



**Series:** Colossians: Before All Things

**Date:** February 18, 2024

**Text:** Colossians 4.2-4.6

**Sermon:** Join God's Mission<sup>1</sup>

### Upside Down Kingdom Preview

Good Morning Mercy Family! If you have your bible, make your way to Colossians chapter 4. Today we reach the end of our Colossians series. Real quick, I want to give you a preview of a new sermon series we'll begin next week that will run up to and through easter. The series will be called **The Upside Down Kingdom** and it will walk through a short teaching of Jesus commonly called the Beatitudes. This short teaching is found in the beginning of Jesus's famous Sermon on

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<sup>1</sup> Works consulted:

Greear, J.D. "Pray, Act, Watch." The Summit Church. 18 November 2018.  
<https://summitchurch.com/message/pray-act-watch>

Martin, Joby. "One More." Church of Eleven22. 28 October 2018.

the Mount in the gospel of Matthew and reads kind of like Jesus' version of Proverbs.

The beatitudes contain a very powerful and important life-shaping message because in them Jesus lays out the outcomes every person wants in life. We want to flourish in this life AND we want security in the face of death, we want comfort in grief, we want justice but also mercy, we want someone to love & we want to be loved and we want a purpose to give our lives to. And Jesus calls that life...the blessed life. Security, comfort, purpose, love, justice, mercy. That is the life of the one who is blessed.

And it's not surprising that Jesus, who the bible says had a hand in making us, comes around and tells us how to find that blessed life. But the thing is - his explanation of how to find it is almost the complete opposite of how the world around us tells us to find the "HASHTAG" blessed life. Thus, our theme "the upside down kingdom." No this is not my take on the Stranger Things series. This is us saying the reason the rat race for more money, power, & romance isn't fulfilling you is because you are building the wrong kingdom.

I think this is a GREAT series to help you introduce your friends to Jesus. We'll talk more about that in our sermon today but as we begin setting our eyes on Easter, and praying for our lost friends, I think this will

<https://coe22.com/sermons/one-wk-03/>

Blaikie, William Garden. The Personal Life of David Livingstone Chiefly from his Unpublished Journals and Correspondence in the Possession of His Family. 2008. Kindle Edition.

be a great series of conversation starters. Go read Matthew 5 and see for yourself. Excited for next week.

### **Sermon Introduction**

But that's next week. Today we finish our series in Colossians. Feels like it's been a great series for us as a church. If you are new with us, welcome. We are glad you are here, and you may want to go catch up on this series but here is the heart of it. Early in the letter in chapter 1 our writer, the apostle Paul, says this about Jesus:

17 He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. 18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. -- Colossians 1:17-18 (CSB)

So, our series is called Before All Things and our aim has been to evaluate our lives around that last phrase - he came to have first place in everything. We said it's easy in the bible belt for Jesus to exist among all things in our lives. And in fact, that's how we MISS OUT on the power of God in our lives. The power comes from putting him FIRST but when we kind of just tuck Jesus into a little spiritual corner among the things in our lives we wonder why we don't experience his life-changing power. He came to have FIRST PLACE in everything. So, we've been talking about what it means to put him FIRST. Maybe to put him first for the first

time. Or maybe to put him back where he was some time ago.

And the sermons are really teeing up your 2024 Discipleship Plan. Like the Goal at the end of the series was to have a discipleship plan that will help you take **practical steps** to begin putting Jesus FIRST in your life. I'm loving hearing the steps you are taking. In that booklet there is a one-page summary page you can just put your steps on, And I hope you tear that out, put that one pager somewhere either in your bible or on your fridge or somewhere you will SEE IT and be reminded of it. And let's see what God does when we take regular steps of faith this year.

Ok, today we are going to see the apostle Paul close the letter - And he's going to do so by charging the church to join him in God's mission. And that's going to be the charge to us today. Will the result of our time, 7 weeks, in this series be simply gathering & hearing some sermons? OR will each of us actually take up God's call to join him in what he's doing? Paul is going to connect some dots for them. Showing them **the honor of knowing the gospel comes with the privilege of sharing the gospel**. And I want that for you Mercy Church. I want our love for God to be made visible by our commitment to the mission of God. To seeing the world around us encounter the God who saved us. That's where we are going today, and the outline today is pretty simple. 2 commands all

connected to them moving from observers of God's mission to participants in God's mission. That's the move to make today. From being an observer to being a participant. From sitting and watching on the sidelines to getting into the game & taking steps. 2 steps today that will move you from observer to participant in God's mission:

1. Pray expectantly.
2. Act wisely.

So, as you ask the question - God what is my purpose? What is my role? In the church & in life? Starts Pretty simple - **Pray expectantly and act wisely.** I'll clarify what both of those mean throughout our message. But that's the call. Don't just sit, watch & receive. That's observer mentality. Consumer mentality. Not only that - the power of God comes when we put Jesus first right? He calls us to engage his mission. So, when we do, that's when we experience the fullness of knowing him! Participant mentality is receiving this grace from God and then JOINING him in his mission. Let's get into it.

