

**[1]**  
**The Point of it All**  
**Colossians 4:2-18**  
**August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Jeff Germon**

This morning we are going to finish up our Colossians series. We took a hiatus over the summer and had some great speakers speak on various themes. We are privileged to have many capable speakers at CRBC. We heard from Adrian, Steve, Leora, Mark Myles, and Derek Bird. A few weeks prior to summer we heard from Benny McGrath a couple times. Next week we are going to have the privilege of hearing from Chris Coon.

**[2]**

September 10th we are going to start our new series called *Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is*. We are going to look at all the major themes of the Bible over the next year, all the way from Genesis, the first book in the Bible, to Revelations, the final book.

What we will see is that we are in the middle of God's story. All of history (HisStory) has been, and is, moving towards a final conclusion where Satan, sin, death, evil, pain and sorrow will all be, once and for all, vanquished. We get to be a part of that exciting story if we live our lives purposefully, walking with Jesus.

It's important that we don't miss this. We each have subplots in the middle of God's overarching story. We have a tendency to live our lives as if we are the main characters, not only in our story, but also in everyone else's story. And if someone moves in on what we think is our scene we get miffed.

We will be continually frustrated with life if we live as though we are the main characters. We were made for something higher. Life will never make sense to us until we have a paradigm shift in our thinking and move in rhythm with what God is doing around us and join him in it. My prayer is that over the next year things will begin to come together for us as to how each of us as individuals and how we as a church can fit into God's great plan to redeem the world.

Today, we finish up our series in Colossians, which is actually a great lead in to our new series. We are going to focus mostly on verses 2-6 of chapter 4, so let's read that to begin.

**[3]**

**Colossians 4:2-6 (NLT)**

***<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. <sup>3</sup> Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. <sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.***

I'm going to read this again and I want you to pay careful attention to what the Apostle Paul is saying. Remember, these are his final thoughts before he closes off his letter, so what he is doing is summing up what is most important. He is giving us the big idea of everything he has written thus far. Listen closely and tell me what you think his main point is.

**<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. <sup>3</sup> Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. <sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.**

Look at some of the key phrases here. What's the main thrust? The main thrust is that Paul is urging us to live our lives purposefully, always being aware that how we live our lives is important. It matters how we behave. It matters how we treat each other.

Several years ago Ruth and I were driving back into Tsawwassen, where we lived at the time, from Vancouver and as we were making our way across the Oak Street Bridge we witnessed a couple of vehicles engaging in a not so friendly game of road rage. One of the vehicles was a large four by four truck and the other a smaller sports car. They were both very angry, and weaving in and out of traffic. The truck was trying to get past the car, which was keeping even with another vehicle beside him on the bridge so the truck couldn't pass. At one point the driver of the truck leaned his head out the window while honking his horn and screaming like a mad man some very choice words that I can't repeat here. He was so irate to the point where it looked like his head was going to blow up. After we got off the bridge I got close enough to the truck to notice a little emblem on his tailgate, in the shape of a fish.

**[4]**

And of course we all know this fish means that he is a follower of Jesus Christ and he's so proud of it that he wants the whole world to know that Jesus has changed his life, and that they too can have what he has found in Christ. What's wrong with that picture? I think that's a very sad story.

**[5]**

## **2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT)**

**<sup>20</sup> So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us...**

**[6]**

We are Christ's ambassadors. The dictionary defines "ambassador" as: **a diplomatic official of the highest rank sent by a government to represent it on a temporary mission.**<sup>1</sup>

Notice that the ambassador serves on a **temporary** mission.

During former president of the United States Ronald Reagan's administration, Secretary of State, George Shultz kept a large globe in his office. He would interview newly appointed ambassadors before they were given their portfolio. During the meeting he would test them. He would say, "Go over to the globe and prove to me that you can identify your country." They would go over, spin the globe, and put their finger on the country to which they were being sent. Schultz did this same test with every ambassador he sent to another country, and every time they would point to the country they were being sent to.

One new ambassador broke that trend. When Mike Mansfield was appointed ambassador to Japan he too was put to the test. This time, however, Ambassador Mansfield spun the globe and put his finger on the United States and said, "That's my country." Since then, Schultz told that story to many new ambassadors

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<sup>1</sup> ambassador. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary1.classic.reference.com/browse/ambassador> (accessed: May 13, 2009).

and he always urged them, "Never forget while you're over there that your country is the United States. You're there to represent us."

