



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 4:2-6

"Prayer and the Outsiders"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We turning to Colossians chapter 4 in the next to the last of our expositions of this epistle that Paul wrote to the little church that met in Philemon's house, and we are reading verse 2 through verse 6 for the Scripture reading. You'll notice the opening phrases of it have to do with the prayer life of the believer, and in our bulletin today, Mr. Spurgeon has some words to say with regarding prayer. They're very effective, and I encourage you to read them and to ponder them. In fact if you would read them and ponder them, we would just dispense with the message this morning, at least the first part of it, because the words are really excellent and lay great stress on the significance of prayer for the life of a believer. The apostle writes in verse 2 of Colossians 4,

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

May God bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the encouragements and the exhortations that we receive from the word of God concerning our prayer life, and we confess, Lord, that so often we forget to spend that important time with Thee in prayer. Forgive us for our sin, and enable us, Lord, to have a true prayer life that glorifies Thee and blesses the people of God. We give Thee thanks, and we give Thee praise for the many promises of the word of God that have to do with the life of prayer and communion with Thee, and we ask, Lord, for each one of us, that by Thy grace we may be motivated and enabled to have a more significant prayer life. We thank Thee for this, the Lord's Day, and another opportunity to gather to hear the ministry of the word of God, to have fellowship with fellow believers and to enjoy the day of rest.

We give Thee thanks for all of the provisions that Thou hast made for the creatures that Thou hast created. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the church of Jesus Christ today, and we pray Thy blessing upon every member of that body of believing people, who by the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit have been brought to the knowledge of him whom to know as life eternal. We give Thee praise and thanks for the forgiveness of our sins, and we thank Thee and praise Thee for the other blessings that are associated with the knowledge of our Lord.

We pray Thy blessing upon every member of this body, wherever they may be today. We ask, Lord, especially Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word, and may it be the means of edification, and strengthening for each of us and for all who belong to this body, that Thou hast brought into being in marvelous grace. We give Thee thanks, Lord, for the local manifestations of the body of Christ, and we pray for Believer's Chapel and for its elders, and for its deacons, and for its members and friends and the visitors who are here with us today. Bless the ministry of the Word in the various forms as it goes forth, and also the life of the body.

We give Thee thanks for all of the past. We look forward to the future with anticipation. We especially pray, Lord, for the outreach of the chapel in its publications and its Bible classes, and its radio ministry and tape ministry. Bless richly, Lord, and use that ministry for the building up of the saints and evangelization of the lost. We pray especially for those whose names are in our Calendar of Concern, and who have requested prayer. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them. Give healing in accordance with Thy will, and extend the fullness of Thy mercy to all of them. We commit them to Thee, and we pray especially that they may have the sense of Thy presence and the sense of Thy ministry to them.

And we pray, Lord, for our country. We ask Thy blessing upon those who are in authority in the United States, and in Texas and Dallas. We bring them before Thee. We pray that in our society there may be a deeper recognition of the claims of the eternal God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who works through the Holy Spirit to accomplish his purposes. We thank Thee for this hymn that we have just sung about the purposes of God.

We know that Thou art truly the interpreter of all of the things that are taking place, and the clues to the significance are found in the word of God. Help us to remember that, and encourage us and strengthen us as we seek to represent Thee in this world of which we are a part. We ask Lord Thy blessing upon our service now, upon the Sunday school that follows and upon the other meetings of the day, and especially as we gather around the Lord's table and remember him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] In these closing words of Paul's letter to the Colossians the apostle discusses the operational side of the faith, and one thing that stands out is that it is very daily. Someone has said, "Life is so daily." Some years ago, one of the well-known lords of the land of Britain in Parliament stood up when divine principles were injected into a discussion that was going on the Parliament, and he said, "Things have come to a pretty

pass, when religion has to affect our daily lives." [Laughter] And I think there are many people who really feel that way, and seem to forget that as a matter of fact, the things that we claim to believe are things that are to be our daily life, and one of the things that one learns from the study of the Scriptures is that in the Scripture this point is made very emphatically. For example we have the case of the Bereans, who search the Scriptures daily, and God through Luke, who wrote the word, lays great stress upon the fact that they were more noble than those in Thessalonica for that very reason, that they searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

The Lord Jesus Christ in some words that have to do with discipleship in Luke chapter 9 in verse 23 makes these statements. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." And the psalmist in the 86th Psalm and the 3rd verse has a word that has to do with that as well, for in this text, in verse 3 the psalmist says, "Be merciful unto me oh Lord, for I cry unto Thee daily." So the things that have to do with the Christian life, are things that are daily things that believers are to be involved in.

