

BIDING TIME OR BUYING TIME?

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Since Jesus Could Return At Any Moment For Us, Perhaps We Should Examine Ourselves As To How We Are Using Our Time.

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Biding Time Or Buying Time

Colossians 4:2-6

The Apostle Paul has told the Colossians how not to act in the context of their immediate families and their church family. Further he explained to them the type of behavior expected of Christians in the context of the homes and the church. In today's text, Paul is going to instruct them in their relationship with unbelievers. Further, he is going to talk to them about prayer.

Paul is adamant that we should live holy lives as a loving response to God's love for us. He also uses the concept of Jesus' immanent return as a motivation for living a holy life. In other words, we are now living between the first and second comings of Jesus. In His first coming, Jesus came to offer His life as an atonement for our sins. In other words, Jesus redeemed us. That word redeemed is an interesting word for our study this morning. In verse 5 he is going to use a Greek phrase that literally says that we are to be redeeming the time. The King James Version translates it exactly that way. It can also be translated as buying time. The NIV translates it as making the most of every opportunity.

I like the King James Version's translation as redeeming the time. In other words, we are now almost 2000 years closer to the return of Christ than when Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians. The next event Christians are looking for is the rapture, when Jesus comes to collect His people out of this world, when we are caught up in the air to meet Him. After that event, Jesus will come as King and Judge.

So the question Paul wants to ask us is this, "How are we spending our time knowing that Jesus could return to collect us at any moment?" In other words, time is growing short and coming to an end soon. Are we just biding our time, waiting for Christ, ... or are we buying time, redeeming time, and using it wisely? Paul says that we ought to be spending our time in prayer and evangelism. If Jesus is coming soon, then we need to get the Gospel to as many people as possible because those who die without having received Jesus as Savior and Lord are doomed to spend eternity separated from God and His love.

I know that I'm good at wasting time. And I think I'm not alone. There was an employee that continually came to work late. Finally his boss confronted him and said, "You're 20 minutes late ... again! Don't you know what time our people start work here?"

The guy said, "No sir, they've always already started work by the time I get here."

Paul wants each of us to ask ourselves if we are simply biding time, waiting for Jesus ... or if we are buying time, using it wisely.

The main idea of this morning's text is simple. **SINCE JESUS COULD RETURN AT ANY MOMENT FOR US, PERHAPS WE SHOULD EXAMINE OURSELVES AS TO HOW WE ARE USING OUR TIME.** In other words, do we take seriously the Great Commission? Jesus left us with the command to make disciples of all nations. We are to be about the Lord's work of rescuing people from the grip of Satan, the world, fear, and death. We are to be about the work of helping people to become Christians and to grow as Christians. First of all that assumes that we are Christians and that we are growing as Christians. Secondly, it assumes that the Bible is true and that Christ is coming soon, almost 2,000 years sooner for us than for the Colossians. If we believe that, and if we believe people will spend an eternity in hell if they don't know Christ, then we ought to feel the urgency of evangelizing the lost.

I. SPENDING TIME IN PRAYER (VS 2-4)

We Are Called To Spend Time In Prayer.

It all starts with spending time in prayer as described in verses 2-4. In other words, **WE ARE CALLED TO SPEND TIME IN PRAYER.** In other Pauline passages, Paul said to pray continuously without ceasing. Prayer is more than a specific format in which we bow our heads,

close our eyes, and kneel down. Pray is an attitude towards God that keeps our hearts and minds open to hearing his voice and a readiness to obey His commands.

A. DEVOTED TO PRAYER (2a)

That's why in the first phrase of verse 2 we are commanded to be devoted to prayer. The word translated here devote has a broad range of meaning. It means to persevere, to stick to a course of action, to show courage in the perseverance, to take great care in, and to be alert and constantly ready for action. To be sure, there are times for formal prayer, but the most common prayer should be taking great care to look for God's hand and direction in our everyday lives. Scripture is essential of prayer. Powerful prayer is dependent on first of all reading and meditating on God's Word, then being alert for God to make those truths applicable to everyday life. Paul said that God prepared in advance good works for us to accomplish. Being alert to that fact and looking for God's provision is the way we find and accomplish these works.

