

CLOSING WISDOM**Colossians 4:2-18****(Read Colossians 4:2-18)**

Intro: Quite a few years ago I preached a sermon with the title *LAST WORDS ARE LASTING WORDS*. In it I quoted the final words of a number of people, both famous and infamous. Here is a sampling. Nathan Hale was being hung for spying for the fledgling US Army against British when he famously said, "*I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.*". Film maker Louis B. Mayer's last words were incredibly sad and full of despair. He said, "*Nothing matters. Nothing matters.*" I just finished a very long biography of Winston Churchill earlier this year – it's almost 3,500 pages took me the better part of two years. He is known for his wise and often humorous quotes, but his last words, when he died in 1965 was, "*I'm bored with it all.*" Edgar Allen Poe said, "*Lord help my poor soul.*" Karl Marx, who when asked by his housekeeper if he had any last words, replied, "*Go on, get out! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough!*" The problem is, he had already said way too much. D. L. Moody's last words were fitting of the man of God he was. He said, "*I see Earth receding and heaven is opening. God is calling me.*"

Last words are important – especially when they impart wisdom, encouragement and hope. In the case of the sermon I just referenced, I was talking about Jesus's last words to the disciples before he returned to the Father as found in Acts 1. Today we can see that the final words of Paul's letter to the Colossians were definitely not his dying last words or even a farewell letter, but they were infinitely important and we can learn so much from them even though they were written to Christ Followers 2,000 years ago.

Paul begins with a an instruction to watch and pray, then he instructs his readers how to walk as the people of God in an ungodly world, and he finishes by dropping some names and he instructs the Colossians even as he does that.

First . . .

Pray

- Specifically he tells the Christ Followers in Colossae to watch and pray. Well, actually he, says *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it . . .* Colossians 4:2a. From the beginning the followers of Jesus have struggled to stay alert and pray. Luke's account of the Transfiguration says that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray and, even though the three disciples *were heavy with sleep* Luke 9:32, they came wide awake when Jesus was transfigured before them. And we are quite familiar with the account of how when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed, and as he prayed so fervently, his disciples were in an exhausted slumber (Luke 22:45). This doesn't point out lack of attentiveness (though it is) as much as how exhausting it is to walk as a Christ Follower. It's easy to drift off. (Tell how I drowsed as I studied this very passage). In the same way Jesus told his disciples to "*watch and pray*" (Matthew 26:41), Paul is telling his readers to persist in prayer.
- How often have you heard it said, or even said it yourself, in a tone of complete defeat and resignation, "*All we can do is pray!*" like we're scraping the bottom of a dirty barrel for options? The truth is, that is NOT scraping the bottom of the barrel – prayer is the most powerful thing we can do! As we pray we are turning all we are and all we have over to the one for whom nothing is too difficult. F. B. Meyer writes, "*We must pray more. Our lives cannot maintain the Godward attitude without prolonged seasons of communication with him through the Word.*"
- So Paul tells the Colossians to steadfastly pray, being watchful and alert and with thanksgiving. Notice, he's not saying to pray in desperation, but pray with thankful hearts knowing what God is going to do.
- And then he continues with, *pray also for us*, Colossians 4:3a. He is in effect saying, "*As you are praying with such anticipation – pray for all of us here in this Roman jail.*" Here's a good place to remind us that this is one of Paul's prison letters, written as he is handcuffed (they called them manacles in those days) to a Roman guard and awaiting trial before Caesar himself. And what does he pray for? A prison break? Nope! A pardon from the Emperor who was that paragon of kindness and mercy, Nero? Nope! Release of any kind? Nope!
- Instead, Paul wants them to pray for this (and these are his exact words), *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—that I may make it*

clear, which is how I ought to speak. Colossians 4:3b-4. He is asking for prayer to be able to present the Good News of Jesus Christ to everyone he came in contact with. He wants the mystery of Christ to become clear to people through the transparent witness of his servants. How cool is that?!!!!!!! He doesn't want to be free, because he is already free in Jesus Christ and he wants that freedom for lost souls.

- That's not just for Paul to do. We need to pray for this for ourselves Church! Let's pray for that/ That God may open a door for us, for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, and that we may too, make it clear. This is our commandment as the people of God. Witnessing is not something other people do, it's what we all should do.
- But there is a way to do it that is infinitely more effective so we must . . .