As usual with Paul, other important questions are raised by operational and ethnical exhortations and as you read through verse 2 through verse 6, other things immediately to your mind. One of them is something that we discuss in theological classroom, but which most people have some questions about at one time or another. We have many places in the Bible where divine election is referred to. One doesn't have to read much of the New Testament before he comes again and again to the doctrine that God elects people.

Well, that raises questions because also with these many references to divine election, we have so many exhortations and admonitions with regard to prayer, and at first glance one might think there surely is some kind of contradiction between divine sovereign unconditional election and the exhortations of the Bible to prayer. How can it possible for us to pray with any sense of accomplishing anything if all things are

determined by the divine electing purposes of God. If it is true that he works all things according to the counsel of his own will, and if it's true therefore that all things are the product of the divine mind, then what is the point of prayer. And yet over and over again in the Bible we have these exhortations to prayer.

I have people write me quite frequently about their views concerning election. This past week I received a very nice letter from a man in Virginia, who was commenting upon the fact that he had come to an understanding of what the Scriptures have to say concerning divine election, and he concluded with the statement, something like that, "That I am firmly convinced that the Bible teaches divine election." Well, that kind of thing, I'm sure raises questions in the minds of all of us. What is the relationship of prayer to divine election? For the apostle tells us that we have been chosen in him before the foundation of the world. In Ephesians, another one of his prison epistle written at approximately the same time as this one, but here he says continues in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving. In Ephesians he says that God works all things according to the counsel of his will. And yet at the same time, he says, continue in prayer, and in the Ephesians epistle in the 6th chapter after having stated the other statement in the 1st chapter he again exhorts the Christian to prayer, so it's evident that the apostle did not consider that these statements concerning divine sovereign unconditional election are in any way opposed to the exhortations to a daily life of prayer.

Well, one thing we could say without going into it, for that's not our purpose today, is simply to point out that while it is true, that God has determined all things that come to pass. He has determined that all things come to pass through certain means. And one of the means for the accomplishment of his purposes, which he has ordained, is prayer. We look at prayer, I think, so simply and often so wrongly. It has been said that prayer's the hearthstone of all piety, but I have the feeling, and perhaps I am judging too much by my own experience that prayer is not nearly the part of our daily Christian life that it ought to be, but I know some other things about prayer. For example, is you open

up the great systematic theologies of the Christian faith, it is very rare to find any one of the great systematic theologies with a section on prayer. Occasionally you'll find references to prayer of course, but they are usually incidental references.

Charles Hodge and his systematic theology a very well known one, does discuss prayer in connection with the doctrine of election because people do raise that question. If we believe in election, then what's the point of prayer? If we believe in God accomplishing all of his purposes, why should we then pray? Most seminaries have no required course on prayer at all. If they have a course on prayer, it's usually an elective course.

Now, that makes us all smile, and I'm not suggesting in any way that evangelical theological seminaries do not lay stress on prayer. They do stress prayer, but so far as really devoting one's attention to it, it's very rare to find attention devoted directly to it. Of course it's an experiential thing, and that in itself makes it not quite as suitable perhaps for classroom lectures as other parts of the Christian faith, but I think that's rather significant.

