

NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON July 23rd am

Series in Colossians "Rooted and built up in Christ" Pt 11

"The power of prayer"

Text: Colossians 4 v 2 > 4 v 6

Scripture references from the ESV

Colossians 4:2-4:6 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.

In many areas of our culture, we are quite good at distinguishing between different groups of people. In football, for example, you can tell who supports which club by the shirt they wear.

What is the distinguishing mark of the Christian life? The Christian life is a complete transformation, as Paul has been showing us throughout this letter. We should certainly look different, given that Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and also made us co-heirs of his fulness. Because of this

- We are counted as his children and are dearly loved
- We are counted as holy and blameless in his sight, no matter how much we fall short
- We have been knitted together with him, and with one another
- We have been filled in Christ – our old life died with him on the cross and we have new selves, being born again

We should be distinctive, having put to death our old selves and instead clothing ourselves with compassionate hearts, humility and kindness. We have seen how the Gospel should be working itself out in our relationships with one another and increasingly, we will be loving the people around us as a natural outworking of the new self.

Yet there is one mark of distinction that stands out as the thing that every follower of Christ can and will do from day one! Out of all that makes up the Christian life, what might that be? Is it:

- Gathering together on a Sunday – going to church? Not everyone can get to a church
- Reading the Bible and hearing God speak through it – not everyone can read or even has access to a Bible
- Telling people about Jesus – you might be surrounded by Christians and again not everyone has that possibility.

**The one thing that anyone, anywhere, who turns to Jesus can do is
pray**

The Colossian church is full of Christians and Paul's instruction to them is to continue to pray. His expectation is that, even though they only have limited access to scripture, they are already praying because that is what all Christians do.

Prayer is the visible distinction of a follower of Christ

In these verses, Paul reinforces not only the joy of this gift, but also the outworking of it – its very effectiveness. He shows us why we should keep on praying.

1. We should keep on praying because prayer roots us in who we are in Christ.

Paul's whole aim in this letter can be summed up in **Ch2:6-7**

**Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in
him**

and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul's desire is for all Christians to live out their new identity, rooted in the gospel alone and built up in Christ alone, as he reigns in their hearts as Lord. We need to keep on praying because it is the key to doing this. We are called to be steadfast in prayer (v2 above). Our first priority is our communication with God in prayer. Jesus himself taught this, and

told the people a parable about always praying not giving up. That parable told of a widow who got her way with an

uncaring judge simply because she nagged him. We, on the other hand, are able to talk to the most loving judge and the most caring Lord. Why would we not do that?

The early church was defined by prayer. In all his letters, Paul talks about how he is praying for the various churches. Prayer defined his life, as it should define ours.

a) Prayer ensures that we bring everything to the Lord. It roots us in who we are in Christ, as we are watchful. We need to be watchful of the world and what is going on. We need to be watchful of our struggles and the temptation to revert to our old life. We need to be watchful of the needs around us. We are to bring all of that continuously to our God, but we are so tempted not to. We are tempted to live in our own strength and rely on our own abilities, knowledge and power.

We like to think that we are in control of all things, but the truth is we cannot manage on our own. We do not control everything. Only God does. When we try to control what is going on, we become less watchful. We hear the voice of the world far more than we hear the voice of Christ, and our identity gets wrapped up in worldly things. We get anxious and stressed, because we cannot control what is going on.

Continuous prayer creates a watchfulness that keeps us aware of the philosophies that distort and the TV shows and books that subtly try to reshape our worldview away from a Christ-centred one.

b) Prayer makes us thankful for who we are in Christ. As we pray and set our hearts and minds on God, we realise how amazing he is, and come to truly revere him. Our hearts become full of thankfulness even on the worst days. You can look back over the day, every day, no matter how hard it has been and give thanks for three good things:

God has been faithful to you

God still calls you his child

God is still working in you

That is what prayer does. It roots us in who we are in Christ.

How are we to be continuous and steadfast in prayer? There are days when you can spend a good chunk of time in prayer, and this should be far more of a priority than it is for most of us. There are many types of prayer including:

- Quick-fire prayers at moments of urgent need
- Confession – a healthy unloading of our sin
- Written prayers – sometimes it is helpful to use the prayers of saints who have gone before us. Sometimes it's helpful to write down our own prayers
- Thankfulness – there is always something for which to thank God

Then again, as one commentator has said:

'Prayer is not so much the speaking of words as the posture of the heart'

So we set our minds and hearts on God at all times. We conform ourselves to the Spirit and strive in all things to connect continuously to him, acknowledging our need of him at every moment and asking him to strengthen us and keep us rooted in Christ alone.

2. **We should keep on praying because it is what makes the difference when we share Christ.** Our communication with God impacts our communication with the world. Paul speaks of thanksgiving (v2). Because of that rooting in thanksgiving, our prayers become less selfish.

Paul was in prison because he had shared Christ and, in his position, our instinct would probably be to pray to be set free from prison! That is not what Paul asked for. Rather, he simply asks for more opportunities to share Christ no matter where he is. His life of prayer has shaped him to be someone who wants to share the good news of the Gospel and he is only thankful that God is using him in that way.

Prayer is what makes the difference in sharing Christ

This is a model for us to follow. The desires of our prayers should be for God's glory, not our own, so that the good news can be shared across the world. Doors open through prayer, not because of man's strength. Over the centuries, many missionaries have proved the truth of this.

We are called to pray for those on the front line of missionary work, both overseas and locally.

This is not just for the 'greats' of the Christian life, like Paul. We are called to share Christ clearly as well. Prayer should be similarly shaping our outlook. In fact, our role in this is not complicated. Once God opens a door, perhaps in a brief moment of conversation with someone, we are to share Christ clearly. You do not need a degree in theology, but you do need to bathe that moment in prayer, relying on the Spirit of God to do the work of taking that message and transforming hearts.

Prayer reminds us that it is not our job to transform hearts or to grow hearts.

Our job is to share the message of Christ clearly.

Paul expects that those who are rooted in Christ through prayer will naturally speak of Christ out of the overflow of their heart (vv5-6 above). That person will also pray for wisdom in their interaction with others.

Prayer is what makes the difference in sharing Christ.

As we understand more and more the grace we have received in Christ, so it will overflow into how we speak. As grace flows into the heart, it flows outward in kindness. We are to be loving and patient in how we communicate, and we are not to antagonise people. That is not speaking with grace.

We must also be clear – seasoned with the salt of Gospel truth. Being gracious does not mean never speaking up. It means being clear on who we are rooted in, and being joyful. We are bringing good news, not boring news!

We are called to wisely and graciously say no when we are being asked to conform to an ideology which is clearly against Christ's teaching, such as the LGBTQI agenda. We are to have an answer ready that is gracious but seasoned with salt. None of us will be able to do that unless we are praying about it. We are to commune with Christ, rooting ourselves in him, so that wisdom, graciousness and saltiness abound.

We need to be praying for each other and ourselves, for our brothers and sisters across the world, for our mission partners and for those in our local churches.

- Pray for our brothers and sisters in the Church of England at this time as they graciously stand up to unbiblical leadership, in a way that is seasoned with the salt of the gospel.
- Pray for those on the frontline daily at work, or at school, college and university.

- Pray for those involved in community groups – orchestras and choirs for example.

Prayer is the distinguishing mark in the Christian life because it is the Christian life.

It is the key to a life of rooting ourselves in Christ and living out who we are in Christ.