

Colossians - the Mystery of Christ

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of a cruciform life, with a vertical beam of prayer and intercession and a horizontal beam of conduct and conversation, as a means of witnessing to the world and proclaiming the gospel.

Duration: 34:08

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Colossians 4:2-6

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of prayer and being watchful and thankful. He encourages the congregation to pray for opportunities to share the message of Christ and to proclaim it clearly. The preacher also emphasizes the need to be wise in our interactions with those outside of the faith, making the most of every opportunity to share the grace of God. He references the architecturally cruciform shape of the church building as a reminder of the qualities to pursue and vices to avoid in our lives. The sermon concludes with a quote from John Wesley, highlighting the importance of inviting, convincing, offering Christ, and building up believers in our preaching.

Transcript

Reading from the New Testament Scriptures from the letter of Paul to the Colossians chapter 4 beginning to read at the second verse. Devote yourselves to prayer being watchful and thankful. 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 might proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. 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. Some of you are here for the first time today. Others have been worshiping here for five years, 15 years, perhaps 50 years.

Have you ever noticed that the ground plan, architecturally speaking, of this church building is cruciform? It's in the shape of a cross. There's the long part, the body of the church, which is the nave. There is this part which could be called the apse or the head.

And then you've got the two transepts or the arms. And if this were uplifted, you would have both a vertical beam from earth toward heaven and a horizontal beam in either direction. Cruciform is not only the ground plan of church buildings, it is also meant to be the shape of the Christian's life.

Whether as individuals or as a congregation, our life should be cruciform. There should be a vertical beam that goes from earth toward heaven and a horizontal beam toward the world around us. And that is seen in our text for today.

It begins with the vertical shaft, prayer to the Lord. Now this matter of prayer should not be left only to certain types of individuals. We expect missionaries to pray because they wear a particular golden halo.

They're in a separate category. You expect it of them. And we extend it beyond missionaries to ministers.

After all, they have had theological training. After all, they have been called and inducted into a pastoral charge. After all, isn't that what we pay them for? But according to the Scriptures, the matter of prayer is not only a privilege, it is a duty incumbent not alone on the missionary or the ordained minister, but on every member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle here is not speaking to missionaries, nor is he addressing himself only to the ordained minister of the congregation at Colossae. He is addressing himself to the whole people of God living in that particular locality of Asia Minor, and he says to all of them, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Now what kind of prayer are we to engage in? Here the Apostle tells us that we must engage in supplication.

We must draw near to God, sensing our need and asking him to meet that need out of the abundance of his infinite resources. In our prayers, we are to be persevering. Devote yourselves to prayer.

At the beginning of the book of Acts, after the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God's heavenly majesty, we find that the disciples obeyed his parting words, and they met together, and day by day they waited dependently upon God, and they persevered in prayer. They were devoted to prayer. It wasn't something that they slapped together in 30 seconds and withdrew for the day.

They were devoted to prayer. They were persevering in prayer, and that created the atmosphere, the context into which Christ poured out his Holy Spirit. Again we find that when people were converted at the day of Pentecost, it wasn't like firing off rockets on Victoria Day weekend and then letting the sky be black again, but it was something that they did continually, for we read that they devoted themselves steadfastly, not only to the Apostles' doctrine and to the breaking of bread and to fellowship, but to prayer.

They were persevering in their prayers. They took seriously what Paul said on one occasion to the people of Thessalonica, in prayer be unceasing. Persevering in prayer, like Jacob who, grappling with God, refused to let him go until he had received the blessing.

What do we know of persevering prayer? Isn't it rather the case that too much of our prayer life is a mere cold formality? God grant us perseverance that we might devote ourselves to prayer. More than that, there must be not only persevering prayer, but watchful prayer. Jesus told Peter, watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.

Be on guard, be alert, have the eyes of your understanding illumined. Look at the great possibilities for the advance of the gospel. Look at Satan and all his strategies.

Behold the tempter in all his tactics. Look at the pitfalls into which you might easily stumble after criticizing others for a moral lapse. With your eyes wide open, with your soul on the alert, with your spirit on guard, be watchful as well as persevering in prayer.

If the eyes of our understanding are enlightened and we are alert to both problems and potentials in life, I guarantee you that our prayers will no longer be fuzzy. They will be sharply focused because we will be concentrating on specific and very real needs. Persevering, watchful, and thankful.

Thankful for what? At the very least for the privilege of access to the heart of Almighty God. That we should be enabled to pray, that through Jesus Christ and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, we should have access to the God of the universe. That is a tremendous privilege for which we ought to be thankful.

It's a wholesome exercise to go through the four short chapters of the Colossian letter and to underline all the things for which we should be thankful. Thankful for Jesus Christ. Thankful for our deliverance from the kingdom of darkness.

Thankful for being translated into the liberating experience of the kingdom of God's dear Son. Thankful for being redeemed, liberated, set free from the bondage of evil habit and from the guilt of sin and the fear of death. Thankful for the reconciliation which we have through the blood of his cross.

Thankful that he is the firstborn from the dead, the first of many who will also experience the glory and the wonder of resurrection. To pray with perseverance, to pray watchful, to pray thankful in our attitudes toward God. Ten were the lepers that Jesus cleansed.

