

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Hold Fast to Christ!

(Col 2:2b-3 ESV) to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Praying as We Ought”

May 19, 2013

Sermon Text: Colossians 4:2-6

Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:31-46

Introduction-

The message to us from God's Word this morning is simple:

1. We must pray continually
2. Why We Must Pray Continually
3. What Happens When We do Not Pray Continually?

Let's begin with an honest confession: We (I) do not pray continually but are much like the sleeping Peter. Prayer is hard work and it seems much easier for us to handle things ourselves. Prayer requires faith and discipline and energy. We often lack all three.

When we need to pray the most, we usually feel like praying the least.

And yet-

Proverbs 3:5-8 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (7) Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. (8) It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

So, to not pray is to be wise in our own eyes and it is to not trust the Lord – the very errors of Peter. Let’s look then at our text:

Colossians 4:2-6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (3) 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-- (4) that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (5) Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (6) Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

One of the fundamental and earliest themes in Scripture is *that the presence of the Lord brings blessing*. In the presence of the Lord there is strength and blessing. You have it in the Garden of Eden when the Lord would come and walk with Adam and Eve. That ended when sin entered the scene. His presence is blessing. His absence is trouble. And so all through Scripture we have the pictures of the Lord *leaving* sinful, unrepentant people.

Exodus 33:14-16 And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (15) And he said to

him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. (16) For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

When we pray, we come into the presence of the Lord at His invitation. Nothing bad can come from that!

Look at verse 2 again – notice the key words:

- Continue steadfastly
- Being watchful
- With thanksgiving

These are intense words, aren’t they? *Continue steadfastly*. That brings to mind a warrior whose feet are planted solidly, ready to face the enemy. His face is set in one direction and he cannot be dissuaded. Check out another reference to prayer just a few verses further on. The word “struggling” is a different Greek word than “continue steadfastly” – it is one that is also translated “wrestling” and sounds like our English word, *agonizing*:

(Col 4:12 ESV) Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, **always**

struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Paul even opened this epistle with a reference to his ongoing prayers for the Colossians:

(Col 1:9-10 ESV) ⁹ ¶ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

And check out these references to prayer:

Eph 1:15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,

Eph 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

1Sa 12:23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

Act 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Phi 1:4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

1Th 1:3 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

1Th 5:17 pray without ceasing,

2Th 1:11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

2Ti 1:3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

Phm 1:4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,

I worry. I complain. But I do not pray. And I suspect that you would say the same is true for you. Prayer is a struggle. It is a wrestling with God – like Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord. I don't know why it is so hard. I suppose there are spiritual forces at work to oppose our praying, and certainly our own weakness would rather nap than pray – and then throw in our weakness of faith. And yet we see all through the Bible over and over again that prayer is vital. Notice that

Paul's prayers are fundamentally FOR the people he is shepherding.

So we are to continue steadfastly in prayer for one another and for ourselves and never lose heart –

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Luke 18:1-8 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

(2) He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. (3) And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' (4) For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, (5) yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" (6) And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. (7) And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? (8) I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Now, consider this other aspect of prayer that Paul mentions here in Col 4

Colossians 4:2-6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, **being watchful in it** with thanksgiving.

In some ways this business of “being watchful” in/by our prayers is the most important. Watchfulness. What is that?

23.72 γρηγορέω: to remain awake because of the need to continue alert - 'to stay awake, to be watchful.' (Louw-Nida Lexicon)

So this definition brings us right back to what Jesus told the disciples in Gethsemane – “keep watch.” And what was the reason they needed to keep watch? *The enemy was coming. Temptation from the evil one was at hand.* And how were they to “keep watch”? PRAY.

Do we begin to see it?

Failing to pray is, for the soldier of Christ, equivalent to sleeping on guard duty. It puts everyone in danger, including ourselves. In contrast, persevering in watchful prayer is a powerful means given to us by Christ for victory over the enemy.

There IS a need to remain awake and alert. There IS something to watch for very carefully –

Mat 26:41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Luk 21:36 But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

And very plainly –

1Pe 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

You have it again of course in the classic passage about spiritual warfare. Here is the enemy-

(Eph 6:11-13 ESV) ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm....

And then in addition to all of the other pieces of our armor, have you noticed the last indispensable item? -

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

And we have it in the Lord's Prayer –

(Mat 6:13 ESV) ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [or "from the evil one"]

Why should we pray? Because we have a very subtle, cunning, purely evil enemy who is the master of lies and who desires to murder and destroy. His propaganda is coming at us all the time. And so we pray that the Lord would keep us and protect us and open our eyes to these schemes. *Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.*

The problem is, we can't see him. Our flesh *wants* to be indulged. And the world entices us as well. The battle rages.

Here is a good picture from the Old Testament:

(Exo 17:8-13 ESV) ⁸ ¶ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.

¹² But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

There was nothing magical about the staff. Moses holding it up was simply an acknowledgment that the Lord is

actually the One fighting for Israel. This is a regular theme throughout Scripture –

(1Sa 17:45-47 ESV) ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

And again-

Psa 33:16 The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

Psa 33:17 The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue.

