

Title: "What are you paying attention to?"

Text: Colossians 4:2-18

Worship: "Praise Jesus who rescued us from the domain of darkness"

Preaching date: March 8th, 2020

Key Sentence: "Paul is going to encourage us that If we pay attention, if we stay focused, we can accomplish the Lord's will in our lives, and greatly impact His kingdom."

Outline:

- I. The need for prayer (Colossians 4:2-4)
- II. The need for wisdom (Colossians 4:5-6)
- III. The need for faithfulness (Colossians 4:7-18)

Notes:

1. Worship: This week's text talks about the importance of prayer, loving those around us, and being faithful to what He has called us to do. We can worship the One who has saved us and who has given us the privilege of serving Him.
2. This is a prayer week. Prayer, living wise lives, being faithful---commit to this, and ask for help in doing it. Luke 6:12, James 1:5, and Revelation 2:10 and 2 Timothy 4:7.
3. Children's Corner: "Keep your eye on the ball!"
4. Visuals: Looking at the stars (telescope, binoculars, etc.)
5. Sign: "Stay focused"

Colossians 4:2-18

6. Bulletin: Stack 2, 19B8 "Fight the good fight of faith"

## Colossians 4:2-18

“Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah, for which I am in prison, <sup>4</sup> so that I may reveal it as I am required to speak. <sup>5</sup> Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. <sup>6</sup> Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

<sup>7</sup> Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful servant, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and so that he may encourage your hearts. <sup>9</sup> He is with Onesimus, a faithful and dearly loved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, as does Mark, Barnabas’s cousin (concerning whom you have received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These alone of the circumcision are my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. <sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always contending for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. <sup>13</sup> For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas greet you. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home. <sup>16</sup> When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. <sup>17</sup> And tell Archippus, “Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it.”

<sup>18</sup> This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.”

“What are you paying attention to?”

Colossians 4:2-18

So, what are you focused on today? What is your goal for this coming week? What is your goal for this year? What is your life vision? These are huge questions that can greatly impact the kingdom of God, or not. These are all important questions that we all need to think about. Because is it all about ME? Is it all about what “I” want? Is it all about money, success, fame, or personal happiness and comfort? These questions should really cause all of us to stop and really ask ourselves, “what am I doing, what am I focused on, have I taken my eyes off of what’s really important?” And if we don’t pay attention to the truth, to what God says, and what He has called us to do, we can easily believe these lies and live our lives for ourselves, and **not** really accomplish much for God’s kingdom. I’ve been reading a book lately by Joseph Stowell titled, “Eternity.” He says, “This present world often captures our attention and distracts us from our focus on God’s kingdom....Eternity is primary. Heaven must become our first and ultimate point of reference. We are built for it, redeemed for it, and on our way to it. Success demands that we see and respond to now in the light of then. All that we have, are, and accumulate must be seen as resources by which we can influence and impact the world beyond. Even our tragedies are viewed as events that can bring eternal gain.” And in today’s text, Paul is going to encourage us that if we pay attention, if we stay focused, we can accomplish the Lord’s will in our lives, and greatly impact His kingdom, not ours.

So, this morning we are going to be in the book of Colossians, and I love this little book. Paul writes to the church in Colossae, and he writes to correct some false teachings. He also writes to encourage the church to stay focused, to not believe the lies, to be faithful, and to work hard for God’s kingdom. This morning we will be looking at chapter 4:2-18. And the first thing Paul encourages them and us to do, is to stay focused through prayer. Paul writes, “Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.” Paul was a prayer warrior and knew the importance and the power of prayer. In chapter 1 of Colossians we see Paul praying for the church. He says, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” Also in chapter 1 Paul says, “...we haven’t stopped praying for you.”

Since Paul knew the power and importance of prayer, he tells them to “devote” themselves to it; meaning to continue in it or persist in it (Don’t give up). So, how committed to prayer are you? Do you see your need for it? Do you see the value in it? So often, we may pray for a few mornings, but then stop. Then a month or two later, we start getting more serious about prayer, but then we stop again. Paul wants us, God wants us to be devoted to prayer, to persist in it; this is how we get power, guidance, and closeness to God.

