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The Power Behind The Christian's Mission

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 4:2-18



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So in your Bible, if you want to look with me the fourth chapter of the book of Colossians, and if you're new with us, we're just verse by verse and we happened to be up to chapter four, verse two. And our hope is to actually work through all of these verses, all the way through verse 18. And what we find here at the end of his letter that was written to a real church, just like this is a real church, is that Paul knew that everybody in the world is asking a very similar question. Once you start asking it, you don't stop asking it until you die, and that is what am I going to do with my life? Or what am I going to do with the rest of my life? What am I here for? What's the purpose of my life? And what we're told in the Bible is that there is a day coming when we are going to see the totality of Jesus' glory.

And on that day, when we see him face to face, we're told that we are going to know without a shadow of a doubt that glorifying him was the intended purpose of our life. And the good thing is that we don't have to wait for that day in order to live towards that end. And the reason is because we have the Bible that actually describes that day for us. There's an actual book of the Bible, it's the very last one, it's written by a man named John, and God reveals to him what will take place in the end. And he describes it for us. And this is what we're told in chapter five. He says, and "He", that is Jesus, "went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne." There was no context with what we're reading here, but what he's doing is this, is he's inheriting the universe that he created from his father, okay?

He's receiving all the authority and heaven and earth forever and ever and ever. And this is what he says. "They", meaning all those in heaven, "sang a new song saying worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.'" Now, this is what we're told is going to happen, but not only does John give us a picture of the setting and the events, he also gives us a description of Jesus himself.

And this is what he says we're going to see, that Christ is "clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars." There's no context here, but these seven stars are actually angels. What he's saying is this, in his hand are all the spiritual authorities in the world. "And from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword", which I know that sounds really weird. But in the Bible it says, the Bible is the two-edged sword. And what that means is this, that in Jesus' hand and in Jesus' mouth are all authority. "And his face was like the sun shining in full strength."

Now these pictures prove something and that is that Jesus Christ is worthy of our adoration. He's worthy of our worship. He's he's worthy of our lives. And what you find in the Scriptures, you find in your own life is this is, that whatever you adore, whatever adoration is in your life, it turns into your mission for your life.

Whatever it is that you care about most you want to share with others. Your team scores, what do you do? You turn to somebody who also cares about your team and you say, “Did you see that?” Now why, they’re watching the same game with you. Why do you do that? It’s because your joy is not complete until you get to share your adoration with someone else. Anytime you adore something it turns into your mission. This happened in our family about five years ago, we went out to White Sands National Park, absolutely amazing place.

You can’t hardly see it here because of dusk, but everything that looks like a mountain here is actually white sand. It looks just like the beach without any water. And as far as you can see, it’s just white sand. And that night we went out there and they said, “Make sure you stay until sunset because at sunset it’s a pretty remarkable thing.” And that night we were out there and the boys were having such a great time. It was a nice, cool night. And suddenly, I know you can’t really see it in any picture, but because there was nothing impeding our view, you can literally view and watch and see as far as you can see in the entire sky, from one side to the other, it was all lit up like fire. And the boys were so excited. Without us having to say anything to them, they were just so overwhelmed with what they were seeing that they were running around all these different dunes and they were running to them and they were lifting their hands.

And then they would run back to us. And they would say something that they didn’t need to say and yet they felt compelled to say, and they would say, “Do you see this?” Well, of course we see this. So why would they say that? Because whatever it is that we adore, it turns into our mission. And Paul here at the end of his letter, he has seen Jesus Christ is utterly worthy. He has described him as absolutely worthy. And now what he does to conclude his letter is he invites us to join the mission of God in helping other people see him as worthy. And so let’s read the first few verses, starting in verse two, he 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 am in prison that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.”

