

“Make the Most of Your Opportunities”
(Colossians 4:5-6)

Introduction: This morning we saw the character of one whose heart was more in love with God and the things of God than the things of the world. David, in the wilderness, longed more for the sanctuary of God and the tokens of His special presence than he did the comforts of his palace. We also saw that if we long for these things as David did in the midst of our spiritual wilderness, then we must humble ourselves and pray. We must pray that the Lord will change the face of this nation, that He will change the hearts of this people, that He will heal our land. And the kind of prayer that we are called to, the kind of prayer that will make a difference, is not the prayer of a few words, or a few seconds, or a few minutes. But it is long and arduous prayer, prayer that wrestles with God by faith, prayer that engages the spiritual conflict all around us. We need to be armed at all times with prayer. And I hope that this encourages you to come on Wednesday evenings to join with the few who are assembled as we continue to pray for the Lord’s Spirit to be poured out on our land.

But prayer is not all that is needed. It is needed, yes. It is desperately needed. But there is more. There are other means that the Lord has appointed to these ends. One of these means is doing all that you can through the avenues which the Lord has provided in this government to voice your opinion. We have seen this in the past. You can call your congressman or senator when key bills are being voted on. You can also exercise your freedom of speech in life chains and in front of abortion clinics. But still another more key means is the witness that you can bring to the Gospel. I don’t think that I can emphasize too much just how important this is. We all take this too much for granted. We don’t think that it is worth our effort. Or we leave the responsibility for doing so on the shoulders of others who are more capable. Jonathan Edwards once wrote that if all the Christians in the world lived as they should, it would do more to further the cause of the Gospel than all the sermons that could ever be preached. Your personal witness and mine, or the lack of it, will make a big difference in how this nation will fare in the not too near future. If we want to see the Lord change our society, then we will have to live the Christian life as our Lord called us to. What I want you to see tonight is,

Christian, you must conduct your life in such a way that men and women may not only hear about the Christ who died for you, but see the Christ who lives in you. (If the world is ever going to see Christ in us, these things must first take place).

- I. First, the Words Which You Speak Are Very Important in Bearing Witness to the Gospel.
 - A. You Must Make Sure that You Have a Good Understanding of the Gospel and of Your Neighbors in Order to Effectively Communicate It to Them.
 - 1. You must know the nuts and bolts of the Gospel and understand them.
 - a. The facts of the Gospel are really quite simple.
 - (i) Man is a fallen creature in need of redemption.
 - (ii) Christ is God's Redeemer sent to save His people from their sins.
 - (iii) Paul even gives us a handy summary of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8,

where he writes, 'NOW I MAKE KNOWN TO YOU, BRETHREN, THE GOSPEL WHICH I PREACHED TO YOU, WHICH ALSO YOU RECEIVED, IN WHICH ALSO YOU STAND, BY WHICH ALSO YOU WERE SAVED, IF YOU HOLD FAST THE WORD WHICH I PREACHED TO YOU, UNLESS YOU BELIEVED IN VAIN. FOR I DELIVERED TO YOU AS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE WHAT I ALSO RECEIVED, THAT CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, AND THAT HE WAS BURIED, AND THAT HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, AND THAT HE APPEARED TO CEPHAS, THEN TO THE TWELVE. AFTER THAT HE APPEARED TO MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED BRETHREN AT ONE TIME, MOST OF WHOM REMAIN UNTIL NOW, BUT SOME HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP; THEN HE APPEARED TO JAMES, THEN TO ALL THE APOSTLES; AND LAST OF ALL, AS IT WERE TO ONE UNTIMELY BORN, HE APPEARED TO ME ALSO.'

- (iv) These are the historical facts of the Gospel. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, born under the Law. He lived a perfect life and died an atoning death. He rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended up into heaven. He waits from there to return on the day when He will judge all men according to their deeds.
 - (v) The facts are not difficult.
- b. But you must also understand the significance of these facts.
- (i) Jesus took upon Himself nature of His people, so that He might represent them in that nature. It is the nature that has sinned that owes the debt.
 - (ii) He lived a perfect life that He might earn a perfect righteousness for His people.
 - (iii) He died the cursed death on the cross that He might bear fully the wrath of God for His people.
 - (iv) He was raised from the dead in order to justify His people.
 - (v) He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for His people and to rule over them in the interim period.
 - (vi) And He will one day return to gather His sheep to Himself, and to cast those who never received Him into hell for their sins.
 - (vii) This is not difficult to understand either.
2. But you must not only know the facts of the Gospel and understand them, you must also understand your neighbors before you can apply it to them skillfully.
- a. You must have a biblical understanding of your neighbors.
- (i) You must realize that they are dead to the things of God. They have no interest in them.
 - (ii) Because they are spiritually dead, there is nothing that you can do in the least to ever make them love Him.
 - (iii) You must expect from the human standpoint that they are going to reject the offer of the Gospel.
 - (iv) But you must not overlook the divine element. God is also at work through men and women such as yourself, gathering in His elect. When the Lord quickens to life, then they can respond.
 - (v) And so you must pray for them, pray that the Spirit would open their hearts and