My challenge to you today; if you’re **not** spending daily time with the Lord, to start tomorrow. Even if it’s only 10 minutes every day, start praying and devote yourself to it and watch God work in your life. And as you do, stay alert in it. So often, if we are honest, this is the hardest thing to do; we start to pray and all of a sudden we start thinking about lunch or paying the bills, we get consumed with life’s stuff, we get distracted so easily, and our minds just wander. And at times, we just fall asleep. When Paul says to stay alert in it, this literally means to “Keep awake.” Remember the disciples when they were with Jesus in the garden before He was betrayed. Several times Jesus told them to pray that you won’t enter into temptation. But what did they do, they fell asleep, they were not staying alert in prayer. And so often we are just like the disciples. So, Paul is saying, be devoted to spending time with the Lord through prayer; and be alert in it; it’s that important.

And as we do this, we should do it with thanksgiving. As we pray, our prayers should be mixed with praise. We have so much to praise Him for, He is so good to us and has given us so many blessings. Again, Paul leads by example. As he prays for the church, he’s also in a state of praise for what God has done. Colossians 1:11-13, Paul says, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy <sup>12</sup> **giving thanks** to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” So, as we pray, we can praise Him for saving us and there’s so many other truths that we can praise Him for. That’s why for the men’s prayer time on Wednesday mornings, we praise Him for 30 minutes, then we lay our requests at His feet for 30 minutes. Our time with the Lord should be full of prayers and praises. And as we pray, we need to realize that through prayer,

anything is possible. Through prayer, we are connecting to the God of the universe. And prayer can change any situation, prayer can change history:

Rees Howells was used mightily by the Lord. God used him as a missionary to South Africa and used him to preach in Wales as the Welsh Revival was sweeping across the land. Years later, Howells started a Bible college in Wales. Prayer was central to running the school and he made it central to the lives of the students as well. When World War II began in Europe, Howells called collegewide prayer meetings, and time after time God answered the student's prayers for the war.

"On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the students met for an early evening prayer meeting and then again for a second one at 9:45pm. At the latter meeting Howells announced, "The Lord has burdened me between the meetings with the invasion of Salerno. I believe our men are in great difficulties, and the Lord has told me that unless we can pray through, they are in danger of losing their hold."

Soon everyone was on their knees imploring God to intervene. Suddenly at **11pm** they broke into spontaneous singing and rejoicing, believing that God had brought a miraculous intervention at Salerno, Italy.

Then they all listened expectantly to the midnight news. The radio announcer said that unless some miracle happened, the Allies would be pushed back into the sea-exactly the warning Rees Howells had heard from the Lord.

The next day the newspaper headline read, "The miracle of Salerno." It reported that the pounding by the Nazi artillery on the first day was so heavy that it was obvious that unless a miracle occurred the beachhead could not be established. Then suddenly, for no accountable reason, the enemy artillery ceased firing---**at eleven o'clock**. The Salerno beachhead was established." God answered their prayers in a powerful way. And He can answer ours too!

Paul then encourages the church, as they pray, to pray for him. Verses 3-4, "At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the Messiah, for which I am in prison, <sup>4</sup>so that I may reveal it as I am required to speak."

So here's Paul in prison. This was during the time of his first imprisonment; and what's his big request? Pray that the Lord gives me an opportunity to share the gospel. Most of us, our only prayer request would be, pray that "God would get me out of here!" But Paul was focused, he was kingdom minded, everything wasn't all about him, but to Paul it was all about the mission; even in difficult times.

Again Stowell says this about having the wrong focus: "Since eternity is not our (focus) guide....Obedience to the point of discomfort, loss, or suffering is an unthinkable option since we have been trained to expect peace, satisfaction, and emotional fulfillment here on earth."

At some level, we have believed the lie that life should be perfect and pain free all of the time. And actually, it's the opposite---we are promised suffering in this world and often that's what God uses to get His gospel out and to grow us so that we can be more like Him. And so often when trials come our way, what do we do? We get angry at God; we blame Him and turn away from Him. But so often, these are the times He can do great thing in our lives and those around us, if we're paying attention.

