

## Christ-Centered Evangelism

Colossians 4:2-6 - NCBC, Nov 8, 2015

Main Point: **Christ-centered evangelism talks to God about people, and to people about God.**

- **Talk to God about People through Prayer (v. 2-4)**
  - Prayer's Passions
    - Faithful
    - Watchful
    - Thankful
  - Prayer's Petitions
    - For opportunities to proclaim Christ
    - For clarity to proclaim Christ
- **Talk to People about God through Witnessing (v. 5-6)**
  - The Powerful Witness of Wise Walking
    - Towards outsiders
    - Redeeming the time
  - The Powerful Witness of Flavored Talking
    - Always giving grace
    - Appetizing and beneficial

Application: **Go and prayerfully fulfill the mission of the church.**

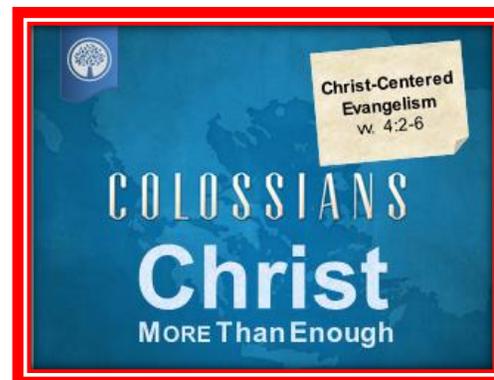
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### Opening Announcements:

*Today Baptism service of 5 believers at 12 noon*

*Veterans Recognition with Military BibleStick - Prayer*

<< Rock of Ages >>



Let's now continue our worship by reading from God's Word. Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 4.**

If you do not have a Bible with you today, we'd love to give you one. Please catch the attention of the ushers as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible to use this morning. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Next week we are excited to have Dr. Gene Getz in our pulpit. Dr. Getz is a faithful man of God who loves God's Word and has given his entire life to preaching Christ and planting churches. He is the editor of the new innovative *Life Essentials Study Bible*, and he's coming next week to preach on God's Word and then to demonstrate the new Study Bible for us. So invite a special friend to come with you next week as we look forward to Dr. Getz' faithful ministry to us.

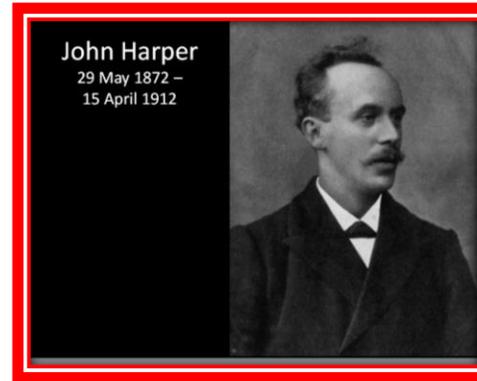
Our text this morning from Colossians 4 is found on page **985** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read our text from **Colossians 4:2**, reading from the **English Standard Version**:

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

**This is the word of our Lord. You may be seated.**

**Let's Pray.**

The most famous ship of all time is possibly the *Titanic*, the supposedly unsinkable ship that went down on its maiden voyage. Many movies have been made and many books written about the fateful journey. But few include the story of **Scottish evangelist John Harper**.



Harper was a passenger on the *Titanic*. In 1912 Harper was travelling to Chicago to preach at the Moody Church. When the *Titanic* struck the iceberg and began to sink he ran throughout the ship yelling

“Women, children, and unsaved into the lifeboats!”

When the ship finally went down he had already given his lifejacket to another passenger. Survivors report that to the very end Harper was witnessing to anyone who would listen. One survivor recalls clinging to one of the ships spars when Harper floated near him.

“Man, are you saved?” cried Harper.

“No I’m not” replied the man.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” pleaded Harper.

The waves carried Harper away and brought him back a little later. “Are you saved now?” asks Harper.

“No, I cannot honestly say that I am” says the man.

Again Harper pleads with him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”.

Shortly afterward Harper went down. But the man he had witnessed to survived. In a public meeting four years later, recounting this episode he said “There, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper’s last convert.”<sup>1</sup>

What gave 39 year old John the courage and grace to be so bold in his witness even to the end? Well some of Harper’s friends gave testimony that John’s life was characterized by extraordinary prayer.

His brother George wrote, “My beloved brother was a man mighty in prayer. He was a master of this holy art.”

A fellow evangelist gave this report, “He was always on fire for God and souls. How often I heard him say, when lying on his face before God covered with perspiration, ‘O God give me souls or I die!’”