Likewise, we are on this earth to represent Jesus. We are living between the first and second advents of Christ, awaiting his return, and he has given us a temporary assignment until he takes us to heaven. Author Philip Yancey commented on what our role as Christ's ambassadors should look like:

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***For the watching world, we ourselves serve proof that God is alive. We form the visible shape of what he is like.<sup>2</sup>***

In other words people will judge Christ by our actions, and they will either like what they see and be attracted to him, or they will hate what they see and be repelled by how we characterize him. Derek alluded to that last week in his story about his friend who hated church people. I have, likewise, talked with many people who hate church, or God because of people who carry his name.

As Christ's ambassadors, we have been given a very specific job to do. He gave us that job in Matthew 28:19-20. We call it the Great Commission. It is his mandate for the church. It is the business we are in. It is why we exist as a church, to make disciples.

There is a temptation as we are striving to create a "successful" church experience that we will forget the reason for it all. We could come up with all kinds of answers if I asked, **"Why does the church exist?"**

We might say, "The church exists **to glorify, or worship God.**" And of course it does. And there are a lot of churches who have this as their mission, or purpose statement. Or, we could say,

"The church exists **to have a safe place where Christians can get away, and be protected from the world.**" Or,

"The church exists **to minister to one another's needs.**" Or, "It exists **for fellowship, so I can have a place of belonging - a place where everyone knows my name.**" And while there might be some truth to all of these, none of them are the main reason for the existence of the church.

Let me ask you, why do you come here week in and week out? Why do the worship teams work so hard at perfecting their music to lead us in worship? Why do we listen to sermons every Sunday? Why do we go to our Growth Group meetings every week and ask how to apply those sermons to our lives? Why are we so intent on making sure we have a process of disciple making at CRBC? Why does your board work so hard to make sure the church runs in an orderly way that honors each other and God? What is it all for? What's the point of it all?

In one of the sermons in the Colossians series we saw that Paul said he struggled with all the energy of the Holy Spirit, who, he said, so powerfully works in him to present the church mature in Christ (1:24-2:2). But, is that the end goal he had in mind? Did he struggle and suffer so much for the church just so they would be mature as an end in itself, or was there something more?

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Yancey, *Leadership Magazine*, Vol. 8, no. 3

Paul began Colossians by teaching about the supremacy of Christ. He said, "This is what is true about Jesus!" Then he went on in the remainder of the letter to show us what difference it should make that the all-sufficient Christ is living in us. It should produce fruit of change. If the Holy Spirit is living in us we should be in the process of becoming more and more like Jesus. Is that, in itself, the end that God had in mind for us? Is the church just about producing beautiful people who can get along with each other? Or, is there something bigger that God has in mind for us?

Let's read our passage one more time and see the reason Jesus wants to make these changes in our hearts.

**[8]**

#### **Colossians 4:2-18 (NLT)**

***<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. <sup>3</sup> Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. <sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.***

I want you to notice first of all that this whole passage has an outward focus. Paul tells them in the first verses that they are to pray that God would open a door for the message of Jesus. And then in the last two verses he urges them to treat those outside the church with grace so they make use of opportunities to introduce people to Jesus.

So, the entire book of Colossians was written with this focal point in mind, to teach us how to be the kinds of people who will reflect Christ's image so others would come to know him in a meaningful way. The first thing he says is "pray."

***<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.*** Devote yourselves to prayer. What does "devote" mean?

**[9]**

The dictionary defines it like this: ***"to give your time or effort completely to something you believe in or to a person."***<sup>3</sup>

Give completely. How's your prayer life? I was convicted about this last week while I was preparing this sermon. My prayer life is not what it should be. Here's what Paul said about prayer in 1 Thessalonians.

**[10]**

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NLT)**

***<sup>16</sup> Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.***

It's not that prayer is an obligation we need to tick off our religious to-do list. Rather, prayer opens up possibilities. It opens up communication between us and the living God. It builds intimacy with him. And for some reason God chooses to act through our prayers. We partner with him through prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/devote-something-yourself-to-something-someone?q=devote>

What do we usually focus on when we pray? It's usually healing for the sick. And we should pray for the sick. The Bible commands this. I am never going to stop praying for healing for people in the church who are sick. We also pray for our needs, whether they are financial, or otherwise, which we should do because the Bible tells us to do that as well. The Bible tells us to bring all our concerns to God.