Teaching and preaching about prayer often distorts the Scripture too, and if you have any doubts about it, read what the Bible says about prayer, and then listen to the evangelists on TV because they often distort the things that have to do with prayer. We are encouraged to claim things that the Bible never names. For example the name of Jesus is evoked over things, he wouldn't recognize as the things that he has in mind in his exhortations. And some of our godliest folk are tortured. One recent book on prayer has said, by barbarian banter, maybe some day you'll have enough faith to be healed. All of these things are really contrary to the teaching of the word of God and this book that I have been reading, this individual says, and I think says it quite well. "An astounding number of Christians believe prayer is the way to get God to give you what you want, and being so convinced their easy prey for hawkers of techniques and equipment which seem to guarantee results. Personal communication with our Lord is less commonly

thought of in mechanical and economic terms." That I think is generally true. People do think of prayer as simply a way to get what we want. In a sense it's a way by which we manage God, and that is thoroughly contrary to what the Bible says about prayer.

Other questions that arise here of course are questions like, What about Paul's financial principles? After all he makes prayer request unaccompanied by petitions for funds. Actually Paul seems to be an individual who depended upon the Lord alone. He doesn't say anything when he tells us his needs about his financial needs. He trusted in the Lord. Appeals that we may pray intelligently are never found in the language of Paul. I receive constant appeals. Everyday I can count on some kind of appeal appearing in my mailbox, from a Christian organization, and they frequently justify the unfolding of all of their specific financial needs by saying in order that we may pray intelligently. I don't know why I must know that this particular organization needs \$425,000 for the building in order to pray intelligently for them. Why I have to know that, and why I have to know that they need it by August the 1st to pray intelligently or September the 1st, or whatever it may be is something that I have found very difficult to understand. It seems to me that an individual can pray intelligently for an organization without knowing those things. So when we look at what Christian life is like today and compare it with the Scriptures, we see things that are quite a bit different.

Another question he raises here is the relationship of prayer and the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we'll say a word that in a minute. Paul is talking now then about general operational duties of Christians, and incidentally addressed to the whole congregation. He has just, in the preceding context talked about wives and husbands, about children and parents, and about servants and their masters, but now his thoughts move out into a little broader area, and he discusses things have to do with the whole congregation. This is, in a sense, the necessary corollary of the statement of our Lord, "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age."

Now, how is that to be lived out in practice? Well, the first thing the apostle does is to exhort us to perseverance and prayer, and in verse 2, verse 3 and verse 4. He speaks with reference to that. Paul attached obviously great importance to prayer, and he practiced what he preached too. In this very epistle, in chapter 1 in verse 3, he says,

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which ye have to all the saints for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel."

And throughout Paul's letters, over and over again, we have the expression of his prayer life. Mr. Spurgeon says that that really is a test of our Christianity. That is that we are people who pray. In fact he goes on to say in that little citation, which Mrs. Ray has put in our bulletin, he goes on to say that a prayer less person is not a Christian person, and I think that's a good test because after all that's one of the most important expressions of Christian life. If we say we have Christian life, and we do not have any time of prayer with the Lord, how can we really say that we are Christians? What is Christian in life includes surely the constant communion with the Lord in prayer, and if that's not part of our life, on what grounds do we really say that we are Christians, so prayer is very significant for us and very important. I am not surprised that the apostle lays great stress upon it. He speaks in many places about this.

In Romans chapter 12 in verse 12 in the section of hortatory material, the apostle says, "Continuing instant in prayer." In Ephesians chapter 6 in verse 18, as he concludes that great epistle, he says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." In 1 Thessalonians verse 17 of chapter 5, the apostle says, "Pray without ceasing."

Now, he doesn't mean by that that we are always to be uttering a prayer, in fact the sense of that expression, "Pray without ceasing," is pray constantly intermittently, but nevertheless the Christian's life is characterized by a prayer, so continue in prayer. That's the general objective, perseverance, and petitionary prayer with eyes fixed on the Second Coming.

Now, when he says, "Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving." I think that's what he is saying to us. When he says that we should watch in it, he's thinking of us as Christians who live our lives, praying constantly, but having our hope fixed upon a Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. So continue in prayer, persevere in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

This prayer is petitionary. That is it has to do with things that we're concerned about, and incidentally the very fact that he accompanies it with thanksgiving lets us know that he is not speaking generally. He is talking about petitionary prayer. That is making specific requests of the Lord. It's possible for us to consider thanksgiving as part of a prayer life, giving thanks to the Lord, but you can see that he has singled that out for special attention and therefore when he says, "Continue in prayer." He's not talking about thanksgiving specifically, he's talking about things that we ask God for.

