

Jesus is Lord of your Time

Good morning. Please turn with me to Col 4:2-6

Thank you Pastor Jerry and Pastor David for preaching God's Word for the past two weeks. Two weeks ago Emily and I were able to get away for vacation—no we did not purposely plan to be gone during the slavery section of Colossians—but Pastor Jerry you did a tremendous job of explaining the cultural differences between then and now that can make us confidently say that no, the Bible does not in any way endorse slavery, and also applying it to our current context to help us see how Jesus is Lord of our work.

David, awesome job as we took a week away from Colossians to help us see that gaining Christ is far superior to any earthly thing we may have to give up. I don't know if I've ever heard a preacher use the phrase "big ol' pile of poop", but it worked, and I'm thankful for your diligence in studying the passage and applying it to our lives.

That said, we have three more weeks in Colossians—two more weeks of studying a specific passage, and then we'll spend one week looking back at Colossians as a whole and remembering some of the big picture lessons we've learned about who Christ is and what it means for us.

After that we'll be taking all 5 Sundays in the month of September to look at "What is the Church?" You may remember a little over a month ago I told you that we are currently in the process of looking at every single thing we do as a church and asking "How can we be the best, most biblical, most Christ exalting Rock Prairie we can possibly be?"

In that process we have developed a new mission and vision statement that I'll be preaching through and talking about what it means for Rock Prairie moving forward.

Like I said, the pastors and deacons have been working together to define from scripture what a church is supposed to be and do.

We have one standard, and that's the Word of God. Amen? Christ is the head of this church and he has given us his Word to help us see what's true about him and how to live as a result. And we want to look to that word alone as our source of truth.

I'm also excited that we've been working with a website company to develop a new website to communicate these things—both to remind ourselves what we're all about and also to help others know who we are as a church. Lord willing that's going to be ready to launch the first week of September.

Like I said before, we want to hear your voice in this process. While it's my role to help lead us through this as part of church leadership, I've only been here for five months. Many of you have been here for years and years and have seen the church through really good times and really hard times.

If there's something you want me to consider, if there's something you love about our church that you want me to know about, if there's something frustrating you that you can share in love, please send it to me in a thoughtful, prayerful email. Don't just say it in the lobby in passing. If there's something you want to share and can do it humbly and understanding that we can't do everything, we as leadership want to hear it.

Sound good?

Col 4:2-6:

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
³ 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—
⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Let's pray.

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Lord, once again we come to you humbly, asking that you would be the one to guide our church. That we would be a people that cherish you above all else, that we would desire to make you known in all the earth, that we would seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

We are the bride of Christ. We don't think about that enough. We want to be a worthy bride, one that honors you by our conduct, one that desires intimacy with you in our hearts, one that is not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lead us to that end, Lord. Forgive us for where we fall short. Make us grow in those things.

Father I thank you for Mark and Carla. For your faithfulness to them on the mission field in the good times and in the difficult times. Help us to become a church that is more and more about the Great Commission, about making disciples of all nations, both here in Tipton County, and to the ends of the earth.

Father I pray that you would help us understand and apply your word this morning. And that we would see a greater picture of your glory and what we need to do in response. Guard my heart and my tongue. In Jesus' name, amen.

(SLIDE)

We've finally reached chapter 4 in Colossians, and these 5 verses really serve as a transition between the commands in chapter 3 and the conclusion of the letter.

Starting in verse 16 of chapter 3 Paul has been following a pattern. He'll single out a group of people, give them a command using an imperative verb, and then give the object of that verb.

Wives, submit, to your husbands—Husbands, love your wives—
Children, obey your parents—Slaves obey your masters—Masters,
treat your slaves justly and fairly

In our passage we have two more imperative verb commands, but they aren't addressed to any group in particular. Instead, he's addressing the whole church, specifically telling them how they should view their time.

Just like Jesus is Lord of the universe, just like he's the Lord of your marriage, and your family, and your work, he's the Lord of your time as well.

And in this passage, Paul gives two things that Christians should be spending their time on: Prayer and evangelism.

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Devote Yourself to Prayer

Not just "pray." He's saying be devoted to prayer. Be persistent in prayer. That's the thrust of the idea in verse 2 "Continue steadfastly in prayer. As in, "Pray like it's your job."

There are two kinds of prayer Paul wants the believers to devote themselves to.

The first is "Thankful prayer"

(SLIDE)

Thankful Prayer

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

It shouldn't surprise us that Paul tells them to persistently pray prayers of thankfulness, because he's mentioned thankfulness in every chapter of Colossians.