## 2 Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.

This is one of those little verses that you could easily let your eyes just kind of move by and yet if you will pause long enough to let God's word sink in, he could transform your life through you accepting his call here.

Devote yourself to prayer church. This is the first part of one who is going to join God's mission it's recognizing YOU HAVE NO POWER TO ACCOMPLISH IT!!! God has the power. And how is that power unleashed? THROUGH PRAYER! Ya'll prayer cannot be some afterthought for us. It certainly wasn't for Jesus. For the one who was ONE with the father he still went to be alone with the father. He who was God prayed for strength from God the Father to accomplish the mission the Father had sent him to carry out. If JESUS did that...how much more should this be our first move? Some of you have told me how you want to see God move in your children, in your spouse who is cold to the gospel & doesn't come to church, in your apartment, on your campus...and my question is not - "Have you prayed about it?" ...but are you DEVOTING YOURSELF TO PRAYER?

That's 2 diff things. One is a momentary reaction; the other is a lifestyle.

Kind of like the gym. In January you have people who go for a workout in reaction to the way they ate over the holidays. But by right now mid mid-February the ones left are the people who devote themselves to working out as a way of life. Now at the end of the year if you put the one who worked out BESIDE the one devoted to working out and asked the question - did you work out this year? Both can answer "yes." But one will look very different from the other. Right?

The same is true for you in your prayer life. There's a difference between praying about something & devoting yourself to prayer. One is a momentary reaction to something in your life, the other is a way of life. DEVOTE yourself to prayer. Here's why these matters -

Because a devoted prayer life is the way you keep Jesus FIRST before all things. Even FIRST before that thing you are praying about. Through PRAYER, You KEEP him in your heart & mind where he is in the cosmos - FIRST. And you discover a deep abiding relationship with God that you were created for. **And the result will be - God's answer to your prayer doesn't shake your faith in HIM.**

Some of you are devoting yourself to prayer & God hasn't answered. The scriptures are filled with such prayers too. And the only way to keep that thing you are praying for from becoming what your heart worships is to keep it before the Lord. In prayer we acknowledge He is enough. And He is good whether he says yes or no.

Church I'm under real conviction that with all God is doing among us we MUST be a church where prayer is not reactionary, it's a part of who we are. But his next words are critical - STAY ALERT IN IT.

**2 Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.**

**(Can we get this actually underlined?)**

By the time Paul is writing this letter, man he had accomplished a lot in ministry terms. And yet he was always on the lookout for what God was up to next. The way my pastor used to tell us when we experience God move is that we should pause and celebrate it. Be thankful...but...**don't put a period where God has put a comma.**

In other words, the wrong interpretation of seeing God move is to think, or act like, he's finished moving. Instead, seeing God move should create expectancy that he's going to move again. If we want to be a people who see God move, who move from observers of the mission to participating in the mission you gotta get this before you get anything else:

### **Participants in God's mission Pray Expectantly**

Listen to me here at this church, what I hope you experience if you are new is that we ACTUALLY expect God to hear our prayers and respond. We actually believe God's power is unleashed through the prayers of his people. One of our 5 ministry values is that we expect God to change a life today.

And that is nothing special about us. It's just us reading his word and ACTUALLY believing what it says. God calls us to pray. The book of Acts, the church prayed, and the walls shook. The church prayed and God saved people. When God's people pray, they should do so ALERT, watching expectantly for God to answer.

For Mercy, I've been thinking about how critical this is for us and you've heard me talk about this really for about a year now how we all gotta pick up this call. See we are 8 years old as a church. On our launch day 8 years ago...man it was the coolest day ever. 60 of us were on the launch team together (Show pic of launch team?) had been praying, dreaming, planning, preparing...and every last one of those 60 had total ownership in the mission. All 60 were members, all 60 had a ministry team they served with, all 60 were tithing, I mean we were ALL in. And on launch day a whole bunch of people showed up, it was awesome! We baptized 3 folks and man we were riding high. We even had a cookout that night to celebrate. And each one of us signed this poster with our original logo on it. Somebody was smart enough to frame it and it hangs in our office today.