We’re going to pause there and leave you with a point for these words and it’s this, is that God calls us to pray for the mission. You see, every single one of us has a part to play. And for some of you, you may be in a place in life, maybe you are simply watching because you can’t come. Maybe you’re bound to your house, not only because of what’s happening in the world with a virus, but maybe it’s simply age, maybe your body doesn’t work like it once did. And you think what is the purpose of the rest of my life? And I want you to know something, you can pray. And what you’re going to find is this is that for those who pray, whether it’s the only thing they can do or it’s the first thing they can do is that God says it’s the first thing we must do for the mission.

You see, when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, right before he did so he says, “Now this is what I want you to do. I want you to go and make disciples, but before you open your mouth, before you tell anything or anyone about who I am, I want you to devote yourself to pray. I want you to pray and then pray some more and pray some more until power comes upon you.” And so we’re told in Acts chapter one, verse 14, it says.

“And all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.” And this not only is important because of priority, it’s also important because of language. You see the word there for devoting is the exact same word as what we find in Colossians 4:2, when he says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer,” to be devoted to prayer. Now, why is it first? Why must it be first? Because 2 Corinthians 4:4 says something that’s terrifying but real.

And this is what he says. He says, “The god of this world,” he’s speaking of Satan, little G god, “has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” In other words, they can’t see him. And not only can they not see him, I want you to notice how Paul and Paul loves to do this. He loves to stack phrases on each other. First of all, they can’t see Christ. They look at Christ and they just can’t see anybody of importance, but then there’s the glory of Christ. And they can’t see the glory of Christ either, which means that when we talk about his attributes, his grace and his kindness and his generosity, and his mercy and his sovereignty and his strength, they look and they just simply don’t think he looks all that glorious. And not only are they blinded to the glory of Christ, they’re also blinded to the gospel of the glory of Christ means the good news.

That means that we could read what we just read, chapter five of all of Revelation, and they could yawn and go, “Well, who cares?” But not only that is this gospel of the glory of Christ, it’s like a lamp and light cascades from this lamp. In other words, that for most people when they hear the gospel, even if they’re not the one who’s speaking it or hearing it, there’s this effect. It’s like a spillover of light. And this is what it says. It says that Satan himself has actually blinded their eyes to such an extent that unbelievers simply cannot see Jesus as important. It’s not that they’re not intelligent. It’s not that you’re not communicating clearly. It’s that if their eyes cannot see something, they cannot see it. And not only can they not see Jesus, but the Bible tells us that he’s not given us the power to open up people’s eyes, which is why we must pray.

So he says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer and then being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” Watchful means it’s like a sentry that’s at his post and he has to stay awake and alert throughout the night in order to protect the people. It’s that we should be people who have understanding. We should be people who stay alert and awake while we’re living in this world and not only that, but thanksgiving. You see these two words, watchful and thanksgiving. It’s really an interesting thing. If you’ve been in Christ for a while, what happens is your value system changes. And so what happens is you start to look at people in the world who don’t look at Christ and don’t see him as relevant. And then you look at their value system, how they treat people, their relationships, what they would prefer is social policy. And you look at them and sometimes we conclude that they’re the enemy.

They’re not the enemy. They’re blinded to the ways of Christ. They’re blinded to his glory. They’re blinded to the word of Christ. And as a result of that, he says, we need to be watchful, not to view them as the enemy, but as the person who’s most in need of our prayers. And then when he says thanksgiving, I think what he’s doing here is he’s saying, and you should be really thankful and you should be really humble. And the reason is this is that if God, by his grace, did not open your eyes, you would be in the same place. We’re no better

than them. We're just forgiven. And then he says, "Now, once you start praying, what should you say? What should you talk about?" And this is what he says, verse three and four, "At the same time, pray also for us." And then notice these two words "that," and he gives us, from these two words, exactly what we're supposed to be praying for the mission.

First, "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." In other words, we should be asking, "God, would you pry open that person's eyes and that person's heart?" And then second, "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." In other words, he's saying, "God, would you pry open the heart and then send the gospel through with strength and with power and with clarity?" I read something years ago that has sort of stuck with me and it's a little convicting, but it's also challenging to me. And it's this, if God, by his grace answered every one of your prayers from this last week, how many people would have come to faith in Christ? Are we praying for people? Are we praying for the advance of the gospel? Do we have an adoration in our heart that turns into a mission that we simply have to talk to even him about?