Psa 44:6 For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me.

Psa 44:7 But you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us.

Pro 21:31 The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.

1Sa 14:6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few."

2Ch 20:15-17 And he said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's.

Zec 4:6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Rom 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is why we must pray at all times and keep watch. There is an enemy on the prowl. He is coming. But the battle belongs to the Lord, not to us.

Therefore we must fight in His strength, that is to say, in reliance upon Him. In prayer, we raise our staff up and the Lord fights the fight. When we fail to pray, we lower our staff and the battle goes against us.

Now, let's pause here for a moment and think through some signs and symptoms of prayerlessness. That is to say, what are the things we do INSTEAD of praying?

- Worry
- Get depressed
- Become anxious
- Take self-made foolish steps and actions
- Think in ways that assume nothing is going to ever change, except for the worse
- Stop reading the Word
- Feel like just giving up
- Entertain suicidal thoughts (our enemy is a murderer)
- Start believing lies
- Envy the world
- Indulge our flesh in order to appease our miserable condition.
- And necessarily distance ourselves (hide) from the Lord (our reading of Scripture goes out the window)

Here is the Psalmist telling about how he was miserable as long as he was in a prayerless state:

(Psalm 73:1-19 ESV) *A Psalm of Asaph*. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

³ For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

- ⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies.
- ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression.
- ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.
- ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

- ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, ¹⁷ **until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.** ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin

It is really a remarkable progression here. Asaph says that HIS feet almost slipped. He is speaking of his walk with the Lord. He almost stumbled in it and fell off the way. Why? *Because he looked at the wicked and he envied them.* How? *It appeared that they prospered!* What saved him? He went "into the sanctuary of the Lord." I believe that what he means is, even if he literally went into the temple, *he prayed.* He sought out the Lord. And it seems to me that inevitably when we do this, we also find ourselves in His Word. There, we find the truth, and we are preserved from believing the enemy's lies – and from sinning:

(Psa 73:21-28 ESV) ²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart,

²² I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.

²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

The enemy didn't get Asaph.

With Thanksgiving

Alright then, back to Colossians 4:2-

(Col 4:2-4 ESV) ² ¶ Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it **with thanksgiving**.

³ 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--

⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Thanksgiving is very frequently connected with prayer in Scripture. Let me give you a couple of examples:

(Dan 6:10 ESV) ¹⁰ ¶ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

(Ephesians 1:16 ESV) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

(Philippians 4:6 ESV) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

(Colossians 1:3 ESV) ¶ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

(Colossians 4:2 ESV) ¶ Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

(1 Thessalonians 1:2 ESV) ¶ We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

(1 Timothy 2:1 ESV) ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

(2 Timothy 1:3 ESV) ¶ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

(Philemon 1:4 ESV) I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,

Why is this? Let me suggest some reasons:

1. We must always be thankful to the Lord. The wicked are not thankful. They do not acknowledge His gracious provision to them. We must not be like them.

2. Thanksgiving is a way of “looking back” while our prayers are a kind of “looking forward” in hope and faith. In other words, by looking back to deliverance from Pharaoh and slavery and the parting of the Red Sea and giving thanks for it, our faith is

strengthened as we pray for what we cannot see.

3. Thankfulness keeps us from an attitude of despair and melancholy.

You see this thing in the Psalms over and over again. Remember, fundamentally the Psalms are not just a hymn book, they are prayers:

(1Ch 16:8-12 ESV) ⁸ Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!

⁹ Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!

¹⁰ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!

¹¹ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

¹² Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered,

(Psa 7:12-17 ESV) ¹² If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow;

¹³ he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.

¹⁴ Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies. ¹⁵

He makes a pit, digging it out, and

falls into the hole that he has made.

¹⁶ His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.

¹⁷ I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.

(Psa 9:1-10 ESV) ^{ESV} **Psalm 9:1**
To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David. I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.

² I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

³ When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence.

⁴ For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment.

⁵ You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever.

⁶ The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished.

⁷ But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, ⁸ and he judges the world with righteousness; he

judges the peoples with uprightness.

⁹ The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

¹⁰ And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

(Psa 28:7-9 ESV) ⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

⁸ The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.

⁹ Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

(Psa 30:4-5 ESV) ⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.

⁵ For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Psa 33:2-10 ESV) ² Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. ⁴ For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. ⁵ He loves

righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰ The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

How many of you this morning are of the mindset – “this is how it is. Nothing is ever going to change.” And so you are discouraged and downcast and fretting and....?

Now you know what to do about it.

Do we see it? What we find in this “thankfulness” when we pray is that we remember two things:

1. WHO God is,
2. WHAT God has done.

Those two things really are at the very foundation of all of our worship of Him. You see? To give thanks, we must necessarily identify something *to give thanks for*. And in connection with prayer to the Lord, our giving of thanks to Him is in regard to who He is and what He has done. Remembering these things, we can look forward in confident hope and faith, praying for Him to act once again now and in the future.