

WHY JESUS WINS [Colossians 4:2-6 VIGILANCE]

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INTRODUCTION

1. There's an episode of Seinfeld called The Bottle Deposit.
 - a. One of the storylines was Newman discovering that Michigan had a 10-cent bottle deposit.
 - 1) Since the deposit in NY was only 5-cents, he saw the chance to make money.
 - 2) Kramer disagreed, saying he crunched the numbers, but it just couldn't profitable.
 - 3) Newman, a mail carrier, signed up for a Michigan route, eliminating transportation costs.
 - 4) As in all Seinfeld episodes, their scheme was unsuccessful.
 - 5) Still, this story brings up an interesting economic concept.
 - b. There's a key economic term called **ARBITRAGE**.
 - 1) It's when you trade an identical product at a cost increase in order to make profit.
 - 2) EXAMPLE: if I find a bargain on t-shirts, but can sell them twice as much online.
 - 3) It's tricky as opportunities for arbitrage aren't frequent and don't last very long.
 - c. Arbitrage is a strategic, opportunistic way for a person to make money.
 - d. It requires knowing the markets and then being prepared to pounce when it's time.
2. Arbitrage, however, shouldn't be confused with **LUCK**, which can impact businesses.
 - a. I lean in on the example of the New York subway and the Cincinnati subway.
 - 1) New York completed their first subway route in the early 1900's.
 - 2) Even though Cincinnati voted to do so ten years later, construction was interrupted by the first World War and the Great Depression.
 - 3) Yes, even in business, some success depends on luck: the right place at the right time
3. TRANSITION: we're in the last chapter of our study of the book of Colossians.
 - a. Paul is instructing an ancient church how they should engage with challenges to their faith.
 - b. This week, Paul discusses what it means to engage with those who need Christ.
 - c. And we'll see that much of this comes down to Christians being ready for opportunities.

VERSE 2

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful (**vigilant**) and thankful.

1. Paul, in concluding his thoughts to the Colossians, gets down to practicality.
 - a. Again, in the New Testament, Paul usually hits on two themes in his books.
 - 1) He speaks of ORTHODOXY [belief] and ORTHOPRAXY [practice].
 - 2) Faith is not only about **doing** what's right, but **understanding** why you do it.
 - b. The operative word here is, "**DEVOTE**."
 - 1) Devote means, "to continue to do something with intense effort, despite difficulty."
 - 2) The idea is a commitment & discipline; it connotes forming a habit.
 - c. In this context, Paul wants us to develop a habit of prayer.
 - 1) I'm assuming nearly all of us here pray, but few think we're very good at it.
 - 2) Rarely do I encounter Christians confident in prayer. But improvement is possible.
 - 3) It's similar to the discipline in becoming a long-distance runner
 - a) To get better at running . . . you need to run more.
 - b) To get better at prayer, do it. Start praying more.
2. Paul describes two postures here when it comes to our prayer:
 - a. *First, with thanksgiving*: our acknowledging what God has done in our lives.
 - 1) A posture of gratitude in life will change the way you view your problems.
 - 2) Make it a habit to list the blessings you've received, and you'll feel blessed.
 - b. *Second, by being watchful*. The synonym of our focus is **Vigilance**.
 - 1) What does it mean to have a posture of vigilance?
 - 2) It means to observe the spiritual realm around ourselves and be ready
 - 3) The issue is that we tend to be distracted. But prayer guides us through this.

VERSES 3,4

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.

1. When we perceive that we are spiritual, we may sometimes believe that we are the experts.
 - a. This posture of arrogance can harm our spiritual journey. Paul, however, acts against this.
 - b. In these verses, we have an apostle of Jesus REQUESTING people pray for him.
 - 1) Paul isn't embarrassed to ask for prayer on his behalf.
 - 2) And this request prayer isn't driven by selfishness or acquisitiveness, but humility.
 - c. Paul adds an aside in verse 3, with the phrase, "for which I am in prison."
 - 1) This is an additional cause of shame but Paul is humble enough to admit it.
 - 2) The idea that a leader of faith was imprisoned could harm his witness.
 - 3) But Paul leans in on his deficiency. "I'm in prison. I need your prayers."
2. In verse 4, we realize that vigilance is dependent upon clarity.
 - a. Clarity in communication must consider the recipient.
 - b. When we discuss spiritual things, we mustn't rely on *churchy* vernacular.
 - c. When introducing Christ to non-Christians, I rarely begin with the Bible (special revelation).
 - d. Rather, I discuss the world/thought (general revelation) to provide clarity to their context.