In 1900 missionaries, Willie and Helen Peat, their two daughters, and two single women missionaries were serving in China and trying to get the gospel out. Well, it was during this time that a group of conservative Chinese rose up to stop all missionaries in China. This group was known as the "Boxers." The Boxers were brutal and started killing all the missionaries in the land. When Willie and Helen heard about this, they fled to the mountains and hid in a cave. And in that cave Willie wrote this, "The soldiers are just on us, and I have only time to say "Good-bye" to you all. We shall soon be with Christ, which is very far better for us. We can only now be sorry for you who are left behind and our dear native Christians. Good-bye! At longest it is only "til He Come." We rejoice that we are made partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when His glory shall be revealed we may "rejoice also with exceeding joy."

Did you get that, did you hear that? They were focused on the big picture, they rejoiced to suffer for Christ and rejoiced even more to be in heaven with Jesus. They lived out what we read from Stowell earlier, "Eternity is primary. Heaven must become our first and ultimate point of reference. We are built for it, redeemed for it, and on our way to it. Success demands

that we see and respond to now in the light of then...Even our tragedies are viewed as events that can bring eternal gain.” They had the right perspective on things. Soon after he wrote this, Willie, Helen, their two daughters, and the two women with them were all martyred. They gave their lives for the mission.

So, this is hard stuff. I know the feeling when you’re in a difficult situation-you just want it to stop; you just want it over. You just want God to fix everything. You just want life to be easy. But, somehow in the midst of that trial, somehow in the midst of the storm, we need to look up and say, “God, this is hard, help me, not my will be done, but Yours. Help me to see the big picture, help me to see what You’re doing; use me in this situation for Your glory.” This is hard stuff, but we need to pay attention in these moments because the Lord may have big plans for us to get His gospel out.

So, Paul has been encouraging the church to pray, now he encourages them (and us) to be wise and to live out their faith for the world to see.

Verses 5-6, “Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. <sup>6</sup>Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.”

Again, to Paul it’s all about the mission. We need to do everything possible to win people to Christ. And to do this, it takes wise living and wise talking.

We should live in way that points people to Jesus. So, how we act, how we dress, the places we go, the movies we watch, the music we listen to, the people we hang out with; everything we do should be done in a way that causes the people around us to be encouraged and to look up, look to Jesus. And believe it or not, we are being watched. Maybe it’s your children, your co-worker, your friend at school, your neighbor, or maybe it’s someone at the grocery store that you see each week. But they are watching.

And as we interact with the world, these are all opportunities to show people Jesus. So, we need to make the most of our time; every moment of every day really does matter. And it’s so

important that our actions do not create a stumbling block for those around us. We need to live wise lives.

Also, let me just say that wise living is beneficial to us too, not just those around us. All that this world offers, never really satisfies. But when we live wise lives, when we live the way God wants us to live, that's when we will truly be happy, when we will experience real peace, real joy, and real purpose in our lives.

And as we are living in wisdom, we need to be wise with our words too. This is huge. So often it's our words that creates a stumbling block for those that are around us. We say that we are a Christian, but our words so often don't reflect that. And we all know just how powerful our words are, they can either encourage and build someone up, or tear them down. Earlier in chapter 3 Paul addressed the words that we use. He said (Colossians 3:8-10), "But now you must also **put away** all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and **filthy language from your mouth**.<sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices<sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self."

If you are saved, if you have trusted Christ for salvation, then you have been born again, you have a new self, and now you have the power in you to put away filthy language from your mouth. Cursing, inappropriate language, inappropriate jokes, and rude remarks should not be coming off of our lips (those are stumbling blocks to those around us). So, as a Christian we should put away, teasing people, bullying people, and saying hateful and hurtful words. The words that come out should be gracious, seasoned with salt. And as we sprinkle a little bit of salt to our food to make it taste better, the words we use should make our conversations better. The words we say should be loving, kind, and pleasant. Our words should be different than the worlds words. Those around us should notice a difference in us. Our words should draw people closer to God.