would be pleased to use your testimony of the Gospel in their conversion. Pray that the Spirit would help them to sense their lost condition apart from Christ. Pray that He would open their eyes to the fact that they have utterly failed to keep His holy Law. Pray that God would give them a heart to love Him, to embrace Him, and to serve Him.

- (vi) And I don't think it is out of line, but perfectly biblical to point out to them, that if they won't come to Christ, it is because they have hearts that are dead to the things of God. If they remain that way, they will surely perish. And God alone is the only One who can change it. They must therefore come to Him, seek Him, plead with Him to change it, or they are forever lost.
- (vii) Don't be afraid to tell them that their salvation is in the hands of God alone.

- b. And it would be helpful to you as well, if you know what their particular background is.
 - (i) Paul said that he became all things to all men, so that he might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:22).
 - (ii) Don't forget that all of your neighbors come from different backgrounds.
 - (iii) If your neighbors are Jewish, then you can assume some knowledge.
 - (iv) If your neighbors are Mormons or JW's, then you can assume that they have some knowledge, but you must be even more aware of their distortions.
 - (v) Some have no religious training, which might be an advantage.
 - (vi) But the more that you know about them, the better you will be able to communicate to them what they need to hear.

B. But You Must Furthermore Be Able to Communicate the Gospel in such a Way that Will Create the Least Hindrance to Their Receiving of It.

- 1. Your words must be seasoned with grace.
 - a. All your communication must be in grace.
 - b. And if it is so with our daily conversation, how much more is it true of the Gospel you present.
 - (i) It should be savory, edifying, godly language.
 - (ii) You should avoid speaking like the world.
 - (iii) For the most part you should avoid trivial conversations. These will eat up all your time to share. Use only enough to provide a door to speak with them, unless they live in your neighborhood and you have more time.
 - (iv) However, you must never bank on tomorrow. You don't know if it is going to be there for them or for you. I think that all of us, if we thought hard enough, would be able to think of a relative or a neighbor who has died outside of Christ, without ever receiving any warning from us.
 - (v) Be as direct as you can, but always do it in a loving and gentle way.
- 2. But you must be careful that your choice of words and tone of voice are not the reason for its rejection.
 - a. Harsh and unloving words can be rejected apart from the content of any message.
 - (i) The way that you say something could very easily be the reason for its rejection.
 - (ii) Your tone should be one of care, concern, urgency, conviction, and authority.

Don't put on an act. If you really don't feel those things, do not act as though you do. Affectation can turn someone off just as quickly as harsh language.

- b. The point is that you should not let the way that you say something be the cause of its rejection.
 - (i) People will reject the Gospel because they don't like the light.
 - (ii) Jesus said, "FOR EVERYONE WHO DOES EVIL HATES THE LIGHT, AND DOES NOT COME TO THE LIGHT, LEST HIS DEEDS SHOULD BE EXPOSED" (John 3:20).
 - (iii) Don't put any more impediments to their coming by the way that you communicate.
- c. But it is not really a lack of knowledge and understanding, or a deficiency in the way in which the Gospel is being communicated today, that accounts for its ineffectiveness. Its biggest problem is in the lives of its communicators.

II. And so Secondly, and of Equal Importance, The Way that You Live Will Either Add Great Strength To Or Greatly Diminish The Message that You Bring.

A. You Must Conduct Yourself Wisely At All Times Towards Those Outside the Faith.

1. Your life is a living epistle that is continually being read by all those around you.
 - a. You are under the constant observation of your neighbors, whether you like it or not.
 - (i) When your neighbors find out that you're a Christian, whether they are Christians themselves or unbelievers, they will closely scrutinize you.
 - (ii) They will watch you to see if you are really any different than they are so that they can have some soothing balm to apply to their own consciences.
 - (iii) They sigh with relief when they see that you are not perfect, thinking that this somehow lessens their own responsibility to be perfect.
 - (iv) Sometimes other Christians watch to see if you might be the one-in-a-thousand Christian who really is living the way that Christ commands His disciples to live.
 - (v) They are looking for someone who can encourage them to also go all out for Christ.
 - (vi) However, others of them might be looking for an excuse not to live a more godly life than they do, and you may provide them with just the justification that they are looking for.
 - b. You must see your life as part of a great chain of cause and effect.
 - (i) You do not live in a vacuum.
 - (ii) No man is an island.
 - (iii) You are either being a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. A means to men's salvation, or a means to their damnation.
 - (iv) And so be very careful how you walk!
2. Your life may be the only presentation of the Gospel that some will ever see.
 - a. You cannot take it for granted anymore that anyone is reading their Bible.
 - (i) The Word of God is available, but few even in the church read it regularly.

