

Dependers Before Doers

Colossians 4:2-6

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October 11, 2026

Good morning, welcome to Christ the King. My name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And friends, it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning, that we can gather together and to worship and to sing and to come to God's word. And if we haven't had the opportunity to meet, I would love to meet you. I'm usually in the back there after the service. I'd love to greet you because we are glad that you would join us this morning. And this morning, we're continuing in our series in the book of Colossians. We're nearing the end. We're moving into chapter four this morning, and there are only four chapters. So we have this morning and then one more sermon in the book of Colossians. And then after Colossians, we're going to spend a few weeks in the minor prophet Zephaniah. So probably no one had a quiet time this morning in the book of Zephaniah. But we're going to spend a few weeks in that before we move into the season of Advent. So if you like to plan, if you like to look ahead, that's what you can be expecting.

But this morning, we're in the beginning of Colossians 4. And one of the things as we're moving into that I thought would be helpful is to just remind us of where we've been. In the very first chapter early on in the book of Colossians, we're told that Jesus is the one who is preeminent over all things. That in all things, Jesus is the king. He is the ruler. He rules over our lives. He rules over this world. He rules over you and me. He is the preeminent one. Now, what's amazing about that is that Jesus isn't simply this preeminent one who is far off from us. But very quickly after hearing about his preeminence, we heard about how Jesus takes all that he has done, his righteous works, his work on the cross, his death and resurrection, he takes all that he has done and he applies it to his people, to you and to me. So you remember, we are united to Christ, right? So what is true of Jesus is true of us. I mean, that's remarkable to think about. His death and resurrection, Paul says, is ours. So that he can say that we have died with Christ and risen with him. Now, coming out of that discussion about our union with Christ, Paul then spent pretty much an entire chapter telling us how we respond by putting off the old and putting on the new, of fleeing from vice and fleeing to virtue. That was chapter 3. And now as we come into chapter 4, we have this last encouragement, this final exhortation of dependence. So let's read Colossians 4, beginning in verse 2. Paul writes,

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, 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. 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.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that as we come to your word, you meet with us, that you are at work in our midst. And so we ask, Father, that you would use your spirit to open our eyes and soften our hearts, and that you would give us understanding. I pray, Father, that the words that are spoken would be honoring to you, and that our minds as we think upon them,

our hearts as we take them in, that our posture would be glorifying to you. Because, Father, everything we do, we want to honor you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

So last night, as Cole and I were watching the baseball game, like I'm sure all of you were, a commercial came on, which, you know, commercials come on. And Cole did what everyone else in my family does every time a commercial comes on. They mute it. They turn it off. They don't want to listen to it. They don't want to pay attention, right? Everybody grabs their phones. We check our email. We check, you know, whatever else we might be checking, but we're not going to watch or listen to a commercial. And I commented to Cole that I actually like watching commercials. I like them. Not the ones that are, like, filled with, you know, medical stuff and all that. I know that's important. But I like the other commercials. And I like commercials because they give us a window into our world. You know, marketers, these artists, really, because that's kind of what they are, they're artists, they have great insight into what makes you and me tick. They have these amazing way of showing us our desires, right? What is below the surface and what motivates us. That's what commercials are seeking to do. They're not just selling us a product, but they're connecting our hearts, our minds, our desires with their very product. They're trying to sell us on that. They're understanding our condition.

And one of the commercials that I one thousand percent resonate with is the commercials for the Home Depot. Because you have all these pictures, right, of men and women, and they're walking around the Home Depot, and they're finding all the things that they need. And then we see them in their homes, right? They're planting flowers, and they're cutting the grass, and they're painting walls, and they're fixing problems in their homes, and they're making their houses and homes a little bit better and a little bit more beautiful. And I want to run out and buy the paint and get that new lawnmower, right? Because I resonate with that line that is said at the end of every Home Depot commercial, that tagline, "how doers get more done." And in my heart, I scream *AMEN! Let's get doing*. Now, I imagine that many of you actually resonate with that as well. Maybe not because you're a DIYer. Maybe, you know, you don't like doing things at home. Maybe you're not handy. Maybe you hate cutting the grass, right? You will gladly pay someone to do that for you. So maybe it's not that way about doing things, but you're doers as well. I know most of you, this is who you are. This is who I am. We want to get doing things, right? Maybe we want to get things done at work, or in the classroom, or in our homes, right? We're the kind of people that sees our responsibilities not so much as burdens, but as opportunities to get doing. And y'all are pretty successful at this, right? Like, we're pretty good doers.

