2 to verse 6 is the way forward, are things that we should bear in mind ourselves as well and take heed of, both like it is in the book of Exodus as well.

Two bits of advice that we see in both circumstances are, first of all, be prayerful, but secondly, be active.

The children of Israel have been calling on God, crying out to God, and he responded to them, go forward, be active.

The church at Colossae has been seeking God, has been learning of the wonder of Christ, and in the same way, the response to that is devote yourselves to prayer and be wise, walk in wisdom towards outsiders that cease.

[5 : 49] And it's always that challenge that we have in our lives, the balance between faith in prayer and faith in action.

Faith in prayer and faith in action. And that's the two points we're going to look at together this evening. These two things, faith in prayer, as we see here in verse 2 of Colossians, perseverance in prayer, continue steadfastly in prayer, it says.

And then secondly, our faith in action, walk in wisdom. So we want to think of these two things.

Under that question, where do we go from here? So where do we go from here, Paul is saying to the church at Colossae? He says, persevere in prayer.

Paul has spoken of the way of holy living in terms of relationships so much in this letter. The relationship that Christ has with the church, with his people, and the relationship that they now have through faith in him, and the relationship that that leads to in their lives, in the church, in the community, in their families.

[7 : 15] You see all that in the previous chapters. And when he's concluding here in chapter 4, he says one of the headings is in the ESV, further instruction.

It's in light of everything that's come beforehand. Here's some further instructions as we conclude this letter. So he's saying in conclusion, go forward in this way.

In all of these relationships, the foundation is your relationship with the Lord. And that's why he says there, continue steadfastly in prayer.

All you have to remember as you're reading many of these letters in the New Testament is that these were people who were young in the faith. These were towns and cities that weren't grounded in the gospel, the way we have experienced in our own nation, in our own islands here.

We are a generation who has enjoyed so much of the gospel, and generations have gone before us who have enjoyed the gospel, as we heard in prayer.

[8 : 23] However, we have the blessing of the gospel having come to our land many years ago. But for the churches that you're reading of here in the New Testament, for many of them, the gospel had only very recently come.

And the church in Colossae was a very young church in the faith. They had come from a very different background. They weren't brought up with the gospel all around them.

They were brought up with other gods and false gods and all kinds of teachings around them, teachings that were still all around them. And the challenge for them would be, you know, where are we going from here?

What are we doing with this teaching? And one of the challenges that would have come to them would be as they were told to pray to God, their faith will be tested in their prayers.

Not seeing perhaps prayers answered immediately. And the false teachers coming in and saying to them, your God's not listening. He's not real. You have to turn away from that and come back to our ways.

[9 : 34] There would have been all these challenges. But Paul is saying, you know, it's not just an occasional prayer that you offer up and God's going to answer it immediately. Or it's not just one long, intense prayer that God is going to hear and everything's going to change for you.

The lesson is, as we always see throughout the scripture, is this idea of perseverance in our relationship with God. Whether it's in the Old Testament or the New Testament, there's always that challenge.

When a challenge comes, when opposition arises, how do we go on? Do we lose faith? Do we lose hope? Or do we persevere in prayer?

Well, the lesson here is persevere in prayer. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

So their prayers were to be prayers of perseverance. And their prayers, as you see here, were to be active prayers.

[10 : 42] Praying, being watchful. Being watchful. Being on their guard. Being aware of everything that's going on around them.

Being aware of all the different challenges. Being watchful there behind that word is the watchman's tower. The one who would look out over and survey the landscape and see the enemy coming and warn the people.

And Paul is saying, you know, you've got to be persevering in prayer. But always, as it were, praying with your eyes open. Praying as the attacks are coming.

As the opposition is arising against you. And that's the way we are to pray ourselves as well. Guard, being on our guard. Being watchful. Being aware of what is happening around us.

Being aware of all the different challenges that are around us. It often reminds me of a scene in the film Titanic I watched many years ago.

