

Gifts for mission

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[0 : 00] We've been going through a series about church membership, what it means to belong and that every Christian should belong to a recognizable visible body of God's people.

! If this is a subject that you are still wrestling with, unhappy about, uneasy about, need to resolve, please do not put it on a shelf and leave it to another moment.

Please do allow God to speak to you on this matter and I'd be very happy to talk to you after the meeting about this as well. Today we're thinking not just that we're a family here but we're also a growing family.

So if you were to come here five years ago there would have been quite a contrast in terms of both numbers and people who are here. We are also an international family which is a beautiful thing. It is such an example and testimony to the bigness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we have a care and concern not just for our situation here but for the city in which we are placed, for the country in which we live, for the world of which we are citizens.

[1 : 17] Because this gospel is for the whole world. And Jesus will have a people from all the world. And it is an imperative that Jesus should have that people because he died for them upon the cross.

And he is looking forward. He is looking forward to that time where they shall all be gathered to be before him and see him and he see them face to face.

So we're touching on the issue here of the way the kingdom of God grows and it grows by Christian mission, by God's grace.

And as I say those two things, we are reminded that there is a matter of personal responsibility for us in telling the good news of Jesus.

There is a matter of personal responsibility in people responding to the lordship of Jesus Christ. And there is the matter also and fundamentally of God's grace.

[2 : 27] Because none of this will bear any fruit at all if it is not for the grace of God working in people's lives. Because that's why every single one of us here today who names the name of Jesus Christ has to say 100% it was God's grace that drew me to himself and that brought me to know him as Lord and Savior.

Praise God. Praise God.

Praise God. Praise God. Is this Christian mission?

It certainly looks like it. It's the sort of images that are seared upon our brains as we read the books and have come to countless missionary events.

Is this Christian mission? Here's a water pump which is saving life. And a medical team at work in some country of the world.

[4 : 29] Is this Christian mission? And what about this? So there is one of those people.

In fact the one who is being prayed for. Who is actually about to leave that church and go somewhere else. And there are people who are praying for this lady.

Laying their hands upon her. Are they involved in Christian mission? Is that Christian mission? Or is this Christian mission? That we should pray in our prayer meetings.

Now is this Christian mission? Because this is Canary Wharf. You might say the United Kingdom capital of capitalism.

With a very swanky office. Glass everywhere. Suited people. Having a business meeting around the table. Or this is your local supermarket.

[5 : 38] And you're desperately trying to find where they put the stuff that used to be in the aisle on the left. And they now change it to the right. Or is this Christian mission?

Because there's this 24-7 gym just down the road. And some of you may actually go to it. And bus stops. A lot of us spend a lot of time in bus stops. This one's got a shelter.

Or is this Christian mission? Because that's a school gate. Or it might be a car factory. Or it can be this meal.

Or there's a rest home. And as we've gone through these images and slides. I suspect that we begin to get a little bit uneasy about some of these latter pictures.

As properly reflective of Christian mission. Because we have the images. And those images stay with us.

[6 : 48] And we put one thing into one box. And another thing into another. And then we have Bible words.

And these are very important. How many thousands of sermons have been preached on this particular text? Then Jesus came to them and said.

And this is the very end of Matthew's Gospel. It's the very final words of the Gospel. Jesus is just about to go back to heaven. These are the last recorded words of Jesus Christ.

You see. I'm building it up. I'm just saying how significant this is. And people when they've heard these words. Have dropped everything.

And gone to a foreign country. And lived the rest of their lives in that land. On the basis of these words. This command of Jesus. Where he says.

[7 : 48] All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father. And of the Son.

And of the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always. To the very end of the age. And I've no doubt that many of us have heard those words before.

And a certain conviction in our spirit may have arisen because of that. These are Bible words about Christian mission.

And these are very, very significant. These sorts of Bible words. They're very significant in the church's thinking about what mission is. And then there is some rationalizing that we do about Christian mission.