God, would you cause your name to be hallowed to the ends of the earth? And so let's devote time to pray the gospel forward. I would encourage you to not only to pray for specific people, but even general peoples, meaning all of us know somebody in our life. Maybe you're in a family with them. Maybe you're in a marriage with them that they don't know Christ. Maybe you have other family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, people you know are far from the Lord. But if you wrote their names down and just prayed even briefly one per day, and you just kind of went through the list, but not only individual peoples you know, but also people groups that we just prayed about where there's entire people groups that has so few people around them who even have the opportunity to tell them of Christ because they don't know Christ.

If God answered all of our prayers for our family, friends and people groups around the world the next week, would there be people who would be saved? It's a great opportunity for all of us. Well, he moves on. In verse five. He says, "Walk in wisdom 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 not only does God call us to pray for the mission." He instructs us to pursue people for the mission. And the reason is because people matter to God deeply. That's why Jesus came to the earth. It's because people matter to God. That's why Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations is because people matter to God. And so notice what he says.

He goes, "Not only do you have an opportunity to engage in this mission by praying, but all of us know someone, everyone has somebody in their life, a neighbor, someone who cares for us, someone whom we care for, work with somebody." And notice what he says to us. Verse five. He says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders." Now this is beautiful. Walking in wisdom means to live with wisdom. Okay? Wisdom is the application of God's truth, knowing how to apply it to everyday life. So he's saying that we need to be people that know how to apply God's truth to life. Now notice the recipients, it's outsiders, it's people outside the faith, and then

notice the word that points the direction of how we're supposed to live our life. He says toward them. Many of us, we get the idea that we're supposed to live away from the world. We are not supposed to live like the world, but notice he says, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders."

I'm facing outsiders. In fact, the word toward it literally means in the interest of. So I'm going to wake up and I see someone who is outside of the faith and instead of running from them and considering them my enemy, I'm going to live in such a way that I'm considering how I'm living in order to benefit their interests. And so I'm going to pray for them. I'm going to seek to bless them. I'm going to seek to serve them, be generous with them, invite them, care for them. In order to, we might be able to open up our mouth and tell them. He goes on and he says not only "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders," but he says, "making the best use of the time," redeeming the time and this word time. There's two different words in the Greek that he uses for time. One is *chronos*, chronology, right? It's units of time, seconds, minutes, hours, days, et cetera.

But then there's another word in Greek. And it's the word *kairos*. And it's the word for windows of opportunity. In other words, God not only gives us days and years, but he gives us windows of opportunities in those days and years in order to walk toward people. And the reason he says, "make the best use" or redeem the time, redeem those windows, this is why. You see different windows in your life where you can look through. I know this is just a metaphor, but you look and you see people. And we just assume that window will always be open. That relationship will always be there. The opportunity will always be there. But what she need to understand is one day that person in your life, in terms of this metaphor, the picture will move from this picture to this picture. One day, the window to open your mouth and declare Jesus' glory on this earth will end.

Either you'll die, they'll die. They'll move. You'll move. There's people in your life that you're burdened for. And you're walking toward them. You need to understand there are moments of opportunity that must be redeemed, otherwise they're lost forever. And so now we're talking about living with intentionality. You see, windows close and the need is real. Ephesians 5:15-16, he actually says almost the same thing and then he adds one clause. Notice, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time." That's almost exactly what he writes right in our letter. But then in Ephesians, he adds, "because the days are evil." You know what that means. People are dying and going to hell without any knowledge of Christ. Funerals are frequent. Hospitals, prisons are full. People are in need. The days are evil.