[11 : 43] Based on a real story, but much of it as well, is fiction as two. But on the night when they were, before they hit the iceberg, there's a scene where there's two watchkeepers up in the mast.

They're on watch for icebergs. And one of the watchkeepers turns to the other one and says to him, you don't have to worry, I can smell ice.

And just moments later, what happens? They hit the iceberg. He was so busy boasting about his abilities. What he could do, how he could smell ice.

He wasn't watching. He wasn't looking. And there's a reminder to ourselves there as well. Again, we heard it in prayer earlier about being careful of our boasting.

How we're standing. How we go on. How good we are. That's not what we are to be like. We are persevering in prayer. Not boasting.

[12 : 43] But being watchful. Being on our guard. Being alert to what's going on around us. But also what's going on within us. So we keep humble before God.

You see it again going back to the book of Exodus. Taking their eyes off God and just looking to the opposition around them. It made them fear. Filled them with fear.

But when they're redirected to look at God and to trust in him, they can go forward. And so it is for ourselves. And the Colossians here in being watchful have been reminded so much of the wonder, of the beauty of Christ.

In chapter 1, it's the preeminence of Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, it says in verse 15. For by him all things were created.

In him, heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. And so it goes on. It's the preeminence of Christ.

[13 : 52] The one they look to, the one we look to as well. So when they're asking this question, where do we go from here?

It's a steadfastness in prayer. This persevering in prayer. This being on their guard in prayer. This thanksgiving in prayer. That they have Christ on their sides.

And you also see too, that it's about being specific in prayer. In verse 3 and verse 4, that's made clear for us as well.

Paul is asking them there initially, specifically pray for his ministry. And at the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word.

Where do we go from here? We want to go forward with the door opening by God, that we may declare the mystery of Christ. That we may proclaim the gospel.

[14 : 56] That the Lord would open doors for the message of the gospel to go out and to go forward. And again, it's a great reminder to ourselves today of being specific in prayer.

We've heard it in the prayers earlier. Specifics of prayer about things that are going on in our own lives, in our congregation, in our communities, in our nation, in the world.

Being specific for prayer. And that's what Paul is asking for here as well. That doors may be opened to declare the mystery of Christ.

Now, we have been blessed with doors that have been opened for us in different ways. With a freedom to proclaim the gospel. To go into schools.

To go into care homes. To go into the hospital. To be with each other here in the church. To have opportunities to go out with the gospel. Doors have been opened.

[15 : 55] And our prayer would be that these doors remain open for us. And open wider. And that other opportunities come. As we pray for ourselves individually.

As we go into the workplaces. We go into the places of sport. Or the places of other places of worship. Wherever we go. Whatever we do. We are praying specifically for doors to open.

And to proclaim the mystery of Christ. The wonder of Christ to others. So you see there's this perseverance in prayer.

But it's an active prayer. One other thing under that is what you see is. Paul's plea for prayer himself. That I may make it clear.

Which is how I ought to speak. He's asking his people. The church and Colossae. To pray for him. That he may make it clear.

[16 : 56] What he preaches. And again. It's a prayer. And I know James mentions this often. And thankful for the praying people here. Who remember us as we preach.

And as we go out with the gospel. Again thankful for the prayers offered up tonight. And that to that end. And for your ongoing prayers. For ourselves as ministers. For Scott. And for all of us together.

That we would pray for one another in that way. That as we're involved in the work of the church. Whatever we're doing. As we're involved in our witness in the community. That we would pray.

That we would be clear. In how we present the gospel. So there's this. There's this. Where do we go from here? We go on in prayer.

Persevering in prayer. That everything we do. Is grounded in prayer. And praying. Remembering. We are praying to the one. Who is able. And the second thing we see here.

[17 : 53] Under that question again. Where do we go from here? We are to walk in wisdom. Verse 5. Conduct yourselves wisely.

