

Sunday 23rd August, 2026

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church Welcome & Prayer

So, join with us this morning to praise God, remembering David's words from Psalm 117:

Praise the Lord, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

*For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*

Prayer. Dear Father, From the time we wake in the morning, to the time we go to sleep at night we have so much to praise you for. We are surrounded by examples of your majesty, power and love. Your creation stares us in the face as we see the majesty of the sun and the rain, of plants and animals, the wonder of the bodies you have given us. You care for us, provide food and shelter, friends and family for us.

Yet, despite knowing all this, we don't always feel like acknowledging you. In times like this, as we struggle with sadness, we often think more about ourselves than about you. Forgive us, help us to return to you and remember your constant love, your promises to never leave us, to provide the best for us. We know that you will renew our hearts and souls, that through your Spirit we can have peace, that you will draw us close to you.

Help us this morning not to be distracted, but instead to have clear heads and humble hearts, ready to acknowledge you, to come close to you and to learn of your purposes for us. In Jesus' name. Amen

Song – Praise 96 [Psalm 96 Praise - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. Sing unto the Lord a new song
Sing unto the Lord all the earth
Sing to the Lord, bless his name
Tell of his salvation day by day.</p> | <p>3. Let all the creation be glad
The earth and the sea sing for joy
Before the Lord, the judge of the earth
Who judges us in righteousness and truth.</p> |
| <p>2. Majesty and honour are his
Strength and beauty, glory and righteousness
Great is the Lord, and deserving of praise
He is to be feared above all gods.</p> | |

Chorus Worship the Lord in holy array
Tremble before him all the earth
Our God reigns.

Bible Reading – Colossians 4:2-6 (NIV)

2 "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. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Announcements

Focus for the month: Mission /Evangelism. How do we take some simple steps to grow in our heart for mission? Last week we heard the Applebys tell us to Give. Pray. Go. We give our time and effort and money to work of God's mission throughout the world. Is there something you could give this week? Pray. We pray that God would open doors for our missionaries so that more people could hear the good news of Jesus. Could you set aside some extra time this week to pray for the work of our missionaries? Go. What would it mean for you to do something about world mission - go to a missions' conference, a missionary prayer group, to do a short-term mission, to a Bible college, to visit a missionary or go yourself to the mission field? The challenge this week is to Give. Pray. Go.

Invitation Service. We only have one week before our invitation services at all three times next Sunday. Who can you invite to come along?

Discover. Another option is to invite your friend (and come yourself) to our DISCOVER course. Five Thursday nights from 27th August @ the Church starting from 7pm. For more details speak to Jannah.

Admin Assistant. After just over a couple of years, our admin assistant Samuel Wilson will be stepping down from the position. Samuel has been offered a full-time job teaching at Charlestown Public. Well done Samuel. Samuel has helped us in so many ways from the move to and from Charlestown public, to cyber security, Elvanto, facebook, webpage as well as a lot of the administrative tasks that would go unnoticed by many. If you would be interested in a 10 hour a week position as an admin assistant, please talk to Stephen who has a job description, pay and conditions all worked out. Applications will stay open until Sunday 6th September with a flexible start date.

Charlestown Work Day. Many thanks to all those who joined us at our work day yesterday. The combination of a new almost finished building and a few old near the end of their live type buildings means plenty of general maintenance work that needs to be done. We are aware that the bulk it falls on a few dedicated people but work days give us the chance to do our small bit to improve the buildings that all our ministries meet in each week.

Next preaching programme – Swansea/Charlestown AM. Light for the Lost

30/8 Come home Luke 15

RECHARGE. Recharge Men's Conference | Saturday 12th September 7:30am-1:00pm Theme – Futureproof Men: Living now with the end in mind. Speaker – Steve McAlpine. Early bird \$40 and under-25 \$20. For details see Greg W or visit <https://www.hgm.org.au/recharge>

Women's Conference | Saturday 19th September (if room) 9:00am - 1:00pm Presbyterian Women are holding a conference at Epping Presbyterian on Meeting Jesus. More info <https://ttw.pcnswwomen.org.au> Our church will also play the recorded talks Saturday 17th October 9:00-1:00pm. See our Women's Ministry Committee members for more details.

