

Date of sermon: 11/22/2020
Speaker: Pastor Tyler Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Col. 4:2-6
Title of sermon: **Simple Gospel**
Series: Against the Tide - #11

Colossians 4:2-6 NIV:

[2](#) Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. [3](#) And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. [4](#) Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

[5](#) Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. [6](#) Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

We are in the letter of Colossians, which we've been in for a few weeks in our series called "Against the Tide." So, if you have your Bible, please turn in it to Colossians 4 -- and while you're turning there, let me take us back to where we've been, and then I'll tell you where we're going. The letter of Colossians has largely been Paul addressing the new responsibilities of this new community and the new privileges of being a believer. And so, last week Mark took us through something very practical where Paul says -- what you do now -- the decisions you make as a parent, as a child, as an employer -- directly will affect your future. God will reward good decisions, or bad decisions lead to a poor outcome. So, along that same vein of practical living, Paul comes to the end of this letter. He's almost done. And he says, I've got a way that I want you to behave to those outside the church. He calls them "outsiders" or "non-believers". There's a way that you need to approach them so that the gospel is unhindered. So, before we get into this, here's my question. And you were teased with this a second ago with Jeff and Christy. Does the word "evangelism" or "witnessing" or "sharing your faith" cause you anxiety? Does that idea make you want to stop and go, "Ah, that's not my gifting! I don't really like doing that -- that's for other people"? Can I gently suggest that if that's how you feel, you are missing a step in evangelism that Paul wants to teach you, so that the idea of sharing your faith not only isn't scary -- you actually approach it with power and confidence and expect a greater outcome. I want to suggest again gently that if you're afraid of evangelism or witnessing, you're actually missing a very powerful step. So -- that's where Paul wants to take us, but before he says, "Hey, here's how you evangelize, here's how you witness," he says, "I want to teach you something else first." So, I'm going to read the passage with us really quick, it's gonna be on the screen, and then we'll jump into the message. Colossians 4, verses 2 through 6:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders [or, nonbelievers]; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

So, again, let's frame this -- he wants to get you to the idea of dealing and being in conversation with non-Christians, but before he does that, he says, "Let me pull you this way. I need to teach you how to pray. Because if you are not praying well, evangelism doesn't come out well." So he says, "Let's learn how to pray first." So -- your and my prayer-devoted life should be marked by two things. Here's the first one. He says, "Be watchful." What does that mean? We are watchful over or alert to things that we care about. Parents are watchful of their children. They are aware of the dangers approaching their kids. Teachers are aware of the dangers and pitfalls approaching their students. And pastors are aware of the dangers approaching the flock, or the Body of Christ. When we look at the things that we are responsible for, or care about, we are watchful of them, and we take steps to make sure that those are protected. But notice, in this passage of Scripture he doesn't say, "Be watchful and act." There are passages like that, but he says, "Be watchful and pray." So, what is he trying to get you to understand? Remember where we're going. We're going to witnessing. So he says, "Before we go there, you need to understand, you need to pray in a way that attaches you to

God." Being watchful and praying means you are looking at your life, and you're going, "God, I can't handle all of this, and I need your help." When you're watchful over your kids, here's what you're saying -- here's the question: "I don't know what to do with my son. He is angry, he's rebellious. I don't know what to do with my daughter. She's got friends that I know aren't good for her. I don't know what to do." You're looking at your business, and you're going, "I have huge decisions to make that affect dozens if not hundreds of people, and I don't know what to do." And God's going -- "I do. I know what to do. In your prayers, be watchful over what you're responsible for, but ask me for wisdom and for discernment." So, for the Christian, for you, for me -- our greatest decision-making abilities happen in prayer as we attach ourselves in dependence to God. See, the believer prays him- and herself into dependence. So, there's watchfulness. But then he says, thankfulness should mark your prayer. Thankfulness has in itself a power to destroy pride. That's why he wants it defining your prayer life. Proud people care nothing for evangelism, because proud people only care about themselves. Pride says, "I'm the most important." Pride says, "I create." Pride says, "I did this." Pride says, and most lethally, "I am owed. I am entitled. Therefore, I am owed good things in my life." And so, Paul says, in your prayers mark your life with thankfulness. Because when you do this, it says a different message. What I have, I didn't create. What I have I didn't give myself. When you pray in thankfulness, you're saying, "I look at my life as a series of gifts." And if you look at your life as a series of gifts, you will approach life and people in witnessing differently.