Depending on God through Prayer

And because we're pretty good at doing things, it's easy to take this mentality and apply it to all various forms of life, right? All spheres of life, including our religious life. So let's get doing Christianity. And there is a lot to do, isn't there? I mean, I just reminded us of chapter three of Colossians, and all that we're told to do, right? Don't pursue vice. Do put on virtue. Don't despise your household. Do love one another. There are lots to do. And yet here, as Paul is nearing the end of his letter, for all the dues, he says, "depend." Depend. Depend on God through prayer. Did you see our passage began in verse 2? "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." So Paul knows what he's written.

He knows what we have heard. Live in a manner worthy of the gospel. He's told us what our families are to look like, what our church community, how we're to live together, how we're supposed to reflect the gospel. And so he knows it would be easy for us to think, *Okay, let's*

form a committee, let's make a plan, and let's get doing. But before we can run out, before we get over our skis, Paul says, stop and pray. Pray. Now, let's be honest. Sometimes it's hard for us to pray because prayer doesn't feel like we're doing anything, right? I know we're in church. You're not supposed to say that. It's a safe place. It's okay. You can acknowledge it. Prayer doesn't feel like we're doing anything, right? When we're in our office, when we're in the car, when we're in our bed, and when we're at church, we close our eyes. Don't close your eyes while you're driving. It's okay to have your eyes open while you pray. But we close our eyes, we bow our heads, and we talk to God, but God's not visible. And we don't hear his voice audibly speaking back to us. And so it could feel like we're not really doing anything at all. We have nothing to show for it. And that's hard for some of us, right?

Like when we come home at the end of the day and we see our spouse and they ask, “well, what did you do today?” If you said, “well, not really anything.” They'd be like, “why did you go to work? What are you being paid for,” right? Or if we just said, “well, you know, I spent the day in prayer.” They might go, “well, that sounds spiritual, but don't you have work to do?” We want to have something to show for our day, right? Don't we? And yet prayer, we can't just check it off. We can't just show people this is what I did. And maybe that's the point. Maybe that's part of the point. Because when we pray in our prayers, we are taking our days off ourselves. We're turning our attention away from all the things that we do. And we're turning independence to the Lord. Paul says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” Being watchful. What are we watching for?

Well, there's a little bit of debate about this among scholars. Some scholars think that we're watching for the coming of the Lord in our prayers. And that would make sense because Paul talked about the coming of the Lord earlier in Colossians. Others think that this is hearkening back to when Jesus told his disciples, “Watch and pray.” You remember they were in the garden and Jesus was about to be arrested. And so he goes off into the garden with his disciples and he leaves them. He goes further in and he prays and he comes back and he finds them. What are they doing? Not praying, sleeping. And so he wakes them up and he says, “Watch and pray.” Watch and pray, right? That temptation wouldn't take over because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And so some people think watch is hearkening back to that. Be on guard against temptation. That's what that word can also mean. Others, one other theologian, he commented that this could be connected with thanksgiving. And so we have this like threefold rhythm of prayer, of intercession, right? Pray, of watching for God to answer and then being thankful when the answer comes. And so I actually think it could be any of these things, honestly, depending on the circumstance, depending on the situation, depending on what we're actually praying for.