Song –And can it be <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQelGbKqiW8>

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| <p>1. And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?</p> | <p>4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.</p> |
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Refrain:

Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

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| <p>2. 'Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?</p> | <p>5. No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;</p> |
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In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

3. He left His Father's throne above—
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

Pastoral Prayer Points

Pray for Tajikistan (Population 10 million. Christians 33,000). Despite Tajikistan having the highest percentage of Muslims in Central Asia, the country's secular, dictatorial state maintains a tight grip on all religions. This includes Christians, especially those from Protestant groups who are deemed dangerous followers of "deviant" sects. Pray that God keeps Christians safe even as they are monitored by the government. Pray He gives extra grace to church leaders. Pray that God will protect believers deported from Tajikistan, especially Afghan Christians who fear being sent home. Pray that secret training to provide the Church with much needed discipleship can continue.

Pray for A Roche Pray for the work of A Rocha in Australia as they implement an eco-church project and produce Creation care materials for kids. Ask God for wisdom and guidance in growing an A Rocha network and projects in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.

Pray for those in our nation experiencing grief in its many forms. That they might not face this grief alone. That they might be given words of hope and comfort. That Christians might be the ones provide help and support and the words of hope in this critical time.

Pray for our invitation services and for the Discover course that we are running in the next week. That our people can have the courage to invite their friends and family to come along. That there might be a clear presentation of the Gospel at these events. And that God's holy Spirit will move within people and draw them to Christ.

Bible Reading – 1 Peter 3:13-18

¹³ "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere 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, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."

Sermon: Open Doors? (Stephen T)

On my book shelf I have numerous books that I have read and courses that I have attended about sharing my faith. You see throughout the years I have seen this as a real weakness in my walk with Jesus. I want to point people to Jesus but I often chicken out. I don't have too many non-Christian friends and so I am rarely in that space where witnessing opportunities come up. And when they do, I often leave a conversation kicking myself that I didn't make the most of the opening that God gave me.

To do something about this weakness, I have tried to find a way to change my heart and my words and actions so I would become better at evangelism. So, I have read books like

- Evangelism in a sceptical world
- Evangelism and the sovereignty of God
- I believe in evangelism
- Honest Evangelism
- Know and tell the gospel
- How to give away your faith
- Out of the saltshaker and into the world and its sequel Stay salty
- How to talk about Jesus without being that guy.

I have attended and even run courses like

- Christianity Explained
- Christianity Explored
- Every Day Christianity
- Two Ways to Live
- Evangelism Explosion &
- Making Friends for life, to mention just a few.

And after 40 years of trying, I am still no good at sharing my faith. So, does that mean today I am going to share out of my own ignorance what you and I should do when it comes to evangelism? Giving your pointers that haven't worked for me but might work for you? No.

Slide 2

Instead, I will open up the Bible and hear what the apostle Paul has to say about evangelism. And we are going to ask the Holy Spirit to take God's word and seek to apply it to our lives. To stimulate our witness. To give us a passion for the lost. And Paul will give us a three-step approach that is so simple that we can all do it. Witnessing is about Pray. Display & Say.

Slide 3

1. Its starts when we Depend upon God, verses 2-4. When we PRAY.

2 *"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."*

Devote yourself to prayer. Persist in prayer. Continue steadfastly in prayer. Keep coming back to prayer. For prayer is the first step in evangelism. A vital component that we often neglect. Because many of us are doers. We want to be out there doing something for Jesus. And we forget that we want Jesus to be in us before we do anything. That we need Jesus power, Jesus strength, Jesus wisdom. And we only get that when we spend time with him. Quality time with him and quantity time with him.

Slide 4

And as we pray, we need to **be watchful and thankful**. Does that mean we don't close our eyes when we pray? So, I can pray while I am driving the car afterall! Well, the idea of being watchful is we **are alert** to the things that are happening all around us. In the world and in our world. In our family and in God's family. At work and during leisure, our eyes are alert, **our senses are awake** to see and notice what God is doing all around us.

Watchful and thankful. Already in this letter to the Colossian Church Paul has expressed his thankfulness that he has been rescued (1:13), redeemed (1:14), reconciled (1:22) and regenerated (2:13). God has already done a good work in his life and the life of the people of the Colossian Church. And so, if he has done it many times already, he can do it again, can't he? If he can save me, he can save my sister. If he has saved a headmaster, he can save a teacher. If he has saved a teenager, he can also save a young married couple. So be thankful!