B. WATCHFUL IN PRAYER (2b)

In the middle phrase of verse 2 we are commanded to be watchful. Actually the word means to keep alert. In other words, as we pray, we should be aware that Jesus' return becomes more and more close as every day passes. Our prayers should be grounded in the knowledge and reality of God's Kingdom coming to earth and as His children; we are a part of the reality. We are to be living Kingdom life right now, even though the complete coming of God's Kingdom will be established at the second coming of Christ.

C. THANKFUL FOR PRAYER (2c)

And powerful prayer is bathed in being thankful for prayer as described in the last word in verse 2. In other words, prayer is the interaction between our Lord and us. I have said this many times before, so let me just state this. We live in a society where people think they are entitled. This attitude of entitlement has found its way into modern day churches. People believe that if we are good, then God is obliged to bless us. There are several problems with this attitude. First of all, none of us are good and therefore none of us deserve God's blessing. Secondly, if God were to give us what we truly deserved, we would all be spending an eternity in hell. Finally, people who have attitudes of entitlement can never truly be thankful because everything they receive, they believe they deserve. Therefore, most people raised in our society, including Christians are never truly grateful.

The place to start in prayer is knowing that we are totally and utterly lost without Christ. If we think we are good in any way or have done any good, or deserve anything but suffering, death, and hell, then we can never be grateful. As the hymn writer said, "It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me." If we truly believed the Bible, how could there be a moment in life where we not thankful? The Apostle Paul also said that we should give thanks in all circumstances. Paul believed that Jesus saved him. If we know that, then we should be thankful with Paul in all circumstances.

D. TOPICS OF PRAYER (3-4)

In verses 3-4, we are given topics of prayer. As we study through these verses, let's ask ourselves how much of our prayer time is spent on our personal comforts and how much is focused on God's will.

The first half of verse 3 reminds us to pray for open doors and open hearts. To put this in context, let's remind ourselves where Paul is at this time. Paul is locked in a Roman prison, waiting to be tried and executed. Paul prays for open doors. But the doors he is praying open are not the doors of his prison cell. They are the doors of people's hearts and the doors of opportunity to preach the Gospel. We know that Paul preached regularly to the Roman guards

and people in the palace were converted to Christianity. Paul did not pray that he be freed. Paul did not pray for personal comfort or for things to go his way. And neither did the early church.

I have quoted this passage before, but I think it is worth reading and rereading over and over again. After Peter and John were arrested, tried, warned, and threatened, they were released. Instead of praying for comfort and freedom from harassment, protection and further arrests, they went back to the church and here is how the church prayed:

"²³As soon as they were freed, Peter and John found the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—²⁵you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor King David, your servant, saying,

'Why did the nations rage? Why did the people waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶ The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord

and against his Messiah.'²⁷"That is what has happened here in this city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. ²⁸In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan. ²⁹And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. ³⁰Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness" (Acts 4:23-31 / NLT).

Let me point out a couple of things about this prayer. First of all, it is bathed and founded on Scripture. The church realized that this was all part of God's plan. Secondly, they did not pray for protection, they prayed for boldness and opportunities to present Christ to the lost.

The Apostles and the early church were not interested in their petty needs, wants, and desires. They were focused on accomplishing God's will and they were centered on Christ through the Word of God. They prayed for boldness to proclaim God's Word. The Holy Spirit answered that prayer in a mighty way. The building shook and Jerusalem shook with the preaching of Jesus as Lord.

How much of our personal prayer time is focused on God opening doors for us to share Christ with friends, family, and people we meet every day? If prayer is our being open to God's opening doors for us to minister, how much of our day is spent looking for these opportunities? I have been a pastor for about 30 years. I don't recall hearing personal or corporate prayers asking for this. I'm trying to make this a regular practice, but it is a constant struggle to keep focused and alert.

Further, we also know that the world has been blinded by Satan. The only way people can come to Christ is if the Holy Spirit lifts the blindness from their hearts. That is something we need to constantly be in prayer for. We need to pray that God The Holy Spirit lifts the blindness from the hearts of lost and confused people. Salvation is the work of God.

I would challenge all of us to start to pray like this in our individual prayers, during the day, and when we gather together as a church for prayer. Let's focus on God ministering through us to reach the lost.