In chapter 1 he tells them to "give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." In chapter 2 says they should be "abounding in thanksgiving." Chapter 3 "And be thankful."

The question is, are you praying prayers of thanksgiving? I think most of us are probably good at thanking God for some things. We thank him for the food that we eat, we thank him for putting a roof over our heads, for providing for our needs, for sending rain and sun at the right times for our crops, and those things are good.

But as a Christian, you need to have an understanding of your cosmic position before the Lord. You were dead in your sin, and now you've been made alive with Christ. You're destined for glory beyond your wildest imagination. Without doing one thing to earn it, you've gone from headed for eternal punishment to headed for eternal glory and satisfaction in God.

That should make us thankful, shouldn't it? That should drive us to worship.

This is another reminder that our understanding of our faith, our understanding of who we are in Christ, should result in the outpouring of devoted, persistent, thankful prayer to the only one who had the power to save us, and who chose before he even created the earth, to send his Son to die in our place.

Practice thankful prayer.

There's another kind of prayer we're supposed to practice.

(SLIDE)

Prayer for Missionaries

³At 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— ⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

God's timing is amazing, because the two times we've come across the idea of missions in Colossians, we've had missionaries visiting us. I promise I didn't plan it that way. But it's amazing because it's a visible reminder to us about the importance of the Great Commission.

This idea of praying for missionaries might seem kind of random to you, but it's not. After Jesus rose from the dead he gathered his disciples together and gave them a command: Go and make disciples of all nations.

And until disciples are made of all nations, that's our command as well. And every believer has a part to play, and something we all need to do is pray for people who are taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Remember, Paul is a missionary. It's easy to forget that, but that was his job, that's what he did. He traveled to places where the gospel hadn't yet been preached, and he preached the gospel and established churches.

That's what a missionary does. A missionary goes to a place where the gospel either hasn't been preached or doesn't have a strong enough local church presence to reach the community, and evangelizes, disciples, and works to plant and develop local churches.

And Paul is asking the Colossians for prayer. Specifically for three things:

First, He asks them to pray for an open door for the word, for opportunities and open hearts to speak the gospel.

Second, he asks them to pray that he would speak the mystery of Christ,

and then third he asks that they would pray that he would make it clear.

I think these three things are what we should be praying for missionaries too.

We should pray for an open door. That the Lord would give them opportunities to share the good news of Christ. A lot of missionaries are in places where you can get in big trouble for preaching the gospel. So we need to pray that the Lord gives them creative opportunities to share the gospel.

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Second, We need to pray that they would speak it. Missionaries are human. There's not a super spiritual class of people called missionaries. They're just people who have been obedient to go where God has called them to go. And just like it can be intimidating to share your faith with your neighbor, the same can be true for a missionary. So pray for them to speak when the Lord gives them opportunity.

And pray that they would make it clear. This is a big one. Paul spent a whole chapter in Colossians talking about how the false teachers twist the message of the gospel. The gospel is not a complicated message—but there are a million ways people mess it up by adding to it or taking away from it.

Missionaries have a difficult task. Often times they need to learn at least one, sometimes two languages—not just superficially but at the level it takes to communicate deep truth.

They need to learn the culture of the people they are ministering to. They need to learn what's important. They need to learn what they believe about life's big questions. And then they need to speak the gospel in a way that is clear and that goes to the heart.

So pray for missionaries to make the gospel clear.

Even as a former missions pastor, I have struggled to pray for missionaries consistently. There have been times that I've done better than others, but I need to do a better job of praying for missionaries on a consistent basis.

The missions committee is working right now on how we can do a better job of helping our people know who our missionaries are and how we can pray for them. Because ultimately it's a spiritual work. And they need us to hold the rope not just financially, but in prayer as well.

That's the first thing way we're called to make Jesus the Lord of our time. Through persistent prayer that is thankful for the gospel and goes before the Lord on behalf of those ministering the gospel to those who have not heard.

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Second, and this isn't any less convicting to me, we are called to

Do the Work of an Evangelist

⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.
⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Paul shifts from his own work as a missionary to remind the Colossians that they are called to share the gospel in their own context as well.

Because he spent so much time warning them about false teachers in the letter, it was important that he make it clear that they weren't called to bunker down and avoid the world, but that they were supposed to take every opportunity to creatively and graciously share the good news of Jesus Christ.

His command is to “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders”. What he means by that is “live your life intentionally with those who are currently outside of the family of God.” And there are two ways he tells them to do that.

The first is “Making the best use of the time.” This phrase literally means “buy up the time.”

