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Sermon Notes

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Heavenly Conversation

Colossians 4:2-6

I. The Gift of Conversation

A. Internet Cafes... “Chat Rooms”... Text Messaging... Voice Mail... E-mail...

1. Modern forms expressing an ancient human drive
2. The drive to COMMUNICATE...to converse... to relate... from person to person

B. Before the Foundation of the Earth: Father, Son and Holy Spirit communicated

C. The Gift Conferred

1. One of the most significant conversations in history: the decision to create man, done in the form of an inter-trinitarian conversation

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

2. Part of this: we are ALSO created to converse, to have relationships, to speak and to listen... the gift of conversation was conferred at creation
3. The Gift of Conversation is the unifying theme of this morning's passage in Colossians
 - a. Heavenly conversation in prayer: Man to God and God to Man
 - b. Heavenly conversation in ACTION: making daily life line up with words
 - c. Heavenly conversation in witnessing: Man to Man about God... speaking the words of life

II. Conversation with God: A Daily Devotion to Prayer (vs. 2-4)

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And 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. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

A. The Strategic Importance of Prayer

1. Every revival in history has started with a commitment to intensive prayer

Dr A. T. Pierson once said, 'There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.'

2. J. Edwin Orr, the great historian of revivals agrees and documents the prayer movements connected with all the great periods of revival

a. 1857: Businessmen's Prayer Meeting Revival: Manhattan, NY

- i) September, 1857: Jeremiah Lanphier, businessmen's prayer meeting in upper room of Dutch Reformed Church Building in Manhattan
- ii) Advertised... only six people (out of a million) showed up...BUT next week, there were fourteen, then twenty three...
- iii) At that point, decided to meet every day for prayer... soon one Church building after another began to fill up at noon for prayer
- iv) By February of 1858 every church and public hall in Manhattan filled
- v) Horace Greeley, famous editor, sent a reporter with horse and buggy racing around to count... could only get to 12 sites but counted over 6100 people praying!!
- vi) Movement spread nationwide... Baptists in upstate New York had so many conversions that winter, they had to cut holes in the Mohawk River to baptize the converts
- vii) D.L. Moody converted in movement, that started as a prayer meeting

b. 1904 Welsh Revival... began as a movement of prayer

God used a Welsh miner named Evan Roberts, who prayed at a preaching meeting with great agony, 'O God, bend me.' Soon he was preaching the same gospel that had converted him... he preached simple steps to revival:

- You must confess any known sin to God and put any wrong done to others right.
- Second, you must put away any doubtful habit.
- Third, you must obey the Spirit promptly.
- Finally, you must confess your faith in Christ publicly.'

The movement went like a **tidal wave** over Wales: in **five months** there were a 100,000 people converted throughout the country. Five years later, Dr J. V. Morgan wrote a book to debunk the revival, his main criticism being that, of a hundred thousand joining the churches in five months of excitement, after five years only seventy-five thousand still stood in the membership of those churches!

The social impact was astounding. For example, judges in courtrooms sat idle because there was not a single case to try: no robberies, no burglaries, no rapes, no murders, and no embezzlements, nothing. District councils held emergency meetings to discuss what to do with the police now that they were unemployed.

Eventually, the revival swept Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, North America, Australasia, Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Chile.

As always, it began through a movement of prayer.

What do we mean by extraordinary prayer? We share ordinary prayer in regular worship services, before meals, and the like. But when people are found getting up at six in the morning to pray, or having a half night of prayer until midnight, or giving up their lunch time to pray at noonday prayer meetings, that is extraordinary prayer. It must be united and concerted

3. Prayer is Strategic

- a. God has ordained prayer as a primary means of advancing His Kingdom
- b. Why? Because it both **HUMBLES** people and **EMPOWERS PEOPLE...** people are “put in their place” in **BOTH WAYS...** humbled and also exalted at the same time
- c. Why? Because it humbles us in the asking and glorifies God in the giving
- d. Why? Because through prayer we can reach every part of the world

B. The Commitment of Prayer: Constant Devotion

1. **“Devote yourself to prayer”** = “continue”
 - a. Many hear sermons on prayer and surge to an instant commitment to prayer, but soon stop praying when the mood has passed
 - b. Paul is commanding Christians to be **CONSTANT** in prayer,
2. Greek word = stand fast in, be fully devoted to, hold firmly onto prayer... despite all obstacles
3. **WHY?** Faith-filled prayer has such obstacles
 - a. Satan: **HATES** a praying Christian and a praying church