Let me give you an example. If your life is a series of gifts, then whether they're good or bad, you recognize their ability to make you a better person. James the brother of Jesus said this. He says, "All good and perfect things come from God. So be thankful." But he says that in the context of trials and suffering. So, regardless of what you and me are going through right now, he says, "These are gifts." Life is a gift. Your wife -- she's a gift. Your kids, they're a gift. Your job is a gift. This season of waiting -- it's a gift. So in your prayers, the devoted, praying believer prays themselves into a dependence on God, alert to what is coming and praying for answers, and being thankful for what you are given. Your prayer life as a believer functions to humble you -- and me. Your prayer life functions to humble you, and that is absolutely necessary if we're ever going to reach people. If you are ever going to evangelize powerfully, your prayer life must be steeped in dependence. And so, after Paul has brought you to this place, brought me to this place, where we understand prayer in dependence on God, he moves you to a second place, and he says, "Can I ask a favor?" He's asking the church. He's like, pause, "Now that I've taught you how to pray, can I ask you something? Will you pray for me? Will you pray for me?" And he prays, in my opinion, two of the weirdest things, seeing as it's Paul. He says, "Pray for opportunity for me, and pray for clarity of the gospel." Now, on a surface-level reading of this text, you're like, "Well, that -- that makes sense. I mean, this is the gospel. We want opportunity for it, and we want it to be clear." But it's weird, because Paul says it, and you have to grab that. Opportunity. This is the most notable missionary on planet earth up to this point! And he's praying, "Would God give me opportunity." Why's that weird? Because Paul was the guy training the church how to share the gospel! Why is he praying for opportunity? You'd think he'd be pretty good at this. What does that teach you he believes about the gospel and evangelism? It teaches you and it teaches me that he believes, even in the act of sharing the gospel, the opportunity to do so is a gift. And where do gifts come from? Somebody else.

So, even in our mandate to share the gospel -- and we are mandated, so if you're pulling yourself aside, "No, this still isn't me." No -- Mark 16. You are mandated to share your faith. But even in the mandate, even in the mandate to share the gospel, Paul's going -- opportunities are given by God. This is important because you and me have to understand this. I think part of the reason we're afraid of witnessing and evangelism, some of us, is because we think it's all on us. We think that our message needs to be completely clear. We need to be overly convincing. We need to know all the answers. We need to be prepared for anything. And what Paul is trying to teach us, as gently as he can, is that even the opportunity to share is God-given. Think about this. Paul over anyone would understand that the non-believing individual isn't dumb. Paul wasn't dumb. They're deceived. The non-believing individual -- your friends, your family, your parents -- they're not dumb. They're deceived if they're not believers. You are not praying for great arguments, you are praying against the movements of Satan. You are praying for the entrapped, blind hearts of people. See, he says,

"God, please, open a door for me!" That's the door of the human heart. And I'm sorry, friends, there's no battering ram on Planet Earth big enough to knock the door down of a human heart. There's none. You and me have to learn how to pray and just get out of the way and let God break the door down. But that should give you a sense of relief. Let's breathe for a second. If it is indeed God who breaks the door down -- think about this -- then God is in control of and responsible for every step along the salvation process. Was He responsible for you being saved? Yes. Was He responsible for opening the door to somebody else's heart? Yes. Was He responsible for then saving them? Yes.

