

Famous Last Words Colossians 4:2-6

Intro:

- **Intro next series beginning Oct. 1:** The Reformation at 500: 5 Solas (and more)

You have probably heard the phrase, "*famous last words*." I know I say them when I am skeptical that someone will follow through with a commitment or someone is about to do something really dumb. Last words are important. This is why when someone is dying people will want to know what the person's last words were. Also after someone dies we gather together as a family to hear the will and his final wishes read, why, these are his final words. Why do we do this? It is because last words seem to carry a special significance.

Jesus last words from the cross just before He died were, "*It is finished*." Redemption was complete and finally everything that had been said about God's Son since Genesis was finished. Then just before Jesus goes back to Heaven in Matthew 28, He gives the Great Commission. Last words are important.

Likewise, the last words of Paul's letter to the Colossian church in Colossians 4:2-6 are important. These are the Apostle last words of instruction in Colossians. We will conclude the letter next Sunday with his final greeting but these are his final words of instruction.

Paul's last words are not complicated. They are clear, simple, timeless truths that often get forgotten, ignored or, for some of us, seem impossible. If you are a Christian you are not going to hear anything new this morning but simple be reminded of our mission in life as representatives of our Supreme King.

- **The main point of the message this morning is actually a summary of Proverbs 11:30.** For our purposes, let me say it this way for us: *The wise follower of Christ prays and seeks to win souls for the King.*
- **There are two points to the message this morning that will guide us as we walk through the text:**
 1. Live a Praying Life
 2. Live an Evangelistic Life

I. Live a Praying Life (Colossians 4:2-4)

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

- **I recently heard a quote by Paul Miller on our frustration with prayer. (Book: *A Praying Life*).** The quote is a little longer than I normally read but I want to read it nonetheless. I think many of us might identify with what he says about prayer:

"We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our bodies screams, 'Get to work.'

If we try to be quiet, we are assaulted by what C. S. Lewis called 'the Kingdom of Noise.' Everywhere we go we hear background noise. If the noise isn't provided for us, we can bring our own via iPod. Even our church services can have that same restless energy. There is little space to be still before God.

One of the subtlest hindrances to prayer is probably the most pervasive . . . we prize intellect, competency, and wealth. Because we can do life without God praying seems nice but unnecessary. Money can do what prayer does, and it is quicker and less time-consuming . . . As a result, exhortations to prayer don't stick.

It's worse if we stop and think about how odd prayer is. When we have a phone conversation, we hear a voice and can respond. When we pray, we are talking to air. Only crazy people talk to themselves. How do we talk with a Spirit, with someone who doesn't speak with an audible voice?

And if we believe that God can talk to us in prayer, how do we distinguish our thoughts from his thoughts? Prayer is confusing. We vaguely know that the Holy Spirit is somehow involved, but we are never sure how or when a spirit will show up or what that even means.

Forget about God for a minute. Where do you fit in? Can you pray for what you want? And what's the point of praying if God already knows what you need? Why bore God? It sounds like nagging. Just thinking about prayer ties us all up in knots.”¹

- **Can you identify with what Paul Miller has written?** I can. My frustrations may not be his but I have them. I feel like a failure when it comes to praying without ceasing. While we may all feel like failures this morning, we should be glad Scripture is constantly calling us back to persist in prayer. We should repent of our failures and keep on praying. So let's allow this text to do exactly what it is meant to do remind us of two basic commands in the Christians life: **pray** and to **share the gospel with others**.

- **In v. 2 we're going to look at how to pray and in vv. 3-4 we will find what to pray.**

A. How to pray (v. 2): *"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."*

- **This verse tells us to pray:** *persistently, expectantly and thankfully.*
- **Pray Persistently: "Continue steadfastly in prayer"**
 - The Greek word "continue steadfastly in prayer" means "to be devoted to prayer" and "to pray persistently obstinately" without quitting.
 - **In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus gives the parable of the obstinate widow who sought justice in order to teach his disciples how to pray persistently:** *"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' " ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*
 - **Jesus ends the parable catching us with our guards down.** We are hearing about being persistent in prayer and then all of the sudden he ends the parable by connecting persistence in prayer to our faith in a loving Father who is in Heaven. Persistent prayer means believing. It means believing that God is listening and He will act because He is good.
 - **Application: What does it mean to pray persistently?**
 - **Praying persistently means we are exercising our faith.** It means we are continuing to trust God even when we cannot see how things are going to work out. Praying is one of the means that keeps us believing and persevering in our faith.

¹ Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, pgs. 15-16.

As one pastor said: *prayer is the breath of the Christian life, when you stop praying you stop breathing and when you stop breathing—you die.* That is a very provocative way to say it but I think we get his point. Brothers and sisters don't stop praying because praying strengthens our faith and keeps us in the love of God.