- b. World: fast-paced, achievement oriented, distracting, alluring
- c. Our nature:
 - i) Proudful: thinking things should be done our way, in our time
 - ii) Self-centered: not really caring about the needs of others
 - iii) Weak: easily swayed, easily distracted, easily discouraged
 - iv) Unbelieving: prayer is such spiritual work, the results so unclear

Example: While Joshua was fighting the Amalekites, in hand-to-hand combat all that long day, he was never tempted to rest, or take a break or to quit

BUT Moses, while lifting up his hands in prayer DID grow weary and start to lower them several times... whenever he would lower his hands, Israel would begin to lose the battle, but whenever he would raise them up again, Israel would start winning again

JOSHUA never stopped fighting, but Moses lowered his hands many times

IT IS SPIRITUAL WORK, and through unbelief we don't think anything is being accomplished by it

Paul calls on us Christians to a life of DEVOTED prayer

- 4. Also: it is a lifestyle as well
 - a. "praying without ceasing"
 - b. Daily times spent in prayer
 - c. Weaving prayer throughout the day

Illus. Charles Spurgeon lived in an atmosphere of consistent prayer... Steve Miller, in his book *C.H. Spurgeon on Spiritual Leadership* related this story:

One day a close friend, Dr. Theodore Cuyler of Brooklyn came to England. Spurgeon invited him for a long walk through the woods—a pleasure that the busy Spurgeon rarely had time for but loved to do when he could. During the walk, Spurgeon surprised his guest with an unexpected comment and they both laughed... Spurgeon had a great sense of humor. Then suddenly Spurgeon looked at his friend and said "Come, Theodore, let us thank God for laughter."

Later, when Dr. Cuyler spoke of this particular visit, he said "That was how he lived. From a jest to a prayer meant with him the breadth of a straw."

We should weave prayer through the most common events of the day...

d. ALSO praying through strategic matters until the day we die:

Matthew 9:37-38 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

DEVOTE YOURSELF to praying this through!!!

C. The Manner of Prayer: Watchful, Thankful

1. Paul commands us to pray in a state of WATCHFULNESS

- a. That means at least we should be AWAKE while praying
- b. The Greek word also implies diligent attention... preparedness... painstaking care...
 - i) Included would be organization in prayer
 - ii) Preparing your prayer time ahead of time
 - iii) Having a prayer notebook
 - iv) Organizing sheets of worship, intercession, thanksgiving, etc.
 - v) Praying for missions and missionaries
- c. It also implies **watching for the answer**... waiting for God to move in response
 - i) Facing the Giants

Godly janitor speaking words of encouragement to an embattled football coach used a parable:

Two farmers in a drought both prayed for rain; but only one of them went out and tilled his soil and prepared for the rain to come... "God will send the rain when He's ready; you need to prepare your field to receive it."

d. Jesus taught this kind of faith... the withered fig tree, His disciples
ASTONISHED

Mark 11:22-24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

2. Thankful

- a. As noted before... a major theme in Colossians

- b. Thankfulness is a form of worship... it is bringing back to God the joy that He has brought you by answering your previous prayers and by meeting your previous needs
- c. We ask a loving Father for rich blessings from heaven... when He gives them, we need to remember that we asked and go back and thank him

D. The Focus of Prayer: Gospel Success

Colossians 4:3-4 And 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. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

1. This should be the center of our prayer life:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; may your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

2. We must pray according to what Christ is doing in the world

Christ came to seek and to save the lost... to build a Kingdom

3. Note how the MIGHTY Apostle Paul feels his weakness, and his need for prayer

4. Look what he asks for:

a. An “open door” for the message... a fair hearing of the gospel

- i) Amazing, since Paul is in chains, but he knows the word of God isn't!!
- ii) Doctrinally: God is sovereign over ALL hearts

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

God has power to make His servants FAVORABLE in the eyes of people in authority to accomplish His own eternal purposes

- The Lord granted Joseph favor in the eyes of the prison warden: Genesis 39:21
- The Lord granted Daniel favor in the eyes of the commander of the officials of Babylon: Daniel 1:9
- The Lord granted Nehemiah favor in the eyes of King Artaxerxes: Nehemiah 1:11
- The Lord granted Esther favor in the eyes of her husband when she came uninvited into the King's throne room: Esther 5:3

iii) Columba and King Brude

Many illustrations of this from church history: praying for an open door for the gospel