See, here's what Paul's getting at with opportunities. Even in our mandate to share the gospel, God wants you to know that every step along the salvation line and journey is designed to give Him glory, not me, not you. So Paul says, "Please pray that I would have opportunities. Please pray that I would have moments with people. Please pray that I would have chance encounters with people." And we know that he believed this. We know that he's been praying this probably his entire Christian life, because -- when he wrote his previous letters to Galatians, Ephesians, he was in prison. Yes? You remember this? His first imprisonment, he's writing all these letters to the churches, and he says the same thing in each one. "Hey, I've heard that you now know that I'm in prison. Don't freak out!" "I've heard that you now know I'm in prison. Don't be scared." And I imagine he would almost laugh when he said this. He's like, "Think about where I am, friends. Yes, I'm in jail, and that's kinda scary. But think about the guard -- he is legally obligated to stay right by me. He's not leaving. So, I'm sharing the gospel with him." Guards are coming to Christ. Other prisoners are coming to Christ. He then went through the court system and made his way to Caesar and pleaded his case and shared the gospel with him. See, if me and you are legitimately praying for opportunities, then even in perceived negative circumstances, that's an opportunity. Don't miss those. Paul didn't miss them, and he's praying, I think, to notify you that we need to be praying this way. So he says, "Pray for opportunities." He then says, "Pray for clarity of the gospel" -- which again, for Paul, makes absolutely no sense, in my opinion. When you surface-level read this. This is the guy that wrote two-thirds of the New Testament. He was the preacher who was teaching other pastors! He goes out and he rebukes Peter and Timothy, followers of Jesus, who were leading other churches. He rebukes both of them. In Galatians 2, he says to Peter -- "Peter, stop telling gentiles to behave like Jews." What was Peter doing? He was taking the gospel and he was adding to it. It was the gospel AND, the gospel PLUS. He was saying, "Become a Christian, follow Jesus, but then don't eat this" or "eat this" or "don't go to the temple" or "go to the temple". "Don't buy your meat here." And Paul's going, "You are clouding the gospel, Peter. Stop." So, not only did he rebuke him, but his rebuke ends up in Scripture. So I feel kinda bad for Peter, because for eternity, he has to be reminded that he messed up. But he also says this to Timothy. In another rebuke, He says, "Timothy, don't be embarrassed of this message." Don't be embarrassed of the gospel. I know it seemingly looks defeatist to say that God is all powerful but then came to earth and died. But that's the power of the gospel! Don't rob the gospel of that moment. Don't rob the cross of its power. Do you want to know why I think Paul's praying for clarity? It's not because he doesn't understand the gospel. He taught everyone how to share the gospel! I think the reason that he prays this is because he has the same fear that me and you do -- that sometimes, deep down, we think that the gospel's not enough. There's got to be more than just believing in Jesus, right? That's too easy. We as human being complicate this all the time. You know this, because look at all of the other major religions. I don't mean to pick on other faiths while there's no representation here, but you just go research them. What do Catholicism, Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism, what do all of them have in common? In terms of salvation? Every single one of them is faith and works. Why do we as human beings love to add to the gospel? Because we like to have a say in how we're saved. We like to gain some of the credit. We like to take some of the glory. Even if we don't verbalize it like that, we like to have control. Yes, I'm saved, but I've also done a lot of good things. But there's a reason that the Bible says, "You are saved by faith alone and not by works." So what? "So that you can't boast." Paul says, "Please pray for me." He's praying this for himself but I think for everybody, that the gospel would be simple and clear, because if it's not, that's not the gospel. It's not the gospel AND, the gospel PLUS.

