

## The sermon

### Intro

According to our church's Ministry Handbook, it's my duty to "promote spiritual interests of the church." So I've taken four weeks to consider our church's mission statement which reads:

**"We exist to glorify God by building a community that is growing in Christlikeness and making new disciples."**

We've learned that the Bible is good for us. We've learned about spiritual progress. Killing sin. Adding godliness. Sanctification. We've learned about local church community. We don't go about Bible learning and sanctification as isolated individuals. Same with evangelism.

The community built by God that's growing in Bible knowledge and practical holiness and love for one another is a church that's growing in evangelism. Bible. Spiritual progress. Community. Evangelism. These should be our passions.

**BIG IDEA: We're saved to speak the gospel to non-Christians.**

### READ PASSAGE

#### Body

#### Passage Focus

I'll work through Colossians 4:2-6 and some other passages. The points are a logical step by step approach to evangelism. In case there's any confusion, let me clearly define evangelism.

Evangelism is speaking the gospel to a non-Christian, including urging them to repent and believe.

#### Point 1: Expectation – disciples will be made (Matt 28:16-20)

#### Explanation

After Jesus rose from the dead, he gave the 11 remaining apostles some instructions.

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:16-20*

The apostles were commanded to go into the world. Why? To **"make disciples of all nations."**

Sounds like people will believe when they speak. Sounds like disciples will be made. Sounds like success is sure. Sounds like they should have some optimism.

Another reason for confidence: Jesus is with them. Physically, Jesus is at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places. Spiritually, Jesus is in us and with us. We're not on our own! The mission won't fail because Jesus will empower bold proclamation (Acts 1:8). The mission won't fail because Jesus will draw sinners to himself (John 12:32).

#### Today

If we read our Bibles, we should have an optimistic realism. Yes, people will be indifferent. Yes, people will be angry. And yes, people will believe. That's what Jesus assumes. If we assume no one's gonna believe when we speak so why

bother?, how motivated will we be to speak the gospel? If we believe disciples are going to be made, even if we don't know where the disciples are going to come from, and we might see some surprises, might we be motivated to speak?

We go into the world expecting disciples will be made. **But how do we go about it?** That's the rest of the sermon.

### **Point 2: Preparation – pray for opportunity (4:2-3)**

Note the mission belongs to every Christian, not just apostles and elders. Colossians was written approximately 30 years after Jesus' instructions took place.

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* – 4:2

Prayer is something we continue in. We don't take a week off. We don't take a day off. We don't take an afternoon off. Just like spiritual progress. We never stop the battle to kill sin in our lives. We never stop the battle to add godliness. We never stop praying. Intermittent prayer is the idea.

Watchful means alert. Prayer keeps us on the alert. Prayer keeps a spiritual focus before our eyes. Prayer keeps us from drifting off into sin and apathy.

*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-* – 4:3

Paul's chained to a Roman guard 24/7 because he's been speaking the gospel. Imprisonment isn't the end of mission. Imprisonment is opportunity for mission. Paul's looking for opportunity. So he asks the Colossian church to pray *“that God may open to us a door for the word.”* Meaning opportunity *“to declare the mystery of Christ”* = an open door for speaking the gospel.

### **Open door**

The open door Paul seeks is opportunity to speak the gospel. In Ephesus there was *“a wide door for effective work”* (1 Cor 16:9) because synagogue Jews and Gentiles were interested in the good news (Acts 19:8-10).

### **Application**

Paul believed God grants us opportunity to speak the gospel. So he prayed. Christian, consider adding this to your daily prayer. Lord, raise up opportunity for me to speak the gospel today.

We expect disciples will be made. So we pray for opportunity to speak the gospel.

### **Point 3: Preparation – pray for clear speaking (4:4)**

*that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.* – 4:4

Paul asks God to raise up opportunity. And he asks God to help him speak well. Lord, help me to speak in a way that people will understand what I'm talking about.

### **Clarity**

How can we make the gospel clear to non-Christians?

**God → man → Christ → response**

**Creation → fall → redemption → consummation/restoration/new creation → response**

## Gospel

If you're visiting with us and the word gospel is unfamiliar, gospel means good news. Good news about a person: Jesus Christ. Good news because there's something wrong with us. It's called sin.

The first man Adam set aside God's rule and did things his own way. Sin came into our world, plunging us and our world into ruin. So we do things our own way rather than obeying God. Damaging ourselves and those around us. Being damaged by others.

Ever been mistreated? Ever felt guilty because of something you've done? Ever thought there's something wrong with me?

The good news is God the Son, Jesus, came into the world to rescue sinners by dying on a cross and rising from the dead. The good news is God is merciful and he's acted to rescue us. Rescue isn't found within. Rescue is found in Jesus. The gospel commands all men everywhere to repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do so will experience forgiveness of sins, newness of life, and life in the coming kingdom of God where sin and death and suffering are no more.

How do you respond to the good news of Jesus' death on the cross? You repent and believe. You turn from sin by trusting in Jesus' promise of forgiveness and eternal life.

## Application

Paul believed God grants us ability to speak the gospel clearly. So he prayed. We're not alone in gospel mission. God helps us to do what he commands. If you lack self-confidence, and this is a good thing, draw on some confidence in God. Lord, help me to speak the gospel in way that people will understand what I'm saying. Be confident in God's enablement, not yourself.

We expect disciples will be made. We pray for opportunity to speak. And we pray for God's help to speak clearly.

## Point 4: Preparation – be ready when opportunity presents itself (opposition = opportunity) (1 Pet 3:14-17)

*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup> yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. – 1 Peter 3:14-17*

Devotion to Jesus led to opposition. The suffering at minimum involved being slandered and reviled. Hostile verbal abuse, threats, and lies from their family and neighbors and co-workers. Other threats could loss of employment, physical assault, and imprisonment.