And so since we're walking in wisdom toward them, the hope is that we're going to have the opportunity to open our mouth. And what do we say when we're engaging and pursuing people? Notice what he says, this is verse six. He says, "Let your speech always be gracious." Meaning that when we're opening our mouth and we're declaring Christ, we're not condemning. We're actually speaking of the grace that can forgive them of all of their sin and not only grace, but "seasoned with salt." This simply means that we would be interesting. We would be appetizing. We would look for ways to speak into their life, that it would be appealing and attractive to them, not that we would give them a different gospel, but that we wouldn't be rude in giving them the gospel. But we would seek to remove everything that would make it more difficult to listen to and more

appealing to hear.

And not only that, but he says, “so that you may know how you are to answer each person.” That means that we should be personal. We should ask them what they’re dealing with. We should identify something about their story. What are the obstacles that they’re dealing with that maybe someone else isn’t and so that we can identify and even answer some of the questions that they might have and not just treat everybody in this way, the same way, needing everything answered the same way. And so he gives us this opportunity and let me just encourage us in particular, as we come upon Christmas, right, to prepare, to redeem windows of opportunity. Studies show that people have a deeper longing for hope and wonder and truth during the Christmas season than any other time of the whole year. And this will especially be true this year, when people are looking and begging for something to be magical and hopeful and peaceful and good.

And so let’s identify a person or a family to bless. Let’s pray for them and serve them and be generous to them. If they’re willing to come and you are as well, you can invite them here to one of the concerts or services, but if not, there’s the live stream that you can invite them to. Let’s look to open up our mouth and give grace to people who are in need and talk about the one that we adore. The last thing that he does is he lists a bunch of people and he does this, I believe for this purpose. Number three is that God inspires us to live his mission. It’s one thing to call us to pray and to instruct us to engage with somebody, but he also gives us motivation. He gives us the picture of what it can be like and what it can be like for each one of us and how for each one of us, it can be a little different in how we engage in the mission.

You see every single one of us live our life and if our life was lived just how it’s lived for the rest of our life, they would form a legacy, an epitaph. And what he does here is he says, “Let me tell you about 10 friends who have been engaged in the mission in some way.” And then what he does is he says, “I’m going to give their name. And then on the basis of what that individual has done in the kingdom for the kingdom, we’ll just give him sort of one little phrase that potentially could be written over their stone.” And what I would encourage you to be thinking about is this, what today would be written on the stone over your buried body, as it relates to the mission of Christ? The people who know you the most, what would they say? Well, he gives 10. And what he’s proves in giving 10 is that each one of us it’ll be a little bit different.

We all have a part and that part needs to be played. The first we find in verse seven and eight. Tychicus and his legacy is wrapped up in the phrase greatness is in servanthood. We see in verses seven and eight, he says this, he goes, “Look, he will tell you all about my activities. He’s a beloved brother, a faithful minister, a fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and he may encourage your hearts.” Tychicus was an amazing man. In Acts chapter 20, we’re told that Paul had to go on this really difficult journey through Macedonia to raise money for starving Christians in Jerusalem. And that journey became so difficult that he even at some point he despaired life itself. And there were two people that we know of that were with him. And one of those individuals who endured that journey with him was this man.

And who was it that Paul trusted enough to put the book of Colossians, the letter of Colossians in that person's hand and then send them on a journey over a thousand miles long that they would have to traverse two different seas, Italy, Greece, and a hundred miles in Asia Minor in order to get this letter to the town and church in Colossae? It was Tychicus. And who was it that Paul, when he wanted a man named Titus to come to him and visit him and yet Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete and he needed to send somebody to the island to take care of the church while he was away? Who did Paul suggest? It was Tychicus. And at the end of his life, when he wanted his son in the faith to come visit him, he said, "Timothy, I want you to come but I know that you're a pastor in Ephesus." And he needed somebody to go to Ephesus in order to care for them while young Timothy cared for him.