Slide 5

Paul says witnessing starts with prayer. Your prayers. My prayers. Being devoted to prayer. Charles Spurgeon used to tell visitors that prayer was the powerhouse of gospel ministry. While he preached to thousands upstairs at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, members of the church gathered downstairs to pray. He once preached. *"The prayer-meeting is the spiritual thermometer of the church."* Another quote attributed to Spurgeon *"Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray."*

Slide 6

God's people are to be devoted to prayer and they need to pray especially for **open doors**. When Paul was writing this letter to the Colossians, he was actually locked behind a closed Roman prison door. But the open door that he is praying for is not his freedom to go wherever he would like to go. It was that God would open the doors of opportunity to tell people around him about Jesus as well as to open the doors of people's hearts so that they would accept the gracious salvation that Jesus was offering them through Paul's witness.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul says that his time in prison has meant the whole palace guard has heard about Jesus. You see Paul had a captive audience when he was himself a captive. There were his fellow prisoners who couldn't escape talking to and with Paul and being chained to a Roman soldier day and night meant the guards themselves, on high rotation, got to hear every word and every attitude that the prisoner Paul said and did.

As a new minister, I remember visiting a retired man in my congregation and after a while he told me his story. He was an ex-minister himself, convicted, he said, unfairly on trumped up charges and spent over a decade in prison. He told me on reflection that his most productive ministry was in jail. Witnessing, discipling, encouraging his fellow inmates. The doors of prison were closed for him but at the same time the doors of opportunity were wide open.

Slide 7

Devoted to prayer. Open doors & the need for a clear proclamation of the mystery of Christ. Back in Colossians 1:26, Paul tells us that the mystery of Christ is the good news that was hidden for ages & generations but has now been revealed in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus. Paul wants people to hear clearly about Jesus. Not really about the Church. Not about heaven. Not about creation. Not about the second coming. But the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if Paul, one of the most amazing Christian communicators of all time & the writer of 12 New Testament books, felt the need for prayer support as he spoke and taught and preached, how much more do the rest of us need that sort of gospel clarity & those gospel opportunities as we share the content of the gospel which is all about Jesus Christ.

For what people need is not cleverness. Nor your brilliance or persuasive words, they need clarity. In the same way that ships don't need fancy strobe lighting or colours, just a clear beam of light from a lighthouse to get into the safety of the harbour, so what our non-Christian friends need is to know that Jesus died for their sins. That Jesus rose to give them life. That Jesus is Lord of all. And that means they need to repent and believe in Jesus.

Slide 8

So, can I ask you are you devoted to prayer? Are you praying for open doors for your own witness and for the witness of your preachers, and for our SRE teacher, youth leaders, kids church leaders & evangelists. We have an outreach service next Sunday, are you praying for those coming? This week we are starting a Discover course are you praying? The youth group are working their way through a 4 week course called Taste and See. Are you praying? For clarity? For open doors? For open hearts? For people to put their trust in Jesus?

Slide 9

In the words of hymnwriter, William Cowper, *"Satan trembles when he sees, the weakest saint on their knees."* And it all begins when you and I pray. When we speak to God about people. And then it moves from praying to displaying and saying, where we speak to people about God.

Slide 10

2. Display Christ (verse 5). DISPLAY

5 *"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."* If we are going to be a good witness to Jesus, we need to not just speak to God about the person and speak to the person about God, we also need display Christ to the one who needs to put their trust in Christ. We need to pray and display. For the gospel message needs to be fleshed out and **be seen**, as well as clear proclaimed and heard.

Slide 11

And that means you and I need to **walk wisely**. You see wisdom is very practical. It is applied knowledge, demonstrating through **words and actions** it shows what the Christian believes and how the Christian lives. We sometimes put it this way; we can't just talk the talk we need to walk the walk. Or sometimes we say that we Christians need to Walk the Talk.

Now what is the message of Jesus all about? Grace. Repentance. Forgiveness. Kindness. Patience. Trustworthiness. And when we look at the gospel Jesus puts flesh and bones on that message. So, the people of Jesus time could hear the message of God's grace and see it lived out before them. But the people of our time can't see Jesus in the same way. But they can still read the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and they should also be able to see a walking gospel in you and me. As we walk wisely the path that Jesus has placed us on.

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Because Christ actually lives within the Christian. And so, Christ should be showing through the Christian in all that we do and say. Now, of course not perfectly, but over time people should be able to see **the difference** that Jesus has made in our lives.