So here's another text in the Bible. It's Acts 13. Where we read. In the church at Antioch. There were prophets and teachers. And they're named.

[8 : 56] Barnabas. Simeon called Niger. Lucius of Cyrene. Mana'an. Who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. And Saul. And while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting.

The Holy Spirit said. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul. For the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed. They placed their hand on them. And sent them off.

So that seems quite like that picture we had on the screen earlier. Doesn't it? Where there was. A commissioning taking place. So the narrative carries on.

And we hear a lot about Barnabas and Saul. We hear of their journeys. But as far as I know. We hear nothing more about Simeon called Niger.

We hear nothing more of Lucius of Cyrene. Mana'an. We don't hear any more of those people. The only picture we have in this Bible. Is the fact that they.

[9 : 58] Set them apart. But what sort of people were they? We're told. They were prophets and teachers. They were gifted people. They were people who heard the voice of the Lord.

They were people who knew what it was to fast and pray. But the story line goes with Saul and Barnabas. So we kind of rationalize.

What is taking place here. And say. There is Christian mission which is going. And there's Christian mission which is something to do with commissioning and praying. And giving. And I'm just saying this because that's the way it is.

I'd like us to look. This morning at this passage which has already been read.

To us. And so please open your Bible at chapter 4 of Matthew. Page 968. Verses 18 to 22.

[11 : 27] Talk about Jesus calling the disciples. That's a really significant moment. Something is about to happen. He's calling a body of people to be close to him.

We know what's going to happen to them later. Because it's recorded in the gospel story. And then in verse 23. We launch into this paragraph that tells us about what Jesus did.

He went throughout Galilee. He taught. He preached the good news of the kingdom. And healed every disease and sickness among the people. Why?

Because the kingdom had come. The kingdom that had been prophesied in Old Testament times. Had now come. It had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. And he did the things that were foretold concerning the Messiah. The sick were healed. There were mighty works done.

[12:27] Which was a demonstration that the kingdom of God had actually come. And then we move into chapter 5. And over the next three chapters.

There is this remarkable, unique, differentiating preaching of Jesus Christ. About what it means to be a citizen of Jesus' kingdom.

He's already called those disciples. And now he's telling to them. And to those who are listening. Because both parties are there.

He's saying this is what it is. To be a citizen of the kingdom. He talks firstly about their character. We're going to look at that. And then he goes on to talk about their behaviour. And we will also come across these two pictures of behaviour.

[13:40] Which I want to focus on later. Which is the pictures of salt and light. Let's think about firstly the character of these people who are in the kingdom.

They're described here in chapter 5. And from verse 3 onwards. Blessed. Happy. Very fortunate. Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. For they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek. For they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart. For they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers. For they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted. Because of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[14:47] Blessed are the people of heaven. Now this is very, very radical. And it is so radical that it's been abused. Because the people of this age and the people of this world are not prepared to receive the plain words that are on this page.

So they put another construction upon it. So instead of reading blessed are the poor in spirit. Which is what God says. They read blessed are the poor.

There's not a great deal of blessedness attached with being poor. It's not a situation in life to be encouraged. And Jesus isn't talking about that.

Blessed are those who mourn. And there are plenty of people who are mourning today. But I say it gently. Jesus Christ is not talking about the character of the people of his kingdom. As those who are sad because of loss.

Of a loved one. Or a job. The world is full of mourning. This city is full of mourning. But Jesus is not accrediting that mourning.

[15:58] And saying you're in a great place. It is not a happy thing to mourn. Loss is a very sad thing. And it's an irony that people should sort of take these words.

And simply apply them as if it was a. There, there, there. It's okay. That's not the meaning of this text. Shocking indeed.

Blessed are the meek. Where this world is so full of struggle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.

But you have to read the next part. It is no blessing to be hungry and thirsty, is it? But it's a great blessing.