But, what does Paul command us to pray for here?

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First he says, <sup>2</sup> **Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.** Being alert for what? What does Paul say we are to watch for?

This is reminiscent of an instance in the New Testament, with Jesus and his disciples just before Jesus was crucified. We don't have time to look at it, but I will describe the accounts. It happened just before Jesus would be betrayed by Judas.

Jesus took his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He told them he was going to be arrested and crucified and that they should watch and pray while he went and prayed to his Father. Mark's Gospel says Jesus went a little further and fell to the ground in deep sorrow, asking his Father God if there was any other way for the mission to be accomplished other than his crucifixion. The answer, of course, was, "No." This was the only way.

After praying intensely he returned to his disciples and found them asleep. He had just finished telling them that he would be betrayed and arrested and then ultimately crucified and asked them to keep watch while he went to pray to his Father. Instead of staying alert and watching, they all slept. He reprimanded them and asked them once again to continue praying, only to return after a while to find them sleeping again. This happened three times until Judas entered the scene leading the Roman and Jewish authorities to arrest Jesus.

It would be easy to criticize the disciples for being distracted from what Jesus called them to. The truth is that if most of us were in their shoes we would likely have chosen sleep over keeping watch too.

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What does it mean when Paul says in Colossians that we are to pray, **"with an alert mind"**?

I think it means that we are to pray that we would be able to resist temptations that would distract us from what God has called us to do. In the Lord's prayer we pray the same thing, **"lead us not into temptation."** Why is this such a concern? Because there are so many things on this earth that pull us away from God's mission for the church.

Remember Colossians 3, where Paul said we are to set our hearts and minds on things above so the pull is upward instead of downward?

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**Prayer is the one thing that will ensure this happens.** It is the one thing that says, "I am depending on the power of Jesus and not my own strength to live the life God has given me."

So we pray for the Holy Spirit, who literally lives in us, to help us resist the temptation to get distracted from the life he's called us to. We pray for the power to resist the temptation to keep unforgiveness in our hearts. We pray that God would give us what we need to love that person we find difficult to love when everything

in us wants us to be vengeful and hurt them because, well, after all, they hurt us first. We pray that God would give us the courage to make eternal investments when the world around is telling us to invest in more toys – that will only end up in the landfill. All these temptations keep us from fulfilling the mission of Jesus.

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So, Paul says be watchful and pray.

And then he says ***we should pray with a thankful heart.*** How many of you find it easy to be thankful when things are difficult? When you feel misunderstood by someone, is the first thing you think, “Praise God!”? Of course not. That’s weird. Or, if someone criticizes you for something, what’s your natural reaction? “Oh, I am so thankful for this opportunity to have my character built!” No, this is not natural, is it? It sounds strange, but, it is what we are told to do. It’s how we grow and keep from being distracted by bitterness. Have a grateful heart, an attitude of gratitude - in everything. Work hard at keeping your joy tank full and filling others’ up while you’re at it. ***“Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”***

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Then Paul says, in verse three and four, we should pray for open doors for the gospel. This should become top priority for us. It is about the mission. It’s about what God has called us to do. The first thing we should do before our feet touch the floor in the morning is ask God who he wants us to bless.

I’ve been telling you since the first Sunday I preached here on May 12th, 2013 that God is preparing divine appointments for us. What he would have us do is keep our eyes and ears open for those people he is working on around us. I’m not talking about hitting them over the head with your Bible. I am talking about keeping in a spirit of continual prayer and asking God to show you who you can love in a tangible way. How can you build relationship with the people who are already around you?

You are an ambassador of Christ, called to reflect his image to your community, to your workplace, to your school, to your family, and even to your church. So, Paul says we are to pray for these opportunities to proclaim ***“the mysterious plan concerning Christ”*** clearly. What’s the mystery of Christ Paul is talking about here?