Only one of these returned to give thanks. God forbid that we should be numbered with the other nine when we pray. And so there must be supplication, praying to God with perseverance, with watchfulness, with thankfulness.

But this must not only be supplication by which we go to God and request blessings from him. There must also be intercession where we pray not for ourselves but for those whom the Lord lays as a blessed burden upon our hearts. Now the Apostle Paul sprinkles his prayers with intercession.

He prays not only to God, he prays for people. For example, in the Colossian letter at the very beginning of the epistle in chapter 1 verses 9 through 11, he prays for this community of believers, that they might have knowledge and discernment. He prays for the Christians of Philippi, that they might grow in their Christian experience.

He prays for the congregation at Ephesus, that they might know something of the height and the depth and the length and the breadth of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. He encourages them to pray to the God who can answer exceeding abundantly above all that we can ever ask or dare to think. He prays for others, but now he asks others to pray for him.

Paul was in need of intercession. He was in need of the encouragement that comes through the prayer of a supportive fellowship. He said, pray for us.

He not only prayed for others, he sensed the need of having others pray for him. For he realized the enormity of the task before him. He realized the complexity of the work that the Lord had laid upon his heart.

He realized the eternal destinies of men impinging on his gospel ministry. He was painfully aware of his own personal limitations, and so he prayed. Pray for me, that I might not merely do my ministerial labor as a cold-blooded professional, but rather that I might always be a shepherd who cares lovingly for the flock of God which he purchased with his own blood.

Paul asked that they should pray for him and for the members of his team, especially during these days in which he was confined to prison and he was no longer free to roam the Roman Empire as an apostle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Supplication and intercession where we pray for others. The high priest in the nation of Israel wore a breastplate, and on that breastplate there were precious stones, and on those precious stones were engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

What a tremendous piece of symbolism that on his breast, close to his heart, God's servant should bear the names of the tribes of the Lord's people. That is a marvelous picture of what the Bible means by intercession. Do we bear one another upon our hearts? Do we pray with and for each other? Do you pray for the vacancy committee of the congregation between Sundays? Do you pray for the elders and the managers of the congregation? Do you pray for those who have responsibilities with college and careers and with our teens? Do you pray for those who lead our various choirs and the ministry of music that we should never take for granted? Do we pray for those involved in evangelistic visitation? How we ought to engage in prayer that is intercessory, bearing one another upon our hearts, praying for each other.

Now in this matter of prayer, in this matter of intercessory prayer, the Apostle refers to divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Notice the way he puts it. He says, pray that God may open a door for our message.

That is an appeal to divine sovereignty. Over and over again the Apostle Paul used the figure of speech of an open door to signify the opportunities that are given in the providence of God to enter in with the word of the gospel. Writing to the Corinthians regarding his ministry in the city of Ephesus, Paul said, a great and effectual door has been opened to me and there are also many adversaries.

If there is opportunity, there is opposition. If there's a chance to advance the gospel, there is also adversity that dogs our steps at every turn. He realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was the keeper of the key of David and that if he would open the door, no one could slam it shut, and once he had closed it firmly, no one could ever pry it open.

He realized dependence on the sovereignty of God, who in the course of his providence opens and also shuts doors of missionary opportunity. And so he prays that God would grant him an open door, a recognition of divine sovereignty. What open doors does God give us in our time? Anyone who has studied the demographics of metropolitan Toronto will be struck by the fact that white Anglo-Saxon Protestants are no longer the dominant component of the city of Toronto, rather that these are now scattered all around the periphery of the city.

And it is easy for the churches to bemoan the fact that our city has changed. But may that not also be God's sovereignty in the course of his providence opening a door, the door that is given to us among immigrants, among international students, among other university students? Divine sovereignty in the course of providence opening a door for the evangelization of people in our land who would with great difficulty be reached in their home countries. How we need to be attuned to the sovereignty and the providence of God who is still opening doors for people who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to work.

But if Paul refers to divine sovereignty that God may open the door, he also refers to human responsibility. That we may proclaim the mystery of Christ to make it clear and plain as we ought to do. If the opening of doors belongs to the sovereignty of God, the proclamation of the message in an appropriate way is the responsibility of man.

And the message is summed up as proclaiming the mystery of Christ. And by mystery of Christ, of course, has meant that mystery which was hidden in the past and then suddenly like a burst of brilliant sunrise exposed to human view. Now in the fullness of time God has sent forth his Son.

Now God has come down from heaven and visited this planet. Now what was a secret is an open secret and it's called the mystery of Jesus Christ. We have a responsibility for the proclamation of the mystery to share the open secret of what God did in sending his Son to be the Savior of the world.

A Christ-centered message. That is our responsibility to proclaim his birth, his ministry, his character, his sinlessness, his suffering, his sacrifice, his resurrection, his ascension, his enthronement, his return. A Christ-centered message that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ and that we may do it with plainness of speech.

That I may proclaim it clearly. Surely it must have been an inspired juxtaposition of type. When in one church calendar the text for today, the day read, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I have not clarity I am a resounding gong or a tinkling cymbal.