To be hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Then the word of God is introduced.

[17:00] The word God. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers. The United Nations do a great job.

There's no blessing in being an earthly peacemaker. Even by itself. That is not the characteristic of the kingdom of the citizens of the kingdom. That's something to do with their relationship with God.

And how important it is for us to just linger at this point today.

Because I'm confident there are people here today. You're needing to hear this. You're needing to hear this particular message. To look at these particular words.

And it's the test of your citizenship. Of whether or not you are belonging to Jesus Christ. Whether you're part of his kingdom.

[18:02] These words are the test of these things. Can you say about yourself. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit. This is not aspirational language.

This is the language of present reality. And it's the present reality that is the gift of God to those who come into his kingdom.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus is saying that's exactly what you need.

You need to be a person who is poor in your spirit. In the sense that you realise you have need.

You have spiritual need. If you're here today and you think I don't have a spiritual need.

I'm sorted. I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm okay. Well you're failing the first test. Blessed are those who mourn.

[19 : 17] Not for personal loss. But being so distressed in your spirit because of the reality of sin.

To be sad in that way. Blessed are those who are meek. The humble. The ones who don't come to God with anything.

Anything of merit. But say I'm just needy. I'm just needy. If you needy. If you can find the beginnings of those things in your present reality then you're in an encouraging place.

and I'd encourage you to ask that you would make that God would make that experience and those feelings in your heart greater the human instinct is to say if I'm in need I need to get out of it fast I need to get a solution fast but God's methodology is to say if you're in need you need that need to be made as great and as deep and as profound as is necessary for you to abandon all other help and resource so that you can cry to God you recognise your need that it would be so deep in your life that you would feel that need to be to change the pathway of your life and to call out to him well may such blessing as be yours and mine because we never move off from this we never move off from this position this is the badge and the hallmark of the discipleship of Jesus Christ if you feel poor in your spirit well you're really blessed today that's a great place to be are you sad for your sin that's a very very good place to be are you hungering and thirsting for the righteousness that you know that you don't have well there's only one place to look which is a cross upon which there's a man who died and who offers his righteousness for us because we have none so this is the character of the people who are the citizens of the kingdom

I want to pass on now to the to what he now says about salt and light verse 13 to 16 and let's just look at the text here and you'll notice the following he says this you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world so salt and light you are he says that's a present reality that is just how it is this is not aspirational language again it is just saying this is what it is to be a disciple you all are there's no distinction here made between some sort of disciples and another thirdly these pictures talk about the effects that these people have upon the world around them they are salt in the earth and they are light in the world it's a very big picture isn't it it's talking about wherever those people are they have an effect outside of themselves and then please notice what a brilliant description this is when

[23 : 40] Jesus says you are the light of the world who else was that ever said about apart from him he says I am the light of the world that's an extraordinary thing that he dignifies the citizens of his kingdom by saying you are the light of the world and that is true because there is a Christ likeness which is the privilege of everybody who has become a Christian the Lord Jesus Christ lives in them and they are being changed more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ which seems so impossible and amazing to us that we can hardly believe it that in our quirky flesh and blood that we should carry about the likeness of Jesus Christ and that people should be able to interact with us and that they find in that interaction with us that they are encountering

Jesus Christ what an astonishing privilege salt it looks ordinary it's unexciting and insignificant we encounter salt it just goes as a kind of it's just an attachment on the table on meal tables isn't it would you like some salt just a small tiny tiny thing but it has enormous preserving properties which I think is probably the main thing that Jesus Christ is referring to here you are the salt of the earth we live in an earth which is which is showing all the marks of decay and deterioration one day this world is going to be burnt up isn't it it's going to come to an end this world is not getting better the signs of self-destruction are all about the judgments of God are upon the earth and we know that one day