Ask yourself this question. When and where are you tempted to add to the gospel? When are you tempted to say, "Okay, it's faith, but then also change these behaviors"? No no no. It's just the gospel. What about when you're in a very intellectual environment. We're in first-world America, there's a lot of very intelligent people. You might work with a bunch of them. And to come into that intelligent environment and say that there is a God, that His son died and then rose again -- that can seem foolish. And so, what do we like to do to the gospel? We like to take that story, but then we add proof. No no no -- we've proven this story in the Bible, so the Bible is true, therefore you have to believe. No, they don't. See, this story of adding to the gospel is very old. It's something we're dealing with but something the early church was dealing with. Paul in the Corinthian church says this. He says "the Jews in the area were demanding signs, and the Greeks wanted philosophy, but we [Christians] preach Christ crucified. A stumbling block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek." Both the Jew and the Greek wanted more. The gospel wasn't enough to them. It was foolish. To the Greek, they were like, "Why would I believe in a guy that died? That doesn't make any sense." And the Jew would say, "I want more. I want more of a miracle. I want more supernatural proof." No. There's nothing more. God is real, He sent Jesus to earth in the form of a man to live a perfect life, and to die for our sins. We need to reckon with what's in here, and He rose again so that we could be in Heaven forever with God. That's the gospel. Don't add anything. Now, you might be going, "Well, hold on -- are we never supposed to practice apologetics or good arguments? Are we never supposed to look at how to enhance our witness?" That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is, the gospel is simple, and when you add things to it, it diminishes the power of the cross. Paul even goes so far as to say this -- he said, "When I preach, I minimize eloquent speech so that nobody can take anything away from the cross." That would be like me saying that I kind of want to botch this sermon so that people can go, "Man, Tyler really messed that one up. But a lot of people came to Jesus!" Don't worry, I'm not gonna do that. But Paul says this -- he says, "I limit eloquent speech so that the cross has even more power." But that's what we're afraid of. And maybe this is where you need to pause the sermon, and you just need to think, "Where am I tempted to add things to the gospel? Where am I tempted to add some research, or evidence in a way, or where am I tempted to add proof or add works?"

If the gospel scares you in its simplicity, that's a good thing. Because what Jesus wanted you to know, what Paul wants you to know, is that in the simplicity of the gospel there's power. Because if you add anything, what you're saying is -- "Jesus, what you did wasn't enough, I'm going to help you." He doesn't need any help. See, the believer's message is steeped in dependence. We pull ourselves into dependence with prayer. That's the first movement. Second movement, even our attempt to witness is steeped in dependence. But more than that -- he says, "Okay, I've taught you how to pray. Here's the motivation. Now let's go do it." So, here's your question, right? Here's what you wanted to know from the beginning. How do I share this message? Paul actually keeps it very simple. He looks at you and me and he says, "To the outsider, to the non-Christian, be wise." That's it. He says, "Be wise." If you want to understand how to reach them, be wise. And you're like, "Okay. I don't know what that means. Tell me more." He says -- here's two things. "Be wise" means this. Number one -- he says make the most of every opportunity. If movement two -- remember what he said. He said, "I'm praying that God would give me opportunity." If you and me are legitimately praying for opportunity to share the gospel, should we not expect it? He says, the first way to live wise is to recognize that in this cosmic story of God saving us, God wants you involved. Don't miss the moment. Sometimes they're glaring. Like, I was working at the Courthouse one time, and one of my co-workers, she comes and she stands next to me, and we're folding towels, and she goes, "Tyler, do you believe in angels and demons? Like, what do you think about that spiritual stuff?" Opportunity! Or if someone in your office knows that you're a Christian and they ask you about your church -- opportunity! Don't miss those.

Here's really the only question you need to ask. If given an opportunity by somebody else, can you articulate your story? Not, do you have all the answers to Scripture's questions. Do you know your story? Do you know the difference that Jesus makes in your life? If you became a Christian later in life, that's actually fairly easy for you, because -- you look at your life, and you're like, man, pre-Jesus me was mean, rude, selfish, treated people like garbage. Cared for no one but me. But after receiving Jesus, my language is different, what I care about is different. I go to church now. I live for