And for those that are here that struggle with their words, Jesus makes it very clear what the problem may be, Luke 6:45, "A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart."

So, what's in your heart will come out. The question you may need to ask yourself, "what's going on with my heart, what is my heart full of?" Because, whatever we put in, will come out. The things we listen to, the things we look at, all goes in, if it's good stuff, good stuff will come out; bad stuff, then bad stuff will come out. So, maybe today you need to repent of some of the stuff you've been filling your heart with and start today filling it with godly things. And as you do this and lean on the Holy Spirit in you to help you to live this out in your life, you will then be ready to know how to answer each person. God will give you the words that you need to help and to encourage the person that you are talking to. We need God at work in our lives to do this, we can't do this in our own strength!

So, we have been encouraged to pray, to live wise lives, and now we will be encouraged to be faithful servants.

Verses 7-9, "Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful servant, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. <sup>8</sup>I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and so that he may encourage your hearts. <sup>9</sup>He is with Onesimus, a faithful and dearly loved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here."

So, we know from Acts 20 Tychicus was a traveling companion with Paul. Paul later sent him to Ephesus to minister to them. And here in Colossians we see that Paul used him most likely to deliver this letter to the church in Colossae and to encourage them. And look how Paul describes him, "a loved brother, a faithful servant, and a fellow slave in the Lord." He could have thought, I'm above delivering a letter, get someone else to do it. But, he stepped up, he was faithful, he did what needed to be done; he was a servant. And for you and me today, we need to be faithful to what God has called us to do, even if it's something small like delivering a letter.

Onesimus, we know him from the book of Philemon. He was a runaway slave, and he most likely stole something from his master and during his time of running, met Paul and got saved. Onesimus was radically saved by the gospel, and then used by God to encourage the church. What a great story of how God can change a life (share gospel). So, if your life is falling apart and going in the wrong direction, God can easily put you on the right path. So, he goes with

Tychicus to Colossae to encourage the church; and how is he described-He also was a loved and faithful brother.

Verses 10-11, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, as does Mark, Barnabas's cousin (concerning whom you have received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These alone of the circumcision are my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."

We know from the book of Acts that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and accompanied Paul on his third missionary trip, now he's in Rome with Paul and most likely in prison with him for preaching the gospel. He was a fellow prisoner for the cause of Christ.

John Mark, he went on a missionary trip with Paul, but deserted him. After that, Paul did not want to take him on any more trips. But here we are years later, and Mark has proven himself to being a faithful servant. And listen to what Paul says to Timothy as Paul is in prison for the second and last time, he says, "Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you, for he is useful to me in the ministry." Paul and Mark had reconciled, and in the end, before Paul is martyred, Paul wants him by his side. He is with Paul in the end ministering to him and ministering to the church. Mark was a faithful servant, not perfect, but faithful.

Jesus who was called Justus was also a faithful servant. Jesus was a very common Jewish name at that time, and he was also called Justus, meaning "righteous." And these three guys, Aristarchus, John Mark, and Justus were all Jewish Christians. These three were co-workers for the kingdom of God, they were focused, they were mission minded. And they provided comfort to Paul as he sat in prison. They were loyal friends who were there when their friend Paul needed them.

These three guys all had a different role to play, but they did their part, and were faithful in it. And for you and me today, we all have a role to play, maybe your're a greeter, a Sunday school teacher, a nursery worker, maybe you serve on the worship team, maybe you lead a small group, maybe you help with setting up the chairs for Sunday morning, maybe you cook food for the Harvey teams when there here; whatever it is, be faithful in it. Realizing that the little part

that we play, makes a huge impact in people's lives, and for God's kingdom. And on this topic of be faithful, say thank you!!!!!!

Verses 12-13, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always contending for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured in everything God wills. <sup>13</sup> For I testify about him that he works hard for you, for those in Laodicea, and for those in Hierapolis."