Now, as I say, I said a moment ago, many people think of prayer as the way in which we are to get what we want from God. In this book, it has a little illustration. I wish I had it here because I'm not sure I can say it exactly as it's set forth in this cartoon. But there's a little boy about four years of age, and he gets up on his head, and he's praying and he says, "And now, God I want to present you with an offer that you cannot possibly reject." And that's I think generally the kind of attitude in which we go to the Lord in prayer. We want something and so therefore we feel that prayer is the way in which we are to get what we want. And I'd like to suggest to you that it's more like this. That prayer is the means God uses to give us what he wants. In other words prayer is one of the means by which we experience the blessing of God. It's not that by which we

get what we want, but it's just the other way around, and the important thing in prayer to God is God, not what we want, and I think if we can learn that then we will learn something very significant.

Prayer then, is something like the mark of a Christian? I think it's so interesting that when Ananias, after Paul's conversion, was told by the Lord in vision that he was to go to the street called strait and there he would find Paul. That he was given the sign by which he would recognize Paul in this way. And he's praying. In other words, here is the Pharisee. You would think of a Pharisee of all people, he spent all of his time praying. He got out on the street corners and prayed just like preachers get behind the pulpit and pray. You never know about a preacher's prayer life, by the fact that he prays on Sunday morning behind the pulpit. He may never pray during the week, but he prays there. He may pray ostentatiously. He may pray with lovely rhetorical phrases that impress people in the pew, and he may never utter a prayer during the week.

Well, the apostle evidently was something like that. As a Pharisee in his life before he came to encounter the Lord on the Damascus road, but the way in which Ananias is to recognize this man of whom Ananias had heard, and in fact, he was not too happy about going to speak to him because he said, Lord, I've heard by many of this man how much evil he had done to thy saints in Jerusalem and here he hath authority from the chief priest to bind all that call on his name, but the Lord had said, "For behold, he prayeth." And if Ananias had had time to think about that, and if he really understood what prayer is, that is genuine heartfelt intercession and petition before the Lord, he wouldn't have had any doubt at all about whether he would suffer from meeting this fearful man known as Paul. The hold he prayeth, that was the thing that marked out Paul as having had an experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, so the hold he prayeth, that's the exhibition of one's Christian life.

I know that what many of us think is something like this, "Well, I've prayed often, but I don't seem to get the answers to prayer that the Scriptures seem to suggest t I should

get from my appeals to the Lord God, but when we have no assurance of a positive answer to our prayer at the particular moment, we need to remember from a three fold background. First of all, the love of God wants the best for us, if we truly believe that God is a God who loves his saints, and has caused them to come into relationship to him, then he wants the best for me. His wisdom knows the best for me, and his power gets the best for me, when he wants me have that specific things that will be for my good, so we can let the matter rest with God, and if we pray fervently with regard to something and we do not get the answer to our petition, that should not disturb us. We are creatures. We are ignorant creatures. We do not understand everything, and I am so delighted that we do not.

We can rest upon the Lord God and his intelligent love and purposeful love for us, and I know that's a very useful thing. You parents, who've raised your children like you should, and those of you who are raising children, you know how important it is for father, and mother to say, no to children, and just the same thing is true in the Christian life. It's so important for us to realize that it's for our good, that God is the kind of Father who says, no to us. We don't understand all of the reasons why he says, no anymore than a child of five, or ten or fifteen even understands fully why a parent says no at that time, but we learn. We ultimately learn. We think that we know, and in fact we so think we know, I can remember when I was told, no by parents, I used to go back to my room and say, "When I'm an adult, I won't treat my children like that." And then I found out that's the way I treated them, and I am so glad that I came to enough of an understanding to realize that that was the way in which we should guide our children.

The apostle says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in it with thanksgiving."