John Harper’s life is a dynamic picture of **Colossians 4:2-6**. Christ saved him and gave him new life when he was 14 years old. And his ordinary life *thereafter* became extraordinary due to the indwelling power of our resurrected Christ!

And so it should be for all who have been made new in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Reported by Elesha Coffman, *Christianity Today*, August 7, 2000. The story is told in *The Titanic’s Last Hero* (Moody Press, 1997)

Our study of Christ’s sufficiency in Colossians has taught us that the redeemed live differently than the world in all their relationships, marriage, parenting, work, and even today as we learn, in relations with unbelievers in this world.

A Christ-centered life seeks to clearly proclaim Christ to lost neighbors and friends at every opportunity. **A Christ-centered life is a passionate lifestyle of evangelism.**

Now evangelism is a big word that is often misunderstood. What is evangelism, and what does it mean to evangelize others?

Evangelism is not inviting others to church. It is not a large event that often includes a tent. It is not just a program of the church, and it is not about manipulation, or winning an argument.

According to the New Testament, evangelism is just preaching the gospel – the “evangel.” **Evangelism is proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of lost sinners *for the purpose of their saving response in faith.***

So how is this really done? What would it look like for each of us to grow one step closer to Christ-like evangelism today?

From today’s text, we learn that



Christ-centered evangelism talks to God about people and to people about God.

Faithful evangelism begins with prayer, and is powered by prayer. Opportunities for evangelism are everywhere around all of us every day, and these opportunities must be seized.

So let's start by considering the heart of Christ-centered Evangelism... Talking to God about People through Prayer (v. 2-4)



Verse 2 transitions from the topic of Masters and Slaves to the topic of the believer's interaction with the world... reading,

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

This verse urges us to employ the right attitudes in our prayers for others around us. As we talk to God about lost people through prayer... our hearts must be driven by these internal **passions**. Our prayers must be Faithful, watchful, and thankful.



The direct statement in this verse is “continue steadfastly in prayer” or “devote yourselves to prayer.” Prayer is a battle and so we must be **Faithful**. Persistent. Putting forth intense effort, even in the face of difficulty.

The present tense indicates this is a lifestyle of persevering prayer ... putting the accent on a faithful intensity of prayer that means business.

The word that Paul uses here is the opposite of fainting... so don't quit praying church! Be faithful. Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17), for you ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

**Prayer is the means by which God's children participate in His sovereign grace.** God's sovereignty in man's salvation compels me towards prayer – believing that God alone is able to save, and that God chooses to use prayer *along with preaching* as the means by which men's hearts are humbled before their Shepherd King Jesus.

Do you believe that God sovereignly works through the means of your prayers to accomplish His saving work?

Not praying removes us from participating in God's work.<sup>2</sup> So intentionally purpose not only to be faithful, but also to be **watchful** in prayer..

*Being watchful in prayer with thanksgiving.*

This means “to keep alert.” To be vigilant. Being alive to the needs of the world around you and being prepared at all times to give our Master an account of the stewardship of our lives. Constantly be on the look-out – paying attention to your prayers.

How often are our prayers distracted by the screen, or our own racing thoughts, or other priorities? But to “watch and pray” means that we invest spiritual energy and priority to our prayers. We must be alert against the

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<sup>2</sup> James 4:2-3

spiritual drowsiness caused by attention to this world. Our prayers – especially for the lost – must not be left to apathetic routine, or when we are most tired.

Prayer's passions are faithfulness, watchfulness, and **thankfulness** as well. As verse 2 makes clear, the worship of thanksgiving should always be a part of our prayers – especially as we pray for the lost.

This is the sixth time in Colossians that Paul speaks of thanksgiving, for he knows the purifying power of such grace. Remember – at the time Paul is writing here, he is in prison for his preaching...but he is not consumed with self-pity or regret. Rather he urges us to pray with sincere gratitude – clearly seeing the obstacles and difficulties but rejoicing in the fact that God is sovereign and able to work.

Therefore, Christ-centered evangelism talks to God about people with faithful, watchful, and thankful hearts...these are the internal passions which should fuel our prayers.

But what specifically do Christ-centered evangelists' pray *for*?

In verse 3-4, we find the **petitions** of an evangelist's **prayers**:



Paul urges the Colossians in verse 3,

*At the same time* in other words – as whenever you pray – *pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word...*

In brief, Christ-centered evangelism starts with praying **for opportunities to proclaim Christ.**

Paul the evangelist is so focused on fulfilling God's mission that he did not ask for the prison doors to be opened, but rather for the doors of ministry to be opened. He'd rather be a faithful minister than a free man.