[16]

**Colossians 1:24–27 (NLT)**

***<sup>24</sup> I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. <sup>25</sup> God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. <sup>26</sup> This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God’s people. <sup>27</sup> For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.***

The NLT uses the word “secret”. This is not a secret we are to keep to ourselves. It is the key, the secret, the mystery, that we are to share with those around us. It is the reason we exist; ***“Christ lives in you.”***

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Christ has bridged the gap between a holy God and sinful man, and he literally resides in those who have placed their trust in him. He is the only hope for a lost world, and we, as ambassadors of Christ, have been entrusted with the task of taking this message of hope and sharing it with those around us. So Paul says we should pray that we would be able to proclaim it clearly. Devote yourself to praying for this because there

may come a time when God calls you to share this message with someone. Pray, pray, pray. Prayer must become the foundation of everything we do and all our relationships.

Here are a few quotes about the gravity and power of prayer from some prayer warriors of the past:

**[18]**

**Samuel Chadwick**

***The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.***

**[19]**

**William Cowper**

***And Satan trembles when he sees, the weakest saint upon his knees.***

**[20]**

**R.A. Torrey**

***When the devil sees a man or woman who really believes in prayer, who knows how to pray, and who really does pray, and, above all, when he sees a whole church on its face before God in prayer, he trembles as much as he ever did, for he knows that his day in that church or community is at an end.***

Prayer is so important. God has given us a task that we cannot humanly do. The task is a spiritual one, and it will only be won as we devote ourselves to prayer.

Many of you are in Growth Groups, and I would encourage all the groups, whether or not your group is an official Growth Group, to spend more time in prayer. Let's not only pray for the sick and the discouraged. Let's get on with the mission and pray fervently that God would open doors for the Gospel so his kingdom will be extended through CRBC.

After Paul says to pray for open doors he tells us what do when God opens the door.

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***<sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.***

When people at work, school, or wherever, see how you live, what, or who do you think they see? Do they see someone who is more loving today than they were a year ago? Do they see someone who is growing in the grace of God, and learning how to trust him in all of life? I'm not talking about being perfect. If I was, I would be the biggest hypocrite here. I'm talking about humbly living our lives, knowing that we have a long way to go, knowing that we don't have all the answers, knowing that we sometimes hurt people with our words, and need to ask forgiveness, knowing that God wants to use us to love those who are not easy to love even when we feel like we have no love to give.

It matters so much how we treat people.

***<sup>5</sup> Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.***

It is not ok to harbor unforgiveness in your heart. It is not ok to lose your cool. It is not ok to snap at people and treat them like we have more worth than they do. God has called us to live above those kinds of attitudes and behaviours.

We are ambassadors of the living Christ and how we act towards those outside the church reflects on him. That does not mean we have to be perfect, but it may mean we are going to be asking forgiveness way more than we are comfortable with.

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Why does church exist? Here's what N.T. Wright wrote:

***"According to the early Christians, the church doesn't exist in order to provide a place where people can pursue their private spiritual agendas and develop their own spiritual potential. Nor does it exist in order to provide a safe haven in which people can hide from the wicked world and ensure that they themselves arrive safely at an otherworldly destination. Private spiritual growth and ultimate salvation come rather as the by-products of the main, central, overarching purpose for which God has called and is calling us."***

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***The purpose is clearly stated in various places in the New Testament: that through the church God will announce to the wider world that he is indeed its wise, loving, and just creator: that through Jesus he has defeated the powers that corrupt and enslave it; and that by his Spirit he is at work to heal and renew it. "***

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In other words, ***The church exists mainly to reach those outside its walls.*** Yes, the church exists to glorify God, but how do we give him glory? We give glory to God by doing what he told us to do. And he has given us a mission to make disciples of all nations. That is what the church is supposed to be about.

Never forget that, although we are all residents of planet earth, we are dual citizens. Our true home is heaven, and we are here, on temporary assignment, to represent Jesus on earth as his ambassadors.

Paul ends his letter to the Colossian church by mentioning the partnership of more than a dozen individuals and several churches who are all working together for one purpose, to bring the mystery of Jesus to the world around them so more people will be welcomed into Jesus' kingdom kind of life. That is why CRBC is here. We have hundreds of people at CRBC serving, growing, becoming more like Jesus. He wants to change the world through us one person at a time.