God is not going to be reforming this earth it will be burnt it will be taken away there will be a new heaven and a new earth all around us in our civic society in our family lives in our societal interactions and so forth we see that decay and it's inevitable because we're living in a world where people are in rebellion against their maker and therefore by confrontationally rejecting the ways of God we are self-harming and as we self-harm we see all the all the tragic outcomes of that in the

micro scale family life in the more macro scale in the way that we do business with each other in a national scale how peace is not upon the earth and Jesus says to his people these people who are poor in spirit who mourn who are meek who have no armies they have no weapons to fight with they do not have the millions in their banks they're not the people who are the sort of intellectual elite but he says these people are the very ones who are in the earth to preserve it so that it doesn't become as wretchedly awful as it might be there's a preservation work goes on as salt is put next to food and so it is that there is a preservation work goes on as

God's people are put into the world it looks odd ordinary it looks unexciting and insignificant but Jesus says it's massive it's beautiful it's glorious you could be like salt in your life situations and that you could add something even a differentiating something in the communities in which you live our lives can have an effect in a sin damaged and decaying world is this what Christian mission looks like I begin to think it is in fact you rather wonder how effective any words can be if they're not backed up by salt like behaviour of

God's people and then let's think about light because Jesus uses this second illustration but it's not quite the same you are the light of the world light illuminates in the dark it shows what's really there and it shows the way so light exposes and we live in a world that needs exposing light shows what's really there what otherwise would just be buried under the carpet and light shows the way and there is a way and Christian people have the privilege not only by their lives but by their words of showing a way!

[29 : 57] so there's word content just as when Jesus went about he did not just simply heal but he spoke he did not simply only do good works but he had something to say at the same time I cannot think of any example in the whole of the gospels where we are given specific instances of healing which are not backed up by word ministry of some kind so there's salt and there's light and there's a promise of fruit here which is beautiful in verse 16 in the same way that your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven you can't read that in any other way than to suggest that there are people who have encountered salt and light in the way that

God's people have lived and as a result of that behaviour seemingly so insignificant they will be found around the throne of grace and praising the father in heaven so what does Christian mission look like I'm thinking of these people here on the left hand side in the board room and I'm just thinking I wonder how many missionaries get inside that board room how many people in mission societies as it were who've had hands laid upon them have managed to get inside that board room because you don't just walk in there you can't just present your card and you say by the way I'd like to have a chat with your CEO today you have to be in a certain relationship you have to have a certain respect you have to have a certain authority to be able to be sitting around that table and to be contributing in that particular discussion but around that discussion there are a couple of people there who want to just twist the law in some way we heard about it last week haven't we the paradise papers okay it's sort of alright but it's on the verges of legality so maybe they're thinking we could save a lot of tax if we could put a load of money into the

Isle of man rather than having to put it through the UK so there you are you're sitting in that meeting you just happened to be the person in that meeting you left and your right and you wish there was another missionary around and there isn't there's you but you've got a great thing going for you two great things firstly you belong to Jesus and secondly you have the respect of the people around that table because you know the business you know what it is to handle money so at that point you sheepishly pipe up and just beg to differ and a decision that could have led to something on the verges of legality or even illegality is just shelved for that day and a bit of salt work has taken place around that table and

Jesus is pleased with that and you have done a good day's job and you are in a rush in the supermarket because you are always in a rush in a supermarket and there are always people in the way and there are always too many people there's never the stuff you want in the right place and so forth so you get to the checkout well there is a possibility of an encounter in the checkout and you could be pleasant there rather than rushed and you could actually make that person's day they might go away and say do you know what I had a lousy day but there was that person who came up with their shopping trolley and they just took an interest in me they actually went off their phone PS be so careful about using your phone where you use it they actually put their phone to one side they gave me the dignity of eye contact and said what sort of day are you having and