- **Praying persistently means praying confidently:** Jesus' point is we should pray and not give up because we have a Heavenly Father who actually loves us. A few verses after the parable of the persistent widow Jesus calls the children to himself by saying, "*let the little children come to me.*" It is no accident that verse follows this passage.

Brothers and sisters we can boldly go before His throne of grace with our requests. There is nothing to fear because Christ is our righteousness. We have a loving Heavenly Father who does not grow weary of us asking Him to hear our requests. He is not offended when we keep returning to Him over and over again so do not give up.

- **Praying persistently means Christ is being formed in you:** Jesus prayed persistently during His life and ministry and He still continually mediates on behalf of His people. So when we become persistent in our praying it means His life is being formed in us as we are praying as Christ did and we are learning to walk in Him, being rooted and built up in Him and established in our faith (**Colossians 2:6-7**).

It also means we are learning to pray as Christ did—that our desire is to see God's will done. Before He went to the cross Jesus asked the Father if this cup of suffering could pass from Him and He concluded His prayer by confessing that not His will be done by the Father's will be done. As Christ is formed in us it will be our desire to see God's will done even when it is painful.

- **Finally praying persistently glorifies God:** What does praying persistently mean except that Christ is supreme. **Colossians 1:20** tells us that Christ made peace between us and God by the blood of his cross. So when you pray in Jesus' name it is like signing a check at the bottom only it is signed in Christ's blood. His blood is our only means of going before God in prayer. *Prayer is a blood bought gift that glorifies our Savior.*

- **Pray Expectantly: "being watchful in it"**

- **Secondly he calls the church to be watchful in their praying.** Being watchful in prayer means to pray and expect God to answer. The opposite of praying expectantly means to pray blindly not looking for God to answer. It means you are not thinking about your prayers beyond your time in prayer.
- **Illst: Perhaps you are like me and you struggle here.** There are many days I pray and then I forget what I have prayed. Now I am glad God does not forget my prayers but how much sweeter would it be if I remembered what I had prayed for that morning.
- **Illst: We need to learn to pray like the wonderful British minister, George Mueller.** In the 19th century, Mueller ran orphanages in England. Mueller ran his orphanages by depending on God in prayer. He simply prayed and asked God to provide. Mueller's biographer wrote that the Mueller and those who served with him sang this hymn without reservation:

*I believe God answers prayer,
Answers always, everywhere;
I may cast my anxious care,
Burdens I could never bear,
On the God who heareth prayer.
Never need my soul despair*

*Since He bids me boldly dare
To the secret place repair,
There to prove He answers prayer.²*

- May we pray as Mueller did with expectant hearts, looking to Jesus.
- **Application: What does being watchful in prayer mean?**
 - **First: what expectant prayer is not.** It is not presumptive prayer. Jesus taught us to pray and expect an answer. Jesus said after giving the parable of the man asking for bread in **Luke 11** to “Ask and it will be given to you.” To pray persistently and expectantly means to pray as the Lord taught us to pray and ask God to make His name holy in how and what we are praying for. It is praying God’s will be done.
 - **Praying expectantly is praying looking for God to answer.** We need to think about what we prayed for and look for how God is working. Pay attention to how He is working in your heart after you pray and pay attention to the circumstances around you. The opposite of this word in Scripture is to be blind, to not observe and to not pay attention. So don’t pray blindly, pray expectantly.
 - **Expectant prayer is an act of worship.** Persistent, expectant prayer rivets our attention on God and that honors God. It keeps us in unbroken conversation with God throughout the day. We continually go to Him and make our request known and conclude by asking Him to honor Himself in what we have prayed for. This causes us to humble ourselves before our King and to obey.
- **Pray Thankfully: “with thanksgiving”**
 - **Word *thankfully* means exactly what it means.** It means to pray with gratitude toward God. To pray with thanksgiving toward God is evidence of faith and dependence on God. To pray with thanksgiving keeps us from praying selfishly because we are able to pray with a God-centeredness in our prayers.
 - **Giving thanks is a key theme in the letter to the Colossian church.** This is the seventh time in the letter that Paul has used a form of the word *thanks*.
 - **Colossians 1:3:** “We always **thank** God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.”
 - **Colossians 1:12:** In v. 12 Paul said he was “giving **thanks** to the Father” who qualified the Colossians believers to share in the inheritance of the saints.
 - **Colossians 2:7:** Paul told the Colossian believers they were to “abound in **thanksgiving**.”
 - **Colossians 3:15-17:** “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be **thankful**.¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God.¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through him.”
 - **Colossians 4:2:** Finally in **Colossians 4:2** Paul closes out his letter just as he began it by emphasizing thanksgiving in prayer. In **Colossians 1:3** he said he gave thanks and now he calls them to practice thanksgiving in their prayers.
 - **Application: What does it mean to pray with thanksgiving?**
 - **First to pray with thanksgiving on our lips means we know God is going to work things out for His pleasure and our joy.** When we can pray and say to the Lord, “Father I thank you for how you are going to answer this prayer.”