Clarity. Clarity is what is needed in the proclamation of the message so that none may miss the point. That means that everyone who prepares for the ministry of preaching should take great pains to engage in plain speech whose point will not easily be missed even by the most casual hearer.

Never say felicity when you mean happiness. Plainness of speech in commanding the Savior. John Wesley, whatever we may think of his Arminianism and however much we might have wished that he'd been a thorough going Calvinist, John Wesley was a man who knew a great deal about what preaching really is.

And as far back as 1744 he called together a group of preachers for the growing Methodist movement and he gave it to them in four simple straightforward sentences. He said when you preach, invite. When you preach, convince.

When you preach, offer Christ. When you preach, build up believers. And surely we can do no better than that from the pulpits of our country from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island, Lord's Day after Lord's Day.

The vertical shaft. Prayer to the Lord. Prayers of supplication.

Prayers of intercession. And now more briefly but just as important, the horizontal dimension of this cruciform life. Witness to the world.

And the Apostle tells us here that our witness to the world, our witness to those around us, involves first of all our conduct. He says be wise in the way that you act toward outsiders. At the risk of being judgmental, the Apostle Paul recognizes that there are those who are in and those who still are out and should be invited to come in.

Some were in the ark and found safety and many spurned the ark and perished in the ensuing deluge. Some are sheep that Jesus has gathered and brought into his fold and are numbered among his flock and others are still going astray to their own everlasting peril. There are those who are joined to Jesus and there are those who are still on the outside.

And we must reckon with the fact that there are outsiders, not so that we might sneer at them with repellent and arrogant self-righteousness, but so that we might do whatever we can to invite them in. We must be wise in the way that we act toward outsiders. And that means that in our attitudes toward others and in our actions in interacting with them, we should avoid all those things which would disgrace the gospel and discredit the church and repel the inquirer.

That is why the Apostle tells us in the beginning of the third chapter that we are to put to death whatever belongs to our old ego-centered nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, the idolatry of things, things that provoke the displeasure of Almighty God, malice, rage, anger, slander, filthy language. We must remember that we are now new creatures in Jesus Christ, that we are numbered among God's elect, that we must be holy, that we must be clothed with compassion, with kindness, with humility, with gentleness and patience, that we ought to bear with each other and forgive each other and that we ought to bind it all together with love.

This is what he means. There are qualities to avoid and there are qualities to pursue. There are vices to uproot and there are virtues to cultivate and when we do that then we are acting wisely toward those who are still outside of Jesus Christ.

And we must make the most of every opportunity. One of the greatest preachers of this past century in Britain was W.E. Sangster and he tells in one of his writings about going to the city of Portsmouth to preach a Sunday evening service and all of a sudden as he was walking to the church a tremendous downpour came and he took shelter in a doorway. In a matter of moments another person came in out of the pouring rain and sought shelter in the same doorway.

They exchanged pleasantries, made a bit of small talk, commented on the awful weather and the man asked, what is it that brings you to Portsmouth? Well he says I'm here to preach a Sunday evening service and the fellow who didn't know anything about church or gospel or Christ having been invited by Sangster to go along with him went. That night he received Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior and for the rest of his life he went around wondering and he wondered over this. Imagine standing in out of the rain and your whole life changed because of that.

What if Sangster had missed the opportunity or had been self-righteously repellent and arrogant toward this man who had no previous relationship to Christ or the church. Making the most of every opportunity, acting wisely toward those who are without, that is a matter of conduct. But the Apostle concludes with a reference to conversation.

He says, let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone. Conversation that is seasoned with grace, gracious speech, winsome speech, drawing people to Jesus rather than alienating them from him. Speech that is seasoned with salt, speech that is not insipid, not dull, but something that has zest and taste and excitement to it.

Enthusiasm for your faith, speech that is seasoned with salt to counteract the corrupting trends of our day. Speech that knows how to give an answer that is appropriate to everyone who asks us. They say that in

order to teach Tommy Latin in schools where they still do that, you not only have to know Latin, you have to know Tommy.

And even when you and I come to know the Word of God, do we really know the world of men? And even when you and I keep the channels of communication clear with God, do we still have relationships with people who are on the outside so that we can listen to what is on their hearts and minds and answer each of them appropriately? Do we as church people get close enough to others to hear their aspirations, to hear their fears, to hear their aches, to share their joys? Sometimes we are guilty of answering questions that people aren't asking and we turn a deaf ear to the ones that they are pleading to have replies. There are some people who need to be confronted rather than consoled and there are other people who need to be comforted rather than reduced to rubble. How we need to know when to apply the challenge of God's moral law and the healing balm of the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ.

And so we have here, with great simplicity of speech, the word of the Apostle concerning our cross-shaped life. Vertically through supplication and intercession, horizontally through conduct and conversation, may God by his indwelling spirit help us all to be the sort of people through whom he will reach out and bring them in. Let us pray.

Lord, we have heard your word. Help us to believe it. Help us to obey it.

Help us to practice it in our conversation and in our conduct day by day. That as we let our light shine, others may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26713.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/mariano-di-gangi/colossians-the-mystery-of-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net