Now, when says, watch in it, I think that that expression watch indicates that he is expecting us to pray petitionary prayer in the light of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a banter if different words for watching in the New Testament incidentally, but this is one that means to watch in the sense of possible and awaked

conscience, and it's found in context of the second coming in more than one place. So we should pray, and we should pray in the light of the fact that the great hope that we have is for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks for freedom from the tyranny of darkness, under which we lived before we came to the knowledge of Christ.

The special objective that Paul mentions after that general objective is outlined in verse 3 and verse 4, and the apostle turns to his condition and he says, "Withal or at the same time praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am also in bonds. That I may make it manifest as I ought to speak." Well, now you can see that that's something that pertains particularly to the life of the apostle. The apostle was in prison at this time, but the thing that he's concerned about is the thing for which God has called him. He called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and he's spoken about the mystery in the preceding context. Look back in chapter 1 in verse 26, where Paul writes, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, and now is made manifest to his saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this secret among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory."

And then in chapter 2 in verse 2 wrote, "That their hearts might be comforted being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God and of the Father, and of Christ or which is Christ." So the thing that concerned the apostle was the mission to which God had called him on the Damascus road, and he saw his task as the proclamation of the secret, the mystery. What was it? Why it was simply that in this age, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is going out in a special way to Gentiles, and in the present age, God is bringing the full number of the Gentiles into relationship to him. In Romans, 11 he will talk about blindness in part. Notice in part, not totally. Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles, shall come in.

That Paul conceived to be his task, and so he devoted himself thoroughly to it, and competently to it. In fact it brought him into the Roman prison because if you'll remember it was when he mentioned that his ministry was to the Gentiles that he got in trouble with the Jewish authorities, so here he is then with the special petition that he asks the Colossians to pray for him, not for his personal benefit. He doesn't say, "Now, folks my financial situation is rather desperate. I have to have \$5000," or 5000 whatever the Romans used for their money. I have forgotten on the spur of the moment, "and I need that immediately, by September the 1st, and so I want you to be able to pray intelligently, so this is what I want."

You see there is none of that in Paul. He doesn't even mention the fact that he has needs, and surely he had needs. He had needs for clothes. He had needs for money, but the apostle, he was so out of touch with a 20th century evangelical Christianity, because he did this strange thing of appealing to God. He appealed to God alone. As a matter of fact, how can we know that God has answered our prayers if we use all kinds of clever stratagems to get people to part with their money, but if we look to the Lord for our needs and our needs are met, well now God has done it, or at least we can say we have a much greater assurance that God has done it, and therefore our particular schemes are not the reasons why God has met the financial needs that we have.

Paul never talks like that, and it seems to me that we in evangelism have erred greatly in the way by which we appeal for funds. As a matter of fact, we bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. We get letters from time to time from our radio ministry. People notice that the chapel does not beg for money, and some of the people write in and say, I am always glad to get these letters. I think it confirms what we are seeking to do, and that is to say that God is anxious to give something to people, and that the Lord's people are not trying to wheedle out of others, amounts of money. So we get letters in which people will say, "We're so glad to listen to a program in which we are not constantly donned for money, because we think that that's a reproach to God." They actually use

those terms. We think that's a reproach to God, and I think it is too. We need to learn to trust the Lord God in matters such as this, and Paul's a good illustration for us. His continual petition that he requests of the saints is not for his personal benefit, but for an open door for the mystery. God's salvation centered in Christ, and now for the Gentiles.

In the 5th verse the apostle exhorts to an intelligent life. He says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." I think has special reference to prayer, but I won't labor the point any more. He moves from his personal situation to general principles of productive or what I like to call operational conduct. That is what we are to do when we know that come from death to life. And he states in this 5th verse, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without redeeming the time."

The writer of the Proverbs in the 6th chapter of the Proverbs, speaking about the wicked man says, "He speaketh with his feet." That's very interesting. "He speaketh with his feet." That is we know what he is by the things that he does. He speaks with his feet. Well, there is an application in reverse here. Christians speak with their feet too. That is they speak about their faith by the way they walk in the Christian life, and Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." He doesn't say walk all over them, but he does say that we should walk in wisdom.