² Bryan Chapell, *Praying Backwards: Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus’ Name*, p. 106.

Illst: I remember how one of our old deacons at First Pittsburg prayed. His name was Johnny Franklin. Johnny was a widower at the time but now he has gone on to be with the Lord. I remember hearing him pray one day and he prayed the sweetest, simplest prayers and after all he had prayed for he closed his prayer with confession of dependence and faith by saying, "And Lord do all that pleases you." I thought to myself, "I need to be thankful and dependent on the God like that. I need to trust that when God does all that pleases him it is always best." Johnny's wife had died and he had reason to be bitter, to despair, to be angry at God but he wasn't. Instead he was thankful and trusting of the Lord. Praying thankfully keeps God at the center of our prayers.

- **Second to pray with thanksgiving means to keep our eyes on Christ's victory.** When Paul says that our praying is to be done with thanksgiving means we do not fight as losers or even as those who are uncertain. We know God will always do what is best because He has won the victory.

Illst: In the Garden of Gethsemane, before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed and asked for the cup of suffering to be removed from Him but it was not. He suffered and died by going to the cross. What looked like defeat in the eyes of the world was actually victory. So no matter how the prayer is answered remember the victory is won in Christ already.

Praying with thanksgiving on our lips gives God the glory for His victory in Christ! It guides us away from living our lives before God as if we are trying to repay a debt. All we ever do is receive from the Lord so we might as well give thanks to Him. We give thanks to the giver of all good gifts, especially for our salvation.

B. What to pray for (vv.3-4):

"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."

- **Pray for those who labor to spread the gospel:** *"At the same time, pray also for us"*
 - Paul's request was that the Colossian church pray for him and his mission team. They were on the front lines proclaiming the gospel and needed prayer. Likewise we should pray for pastors and missionaries and for all who are engaged in evangelistic efforts.
- **Application:**
 - **Verse 5** helps us build our prayer lists. Pray for those who are laboring to spread the gospel . . .
 - The prayer request for the Iowa Missions offering is in the back of the worship guide. Those prayer requests fit how we are being called to pray in this text. Pray for pastors, missionaries and for opportunities to spread the gospel. Pray for men and women to be equipped and sent out to spread the gospel.
 - Pray for the leaders in our church who labor to equip and lead others to spread the gospel in our church and community.
- **Pray for the Lord give us opportunities for gospel conversations:** *"Pray . . . that God may open to us a door for the word"*
- **What is significant about Paul's prayer request is that he is in prison for preaching the gospel** and yet he is asking for more opportunities to—preach the gospel. Wow!! He is not asking to be let out of prison or to have his guards be nice to him or anything else. I mean think of all of the things he might have asked the church to pray for and his concern was having more opportunities to preach the gospel.
- **Honestly I was deeply convicted as I mulled over this verse this week.** I look back over my pitiful prayers of safety and comfort and ease and thought to myself, *"How shallow and unconcerned for the things of God I am."*
- **Application:**

- **Do you pray like Paul while in the middle of suffering?** Are you asking God to give you opportunities to share the gospel while in some seemingly, forsaken place in life or in the busyness of life?
- **Do you pray regularly that the lost will be saved?** Is this a concern of yours as a Christian?
- **Here is what we need to do:**
 - We should just outright pray that God give us opportunities to share Christ.
 - We should pray that He would give us boldness and not fear man's response to the gospel.
 - Is your small group praying like Paul's small group (his little mission team) did? Let me challenge our small groups to be praying for opportunities and praying for the lost to be saved?
- **Friend if you are here today and you are not a Christian, you need to know you were prayed for this week to come to faith in Jesus.** You need to know that Jesus prayed for those who would come to faith in Him. He prayed for the lost and not only that He sought them and He died for them. Have you trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior?
- **Pray for the gospel to be made clear:** *"To declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison."*
- This is part of the verse is loaded with implications. Not only is Paul asking for opportunities to share the gospel but when he has those evangelistic conversations he wants to be able to clearly explain the mystery of Christ. He wants people to understand.
- **Application:**
- **So in order to speak the word clearly in gospel conversation implies that we understand the gospel.** This means we must spend time in the word in order to learn the word so we can share the word. You may not share a rehearsed gospel presentation (nothing wrong with those) but the witness you share is how the gospel relates to real life.
- **On the other hand, you might have to have an extended and deeper doctrinal conversation with others.** So as we pray to have gospel conversations let's also pray that we accurately proclaim the gospel to our friends, our neighbors and in our city. We should pray that we speak clearly to people so that they understand the mystery of Christ:
 - *That the Son of God became man.*
 - *That He was born of a virgin.*
 - *That He was sinless throughout His whole life and died perfect and sinless.*
 - *That He was fully God and fully man (the incarnation).*
 - *That he died in the place of sinners and bore the curse of the law in their place and for their sin even though he was sinless.*
 - *That he rose from the dead and reigns in heaven today.*
 - *That the ungodly can be justified by faith alone in Christ.*
 - *And that Christ dwells in our hearts of all who believe and that he has sealed with his Holy Spirit for his glory.*³
- **These are all things you might have to explain but the point is we must grow in our understanding of the gospel throughout our lives so we can share our faith.**

