

HEY NEIGHBOR

Colossians 4:2-6

ATTENTION: Video

ATTUNE:

² Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.

³ At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, ⁴ so that I may make it known as I should. ⁵ Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

Colossians 4:2–6

- Our text today is a part of Paul's challenge to Christians found in Colossians 3:1, *If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...*
 - Paul applies this principle to the Christian's personal spiritual growth 3:2-11
 - Then relationships within the community of faith 3:12-4:1
 - Finally, here in our text to those who are *outsiders* to the community of faith-the church (4:2-6)
 - The external aim of the challenge of this text is important for us as we think about what is before our church.

BODY:

THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

- The first thing to notice here is the priority of prayer to the external focus of the church!
 - Paul began this epistle in chapter 1 with a call to pray!
 - He expresses gratitude to God for them (1:3)
 - He prays that they would be *filled with the knowledge of his will...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...bearing fruit in every good work...* (1:9-12).

Prayer is essential to the mission of an external focus

- Notice how bold Paul is in his call for prayer:

1. v. 2 Devote yourself to prayer

- We are to apply devotion to our prayer lives
- Gr. could be translated "to persist obstinately"

- Church, prayer is not make-believe, fantasy, "Let's pretend that we can talk, and God will hear us."
 - Prayer is neglected especially when prosperity and success cause people to become very self-sufficient.
- An external mission will create stress, challenges, and desperation.
 - We are going to pray when having these feelings.
 - We will not be able to figure everything out.
 - And that's very good for our prayer lives!

2. v. 2 stay alert in it

- The word means be mentally alert, be awake, be alive!
 - Prayers were to be in tune with what is going on!
 - Know the circumstances of life
 - Be in tune with people and their struggles, etc.
- Informed prayer!
 - Likely to be more purposeful, personal, persistent.
 - The meaning ≠ stay awake when praying.
 - But, look around at what is happening in the world and culture, at the needs in your neighborhood, at the needs of people near you – know where you are needed.
 - Do not allow self-focus to drown out the needs of people and the world around you.
 - But, we have "woken-up" to why we are in the world, why we live where we live, why we do what we do, and how it all relates to God's kingdom.

3. v. 2 with thanks giving

- Gratitude is a central characteristic of what it means to live as a Christian in the world

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
Colossians 3:17

 - Be assured God is full of plans for your life!
 - Pursue that life with thanksgiving!!!

The opposite of this spirit of gratitude is a Christian who is self-focused, often bitter, and often unappreciative.

- A foul spirit can be a barrier to people coming to faith in Christ.

Why would they want what a bitter, selfish and ungrateful person has?

- Also, grateful people are more inclined to talk about the beauty of the gospel.
 - When your heart is full of gratitude, conversations tend to become opportunities to share your joy.
 - For some of us, the problem with evangelism is our lack of joy.
 - You easily talk about -gas for under \$3.00, -crazy cat video on Facebook, -value of whole grains.
 - But it is a struggle to talk about the gospel -part of the reason is we are just not that excited about it.
 - Gratitude is unusual in our culture and yet it is so central to the gospel.

WHAT TO PRAY

- Paul identifies some specific things for which the Colossians are to pray that are related to his personal ministry.
 - This is very helpful - it gives us a window into the heart of the Apostle Paul and a model to emulate.

1. Open Doors

- Paul specifically asks that the church would pray for open doors for the word.
 - Paul saw his life through this lens of walking through doors that God was opening.
 - Paul reported: that God had *opened a door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27)*
 - He told the church at Corinth *wide door for effective work has opened for me (1 Cor. 16:9)*.
 - Paul lived in this *open-door* mindset living his life on a gospel mission, always looking for open doors.
- Paul is talking about open doors in an interesting situation: *v.3 to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains*
- This is a remarkable thing about Paul; he always looks beyond his circumstances to what God may be doing.
- A great example of this:
 - 12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the*

gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is because I am in Christ. 14 Most of the brothers have gained confidence in the Lord from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the word fearlessly. 15 To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. 16 These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice 19 because I know this will lead to my salvation through your prayers and help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:12–19

- The question for us to wrestle with today is whether or not this is the lens through which we see life.
 - It is so easy to fall into the trap of not thinking or praying or using the doors God opens for us
 - Our American culture, while a blessing, can be deadly to our gospel witness because of its prosperity, -achievement -success and -pleasure.
 - It's so easy to forget why we are in our neighborhoods, in our places of employment, on the recreation soccer team, or in the school system.
 - We must see our lives through the lens of God-given open doors.
 - Praying for open doors.

2. Clear Words

- Another thing Paul requests prayer for is the ability to make the mystery of the gospel clear.
- He knew open doors were walked through by making known the message of the gospel.
- Paul is concerned that he makes it clear in the situation and to the people he encounters.
 - If you follow his ministry, you will see that Paul, while not changing the message of the Gospel would adjust the way he communicates it in order to better communicate in the unique circumstances he was in.

- Isn't that what we need as well?
 - Every person and situation we encounter is unique.
 - What we need from the Lord is to know how to make the gospel clear to each people.
- After God opens the door we have to open our mouths, praying that the gospel will be clearly understood.

PROJECT:

Prayer is essential to the mission of an external focus

- Praying for open doors and clear words engages you in God's mission.
 - It is one of the most challenging yet rewarding things that you can do in your walk with Christ.
 - I want to challenge you to start praying for God to give you open doors and clarity in the words that you speak.
 - We are talking about stepping out in faith
 - It is exciting to know that God is at work around you and through you.
 - Some of you have never experienced that.
 - For others, it has been a while since you experienced it.
 - The joy of seeing God working in and around you!

ACTION:

- Walk or drive your neighborhood while talking to God like the man in the video.

Hear the things he said...

- I want to do this within your power and strength Because honestly, I love you.
 - I am asking, "How do I do this?"
 - How do I overcome my fear and reach out to my neighbor?
 - How do I evangelize in my sphere of influence?
 - I want to love them. Not just with words but with action.
 - I have tasted that and I pray that I can play a part in giving that to the neighborhood, community.
 - It's my mission field, right?
 - I don't know where else to turn so I am praying to you.
- I want to serve you with my entire life.
- So here I am Lord, send me.