But here's the thing - We only asked them for a 2-year commitment to help get us started. Over half of those folks are not here at mercy anymore. Many were young pros who moved to different cities. And life moved many people. But before I make my point, I actually do know there are a few left & I want to thank you for your expectant faith all these years.

So, in a second, I want to ask if you were a launch team member of mercy church, to stand up. But first kind of the point is with 7 services now across 3 campuses you may not have anyone standing. Which is my point. It's

not a disappointment if no one stands up. There will not be a room anywhere at mercy filled with people standing. That's my whole point. BUT whether you do or don't see somebody I want you to thank God for their faith.

Ok Launch Team members will you stand?  
(applause)

Here's the thing now - the time has come for **you** to join them. Because since that day in 2015, God has sent literally thousands probably hundreds of thousands of people to this area. Who need to hear the gospel. And he's put you among them. And man 8 years from now when I say how many of you were a part of that 1000 people who took up the mantle of faith and prayed expectantly in 2024, I want you to be able to say yes that was me! When I think about what God did through 60 - who prayed expectantly, can you imagine what God would do with 1000 people ALL IN together for the mission of God? I want to be a part of that. BTW one of our staff members who I read this to send me a calendar invite for February 2032. 8 years from today. I'll see you there.

My point in all this is pray expectantly that God has not put a period on his work in your life or through your life in the life of others. He IS working. And we pray with thanksgiving because we know it is only the grace of God that saved us and only the grace of God that he

sustains us and uses sinners like us in his plan so what can we be but thankful? Amen?

Ok he keeps going in on prayer and he does so by inviting them to pray for the assignment God has given him...which is also the assignment God's given the church. Check it out.

3 At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, 4 so that I may make it known as I should.

this gives us a little clarity to what your expectant prayers should be directed towards.

Paul prays for new gospel opportunities. So should we. When you pray expectantly, Pray for new gospel opportunities.

Pray that God may open a door to us for the word...to speak the mystery of Christ. This is the prayer of one who WANTS to be used by God. I think a lot of times I approach evangelism like...well God if you want me to share the gospel with this person, give me a sign. And Paul seems more like he's pushing on doors & looking for doors and saying GOD please open one of these!

Despite everything Paul had done, he wasn't done. Because he knew God wasn't done. And ya'll listen that's the spirit of what we are after here as a church.

This is really important to me that you hear this - We are not trying to JUST grow a big church. But we ARE trying to reach the one. Jesus had said that there was more joy in heaven over the 1 that repents than 99 who already belong to him, which meant for Paul that as long as there was breath in his body, he'd keep reaching for that lost one. That's what we are after here. We want to love what God loves and he loves the one lost sheep, and we are devoting ourselves to praying for and reaching out to that one.

And that's why we are committed to sending our best out to plant churches that will reach more people in more communities. Because it's not about us. In fact, it hurts to send our best. Like in 2022 when we sent our student pastor, Alan, to go plant a church - THAT HURT. He was our best and we sent some of our best members with him. When we send Joseph and Kaylon to Atlanta to plant later this year...man that hurts! They are pillars in our church family. And right now, I'm asking all of ya'll to pray about going with them. If you go it will hurt. Financially it hurts because church plants are like teenagers. They keep calling and asking for money & they are all confused about what to do next. But it's worth it because of the ONE lost sheep. Because of the new gospel opportunities, we want to seize.

And at the same time, we have to faithfully reach the people God is bringing right here. How could we send

churches to do that and not lead the charge in doing that ourselves? We don't operate on a "if you build it, they will come" mentality.

But we do operate on a "if they are coming, build to facilitate it." How could we not? Praying for new gospel opportunities means planting churches, it means increasing our capacity as a church, and on a personal level it means you and I praying expectantly for our lost friends and family.

Brings me to an action step that begins today and carries us through the season of LENT. Lent is a 40-day period set aside in church history to fast and pray in preparation of celebrating easter. It's 40 days long because it is designed to commemorate and, in a way, participate in, Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. So, during LENT which started this past Wednesday, we want to commit ourselves to praying & fasting. And our prayers are going to be for the lost one. For God to open a door to us for the word.

See that card you got on your seat? Let's pull that thing out for a minute. This comes from a training program here at Mercy called disciple making teams. Best training we have for growing in sharing your faith. They use this card and call it "little blue." And it's like a little prayer card with some helpful accountability steps written on it. On that back side there you write the name of one God has put in your life who is lost but

God loves, and you want them to know the hope of the gospel. Stick this card in your bible and we are going to pray over that one every day, now till easter. And plan on inviting that one to easter. Instructions are on the front & then there's a little legend on the back that's just there to help inform your prayers for them BUT the main point is, put a name down & pray!