Church - we pray for what we want most....so do you pray for opportunities to share Christ with others? The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done in heaven...but God's will done on earth. **So what do you pray for, when you pray?**

God has called us to be fishers of men, right? Like one pastor said, "We've turned the commission around so

that we have become merely keepers of the aquarium. Occasionally I take some fish out of your fishbowl and put them into mine, and you do the same with my bowl. But we're all tending the same fish."<sup>3</sup>

Let's not forget we are on mission... this world is not about us. Pray specifically about people who are yet enslaved to sin – and pray for opportunities to tell them about God's saving grace.

The Apostle's request was simply **for clarity to proclaim Christ.**

*...to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I might make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

The whole reason Paul's in prison is for preaching the mystery of Christ. But still he prays for clarity to proclaim Christ just as God would have him to speak.

Such is the prayer of all Christ-centered evangelists. Praying for bold clarity. So that as God grants opportunities – you would speak of Christ accurately, truthfully, and clearly.

This is a prayer that God longs to answer.

So this week, will you pray fervently that God will give you at least one opportunity to clearly share Christ with someone? And then come back and share with your Life Group, ABF class, or Bible Study group next week on

<sup>3</sup> The late Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopalian bishop

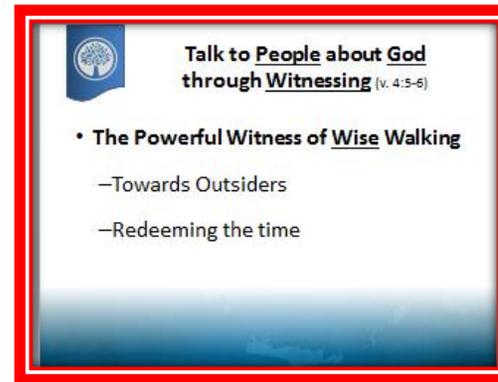
how God answered that prayer. Will you do that? Let's encourage and build each another up, as we faithfully live out our calling as God's ambassadors here in our region.

But Christ-centered prayer begs God for the privilege of being part of the answer... so out of our prayer closets comes a **powerful witness as we talk to people about God.** (v. 5-6)



After establishing the priority of prayer, Paul goes on to highlight **The Powerful Witness of Wise Walking** in verse 5,

*Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.*



Church, as an ambassador for Christ, our lives will be the only Bible some people are willing to read.<sup>4</sup>

So what does it mean to walk or live wisely in this world? To conduct ourselves in such a way as to demonstrate to unbelievers that Christ is more than enough – to live so as to make Christ attractive and appealing to those who don't yet know Him personally.

Basically it's this simple – **the reputation of God and His Gospel in our community depends upon how Christians live in our community.**

The powerful witness of a life that matches its lips is the greatest apologetic for the sufficiency of Christ!

So notice ... we are all called to "walk in wisdom **towards outsiders.**" I found these last two words instructive... not *avoiding* outsiders. Don't live so that you never interact with those who are outside of Christ – those who are

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<sup>4</sup> William J. Toms

non-Christians. Literally the words mean walk continually toward or “face-to-face” with the unsaved.

Biblically the main duty of the church here on earth is to evangelize – to proclaim Christ to the lost – so that they might respond in faith and be saved. This is our mission. It’s not primarily fellowship. It’s not primarily teaching. It’s not primarily praise. All of these priorities are good and right of course... but these are not the *primary* function of the church on earth – in fact all of these things can be and will be done better in heaven!

As Pastor John MacArthur rightly reminds us, “Fellowship, teaching, and praise are not the mission of the church, but are rather the preparation of the church to fulfill its mission of winning the lost.”<sup>5</sup>

Since evangelism is the mission of God’s church – is it the mission of your life? As a member of Christ’s church, are you actively participating in the mission that God has assigned to you?

Whose salvation are you now praying for? And how are you purposefully seeking to walk in wisdom towards that person... intentionally pursuing every opportunity that God would give you to tell them of Christ and His grace?

Verse 5 is clear – since we are called to wise walking... we will **redeem the time**.

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur Commentary on Matthew 28

Literally, the phrase means to “buy-back” or redeem the time. Make your life count – use every opportunity to the full for the glory of Christ!

Perhaps there’s someone in your life that would listen if you wrote them a card, or invited them to coffee, or purposefully stopped by to pray with them this week?

If the foundation of your life is prayer, and you add the subfloor of a holy and loving life... grace-saturated words will effectively complete your Christ-centered evangelism.