Now, many of us are not walking in wisdom, and the apostle's exhortation is one I think that we all can use. In fact, we all know that the Christian is often the only version of Christianity that some people have, and as some of my friends like to say, "Could we use a revised version?" Well, yes we can use a revised version because if someone looks at the life of some of us and all of us at some time or another. They probably have good reason to say, "Well, if that's what a Christian is I don't want to be a Christian." I don't know how many times I have heard that in my Christian life, of individuals speaking about others, and saying, "If that's what Christianity, I am not sure I want to be a Christian. We do give a message by everything that we do. The way we conduct ourselves, the way we pay our bills, the way we act toward our neighbors, the way we

treat our friends, the courtesy the tact, the truthfulness, the honesty that characterizes our lives, our relationships. These are ways that we witness. Every one of us is a witnessing Christian. You may think, "No, I am not a witnessing Christian. I hardly ever give the gospel. I should, but I don't. I am not a witnessing Christian. I feel sorry about." I am sorry to tell you, you are a witnessing Christian. You witness by everything that you do. You give testimony to the kind of faith you have.

When Paul says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." He is giving us a command that is very significant and further he tells us how we may walk in the fullest wisdom, and that's by redeeming the time. That clause, redeeming the time, is the means by which Paul says, that we walk in wisdom. So you can see that what he had primarily in mind is that we should take advantage of the opportunities that we have to let others know the news that has meant so much to us. If we can pass through our day and never have a word for anyone outside of Christ, that's not walking in wisdom. We have many opportunities. Those of you that are in business, or if you are not in business in your daily life, whatever your daily life is almost everyone of us, have an opportunity everyday to give a testimony that is significant, and I think often, at least for me it's a test of our courage. A test of our spiritual guts, for me to say, that we are willing to say something for our Lord, and if we feel guilty afterwards, that's the way we ought to feel. We ought to get done on our knees and continue in prayer that God will enable us to have spiritual courage in our daily life and walk in wisdom toward them that are without. The wisdom is expressed in redeeming the time.

I'm sure that we could broaden this out to say than biblical wisdom is simply sanctified common sense too, that we should use the minds that God has given us, and one expression of it, the one that Paul has in mind particularly here is, snapping up every opportunity that we have to further the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then finally in the 6th verse, the apostle exhorts to an intelligent witness. He says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt that ye may know how ye ought to answer every

man." This is the 6th verse, and the apostle moves from our walk to our talk. I like that expression, "Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt." Grace.

Now, I think the sense here is the kind of sense that we have in the Bible when we read in Luke chapter 4 in verse 22 concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "In all bear him witness. This is when he gave his first message in the synagogue in Nazareth, and all bear him witness and wondered if the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and they said, Is this not Joseph's son?" There was something different about our Lord's phraseology, and not phraseology in the purely rhetorical sense but in what he was saying there was an obvious sense of spiritual appropriateness in what he said, or as they said, with reference to him in John chapter 7 and verse 46 the officers spoke of him and said, "Never man spake like this man." Our Lord's words marked him out as different.

Now, when Paul says, to us, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." He's talking about graciously spiritual speech. Now, it's sinful I think to bore outsiders with pious platitudes. He's not talking about that. He's talking about having a true spiritual life and the expression of it, in the words that God the Holy Spirit gives us to say with reference to Christ, so we're not to go out and manufacture a little speech or little ways of saying things that are simply as I say pious platitudes. He's talking about speaking out of the fullness of the heart that is continually in prayer and in the study of the Scriptures, and if you rely upon the Lord God to do this for you out of the experience of that kind of life, you will be having speech that is full of grace and seasoned with salt. Salt is symbolic in Bible of preservation of purity. It gives flavor to things, and in Christians characteristic of the speech of Christians is a kind of heavenly flavor.