II. Live an Evangelistic Life (Colossians 4:5-6)

"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."

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/walk-in-wisdom-toward-those-outside>.

- Paul continues to challenge the Colossians in prayer and evangelism by calling them to get wisdom in order to be able to share Christ by sharing the gospel with unbelievers.
- **Verse 5 says: "making the best use of the time."** Literally means to redeem the time. Paul used this phrase in other places to describe Christ's redemption of us.
- **Verse 6** completes the call for redemptive lifestyle because not only is what we do supposed to be redemptive but also our language is to be redemptive. Redemptive language is gracious language that is seasoned with salt. Salt is symbolic of endurance and value. This is language with unbelievers that has eternal value this is the gospel.
- **The wisdom in vv. 5-6 is redemptive wisdom. It is wisdom that is aimed at living an evangelistic life.** It is wisdom that surveys where one lives and works and then prays for the people, prays for opportunities to share Christ and then makes a plan to **serve wisely** and **speak wisely**.
- **This had to be challenging for Paul because he was in prison when he wrote this letter.** I am sure the men who guarded him were not especially nice to him. So if you think you have a difficult co-worker just imagine being in prison and thinking: *"How can I love this prison guard (my neighbor) here? How can I be wise and make the best use of my time?"* It was not like Paul was going anywhere, he had nothing but time. Paul had to be thinking of ways to transition to the gospel, declare the mystery of Christ to them.
- **It would have been easy for Paul to destroy his witness to the guards.** All he had to do was begin:
 - Complaining about his situation.
 - Show a lack of trust in the Savior he was preaching.
 - Stop praying.
 - Live an ungodly life while in prison. Perhaps begin bribing the guards, cursing and gossiping. He had plenty of opportunities to blow his witness.
 - Instead Paul gave credibility to the power of the gospel by his faith in Christ in the worst of situations. An example of this was when Paul and Silas were in prison and they were singing hymns. As they sang and worshipped God the place was shaken, their chains fell off but no one left. The guard came in and eventually asked, *"What must I do to be saved?"* Paul and Silas made the best use of their time in prison.
- Paul's points in **vv. 5 & 6** can be summarized in these two points: **Serve wisely and talk wisely with outsiders.** In other words, love your neighbors well.
- **Application:**
 - Brothers and sisters in Christ to apply **vv. 5-6** in our lives means we acquire the wisdom to serve those who are not Christians. This means we consider how to serve and we make time to serve them.
 - **If you are trying to reach out to those in your neighborhood then perhaps you work with your small group and together you pray and plan a time to invite your neighbors over.**
 - If some of your neighbors are of a different religion or have different views on things you make sure you learn how to talk with them. If your neighbors are Muslim then learn how to talk with them without offending them. If your neighbors are homosexual or transgender learn how to serve and have respectful discussions with them. I am not saying compromise your beliefs but know how to give gracious answers to difficult questions.

- If someone has dietary concerns perhaps you learn about those before they come over and you have the kind of food they can eat.
- **If you are trying to share your faith at work you might not be able to have many discussions because of company or government policy. How can you share your faith in that context?**
 - Do you work hard? One of the ways Christians destroy their witness is by not working hard and so one way to be a witness is to work hard.
 - How do you talk about your co-workers? Do you gossip? Are you suspicious of others or do you encourage them? Is there a way to discourage gossip when it does happen?
 - How can you show kindness to others?

Conclusion

I want to conclude by reading the Apostle Paul's explanation of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31: *"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

Jesus Christ is the ultimate display of God's wisdom and not just any wisdom but God's wisdom is redemption of foolish sinners. Jesus is the embodiment of God's wisdom and He came and bore the wrath of God on the cross for the foolishness of our sin. He never committed one sin, He never did one foolish thing in His life and yet our Supreme Savior died on the cross for us.

Remember Proverbs 11:30? "he who wins souls is wise." Jesus is the fulfillment of this verse. He won sinners by the blood of His cross and now He calls us to join Him in winning souls.