Epaphras was most likely a leader in the church at Colossae. And as Paul was in prison, Epaphras was with him. And how is he described--He is described as a "slave of Christ Jesus," he was another servant for Jesus. And obviously prayer was important to him. And what was his prayer, that they would stand firm, in God's will, being fully mature. We need prayer warriors like this today praying for our church. Epaphras is a great example of someone being faithful in prayer.

Verse 14, "Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas greet you."

Doctor Luke wrote the third gospel and the book of Acts. The gospel of Luke is the longest of the four gospels and most scholars agree that Luke was a gentile. And if so, that would mean that he was the only Gentile to write a New Testament book. Luke was with Paul during his first imprisonment and it seems like "only Luke" was with him during his second imprisonment. Luke was a faithful follower of Christ, and faithful friend.

Demas on the other hand, we don't know much about him, but we know he was with Paul during this time. And in Philemon verse 24, Paul calls him a co-worker. Demas was on mission and serving the Lord. But, something happened with Demas. While Paul is in prison for the second time, he says this about Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10, "for Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica." Demas started out strong in the faith; but took his eyes off of Jesus. He got distracted by the things of this world. And instead of going all out for Jesus, he pursued the things of this world instead.

And for us today, any of us at any time, could fall. The temptations of this world are all around us; money, success, fame, possessions, and all of the shiny things that catch our eyes, are all

constantly tugging at us. Demas should be an example to all of us of what can happen if we are not focused, and not paying attention. We don't know what happened to Demas after this. Did he turn back to the Lord, or did he continue to love the world more than God. We don't know, but Scripture records him as turning from his faith. The enemy is after all of us every day. We have fight the good fight and not give in the tactics of the evil one.

Verses 15-16, "Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home. <sup>16</sup>When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea."

Paul asked that is greetings be given to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha. Depending on your translation in your Bible, you will see that it either says, her house, or his house. We don't know if Nympha was a he or a she. But, we do know that the church in Colossae was meeting in Nympha's house. Back then the church met in homes, church buildings didn't spring up until the third century. So, Nympha was faithful to open up her or his house to allow the church to meet.

Paul urged an exchange of letters. Once they had read Colossians they should send it to Laodicea and read the letter coming from Laodicea.

Verse 17, Paul ends with a charge to Archippus, he says, "And tell Archippus, "Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it."

Archippus is mentioned in Philemon and was most likely the son of Philemon, one of the leaders in the church in Colossae. Paul encourages Archippus to stay focused, so that you can complete the work God has given you. And for us today, we need to pay attention to the work God has given us to do, so that we can accomplish it. Notice the work to do is God's work, not ours. It's all about the mission and advancing God's kingdom.

George Whitefield was born in England and was the greatest preacher of the eighteenth century. He devoted his life to preaching God's Word. He preached wherever he could, he made 14 trips to Scotland and 7 to America. On a normal week, he would preach about twenty sermons. At the end of his life he went out to preach his last sermon to a crowd in the fields of

Massachusetts. And as he left, people in the next town were waiting for him to get there so that they could listen to him preach as well. He wasn't planning on stopping, but he did anyway. He was sick, not feeling well, but he preached for two hours anyway on one verse, "Examine yourselves to make sure you are of the faith." That night, he and his friend who had traveled with him went to the home of a pastor in the area to sleep for the night. But, when they got to the house a crowd was waiting for him to preach again. Tired and sick, Whitefield preached until the candle in his hand went out. That night the young man who had been traveling with Whitefield got on to him and told him that he should slow down and not preach so much so that he can rest and get better, to this Whitefield responded, "I had rather wear out, than rust out." He died that night, he gave his all and was faithful to the end.

Paul ends by saying, "This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you."

And I just want to end by saying, let's do this Trinity Fellowship; let's strive to devote ourselves to prayer, to live in all wisdom, and to be faithful to what God has called us to do. And in doing this, let's remember His grace that He showers on us every day. We will fail at times; this is an impossible task in our own strength. So, may we stay focused, paying attention to the ministry God has given us, may we all wear out, instead of rusting out; and when we do this, we can greatly impact the lives around us and God's kingdom.