How were they to respond?

1. Resolve to honor God instead of fearing man. = I will speak.

Fearing God kills the fear of man!

2. Resolve to respond to slander “with gentleness and respect.” = I will be ready to speak.
3. View slander as a blessing.
4. View slander as God's will.
5. View slander as opportunity to speak the gospel.

To evangelize we need to be prepared beforehand so that when opportunity to speak the gospel presents itself, we know what we're going to say. Another thing. Being slandered, shamed, accused of evil, mocked, verbally abused; all these are gospel opportunities. When someone speaks ill of you or God because of your faith, Peter says that's opportunity to speak!

Peter's saying if someone insults you because you don't curse or you don't get drunk or because of the Bible's stance on sexual immorality or the idea that Jesus is the only way to heaven, you have a green light to speak the gospel! **Opposition = opportunity.**

### **Application**

We can only take advantage of the opportunity if we have enough Bible memorized to speak the gospel. Prior effort is required. Alertness to opportunity is required.

We expect disciples will be made. We pray for opportunity to speak. We pray for God's help to speak clearly. And we're ready when opportunity arises.

### **Point 5: Expectation – people will ask questions (4:5-6)**

*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.* – 4:5-6

Peter says people will slander you. Paul says people will ask you questions.

Note the Christians spent time with "outsiders" = non-Christians. They weren't sheltered from the world. They made contact.

And when they made contact, people asked them questions ("*so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*"). Somehow these "*outsiders*" knew they were spending time with Christians. And the "*outsiders*" had questions for them about their faith.

### **Application**

Like Peter said, we need to be ready. We need to be prepared. We need to expect questions are coming.

When someone asks a question, how did you become a Christian?, what happens in a church service?, what do Christians think about the afterlife?, why do you think marriage is between a man and a woman?, where is God during these Los Angeles fires?, you have a green light to speak the gospel!

Again, we need to have enough Bible memorized and understood to answer the questions "outsiders" are asking today. Why should every Christian be a theologian? So we can be good evangelists.

We expect disciples will be made. We pray for opportunity to speak. We pray for God's help to speak clearly. And we're ready when opportunity arises. Whether the opportunity is slander or a question, we seize the opportunity and speak the gospel.

### **Point 6: Action – live wisely among non-Christians (= salty speech) (4:5-6)**

*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* – 4:5

Christians live among non-Christians and we need to be able to discern whether or not someone's a Christian. Paul assumes we'll be able to know who's a Christian and who's an outsider.

What do they believe? Do they believe Jesus came in the flesh? Have they been born again? Do they give evidence of "newness of life" (Rom 6:4)? Do they love Christians? Do they love the church? Are they trusting in Christ today? These are a start.

While we live in the world, we live wisely, which means "**making the best use of the time.**" We're given a limited amount of time, limited opportunity with "outsiders." So we need to seize opportunities that arise.

Wisdom = speaking the gospel skillfully when the question arises.

***Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*** – 4:6

"gracious," salty speech is winsome, attractive speech. Think a potato chip. The salt gives the chip flavor. The salt makes you desire the chip. Make them want the gospel like you want a potato chip.

Elsewhere Paul said, "*the gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*" (Rom 10:16). The converting power's in the gospel, not our charisma, cleverness, or creativity.

But Paul's saying the way that we speak the gospel can be skillful or sloppy. I'm meeting with someone who's depressed and suicidal. I don't go in full throttle on the torments of hell. I might have compassion for those ravaged by Satan's lies and the sins of others. Someone asks me a sincere question about why their brother died at a young age, I don't go full throttle on the proofs from intelligent design, prophecy, and the resurrection. I engage their question. I affirm their loss. I don't attempt to explain why it happened because I don't know God's hidden will. But their loss illustrates the fall. I speak to hope beyond the grave.

### **Application**

If we're honest, we've blown it. I'm assuming every Christian here has evangelism regrets. When my kids were younger I was wrapped up in my family, church activities, church ministry, and online master's classes. Should I have played disc golf once a week with my co-workers? Should I have engaged my sister more? Within reason I could have given more time to outsiders.

What can I do? Learn, repent, trust God's forgiveness, and make spiritual progress. Two weeks ago we talked about killing sin and adding godliness, that's sanctification, which means failure and progress is part of the process, evangelism included.

### **Conclusion**

I'm trying to promote evangelism. With Scripture. Not with guilt.

If evangelism is intimidating, and the Bible assumes it is, intimidation is opportunity to turn to the Lord for strength in our weakness. That's why Paul said pray for me. Don't let the need to evangelize end in guilt or despair. Let the need to evangelize move you to pray. Seek God's help! Pray because you lack!

Another thought from last week. "***There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear***" (1 John 4:18). How do I overcome the fear of a negative response? First, love for God. If I delight in God and believe he's good and everything he says is just and right and worthy of praise, I will want to talk about him. I will want to obey him by speaking the gospel. Second, love for lost people. If I love the person, love will drive out fear. My passion will move from self-preservation (what will they think of me?) to I want to see this person saved so I'm gonna speak because the Bible tells me people come to faith by hearing the gospel (Rom 10:17).

If you're with us this morning and you're not a Christian, I want to see you rescued by Jesus. I want to see you experience "*newness of life*." I want to see you live as you were designed to live. In fellowship with God. Joyfully submitting to his rule. Walking in wisdom, not self-destructive foolishness.

And, Christian, I want to hear of your children and grandchildren being saved. I want to hear stories of Darryl and Dennis and Hazel sharing the gospel and new converts added to our church.