Slide 13

We are to walk wisely the path that Jesus has laid before us and also make the most of **every opportunity**. The phrase in the original Greek language suggests that time is in short supply and so like a bargain hunter in a sale, you and I need to snap up what time we can find.

There is a sense of urgency about sharing the gospel. We don't know when Jesus will come again and the door of opportunity that is currently wide open will be slammed shut forever. So, we want to make the most of any and every opportunity that God gives us. And you can see how this relates to our first point about prayer. For if we are praying for an open door. And if we are doing so while awake and when we are fully aware, then we will not only **see** the opportunities that God gives us but we **will be ready to grasp** those opportunities.

Let me confess that when I am not praying for open doors for myself and others, when I am not devoted in prayer for the spread of the gospel, I often miss my chances when they come. I leave a conversation kicking myself. "Why didn't you say something Stephen. You have let God down again, haven't you?" But when I am praying, then God more than often answers that prayer and gives me a chance to say something. Then I have not just **the chance** to point people to Jesus but **the choice** as to whether I will do so or not.

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It was Canadian author Marshall McLuhan who coined the phrase *"The medium is the message."* That what we do is almost as valuable as what we say. There's a well-known story, whether, entirely true or not I am not sure, but it captures the point well about the preacher who on the Sunday night had preached a sermon on honesty. The next day, he boarded a bus. When he paid his fare, the bus driver accidentally gave him too much change.

He sat down and wrestled with his conscience. "It's only a small amount," he thought. "The bus company won't miss it." But the Holy Spirit kept convicting him. So, when he got off the bus, he handed the extra money back and said, "I think you've given me too much change."

The driver smiled and replied, "Actually, I did it on purpose. I came to hear you preach last night about being an honest Christian. I wanted to see if what you said was true."

As the bus drove away, the young preacher reportedly prayed, "Lord, forgive me. I almost sold my testimony for a few coins." Friends you & I can sell our testimony short if our words and actions don't match. Now I am not saying you and I need to be perfect in order to tell others the good news about Jesus. But when we do make mistakes, we need to own them & ask for forgiveness. And rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to make changes in our lives. The median is the message. Which means we need to Pray. Display and lastly Say. As we

Slide 15

3. Declare Christ (verse 6)

6 *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."* Paul now gives us some guidelines as to what to say, how to say it & when to say it. And his first point for us to remember is that our speech needs to be **grace filled**. Our conversations, take note of that word, conversations. It is not about a monologue where we tell someone else the gospel and they sit and listen to us speak but let your conversations be always full of grace.

Slide 16

Christians should never sound argumentative, superior or harsh. And yes, our message includes difficult truths but our manner should reflect the grace we've received. Jesus was always full of grace and truth. And so, as we speak the truth in love, we are required to do so graciously. We **always** need to speak the truth graciously. Now that packs a punch, doesn't it

Sometimes I have made the mistake of trying to win the Christian argument. Jesus did rise from the dead. Yes, God does exist. Our sin is a problem & in order to have this conversation with an unbeliever; I get frustrated when they just don't get it. And so, I want to win the battle and forget about winning the war. I want to show the truth of my argument but often that means I lose my graciousness.

But sometimes I go to the other extreme and become so gracious that I don't push back on what they are saying. I could lose this friendship that means so much to me, I am going to have spend the rest of the weekend with these family members and I don't want there to be tension in the house. So, this time I will let what they say go through to the keeper and I will keep my mouth firmly shut.

It's hard, isn't it? That's where wisdom and prayer come in. The Holy Spirit can lead us and guide us when we are to speak and when we are to be silent. But when we speak, we need to be gracious and when we are silent, we need to keep looking for opportunities to speak.

Grace filled and **salt seasoned**. *"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt."* Now when we talk about someone having salty speech, we usually have in mind someone whose language is quite colourful. But here Paul is saying just as a good cook knows how and when to season a dish, how much seasoning to add so that the dish is full of flavour; so, you and I need to season our words so they are interesting, wise, careful, judicious. What we say should perfectly fit the context that we find ourselves in.

Jesus is a good example for us here, isn't he? His parables were salty in that they used everyday examples and objects all around him in such a way as to draw his hearers in. The way he treated people and the message he preached was thought provoking, challenging and never dull and boring. He treated each person on their own merits which meant his response to the women caught in adultery was different to

the women with internal bleeding; the way he treated the Pharisee was different to how he treated the tax collector. Jesus always seemed to find the right thing to say at the right time to the right people.