Who did he send? He sent the same guy, Tychicus. And you know what's amazing this man, in all of his efforts, there's not a single word in all the Bible that's recorded that came from his mouth. We don't know anything he preached, anything he said, anything he read, anything you wrote. And yet what we do know is this is one of our faith's great individuals. And he's great because he's served. You know you can serve? You may not be a preacher or a missionary, but you can serve. You can use your gifts and say, "I'm going to endure and I'm going to serve." And so, you too can be great. The second individual, Onesimus, you find him in verse nine. And his legacy would simply be grace can set you free. You notice that he also was faithful, brother. He was beloved. And he says who is one of you, meaning he came from the church. "They will tell you everything that has taken place here."

What does that mean? Well, it means that he went with the letter. Two of them went. Onesimus at one time, though, was a bond servant in Colossae to a man named Philemon. And he ran away. He ran to Rome. He came to faith in Christ. He became friends with Paul and Paul says, "You need to go back and make things right. You have a debt that needs to be paid." But he wanted to help him. And so he gave him a letter and he goes, "Look, here's the book of Colossians, but here's the letter to Philemon. You give this to him." And in that letter, Paul tells Philemon to welcome and receive Onesimus by the grace of God in the way that you would receive me, no longer as a bond servant, but as a brother. And this is what happens. Many of us in the room right now, you have a debt with God that can only be paid for by the grace of Christ.

Many of us, we have a debt with our own conscience because of guilt or shame. Many of us have a debt before one another. And sometimes that debt, it needs to be forgiven. The only way that happens is grace. But friends, grace is available for you. It's available for me. The third man, Aristarchus. It says that Jesus is worth adversity. That would definitely be on his tombstone, I believe. The only thing he tells us here is that he's a fellow prisoner, but this man, in Acts 19, when Paul, it ignites a riot accidentally by preaching the gospel, it was Aristarchus that was dragged out of the theater in order to save his life. In Acts chapter 20, he was one who was traveling with Paul and then in Acts chapter 27 if you've ever read of Paul, being in a shipwreck and where the boat sank, Aristarchus was with him on the boat. This is an amazing man.

And why in the world would you risk your life and endure hardship in danger in order to become a fellow prisoner? Because Jesus is worth adversity. Some of you, you go through such deep pain in life and because of your hope and endurance, right, Christ is being magnified. And that's one way that you can engage in the mission. The next name we have is Mark. Mark tells us that failure is not final. In Acts 13, Mark joined Paul on his very first mission trip. In Acts 15, two chapters later, Paul was about to go back on another mission trip, but Paul wouldn't let him go. And the reason is because on the first mission trip, when things got hard, Mark ran home. So as Paul is now repacking for a second trip, Mark comes up and he goes, "Hey, great. When did we leave?" And he goes, "We leave, you don't leave. You stay. You're not going."

And he goes, "What? Well, why?" And so there's this argument. Finally, he goes, "Hey cousin Barnabas, you're going to let me go, right?" And Barnabas says, "Absolutely, we're going to let you go." And Paul says, "Barnabas, here's the deal. If he goes with you, then you're not going with me." This is like real life stuff happening, right, on the mission field. What he's saying is this, "Things are going to get hard where we're going and I don't want Mark near me." And yet now at the end of this letter near the last years of his life, Mark is with him. He says that he may come to you. And if he does, you need to welcome him. So what happened? Why was there this restoration? Well, what happened was Paul happened. I'm sorry. What happened was Peter happened. Peter, if you remember, also was familiar with failure when it came to Jesus and Peter recognized what had happened.

And he took Mark by him and he said, "Look, let me mentor you, let me care for you." In his letter, 1 Peter, he actually calls him his true son and his investment in his life eventually led Mark to write this little thing called the gospel of Mark, right, which was Peter's account of the life of Christ. At the end of Paul's life, he says, "Hey, would somebody bring Mark to me? Because his gifts are exceptionally needed right now in the kind of ministry that I'm doing." Failure is not final. Some of you, you failed in a big way. And I want you to know because of the grace of Christ, you can re-engage in this mission. The next name is Justus. He had two names. First Jesus was his name as a Hebrew, but then Justus. And all we know about him is he was Jewish, but also he was a great comfort to Paul. His epitaph would be encouragement is key.