But regardless, the point is, is that in prayer, we are recognizing our absolute complete 100% need of the Lord. And so we pray, acknowledging we can't do a thing without him. And Paul recognizes this, not just for the Colossians, but Paul recognizes this for himself because look in verse 3, he's just said to the Colossians, y'all pray. But now he says, verse 3, “pray also for us.” Now look, of all the people, the most skilled, the most talented, the most equipped, the most intelligent, we would, you know, we'd have to say Paul ranks pretty high, right? You know, there's like Jesus, and then like everybody else is like way down here, but Paul's probably on the top of the way down here, right? And so we would think that, you know, maybe he doesn't need to depend. And yet he knows, he knows very well that he needs God's help, that he doesn't need to depend on himself, but he depends on the Lord. And so we depend in prayer, knowing that God loves us, knowing that God hears us, right? Psalm 116

says that the Lord inclines his ear to us. 1 John 5 tells us if we ask anything in the name of Jesus, our Father hears us.

Depending on God in the World

And so we cry out, we cry out for ourselves, and we cry out for others. We depend upon God through prayer, but we also depend on God as we live in the world. You see, what Paul asks for is that the Lord, as Paul is living in the world, that the Lord would open a door, and that for his speech to be gracious. You see that? He asked for God to open a door, right? That a doorway would be open for the gospel to go forward. A friend of mine, I heard him once say that this is a good word for believers because we need to look for God to open the door and not try to kick it down ourselves. And I resonated with that because I want things done on my timeline and in my ways, and I want the Lord to work in the people I want him to work with and in. But Paul is simply asking the Lord to open a door. He doesn't say which door. He doesn't say his cell door. He just says open a door. You see, it's not our job to force the door open or to make the opportunity ourselves. That's the Lord's work, his job. Now, we simply look for the open door and walk through it.

And so we don't just ask for an open door, but we ask the Lord to open our eyes to see it, to walk through, to have the courage to do so. We ask God for opportunities to take God's word into the places where God is working. That's what Paul's request was. Now, Paul's request, it probably doesn't seem odd to us until we maybe consider his circumstance because you remember where Paul is? He is in jail because of sharing the gospel, because of this message. He is in prison. And so if there was ever a person or a situation that could get a pass on sharing the gospel, wouldn't we think it'd be Paul right now? And yet his chains are not a reason for him to stop sharing. No, you see, he sees this situation and all situations as opportunities for the gospel. Pray. Open doors. God, reveal where you are leading. Reveal where you are working and lead us to where you're moving. And when you do, give us words of grace that communicate truth. That's what Paul says, right? He prays for an open door. And then verse 4, "that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." This is a very simple and profound prayer: *Let my words be clear*. I imagine that some of you wish I prayed that more frequently on Sunday mornings, *Lord, make my words clear*. But really, like, every Presbyterian should pray this because, right, we're the people who, when a five-cent word is sufficient, we wouldn't use it because we've got a 500 word in our pocket. But seriously, this is what we want, isn't it? To speak the truths of God's grace, his glory, his goodness, in a way that those who need to hear it and those who hear our words can understand it.

I remember when I was living in St. Louis, I was talking to my neighbor who had a garden. He just started a garden. He also had chickens, which was very fun. He also had a beehive, which was really fun. But we're talking about his garden because, y'all know, I like to garden. And so we're talking about and he's talking about how much he loves being in it and it's therapeutic and he takes great joy in it. And I am totally resonating with this, right? Because I love getting my hands dirty and planting seeds and seeing it grow and eating from the fruit of my labors, right? It's wonderful. It's glorious. It's beautiful. And so as I'm talking and I'm resonating with him and connecting with him, I go, "yes, it's almost Edenic." Now, y'all know me. I'm a pastor and we're in church. And so maybe you hear Edenic, E-D-E-N-I-C, right? Edenic, like Eden, right? Regardless, you know what I'm talking about. So that place, Eden, right? You would be able to figure it out from context. However, my neighbor, my friend who heard me call the garden Edenic, he looks at me as though I was speaking Martian. I thought I was being wise, philosophical, theological, maybe a little esoteric, right?

And yet he had no idea what I was talking about. I left him confused because I defaulted to churchy language. See, I wasn't thinking about him. I wasn't thinking about the person I was speaking to or our shared vocabulary or our lack of a shared vocabulary. And that left him confused. I could have benefited from this prayer, "Lord, make my words clear."