Grace filled. Salt seasoned and **answer ready**. 6 *“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”* You don’t always have to initiate the conversation turning it around to Jesus. You can respond to what the person in front of you is saying. Sometimes they will be asking you a question and other times they will be speaking about the world around us and giving their opinion. But whatever openings they give you, whatever door is opened, make the most of it.

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A skilled GP doesn't prescribe identical medicine for every patient. The diagnosis shapes the treatment. Likewise wise evangelism listens carefully before speaking. Tim Keller described this as finding the gospel bridge. Start with a familiar topic and build a bridge to Jesus.

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For example, when someone tells you the world evolved and wasn’t created, ask them how the first something of this world came from nothing. When they tell you that Jesus was a myth ask which historians they know think that Jesus never existed and have their theories been peer tested? When they say all religions lead to God, ask how Hinduism which says there are millions of Gods, and Buddhism which says there is no god and Christianity which says there is only one God can all be true at the same time?

When people talk about the World Cup soccer, point out how many of these rich and talented players, were found praying to Jesus at the end of the game. When people complain about the cost of living ask them what the cost of dying is? What will they lose when they die? When they complain about AI point them to God’s real intelligence. When they are upset about climate change, tell them that creation is broken and only its maker God can truly fix it. When the topic of mental health is raised, talk to them about how Jesus offers to help bear our burdens and takes the things that are too heavy for us on our behalf.

Slide 19

We can do that also with loneliness, marriage breakdowns, holidays, success and failure, broken relationships, natural disasters and more so much more. Maybe this simple formula could help you Listen/Link/Lead. Listen to what is the longing behind what they are saying. Link, how can you connect that longing with the gospel. Before leading them gently to Jesus.

Paul doesn't say, 'Know **the answer** to every question.' He says, 'Know **how to answer** each person.' The emphasis isn't on mastering every argument; it's on loving every person. We don't need a prepared speech for every topic. We need hearts so full of Christ that we naturally connect everyday conversations to the greatest news the world has ever heard.

Slide 20

So, there you have it. A three-step approach we could all do PRAY. DISPLAY. SAY. But here is what my experience has taught me. When I pray and display and don’t have the courage to say anything, Jesus is left out of the equation. After plenty of arguments with my mum, that was the approach I took until she misread my silence as trying to tell her that I was better than her and that my good works would get me to heaven. We need the good news of Jesus to point everyone to Jesus being the way, the truth and the life. That there is no other way to heaven but by Jesus.

And when I pray and say but don’t display. Then my inconsistent life, my hypocrisy builds a barrier where the gospel seeks to build bridges. If Jesus doesn’t have the power to change my life, why would he have the power to change anyone else’s life?

And when I display and say but don't pray, then I am relying on my words, my arguments, myself, to convert someone & I am setting myself & my friends & family up for disappointment. We need God to open doors, soften hearts, give sight and grant new birth. And what the Bible says is that God does that, through the means of prayer. And as a result of his followers sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Slide 21

Let me put it this way. When we don't say, people don't hear Christ. When we don't DISPLAY people won't see Christ and when we don't PRAY, people won't meet Christ. Prayer opens us up to God's power. Display shows others the changes that God has made in our lives. And what we SAY give people the truth they need to respond to be saved. Take one away and our witness is weakened. Together they powerfully point others to Jesus Christ. And that's what we want to happen. For all people to hear about the Jesus who has changed our lives.

Song – His mercy is more <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAa2C1yoQ-0>

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| <p>1. What love could remember
no wrongs we have done
Omniscient, all knowing,
He counts not their sum
Thrown into a sea
without bottom or shore
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more</p> | <p>Chorus x2
Praise the Lord, His mercy is more
Stronger than darkness, new every morn
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more</p> |
| <p>2. What patience would wait
as we constantly roam
What Father, so tender,
is calling us home
He welcomes the weakest,
the vilest, the poor
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more</p> | <p>3. What riches of kindness
He lavished on us
His blood was the payment,
His life was the cost
We stood 'neath a debt
we could never afford
Our sins they are many,
His mercy is more</p> |
| | <p>Chorus x2</p> |

Benediction. *5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4:5-6)*