Now the cool thing is your community group leader, today, is picking up something called "big blue." And they will have that at group this week. Big Blue is where you each write the names of your one and each time you gather for community group between now and easter, you pray for everyone on big blue. And man let's pray expectantly that God would open an opportunity for the word. What if every person sitting in mercy's worship service today thought of the mission as their mission? And your step was writing one name down. And praying. Here's something that might really mess with some of you - some of you are here because the person beside you has been praying for you. Praise God. time for you to join the prayer team too. Listen we've got baptisms today and then our next baptisms are on Easter Sunday, and I am praying the lord answers our prayers & we see people take their next steps. We'll come back to this at the end.

Not only does Paul call them to pray though, but he also calls them to act. Look at our last two verses for today.

5 Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person. -- Colossians 4:2-6

Act wisely. But what does he mean? Well, after we have prayed Paul is reminding us that our time is far more valuable and limited than we usually function like day in day out. Paul is calling them and us to the kind of wisdom that prioritizes our brief time God has given us. Psalm 90:12 says.

12 Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts. -- Psalms 90:12

This is the kind of wisdom that prioritizes what God cares about. That puts Jesus first. And then we act according to that wisdom. Ya'll I'm not going to go into it a lot but are you aware how brief your time on earth is? I'm being hit with it like a ton of bricks right now because I have teenagers. And teenage years are the ones where you grow ALOT really FAST. And Courtney and I will sit around looking more and more at pictures of them from when we could hold them. I can't exactly scoop my 15 yr old son up in my arms. Our days are brief. There's this picture of that first day we started mercy and I'm baptizing someone and one of our folks asked me recently...did you used to die your hair? And I was like OUCH. And I answered no, I got these gray hairs from being your pastor. Our days are brief and

fleeting. And acting wisely means prioritizing what God cares about. And he cares about people!

Participants in God's mission act wisely by **prioritizing God's mission**

Simply put, this all comes back to - Put Jesus First in everything. Is he first not just in your mind & heart but in how you carry yourself in the world? Does he have first place in EVERYTHING?

Also, I think it's important to acknowledge the inverse of acting wisely with your time. It's acting as if eternity doesn't exist. Not taking it into account. And that for sure is the way the world calls you to act. The world celebrates you building a comfortable life for yourself because...well...in the world's eyes this is all there is. Acting foolishly towards outsiders would be acting according to their values. Wasting your time, talent, & treasure building their kingdom.

But the Christian has found a greater treasure than anything this world has to offer.

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. -- Matthew 13:44 (CSB)



I hope this is us. That prioritizing God's mission is a joy for us. This is big for me and for what we pull from this letter. We put Jesus first, before all things...because he IS first. But also...because he went first. He sacrificed himself for us. This is the hope of the gospel. We were sinners in need of a savior and God in his kindness sent his son to pay for our sins. He went first Hebrews says for the joy that lay before him. The joy wasn't the cross...the joy was the salvation of sinners like you and I. So, we...having discovered that...what other response could we have than joyfully investing what God has given us into building his kingdom.

In 1857 David Livingstone, a British missionary to Africa, was back home & was invited to give a lecture at Cambridge. Big deal, lots of well-educated affluent people in the crowd. And the guy who introduced him spoke of how he sacrificed everything to go to Africa. And Livingstone takes the podium and says...I never sacrificed. Listen to this...

*"For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Other men*

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<sup>2</sup> Blaikie, William Garden. The Personal Life of David Livingstone Chiefly from his Unpublished Journals and

*count it an honor to represent an earthly sovereign. It is my privilege to offer my life in service to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords..... It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left his father's throne on high to give himself for us; 'who being the brightness of that Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.'...<sup>2</sup>*

May we see whatever step God calls us to take to participate in his mission...maybe it's giving up a lifestyle to invest financially. Maybe it's giving up charlotte to move to Atlanta or even overseas. Maybe it's giving up social comfort to talk to a lost friend about Jesus. Whatever it is...the one who sees the full hope of the gospel counts it as no sacrifice...but a privilege.

Correspondence in the Possession of His Family. Kindle Edition.

**\*\*Pray Expectantly, Act Wisely\*\*** - bring this back in at the close.

May it be our privilege, mercy church, to put Jesus first before all things.

CLOSE - Pray Over Little Blue