For verse 6 teaches us **The Powerful Witness of Flavored Talking**,



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

Let your speech always be gracious or **always giving grace**. In the context – speech here emphasizes what we say to unbelievers about God.

Remember that old phrase, “preach the gospel, and if necessary use words.” Well **Col 4:6** joins the biblical chorus of **Romans 10** and **2 Cor 5** shouting – words indeed are necessary! Believers on God’s mission must intentionally use words as often as God provides opportunity to do so!

But the kinds of words that we use must always – consistently – be grace-giving, wholesome, truthful, loving, and thoughtful. There is no witnessing in arguing. Rather the words of God’s children should be an expression of God’s grace in our hearts – for out of the heart the mouth speaks. (Lk 6:45)

That word always is convicting isn’t it? Yep – it means the same in English as it does in the Greek. Even when we’ve been taken advantage of or provoked. Even when we’re sitting in a Roman prison for the preaching of Christ ... may our words always be giving grace for the glory of God.

Just to drive this point home, consider the rest of verse 6:

*Seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

The point is simple – Christ-centered evangelism uses words that are **Appetizing and beneficial**.

In biblical times, salt prevented corruption as a preservative, and it made the foods taste better.

Here’s the point – talk to others about Christ and His glory in a way that is both purifying and cleansing and witty and compelling. Don’t bore people with the truths of God becoming a man – being born of a virgin – dying a substitutionary death as the Passover Lamb of God – only to be raised from the dead 3 days later to give everlasting life to whosoever will believe on Him! Don’t bore people with the ministry of God’s Spirit who indwells our hearts and sets us free from the slavery of sin! No. Open your mouth and take every opportunity to tell others about God’s grace in a manner that is real, authentic, tactful, and appealing.

The young salesman was disappointed about losing a big sale, and as he talked with his manager he lamented, "I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." The manager replied, "Son, take my advice: your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty."<sup>6</sup>

So it is with evangelism. Our lives and lips should be so filled with Christ that they create a thirst for the Gospel.

The Christ-centered evangelist knows that God has given the mission of showing and telling Christ to the world...so he prays... and talks to God about people...and he watches his life and his words carefully...for he knows that nothing will silence the lips like a careless life.

So how will you choose to respond to the teaching of Colossians 4:2-6 this morning? My prayer is that you would,

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<sup>6</sup> *Preaching*, November-December 1985.



Go and prayerfully fulfill the mission of the church.

J.I. Packer's excellent book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* tells the following story:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who were saved wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money to support its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the

sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Now, the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired life-boat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a symbolic life-boat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

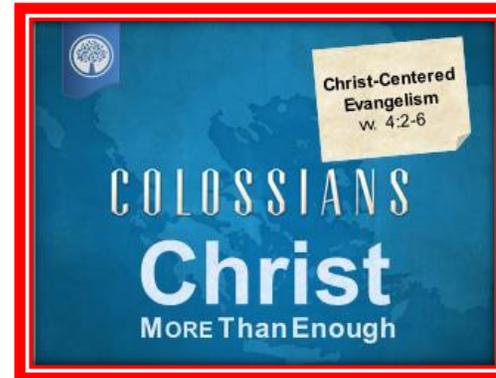
Dear Church...may we never forget our calling. It's time we prayerfully go...to show and tell Christ in our watching community. Prayerfully go and live out a lifestyle of Christ-centered evangelism.

It starts with submitting your own life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Repenting from your pride and self-reliance. Repenting from a life ruled by fear, self-centeredness, and comfort. Putting your faith in Christ alone for the salvation of your own sins. There is no greater witness for Christ than a transformed life.

And then as you pray - have the right expectations – the world hated Christ so people will also hate you. This is one part of life where talk isn't cheap if it's built on a consistent walk. So make sure those outside Christ hate you for His message of grace... not your unattractive or argumentative methods.

Church, our time is short. Let's speak up. Start the conversation. Use the Bible. Be clear. Ask good questions. And may God answer our prayers.

For Christ-centered evangelism starts by talking to God about people & then seeks to humbly to a part of the answer to those prayers.



Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

At this time, we will dismiss those getting baptized and their families so they can prepare for our baptism service which will follow immediately after this service in the South Sanctuary.

For the rest of us, let's stand as we sing our closing song together.

Closing Song – <<Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus>>

**Jude 24-25** *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

Parents - please promptly pick up your children as we all make our way into the South Sanctuary for 5 baptisms which will be starting in just a few minutes.