That's characteristic of those who have, in Christian life, have made some advances, even in their speech you can tell that they are different. It's not talking about religiosity, incidentally salt was used in ancient times of wit, but he's not talking about wit here, primarily, although I think Christians ought to have a sense of humor. Look at yourself, and you'll have a good sense of humor, if you pay attention to what you see

there. Take a good look every morning as you look in the mirror, and laugh because that's the proper response to the first look at yourself in the morning, and realize it's not all that serious for you. You are a child of the Lord God, and by God's grace you are going to represent him and rely upon him. Get down on your knees. Make it a habit to get by your bed and have some time in prayer that, not to get something from God, but that he by his grace may get something from you, and of course God is sovereign, and he works mightily in your life. So let me conclude, perseverance in prayer with eyes fixed on the Gentile mission, and the Second Advent, characterized the Apostle Paul.

Now, I know that many of us hope that the Lord shall come soon, and I think that's a perfectly appropriate hope for us to have. In the Bible we don't have any specific texts that tell us that the coming of the Lord is pretribulational or posttribulational. We cannot raise that issue in five minutes. One thing characteristic of the New Testament is this. We have many, many exhortations to look for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our lives are to be lived with a constant hope before us. There's a lovely story about an individual who visited the gardens of the villa, Aracinoti in Northern Italy. People come from far and near to see them, and this visitor after going there wrote an account of an experience he had at that villa. He said, "I arrived at the Villa Aracinoti on the Banks of Lake Como, one of the most beautiful spots in that lovely region. A gardener opened the gate, and conducted me through the exquisite garden. "How long have you been here? I asked." The gardener said, "Twenty-five years." "How often has the owner been to see the estate?" "Four times." "When did he come last?" "Twelve years ago." "He writes to you, I suppose." The visitor said, "Never." The gardener said, "From whom then do you get your orders?" "From the steward in Milano." "Does he come here often?" "Never." "Who comes then to look after things?" The gardener said, "I'm left pretty much alone. Very seldom do I see any stranger." "Yet you keep the garden so spick and span that one would think you were expecting the owner tomorrow." "Today sir," said the gardener.

That's the kind of attitude that the Christian is to have concerning the Lord's coming. He may come today. We look for him, and we constantly look for him, so the Scriptures say. Fundamentally, may our life then be pleasing to the Lord, as Paul has just said, in the preceding chapter, "Ye serve the Lord Christ." Verdi was one of the greatest of the operatic composers. It's amazing the things that Verdi composed. Think of them. Things like *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, *Falstaff*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, not to mention some others, and not to mention even the first one, *Oberto*, which was his introduction. Some of you may know that Verdi was rejected when he first sought to have contact with La Scala in Milan. They didn't think he had sufficient training, so he studied with a man by the name of Lavinga, and it is said that Verdi, when he conducted his first composition in the La Scala, that at the conclusion of it, there was great praise for him, but as they looked at Verdi, he had his eye on one man, right down front, and that man was Lavinga, his teacher. That was the thing that really concerned him. Am I pleasing to him?

Well, that is an illustration of our Christian life. We serve the Lord Christ, and so you who are believers in Christ in exhort you in the exhortations of Paul, persevere in prayer. Well in wisdom toward them that are without. Let your speech be the speech of a Christian. If you are here today and you've never believed in Christ, you cannot do these things. You cannot even pray, except the prayer of confession, repentance, and forgiveness of sins. You cannot walk in wisdom toward those that are without. You cannot have speech that is seasoned with salt, that's a potential for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered an atoning sacrifice by which you may possess spiritual life, regeneration faith, forgiveness of sins, and the hope for the future. May the Lord God touch your sinful heart, as he has touched other sinful hearts, and move you to come to Christ believing in him who has offered the blood upon which our salvation is based, the cross of Calvary, and may you receive as a free gift salvation through Christ. We urge

you as an ambassador of Christ, come to him, believe in him. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful for these marvelous practical and operational exhortations from the Apostle Paul. May they go with us this week? Enable us, Lord, to persevere and prayer, to walk in wisdom toward those that are without, and to have our speech always seasoned with Christian believing, heavenly salt. And, Lord, we pray for any who may be here without Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit if it should please Thee, bring them today to the knowledge of him whom to know as life eternal. We pray in his name. Amen.