But that's not just Paul's prayer for himself. It's later what he says about the Colossians, to the Colossians, "let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Now, in speaking this way before the world, we're embodying what Paul said, walking wisdom toward outsiders. Right now, outsiders, he's not speaking disparagingly about anyone. He's simply referring to those outside the church. And he's saying we need to live wisely before them. And this wise living is reflected in the words that we use, in how we speak, that we are gracious and seasoned with salt. Now, this challenges, I think, what our perspective often is when we think about talking with non-Christians. Because it's very easy for us to think that when we engage with a non-believer, that we need to make sure to tell them all the ways that they're wrong. And we need to make sure that we are ready to destroy and dismantle any one of their arguments. And we need to make sure that they are clear that we, what we are against. Now, for sure, we should not shy away from the truth. And sometimes the truth can be hard to hear, but we don't have to be punks about it.

I mean, do you remember the Apostle Paul in Acts 17? He enters into the city of Athens, and he walks through the marketplace. And what does he see? He sees all the idols, right? He sees all the idols. And if you've read the New Testament, you're familiar with the writings of Paul, you know Paul was not a fan of idols. And so, when he has an opportunity to talk to the people of Athens, do you remember what he said about these idols? *Are you insane? Are you worshiping things made with human hands, things made of stone, of wood, of rock? What is wrong with you?* He didn't say any of those things. No, you remember what he said? He said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious, idolatry, false worship. You are very religious. For I passed along and observed the objects of your worship. I found also an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, would therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." And then he went and told them about Jesus. He then went and shared with them about Christ and how he was resurrected from the dead. He told them about the Lord, about his death and resurrection. He was calling them to repentance. He didn't mock them. He didn't belittle them. He didn't intellectually bully them or shame them. He was gracious with his speech and pointed them to the gospel. Let your speech be gracious, full of salt.

Paul here isn't simply calling for civility in our speech, but he's saying this is how we should respond to a world with good news. This is how we should respond to the world with good news. Good news that grace has come, that Jesus has died, that forgiveness is ours. I mean, that is news that should bring smiles to our faces and joy to our heart, not anger and frustration. And that's what we should be telling our neighbors. That's what we should be bringing to the world. Speaking graciously. Full of joy. And y'all, the truth is, is we need the Lord's help to do this. Because we're sometimes not going to know how to respond. And we're not going to know what to say. And we're not sure if the Lord opened the door or not. And so we pray. We pray for ourselves. And we pray for one another. Pray for me. Just this past week, I had a conversation with a woman is a self-described pagan. I didn't know what she meant. And so I asked, "When you say pagan, what do you mean?" And she said that she is a worshiper of the ancient Nordic gods. And I have to tell you, that is a new one for me. And I had no idea what to say to her. I wasn't sure how to respond. But I knew that if I would

have responded with shock, if I would have kind of smirked, if I would have nervously laughed, I'd probably never talk to her again about this. I didn't know what to say. I was caught off guard. So pray for me. Pray for one another. Because I imagine I'm not the only one who's been in a situation like that. It might not be about some religion that we are unfamiliar with. It might just be the coworker that's standing before us, and we have no idea what to say. It might be our neighbor who is talking about a garden, and we're not sure how to turn it to the gospel. It might be someone in our class, wherever we might be. I imagine many of us have been in that situation where we're not sure. Should we speak or be quiet? What should we say in that moment? How is it that we walk in wisdom before others? How is it that I should speak graciously and clearly right now? And so, pray for me. And I'll pray for you. And we'll pray for one another, knowing that we don't kick down the door, but it's the Lord who opens the doors. And knowing there is the Lord who is at work. And knowing there is the Lord that we depend upon. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you have given your Son, and this is good news. Good news for those who are in need of grace and mercy, of forgiveness and love. And so, Father, we pray that you would show us where it is that this news is needed. We ask, Father, that you would open doors and give us eyes to see those open doors, and that you would lead us through them so that we would be able to speak, speak clearly, that we would know when to be silent and to ask questions, that we would know where it is that you are leading. And we ask that you would use us. Use us to proclaim your truth, to tell of it to our neighbors, to the world. Father, we ask that you would help us to depend upon you. And we pray all this in the name of Christ and all God's people said together, Amen.