Paul further prays for courage and clarity in the second half of verse 3 and in verse 4. As we build on the prayer we just described in Acts 4 where they prayed for God to work through them to spread the Gospel, Paul starts out by asking them to pray for courage. He doesn't again pray that he be released from the human chains that bind him. He realizes that this is a way in which God provided him to spread the Gospel message. He wants the courage to preach the Gospel the way it should be preached. He wants the courage to live out the Gospel. And further, he wants

the courage to live and preach the Gospel with clarity. Look at verse 4. The NIV translates the phrase, "that I may proclaim it clearly. The Greek is much more dramatic. It reads like this, "that I may manifest it I manifest." The emphasis is on the Gospel, that Paul might be a living manifestation of the Gospel, that he reveal the plain and simple truth of the Gospel in his words and in his life.

We are called to be living testimonies of God's open invitation of salvation to all. In our prayer lives, do we spend a great deal of time asking for God to do things for us? That's okay, but do we spend as much time before God rehearsing our personal testimonies and Gospel presentation. I have heard Christians present the Gospel in a way that it applies to the lost world. But I don't often hear Christians present the Gospel in terms of how God is working on their lives at that time. I have heard testimonies of what God did way back in the past in a Christian's life, but rarely what God is convicting them of at present. Effective evangelism depends on our prayer life, and by that I mean learning to ask for God to present us with opportunities to present the Gospel, and to have a vibrant relationship with the living God. If we are not pursuing righteousness, if we are not humble enough to have open hearts, then our verbal presentation of the Gospel is really meaningless.

Knowing that Jesus is going to return at any moment, and knowing that we will have to give an accounting of our lives, how are we spending our time in regards to our prayer lives? **WE ARE CALLED TO SPEND TIME IN PRAYER.**

II. SPENDING TIME WALKING IN HOLINESS (VS 5-6)

We Are Called To Spend Time In Evangelism.

In addition to a rich prayer life, we should be spending time walking in holiness as described in verses 5-6. One way we walk in holiness is to evangelize people with our words, with our transparent lifestyles, and with our actions. **WE ARE CALLED TO SPEND TIME IN EVANGELISM.**

Most of you know that I belong to the Evangelical Covenant Church. I purposely chose to join their ministerium because they are a pietistic movement. The two famous historical phrases of the Covenant are, "How's your walk, and where is it written?" Look at the very first phrase in verse 5. It commands us to walk in wisdom. I love modern translations, but oftentimes we miss some very important metaphors for life. For example, the original Greek and the King James Version wording of this phrase is, "Walk in wisdom." There are two important concepts here. First of all, the pursuit of holiness for the Christian is described in the Bible as our daily walk with God. Did you ever think about that? Our part in God's sanctification process is that we walk together with Him.

And the second concept here is that we walk wisely. In the Bible wisdom is always described as applying Bible truths to everyday life. It never means walk wisely according to the world, or our society, or even conventional wisdom. Wisdom in the Bible always means the application of the Bible truth to each particular situation we are faced with.

A. WALKING IN WISDOM (5a)

In this case we are to walk with God in our contact with people who are not believers in Jesus. The wording here is very interesting. The word for church in Greek is *ekklesia*. It means those who have been called out, in other words the called out ones. So Christians are outsiders to the world. But here Paul takes a view from within the church and refers to unbelievers as those who are outside. Think about the magnitude of this statement. If we as Christians find ourselves as outsiders to the society in which we live, our egos may be hurt. But unbelievers who find themselves outside of God's Kingdom will find themselves separated from God for an eternity. Those are horrible consequences. And so walking wisely towards unbelievers means that we

have a heart for them and desire for them to be saved. Again, as we said above, a rich prayer life will help us in being ready to approach them with the Gospel.

B. WALKING ALERTLY (5b)

Next, the second half of verse 5 instructs us to be walking alertly. We have already dealt with this so let me just summarize this quickly. The phrase translated, "make the most of every opportunity," is literally, "redeeming the time, or buying up time." In other words, in light of the fact that Jesus may come any time, and those who don't believe in Christ will be left behind, a good use of time would be to evangelize those who do not know Christ. I like both words used here.

First of all, we are to be buying up time instead of just biding our time. Jesus commanded us over and over again to preach the Gospel to the lost. It is His desire that none be lost. If we are not telling people about Christ, then we are just wasting time until Christ returns. We should feel the urgency of bring the Gospel message to the lost. But that assumes we understand and are living the Gospel message.