Prepare

- Sharing the Good News takes the kind of care a delicious meal requires. Look at verses 5-6 again, *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* Colossians 4:5-6. Commenting on these verses, Archibald Hunter quotes Paul's words, "*Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.*" And then he asks, "*Shall we call this a culinary metaphor? The picture is of a cook putting in the appropriate pinch of salt to suit the individual palate.*"
- Last week Kathy came home from Pennsylvania with a Pennsylvania Dutch delicacy called Chicken Corn Soup. To be authentic it MUST be made with fresh sweet corn. (Describe it and the heat of the summer). Well, I was excited to have it, especially since it was cooler than the normal Chicken Corn Soup weather. But Kathy warned me, "IT NEEDS SALT!" And it did! Here sister and brother in law, Linda and Ed have to watch their salt and they don't like pepper as much as we do, so we had to help the seasoning to make it just right for us. I make Cajun chicken fettuccini – it's a family favorite for us. My daughters, Evan, and I like it with copious amounts of HOT cayenne added to what is already in it, Kathy and the grandkids do not. We all season it the way we prefer it. Kathy always puts too much sugar in her spaghetti sauce . . . in my opinion. We all enjoy different seasoning in our food.
- Here's my point, and it's speaking to the perfect illustration Archibald Hunter made – our witness for Jesus to those around us needs to be tailored to the person. Some people find Jesus when a friend shares a FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS pamphlet with them. Others find faith in Christ on their own like my friend Kimi did who read an article in the newspaper article as she and her husband were on their boat in the middle of the Susquehanna River. Others see Jesus lived out in the life of a friend they have worked with for years, and then they finally blurt out – "*Tell me how I can become a Christian, I want what you have.*"
- It's been said, "*Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.*" Paraphrasing Paul's words into a more crude yet accurate rendering could easily be, "*Watch for opportunities and don't be a jerk.*" Many an opportunity to witness has been thwarted by the obnoxious behavior of the people of God, many of them very earnest and sincere, but sadly inept. William Barclay says, "*The Christian must behave himself with wisdom and with tact towards those who are outside the Church. He must of necessity be a missionary; but he must know when and when not to speak to others about his religion and theirs. He must never give the impression of superiority and of censorious criticism. Few people have ever been argued into Christianity. The Christian, therefore, must remember that it is not so much by his words as by his life that he will attract people to, or repel them from, Christianity. On the Christian there is laid the great responsibility of showing men Christ in his daily life. The Christian should always be on the lookout for the opportunity to serve Christ and his fellow-men.*"
- Finally, Paul ends with . . .

High Praise

- Specifically, he holds up his fellow jailbirds and helpers. Let's quickly cover them.
- Tychicus has been a healthy colleague for years and has been with him through, in the words of Amazing Grace, *many dangers, toils, and snares.* And he is probably from the region of Colossae and is known to these people. He can be trusted.

- And then there is Onesimus who is the main reason we have the little letter of Philemon in the New Testament. Onesimus was the runaway slave who had somehow reached Rome and become a Christ Follower under Paul's teaching and discipleship. Now, Paul was sending him back to his master. But the cool thing is he does not call him a runaway slave; he calls him a faithful and beloved brother. I love how Paul describes him as, "*one of you*" in verse 9, showing the unity in Christ we have.
- Aristarchus gets a mention and in Acts 20 he is mentioned as one of the colleagues who ministered with Paul along with Tychicus.
- And then there is a cool success story in the case of Mark. Mark is the cousin of Barnabas, who was along with Paul on the first mission journey. And then there was a falling out because Mark wimped out (Tell the story) There is redemption! Paul gave up, but God didn't and in the end Paul had him in ministry at his side. Paul also mentions Epaphras who is the one who planted the churches there in the valley where Colossae was situated, and he sends greetings to a woman by the name of Nympha who leads a house church there in Colossae proving that ministry leadership is not a male domain.
- There's one person who gets a mention who doesn't have a positive slant. His name is Demas, and while Paul doesn't say anything bad about him, it's obvious that Demas is beginning his fall away from Paul's good graces. By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, Demas had seemingly taken a hike and Paul refers to it in 2 Timothy 4:10.
- I've not covered everyone but the awesome thing about this list of names is how Paul brings them all to the fore to show how they all (with the possible exception of Demas) are in significant ministry with him. These saints help Paul's incredible ministry to be as incredible as it is. They were just regular people who faithfully stood by him through persecution and pain, and they saw the redemption and reconciliation that is so possible in the Body of Christ – and here's my point, they were just like you and me.

Conclusion: Thus ends my series, Christ at the Center, begun on August 7. With this closing wisdom, we've seen a loving letter written to a people he had, for the most part never met. He was speaking into their lives and doing what he did best, doing his best to expand the Kingdom of God by helping the people of God to do the same. His words add value to our lives and encourage us to continue with, confidence, to bring Jesus to a hurting world. Let's continue, with Christ at our center, to BE JESUS TO PEOPLE. Amen.