Prime example: Columba, the Irish monk whose heart burned with missionary zeal for the Kingdom of Christ... went to evangelize the fierce highland people of Scotland called the Picts; they were terrifying warriors, so fierce that the Romans build Hadrian's Wall to protect their conquests in England from invasions from the Picts

Columba, with a deep missionary passion, went to bring the gospel to these fierce warriors; he was refused entry by their King Brude... so, Columba sat outside their fortress at Inverness and began to fast and pray; after a long time, finally, King Brude sent for this strange messenger from God and was willing to listen to the gospel... eventually Columba was able to lead him and many of his people to faith in Christ

God opened a door for the gospel through the prayers of a single man

This scene has been repeated again and again: including Hudson Taylor's faith-filled prayers for an open door to the inland regions of China

b. Secondly, Paul asks for **Clarity in presenting the gospel**

- i) Gospel is very deep
- ii) Paul has GREAT LEARNING and could easily overwhelm people with
- iii) Paul needed God to give him the best words to say to make it clear
- iv) Similar prayer request in Ephesians, but for BOLDNESS

Ephesians 6:19-20 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Practical point: choose some missionaries seeking to reach difficult people with the gospel and make it your daily ambition to hold them up to the Lord in prayer

III. Conversation in Action: A Carefully Observed Walk (vs. 5)

Colossians 4:5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

A. A Watching World

1. "Outsiders" are non-Christians... the watching world
2. God intends for us to have an AUDIENCE

Matthew 5:14-16 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

3. everything in this passage from here on out is living in such a way that lost people will ASK YOU ABOUT CHRIST

1 Peter 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience...*

4. Like the Philippian jailer, who trembling asked Paul and Silas,

Acts 16:29-30 *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

B. The Need for Wisdom

1. Paul's expression is provocative: **"Redeeming the time"**
2. Concept: every day is like a kidnapped captive, which needs to be rescued
3. Latin expression: carpe diem... "Seize the day"
4. Satan wants us to waste our days in worldly pursuits... Paul wants us to redeem the time
5. So Paul talks about being WISE toward outsiders... living a life of biblical wisdom... with our money, our time, or children, our jobs, our possessions... everything we do

C. The Need for Integrity

1. You never know who's watching
2. Be a man or woman of integrity at all times!!

IV. Conversation in the Gospel: Speaking the Words of Life

Colossians 4:6 *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

A. Speaking the Words of Life

1. No one will be saved by watching our daily lives
2. "Redeeming the time" and living wisely in the laws of God are pre-evangelism... they give you a hearing

3. But God has ordained the gospel message as the potent life-giving force that alone has the power to save souls... it is WORD not ACTION that saves

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

James 1:21 humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

4. So therefore, our daily lives create a context for the preaching of the gospel
5. Key point: do you know the gospel well enough to share it?

Don Whitney “Building Bridges” conference, spoke of a Sunday School class he led of senior adults... he asked them how well they knew the gospel; “Oh very well, we’ve known it for years... years even before you were born, young man!” Don Whitney then gave each one of them a piece of paper and a pen and said, “Okay, take ten minutes and write it down. Simply write a summary of the gospel message.” Most of them struggled!!

Four basic points: God—Man—Christ--Response

B. Gracious Speech

Let your speech always be gracious

1. Paul talks about speech that is “in grace”
2. At least this much: “Gracious speech”
 - a. Mannerly... not rude or coarse or harsh
 - b. Purified of coarse joking, or off-color topics, of gossip, of slander
 - c. Filled with grace: loving, forgiving, kindly, Christ-like
 - d. AT LEAST THIS MUCH
3. But MORE... filled with words of grace... with Scripture
 - a. Memorize lots of Scripture and your heart will overflow with it... speaking the very words of God
 - b. Looking at a beautiful mountainous valley, you say to someone you meet at the scenic overlook: “Scripture says ‘God’s righteousness is like a majestic mountains...’” (Psalm 36:6)... and ask the person “What do you think that means?”

- c. Or when you are discussing some crime in the news, say “I know that only God’s grace can cover a sin like that”
- d. Or when you are looking at the fresh produce at Kroger or Food Lion say “Isn’t it incredible that God gives us so many good things to enjoy?”
- e. Or when receiving some blessing, a gift or an award, say “God certainly does not treat us as our sins deserve, does He?”
- f. GRACE GRACE GRACE GRACE... flowing from your mouth like a cleansing river

One older pastor, whenever someone would ask him “How are you?” he would answer “Better than I deserve!!”