VERSE 5

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

1. Not only are we told to *make the most* (be vigilant), we're to be aware of *how* we do so.
 - a. There is an attitude of philosophy espoused by poet Harry Styles,
**"You have to take me for me. I am who I am."*
 - b. This approach may be acceptable for the world, but not for Christians.
 - c. When it comes to outsiders (non-Christians) we must exhibit wisdom and grace.
2. There are three places in which we can do so.
 - a. *Personally*: in our day-to-day relationships with friends, neighbors, and family.
 - b. *Professionally*: in how we carry ourselves in our work/school.
 - c. *Programmatically*: in the overall attitude by which we view our world.
3. Or as Jesus says in **Matthew 5:16**: *"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

VERSE 6

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

1. What does it mean to vigilant in our conversations with those outside our faith?
 - a. Paul tells us to have graceful conversation, "*seasoned with salt.*"
 - b. The way that you and I view salt today is different than how the ancients did.
 - 1) First, understand that salt was an incredibly valuable commodity.
 - a) In some places, it was actually used as currency.
 - b) The etymology of the word SALARY can be traced back to SALT.
 - 2) Salt was definitely used to add flavor (something we still appreciate today).
 - a) Food can be incredibly bland; salt unlocks opportunity for taste.
 - b) Many chain restaurants make a living with high sodium content.
 - 3) Salt was used as a preservative before modern refrigeration, making food last.
 - a) Salt triggers osmosis and will remove water from food.
 - b) It's important because, in absence of water, bacteria won't multiply.
2. So let's take those applications and examine what that means to our conversations
 - a. Our conversations with others should be *valuable*.
 - 1) This doesn't mean that I can't talk about pop culture.
 - 2) But when we meet people that might be far from God, we should be wise.
 - 3) If I'm vigilant, I'm searching for chances to transition toward spiritual talk.

- b. Our conversations with others should be *flavorful*.
 - 1) My work requires new conversations with people every week.
 - 2) I'd offer that I've had hundreds of these conversations for work this year alone.
 - 3) I also try to engage people at the store/on the street. What's the key to talking?
 - 4) Ask questions! This is the best way to get people to open up.
- c. Our conversations with others should *preserve*.
 - 1) A synonym of preserve is TO KEEP.
 - 2) If I aim for valuable and flavorful conversations, they'll be memorable.
 - 3) Even if I only talk to someone for a few moments, I want them to remember it.
 - 4) The world is full of so many poor interactions, good ones are cherished.
- d. What's the point with talking about our conversation? Scholar NT WRIGHT shares . . .

"Paul knows that a tedious monologue is worse than useless in evangelism. Christians are to work at making their witness interesting, lively and colorful."

CONCLUSION

1. Why does Jesus win? Because he was vigilant. And we're asked to be vigilant.
2. On the surface, this means little. We live in the era of can-do opportunism
 - a. It's a time of ARBITRAGE, as people are seeking to profit on market opportunities.
 - b. In modern vernacular, it's the value of (yes), "*staying woke*."
 - c. It's always apparent in popular song today . . .
 - Alexander Hamilton: "*I'm not throwing away my shot.*"
 - Miley Cyrus: "*There's always gonna be another mountain. I'm always gonna wanna make it move.*"
 - Drake: "*I was trying to get it on my own, Working all night, traffic on the way home.*"
 - Eminem: *You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow*
 - Bon Jovi: "*It's my life. It's now or never. I ain't gonna live forever. I just wanna live while I'm alive.*"
 - Katy Perry: *Cause baby you're a firework. Come on, show 'em what you're worth. Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh". As you shoot across the sky-y-y"*
3. As good as this inspiration sounds during your workout, it lacks perspective.
 - a. Jesus was vigilant in the way he approached his life and sacrifice on the cross.
 - b. Our vigilance, then, should emulate that of our Savior.
 - c. Instead of seeking arbitrage/staying woke for my benefit, I should do so for other's eternity.
 - d. Perhaps a better view from the apostle Paul from Ephesians 5:15,16.

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity."
4. Do I make the most of my opportunities for Jesus? Be vigilant!