- (ii) And of the many who read it, only few really seek to understand it.
- b. So it may very well be that your life, transformed by the grace of Christ, is the only Gospel that many of your neighbors and acquaintances will ever see.
 - (i) As I said, they are watching you, carefully observing all that you do.
 - (ii) They want to see if Jesus makes any difference in your life at all.
 - (iii) Though God is the One who saves, you must remember that He saves through means. Your lives are one of those means.
 - (iv) Perhaps the reason we don't see too many coming to Christ in our days is because we are not exhibiting anything that they do not already have. We are not exhibiting the supernatural love of Christ.
- B. And So You Can See the Importance of Not Negating with Your Lives the Gospel That You Are Proclaiming with Your Lips.
 - 1. Do not live in such a way that the very things you do deny the words which you speak.
 - a. If you are living as though you don't believe the Gospel, then why should they believe it?
 - (i) You really believe something to be true when it affects your life.
 - (ii) No one is apt to believe that the building is on fire if show no concern to run from it yourself.
 - (iii) No child is going to take the instruction of his parents seriously, if he does not see his parents living what they teach.
 - (iv) In the same way, you must seek to live what you believe to be true.
 - b. You must be careful that your life does not give the unbeliever an excuse not to believe.
 - (i) Your life can greatly influence those around you.
 - (ii) The Lord can use your godly behavior to convict and bring light to those in darkness, just as Peter said the behavior of the wife can cause her disobedient husband to be convicted without even saying a word (1 Pet. 3:1-2).
 - (iii) If your life does not exhibit more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, or self-control than theirs does, it only gives them an excuse to continue in their sins.
 - (iv) This would be unprofitable for you, and a means of damnation to them.
 - 2. But you must live in such a way that your life will adorn the Gospel of Christ.
 - a. Let your life exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.
 - (i) Your Lord commands you to be filled with the Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18).
 - (ii) You do not need to seek a second experience from the Holy Spirit as some perfectionists teach.
 - (iii) But you must be yielded to Word of God. You must give yourself over fully to God in obedience, so that the Spirit of God, who already indwells you as a gift of God's grace, will be able to lead you into greater and greater obedience.
 - (iv) And you know that you are filled with the Spirit when your life evidences one main characteristic, that of love.
 - (v) Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, by your love

for one another” (John 13:35).

- (a) Jesus did not say that His disciples will be known by their friendliness.
 - (b) He did not say that they would be known by their hospitality.
 - (c) These are some of the evidences of love, to be sure, but we must not accept a part for the whole.
 - (d) Jesus said that they would know that you are His disciples because you have love for one another.
 - (e) Not love as the world defines it, but love as it comes from the hand of God. Love that keeps the commandments of God, love that does a neighbor no harm, but seeks in every way to bring that person closer to God.
 - (f) When an unbeliever sees this kind of love operating among a group of people who profess faith in Christ, when he sees such personal zeal for the things of God, that will be the strongest testimony that he can receive. He will know that we are Christ’s disciples.
- b. But realize that this Christian virtue does not happen automatically; it must be cultivated.
- (i) The love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit does not grow on its own.
 - (ii) It must be nurtured, it must be cultivated.
 - (iii) We must use the means of grace to nourish our souls. And through the grace he supplies, put off all of the deeds of the old man, and put on those of the new, who is being renewed into the image of Christ.
- c. But most of all, you must want to tell others about Christ.
- (i) Unless others are convinced that you really care about them, you will probably have no affect on their lives.
 - (ii) You must really want them to be saved from hell if you are to have the kind of compassion and zeal that the Lord can use to save them.
 - (iii) People of God, let us strive to cultivate the knowledge of God’s Word and of men. Let us strive to cultivate the spiritual virtue of love in our hearts for all men, in order that by word and conduct, we may draw the lost to our Savior. In this way, you will be making the most of your opportunities.
 - (iv) May the Lord bless you and make you faithful witnesses for Christ. Amen!