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Buy up the Time

When Owen was an infant he had some stomach issues and there was only one kind of formula that he could keep down. And of course it also happened to be the most expensive formula that is currently made.

We were spending what felt like a small mortgage payment every month just on formula. And we would do anything we could to find it cheaper. We would call different doctor's offices and ask if we could swing by and pick up their free samples. Emily would scour eBay and

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other websites to try to find it cheaper. Finally the time came for him to get off the formula, and a couple weeks later Emily and I were at a store and we saw on clearance an entire shelf of this formula. If he was still on the formula, you better believe we would have bought out every last can that was on that clearance rack.

That is the image that Paul gives for how we're to view our time. Thursday is grocery day, how can I use that time for the kingdom of God. When I go on vacation, when I go to work, when I'm mowing my lawn, when I'm getting ready to move into a retirement home, whatever it is, we're called to "buy up that time" for the kingdom of God and share our faith.

Let me ask you, how are you doing?

I have to brag on one of the pastors here. A few weeks ago we were talking about the Family Fridays in one of our staff meetings, and I asked David how he thought it was going. He pulled out his phone and had a list of all the people he talked to that he didn't recognize, facts about them, if they had a church home or not, etc. I didn't do that.

David was buying out the time at our Family Friday event. He saw the opportunity he had and he got the most out of it that he could. Several of you did the same.

Paul is saying you need to do the work of an evangelist by making the most of the time the Lord gives you. We're not all missionaries. We're not all called to cross cultural ministry. But we're all called to make the most of the time he gives us.

Second, we're called to speak intentionally.

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Speak Intentionally

6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Evangelism is a spiritual gift. Ephesians 4:11 says, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry."

Some people are gifted by God in evangelism and they're just better at it than others. And that's a gift to the church. My prayer is that many in this church would be spiritually gifted that way. We should be thankful for those people.

But it doesn't let us off the hook. The work of the evangelist is for everyone, not just those who have been gifted.

Last year I went to the New York City Spread Truth mission trip that several of you have been on where you do street evangelism for a week.

I was one of the leaders in our group along with a guy named Percy. Percy was a gifted evangelist like I've never seen before. The first day we were on our way to Harlem and we were stepping onto the Subway for the first time. As we stepped on, there was an older lady just absolutely screaming at a younger man.

So I kind of motioned to the team to make their way to the other side of the Subway. But not Percy.

He went up to the lady, calmed her down, and ended up sharing the gospel with both of them, sitting in-between them as they both listened intently to what he had to say. It was incredible. I'd never seen anything like it.

All week I ministered side by side next to Percy, and got to watch him be so natural at sharing his faith with strangers on the street. He always seemed to know exactly what to say. To be honest I was a little jealous.

I struggled, on the other hand. I often felt like I didn't know what to say, or that I was imposing. But I fought through it. And God was faithful. And I was able to have several fruitful conversations about the gospel with people I had never met.

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So speak intentionally. The gospel is a message that's spoken. It's impossible to communicate it without speaking it. You might have a neighbor or a coworker who is genuinely curious about what this whole Jesus thing is all about. Are you letting your fear of being awkward get in the way?

Our speech is supposed to be seasoned with salt. Which means it's not supposed to be bland. If one of your fears in sharing the gospel is that it's going to be boring, or not relevant, then you fundamentally misunderstand what the gospel is.

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The gospel is the greatest news there is. It's the greatest story ever told. The gospel changed everything about you.

Many people will reject your message. The bible says that. But that's not your problem. That's not for you to worry about. You need to worry about making the most of the time the Lord gives you, and letting your speech be seasoned with salt as you share, knowing that according to Romans 1 the gospel is the very power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Maybe you're gifted like Percy at evangelism. Maybe you feel like you're always tripping over your words.

Either way, if the gospel has truly changed you, if Jesus is truly the Lord of your life, you will be persistent in prayer, you will consistently pray for others doing ministry in all nations, you will make the most of the time that the Lord gives you, and your speech to others will be filled with the seasoning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I think we all, myself number one, can grow in these areas. Let's pray to that end.

Father, once again we gather together to marvel at the gospel. We are amazed at what you've done in sending your son to die on our behalf; so that—as unrighteous as we are—we might become the righteousness of God. So that us spiritual orphans could be adopted into the family of God—sons and daughters of the king.

Father I pray that as a result we would use our time intentionally for the kingdom of God. May we be a people who pray persistently—in thankfulness for the gospel and for those who are sharing the gospel overseas. May we also be a people who buy up the time that you give us, making the most of every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

I pray that we would fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. In his name we pray, amen.