Toward 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. So there's this idea that prayer is what we are grounded in. But that there's also activity.

That is our conduct. That is our walk. That is our making the best use of the time. And you see wisdom is a recurring theme in this letter.

In chapter 1. Verse 9. It says. And so. From the day we heard. We have not ceased to pray for you. Asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will. In all spiritual wisdom.

[18 : 53] And understanding. So there's wisdom. That's the prayer of Paul for the church at Colossae. In verse 28 of chapter 1. There it also speaks of wisdom.

Him we proclaim. Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom. That we may present everyone mature in Christ. Wisdom is at the heart of the preaching of the gospel.

In verse 3 of chapter 2. There it speaks again of wisdom. In verse 2. That their hearts may be encouraged. Being knit together in love.

To reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding. And the knowledge of God's mystery. Which is Christ. In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Christ has all wisdom. And if we lack wisdom as it says in James. We are to ask God who gives. Because he has all wisdom to give.

[19 : 54] And he gives wisdom to us in order to live for him. To conduct ourselves in the right way. Because we don't have that wisdom of ourselves.

How often we make mistakes. How often we fail when we go in our own strength. But we have him to come to and ask for wisdom. But as we do.

We are to go on. To walk in that way. To walk in the way of wisdom. There will be the temptation here. For the church at Colossae.

If you like. To almost back away. From everything that's going on around them. To hide themselves away. To be a people who say. We'll just keep ourselves to ourselves.

We'll pray that God will work. But that he'll work apart from us. Away from us. But yet Paul is saying no.

[20 : 50] You continue steadfastly in prayer. Being watchful. And all of these things. But then conduct yourselves wisely. Towards outsiders. Be in their midst.

Do not distance yourself. From them. But resisting their teaching. Take the opportunities that arise. To present the faith.

To present the gospel. In our prayers. There should always be a plea. For wisdom. But it's a wisdom. That goes forward. We will be in prayer.

But looking to action. As well. And that's the key. For the church at Colossae. Here as we are reading. And it's key for ourselves. Today it was the key. For the children of Israel.

In Exodus 14. Sometimes we can be afraid. To go forward. We can be afraid. Of the challenges. That are all around us.

[21 : 48] But still. We cannot just become. So comfortable. In prayer. That we leave it all. To others.

And always just. Don't take that step. Of faith. When you look at. The children of Israel. When you see them there.

In chapter 14. They are crying out. To God. And God. And Moses says to them. You know. You be still. We're going to see. God's hand. In the midst of this.

But what God says. To them is. Why do you cry. To me. Tell the people of Israel. To go forward. To go on.

In faith. So I think it was the time. To stop praying. And start moving. To start going forward. And it's always the case.

[22 : 46] For the church of Christ. Yes. Everything is grounded. In prayer. But we always. Pray. In the hope. And in the will of God.

To go forward. To walk. In wisdom. To conduct ourselves. Wisely. Towards outsiders. To do all things. As unto the Lord.

There's faith. And there's action. We remember Hannah. Who we were looking at last week. Who was praying. For a son. And she prayed.

And as she was praying. She was making a promise. A promise to God. If you give me a son. I will give him back to you. All the days. Of his life.

God honoured her prayer. And Hannah honoured God. In her action. In her faith. She moved forward. In faith.

[23 : 43] And gave the child. Over to God. All the days. Of his life. Where. Do we go.

From here. We go forward. Devoting ourselves. To prayer. But being wise. In our actions. To all. Around us.

Being on our guard. And being thankful. That the Lord. Is on our side. We all know. Prayer is. Indispensable. Prayer is the heart.

The heartbeat. Of what the church. Is all about. And it would seem strange. Maybe to say. At times. That. We can let.

Prayer. Impede. Our progress. But we can. If we say. All we can do. Is pray.

[24 : 41] Because God. Gives. Commands. To go forward. To pray. And to go forward. To go forward.