We don't know much about him, but he was a comfort. He was medicine to the soul. And this is what we know. The mission is very hard and therefore we need people, a lot of people just like Justus. Some of you, one of the greatest things that you're going to bring to the mission is you're going to encourage people to keep running. The next is Epaphras. Epaphras tells us that prayer is mission critical. We see this in verse 12 and 13. Epaphras was actually the founder of the church and what we're told is that when he came to Paul, what startled Paul the most about Epaphras was his prayer life. He says, "Look, he's always struggling on your behalf in his prayers." See this word struggling. This is the word that is used when Jesus was in the garden, praying so intensely that he began to sweat blood.

He looked over from his prison cell and he goes, “Man, Epaphras, man, you just get after it when you’re praying for these people. You feel it everywhere. He’s praying on your behalf in his prayers that you may stand mature and fully assured in all of the will of God.” This is Epaphras. Some of you, your greatest investment will be where nobody can see you but God, because you’re going to be on your knees, praying that the gospel goes forward. The next is Luke. Luke reminds us to invest in a better kingdom. See, Luke was a doctor. He was educated and affluent. He was cultured. He could have made earth his final investment, but Luke gave his talent to the Lord. And the Lord gave him the privilege of writing 52 chapters of the New Testament, of caring for Paul and seeing the gospel go forth.

Many in the room are doctors or nurses or lawyers or technicians or engineers, whatever it is that you do, you give it to the Lord and he can use that in that marketplace, in that setting. The next is the fly in the ointment. His name is Demas. Demas would tell us, his would be the saddest to read. And it says, “I traded riches for rags.” After a great start in the mission, 2 Timothy 4, we’re told that Demas fell in love with the present world and deserted Paul. He never came back. We don’t know what captured his heart. All we know is that he traded riches and purpose in order to embrace the world. And then he had to stand before Jesus Christ and there he saw the folly of his exchange. Don’t be Demas. Nympha. Nympha tells us that little is plenty with God. We don’t know very much other than Nympha had a house and that’s where the church was meeting.

In other words, Nympha says this, “Look, I’m not a lawyer. I’m not a technician. I’m not a pastor. I’m not a necessarily an author, but I want to contribute. I don’t got anything, but I got this house.” And God goes, “We can use the house.” What do you have that can be leveraged and mobilized for the mission? Very little that is freely given placed into the hands of God is plenty. And the last one, Archippus. Verse 17, all we’re told is this. He says, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.” We don’t know if he was struggling to engage in the mission or tired because of his constant engagement in the mission. But what he does say is this, “God has given you a ministry and you need to fulfill that.” I wonder what would be on your epitaph and what will be on mine? What I do know is this, let me encourage us to identify our part in the mission and engage.

We all have a part to play, every one of us. I encourage you to play that part because the windows are going to close. And the very last thing I want to say is this is the windows also to trust Jesus Christ and be forgiven of sin will also close. They will not be open forever. And so I urge those of you today who are hearing this, that Jesus Christ died on a cross and rose again in order to pay for your sin. Stop treating that like it’s something that will always be available because there will be a day that it’s not. Admit your need for Christ, believe in him and confess him as Lord and be saved. So let me pray. Father, in heaven, we love you. We thank you for these individuals in our family of faith that we’ve never met personally and yet here they are and they inspire us. We thank you for recording them in Colossians.

We thank you for the time and the book that we've studied and I pray God that you would help us as a people to be inspired by their example. We also want to thank you now for Matt and Liz, Cora, Lydia, Beau and Bethany and as we hear of their calling to leave this place and to go to a place that's very dark, that you would inspire our hearts, not only with their faith and calling, but that we would seek to leverage our life wherever we're at for your glory and honor. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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