Fill your mouth with tiny tastes of grace, so that you can speak the words of grace, the gospel to someone who asks you why you are so different

C. Salty Speech

Vs. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt

1. “Seasoned with salt” is a curious phrase, and an example of what I’m talking about
2. Our speech should stimulate people to think about Christ, to ask questions about eternity
3. Salt is a fascinating substance, of a major significance in world history
4. Reading a whole book on the history of salt in human history, called *Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky
 - a. Salt is the only rock we eat
 - b. Salt was so valuable it was used in some cultures as currency
 - c. Salt established trade routes and caused whole cities to spring up where there were none
 - d. Salt has helped to secure empires and caused others to come crashing down
 - e. Salt has inspired revolutions
 - f. In the 1920s, the Diamond Crystal salt company of St. Clair Michigan published a booklet “One hundred and one uses for Diamond Crystal salt”
 - i) List of uses included: keeping the colors bright on boiled vegetables, making ice cream freeze, whipping cream rapidly, getting more heat

out of boiled water, removing rust, cleaning bamboo furniture, sealing cracks, removing spots on clothes, putting out grease fires, making candles dripless, keeping cut flowers fresh, killing poison ivy, etc,

ii) The modern salt industry actually cites 14,000 uses for salt including pharmaceuticals, melting ice on roads, and softening water

g. Salt is also an indispensable flavoring for food... some foods would be unpalatably bland without salt

Arabian Nights: One of the tales was of a sultan who had three daughters and wanted each one to tell him in his court how much they loved him; the first two used flowery, poetic speech to express their affection for their powerful father; the third quietly said “You are like the salt in my food.” The sultan was enraged and banished the daughter; some time later, however, he was traveling and came to a restaurant where he was served a meal that tasted horribly bland. In anger, he demanded to see the cook; when she was brought in, he demanded an explanation; it turned out to be his banished daughter who had made the meal with no salt added. He understood her expression of love and welcomed her back

h. But without a doubt, before the age of refrigeration, the most strategic use for salt was as a preservative for meat

i) Salt is a desiccant—it dries the moisture that can be a pocket for bacterial growth... it inhibits the spread of bacteria across a piece of meat and greatly lengthens the safe eating period of food

ii) As a result, salt became a symbol for eternity... for something LASTING

i. God called His covenant with Israel a “covenant of salt”

Numbers 18:19 It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring."

2 Chronicles 13:5 Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?

j. All Jewish grain offerings had to be made with salt included (Lev. 2:13)

Leviticus 2:13 Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

This was symbolic of the purity and everlasting nature of the covenant

k. When Jesus therefore says His disciples are the “**salt of the earth**”, He means a preservative who are in the earth to keep it from decaying... and the salt in the offering of the human race... pure and holy

5. Thus, conversation “seasoned with salt” means conversation that is HOLY, pure from evil; conversation that is seasoned... flavorful in the grace of God; conversation that causes someone to thirst for the living water
6. STUDY WHAT YOU SAY TO PEOPLE... does it bring them closer to the gospel or drive them away

Key questions to ask a non-Christian:

- Do you ever think of life after death?
- What is the richest blessing of your life?
- Why do you think so many lottery winners end up more miserable after they get the money than they were before?
- If you were laying on your death bed and were looking back on a successful life, what would it contain?
- What image do you have of heaven?
- Why do you think Christ has had such an impact on human history?

SPEECH SEASONED WITH SALT!!!

D. Reasoned Speech

So that you may know how to answer everyone...

1. Answer? Answer what? The questions we all have in life...
 - a. Why am I here?
 - b. What will happen to me when I die?
 - c. What can I do about my sins?
 - d. How can I live forever?
 - e. How did the universe come to be?
2. This passage of Scripture is all about living in such a way that people WILL ASK YOU these kinds of questions
3. Then you can give them a reason for the hope you have

V. Application

A. Come to Christ

B. Change your prayer life...

1. devote yourself to it... learn to be watchful and thankful

2. Tonight: Home fellowships
 3. Daily quiet times
- C. Live a life constantly ready to share the gospel
1. daily life winning the respect of outsiders
 2. Speaking words of grace...holding out the words of life