other people. So, it's fairly easy. But if you've grown up in church and you became a Christian at five, it is a little harder but the question still stands. In what way does knowing Jesus shape your life now? How does it shape your decision-making? How does it shape your emotions? Are you given to emotions? Or do they simply serve to point you back to God? When you look at your life, what difference does Jesus make? And be able to have those conversations. And here's where you move to the second part. How do you be wise with people? The first thing is, you don't miss an opportunity. Be ready for it. And number two, Paul says your conversations should be defined by two things. The first one is grace, the second one is salt. And you're like -- that doesn't make any sense. I'll explain that in a second. Grace. What is grace? Grace is a space to turn around in the relationship. Grace is something that we receive that we don't deserve. See, the Bible says that while you were still a sinner, while you were arrogant, while you were mean, while you rejected God - - even in that space, God came in and invaded your life and rescued you. You did not deserve that. I didn't deserve that. So, if indeed that's real, why would we not extend that to other people?

Now, here's where the rubber meets the road, though. Here's why this is so difficult. There are people whose life decisions you vehemently disagree with. And so, I just want to ask you -- here's a little test. When you look at other people's political decisions, how easy is it for you to talk to those people? I mean, I kind of hope that that stung a little bit. I'm not saying that you need to be obsessed with politics, that's not my point. But if you find yourself unbelievably enraged at politics, or the election, and you can't even talk to people -- might I suggest that you then have no business talking about sin. And talking about the gospel. Because if we can't engage with people even on a political level, and give grace enough for someone to potentially change an opinion -- if we can't do that, then how are we ever going to do it with the gospel? Or, let's take another hot-button issue. Let's take abortion, and you're talking with someone that vehemently disagrees with your point of view, but you cannot find it in yourself to be gentle in your conversation. If you can't, might I gently suggest that the gospel and its delivery is going to be very difficult for you. Grace is a softness. It's a gentleness. It's a kindness. And Scripture says it's wasn't God's perfect logic that brought you to repentance. What does it say? It says it was his kindness that leads you and me to repentance. So, if God treated you and me that way, then should we not treat other people that way in our presentation of our story and the gospel? He also says, "Let it be full of grace, let it be full of salt." What is salt? Paul and his audience would have understood that salt is a preservative. So he says, "I want your conversation steeped in this," meaning, "I want you to preserve people." If your goal is to go in and shred someone with an argument, if you're coming in with your Bible-thumping club, you have done nothing except for maybe help them throw up more walls between them and the gospel. But if salt genuinely preserves, and our words preserve, that means you go in with the sole goal to protect and win that person's heart. Ravi Zacharias used to say there's an old Indian proverb, and he said, "Don't go and cut off someone's nose and then ask them to smell a rose." Don't cut off their nose and then ask them to smell a rose. That means, you don't go in and shred someone's belief system, and their family system that's been with them for decades -- years and years and years -- and then, after you've shredded them, go, "Hey, Jesus is nice." See, if they're not safe with you, then why on earth would they be safe with your God? That's what they're asking themselves. If people aren't safe with you, one of their first windows into the heart of God, then why would they be safe with God?

See, first movement -- you pray yourself into dependence and you don't leave your knees until you are fully dependent on God. You don't go into conversations unless you go knowing -- "Everything I have is from You, and I don't want to move until me and you are in step." That's the first movement. Second movement is, you pray repeatedly for opportunities. Not just that someone would get saved, but opportunities for you to share, and clarity of the gospel that you wouldn't add anything. Because it's a supernatural event. Let it be a supernatural event. And then the third movement is that you would go and not miss opportunities by sharing your story, by sharing Jesus with people with grace and with salt. See, witnessing doesn't -- it's not just the conversation with people. There are two steps before it. Have you been praying yourself into a position where you're ready? And then, are you praying for opportunities and clarity? Then you go share. So, wherever you're at, work yourself through that pattern. Get me and God on the same page. Pray for opportunities so that this moment is supernatural and not just you being convincing. And then go share. Because a prayerful

dependence leads to a gracious invitation, and that's when people turn. Give them space enough to turn so that they're safe with you.

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