Secondly, I like the word redeem. As I said earlier, it is the same word used of redemption in the atonement. Human beings were created to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. However, because we were all born into sin, and further separated ourselves from God through our own rebellion, we sold ourselves into slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Every human being needs to be redeemed and set free from sin, Satan, and death. The only way to find this freedom and redemption is to place our faith in Jesus Christ. That is the message we have been entrusted with. Listen to how Paul views his mission:

"¹⁶So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! ¹⁷What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!

¹⁸All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.

²⁰We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!"

²¹For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ" (II Corinthians 5:16-21 / NLT).

I hope that we can take this calling seriously and be alert to people God is bringing into our lives to find salvation, freedom, and redemption. We are entrusted with a great message.

C. SPEAKING GRACIOUSLY (6a)

In the first part of verse 6 we are advised to speak graciously. Paul commands the Colossians to speak graciously. Over the years, I have seen the most offensive, arrogant, judgmental, gossipy, angry, and unhappy "Christians" trying to evangelize people. How absurd is that? If I were a non-Christian and these people were presenting the Gospel to me, there is no way I would ever accept that message because I certainly would not want to become like them.

We represent Christ and we are living examples of His love and His grace. If we are not living and speaking graciously, then the best thing we can do is not tell anyone that we are Christians.

D. SPEAKING INTENTIONALLY (6b)

I love the next phrase in verse 6. We are to season our conversation with salt. My language has been described as salty ... and as much as I'd like to justify it ... I don't think that's what Paul is

after. He is telling us speak intentionally. In other words, Christians ought to be happy, interesting, engaging, and relevant. Again, we should practice our testimonies and be wise enough to apply the Gospel to our everyday lives and to present it in a clear, relevant, and loving way.

E. SPEAKING INTELLIGENTLY (6c)

And finally, the last phrase in verse 6 commands us to speak intelligently. I'm going to say this at least for the one-billionth time. Being a Christian means that we read, study, memorize, and intimately know our Bibles. I really don't understand how anyone can call themselves Christian if they are not reading and studying the Bible. I have found that most "Christians" in modern day churches talk like they understand who they are in Christ and talk authoritatively as if what they are saying is Christian, but in reality is so far away from Biblical truth, that it's hard to believe they are Christians. If we don't know what the Bible says, we should probably just shut up.

We are called to live and speak the truth and love of Christ to a lost and hurting world. That carries with it the mandate to know not just some things about Christ. It mandates that we know Christ. It mandates that we don't just know just a few bible verses; it mandates that we devour our Bibles. It mandates that we not just agree with the lifestyle of Jesus, it means that we follow Jesus and walk with Him. **WE ARE CALLED TO SPEND TIME IN EVANGELISM.**

III. EPILOGUE

I wonder if we are just biding time waiting for the second coming of Jesus or if we are buying up time and using it wisely. As I studied through this text, I was forced to really come to terms with this in my own life. **SINCE JESUS COULD RETURN AT ANY MOMENT FOR US, PERHAPS WE SHOULD EXAMINE OURSELVES AS TO HOW WE ARE USING OUR TIME.**

In Jerry Bridges' book The Pursuit Of Holiness, he tells this story about a famous guy who I think summarizes the essence of what Paul was trying to teach the Colossians and us:

"We do not act as the salt of the earth or shine as the light of the world by necessarily denouncing the sins of our worldly associates. Our own holy life will serve as a sufficient rebuke, and our interest in others at this point is not their conduct but their need of Jesus Christ as their Savior. Henry Clay Trumbull was, among other things, a great personal evangelist. One day he found himself seated on a train next to a young man who was drinking quite heavily. Each time the young man opened his bottle, he offered a drink to Mr. Trumbull, who declined with thanks. Finally the young man said to Mr. Trumbull, 'You must think I'm a pretty rough fellow.' Mr. Trumbull's gracious reply, 'I think you're a very generous-hearted fellow,' opened the way for an earnest conversation with the young man about his need to commit himself to Christ."

When I read this, I was immediately convicted that I don't think enough about opportunities God is presenting me with to preach the Gospel. I want to start preparing and rehearsing, gracious, salty, and loving responses that will open the door for conversations about Christ ... and I want to pray for opportunities and to recognize these doors that God opens each moment. How about you?