Thrusting him. To go forward. Looking to him. To perform. Miraculous things. As we go on. The Red Sea.

As they went forward. Parted. And they crossed over. On dry land. God. God. Was able. To do it. But they had.

To go forward. And for ourselves. Too. And so many things. That we are doing. It may be personal. An individual. It may be as families. It may be as a congregation.

As a denomination. Whatever we are doing. We pray over it. But we go forward. In faith. Challenged.

[25 : 38] To trust. God. There's a story told. During the American Civil War. Of an army. That was led by a general.

And they found themselves. Coming into the evening of a day. On the wrong side. Of a river. And they needed to be on. The other side. As soon.

As possible. And the general. Went to his engineers. And said. We need to get across. That river. So he told his engineers.

To come up with a plan. To build a bridge. So the army could cross. But he also called. The man who was in charge. Of the wagons. The horses. That were carrying the wagons.

With all the supplies. All the ammunition. All the guns. He got him ready. As well. He said. To him. We have to be over that river. As soon as possible. So get the wagons.

[26 : 33] Ready. The man in charge. Of the wagons. He went away. And started. Getting everything ready. The engineers. Went away. And started planning.

But the man. Who was getting the wagons. Ready. When he had done that. He started gathering logs. Started gathering rocks. And anything else. He could find. To build a bridge.

And then he came back. To the general. Not too long after. And he said. To the general. That's the wagons. And all the horses. Across the river.

And the general. Was surprised. And he asked. Where are the engineers? What are they doing? He said. They're still in the tent. Making a plan. The work.

Had been done. Because the man. Saw it could be done. And he went ahead. And did it. And sometimes. That's the way. We can end up too. We think of our own.

[27 : 31] Prayer life. We think of our own. Community prayer life. We think. Of what we're doing. In prayer. It's so important. So important. That everything. Is grounded in it.

But there's always a time. When we have to say. It's a time for action. It's a time to do. It's a time to go out. To stand up for the gospel.

To proclaim the gospel. To speak to others. Whatever it is. We pray. And plan. And we also. Put our faith.

Into action. The children of Israel. Faced it at the Red Sea. They cried to God. And God said. Go forward. The church at Colossae.

They were told. Continue. Steadlessly in prayer. But also. Conduct yourselves. Walk. In wisdom. Go forward. For the Lord.

[28 : 30] And for ourselves. We ask so often. Where do we go. From here. Tonight. Where do we go. From here. Let us go on. Persevering.

In prayer. Not losing heart. Or hope. In our prayer. But also. Conducting ourselves. Going forward. In faith.

And trusting. God. That he be with us. And that he help us. And guide us. Along the way. He is able. And we have to believe.

Let us pray. Lord our God. Our Father. In heaven. We do thank you. For all the. Instructions. And reminders. That you give. Through your word.

Of the power. That there is. In prayer. But we thank you too. That there is also. A reminder. Of the power. Of the response. That there is. To prayer as well. That we are a people.

[29 : 26] Just as a people. Of old. Who are told. So often. To go forward. To go out. With the gospel. Even the great commission. Reminds us of that. To go. To all the ends.

Of the earth. With that great promise. That you are with us. And so help us. That we will ground ourselves. In prayer. And be persevering. In it. But also. That we will walk.

In wisdom. And know that you are with us. Help us. To be courageous. And to be bold. In the days. That we live. When there is. So much opposition. Around us. And there are so many.

Challenges to us. And to the faith. And to the gospel. But we thank you. That you are on our side. That you are sovereign. In all things. And that you are with your people.

Here and all over the world. And that your gospel. As is promised. Is and will. Bear much fruit. We pray that for ourselves. As a denomination. And as a congregation.

[30 : 19] As a community here. To see your spirit. Working in our midst. So give us that faithful prayer. And that perseverance in it. And give us that wisdom.

And to walk by too. As we ask it all. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.