I reckon that was a bit of salt that was thrown into their lives at that point and you say that's so small God has a wonderful sense of humour almost in using the tiniest things to break into people's lives because that happened that day but the next day something happened in their lives and they had another conversation and they read something in a magazine article and one thing led to another which you are completely ignorant of but God had his hand upon their lives so it is in the gym don't ask me about those things I see the pictures I can't think why people do it why not just go for a nice long walk but people do do this and they go on now as far as I can tell they all have these headphones on and they're all looking at their screens and they're all in their little world but at some point or another they must get changed in some way they must be a receptionist on a desk there must be somebody they encounter and maybe the machine to the left of them breaks down and maybe they might just say to that person who is very frustrated because their machine is breaking down and they might say

[36 : 07] I tell you what it's busy but I'll just go off for a moment go and have a coffee use my machine well that's very kind of you people don't normally do that or the bus stop it's 745 the 5a is late in fact I don't even know whether it's going to come at all and it's raining and the bus stop outside Bishop Huntington doesn't have a shelter it's a bad situation isn't it what do you do what do you do but there are three other people waiting for the same bus as well well I suppose you could say that's a bit of an opportunity isn't it because we're stuck together for 15 minutes so who knows what we might be able to talk about with one another we'll do the British thing and we'll talk about the weather and we'll talk about the buses and talk about the weather again and then you remember that you prayed that morning that you might have an interaction with somebody it's a dangerous prayer to pray it's a dangerous prayer to pray isn't it to say

Lord give me an opportunity to say something don't really want it pray the prayer so many occasions the Lord answers that prayer and it gives you the opportunity and you're saying that doesn't look like an opportunity it's the opportunity the opportunity by that bus stop to be having that interaction and because you're listening to the voice of the Lord and the prompting of the Holy Spirit you're just beginning to think this is it you have that sort of feeling growing inside of you this is the moment I can say something mealtimes you never know how a conversation might go at a mealtime how it might go and I suppose many times we kind of chicken out where there was an opportunity to go away we say religion politics don't go down that territory at all but people are freer when they're having meals aren't they especially when they're into the third course so on you know tongues are loosened things are said opportunities are created we're coming up to the Christmas season you'll be going out with your office parties and so on you'll be having the family events and you'll be partly dreading it partly embracing it but here's the prayer to pray isn't it what can I say at that time would they allow me to say grace at the beginning of a meal that'd be quite a thing wouldn't it what could I talk about what about this dear couple on the right hand side one of them's a Christian I hope she's bringing the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to that other person certainly by the kind tenderness of behaviour but there's a word that can be spoken there's a word that can be spoken and it won't be snatched away because God can make it powerful in that person's life so I'm thinking of a phone call

Ross where are you Ross come in join us it's so lovely to hear the stories of different folk where salt and light is taking place so a couple of weeks ago I was talking to Ross and he began to tell me a story about a phone call hi everyone so yeah I have the privilege of working for a bank talking to folks who have fallen upon hard times so yeah I mean I get to help a lot of people but it's mainly people who can't pay loans credit cards mortgages because of illness or sickness so yeah I worked with a couple started last summer he was a kitchen fitter and she was a part-time school nurse and he got cancer and had to give up work while they treated him and so they couldn't pay their loan they couldn't pay their mortgage they ended up with several thousands of pounds of arrears on their mortgage but I just kind of worked with them through it and he then went through chemo and at one point literally couldn't leave the house because of how sick he was from it and then he started to be able to walk the dog around the block and then after about nine months after the diagnosis he managed to get back to doing like two days a week work and then eventually

I sorted out a plan for them because he was going back three days a week and so I got them on a plan on their mortgage and then after six months of the plan he was then working full time again and we did something called recapitalisation which basically means we rolled the arrears back into the balance of the mortgage and they're now out of arrears and he's working again and they've got

the security of their home again so yeah that's just a little thing that I do day by day really but you know I'm privileged because I've got that opportunity to help people like that yeah but there we are yeah yeah well isn't it great you know Ross is there at that time and in some way or other what could have ended so badly was recovered

[42 : 35] Katie tell us about a bus ride little story that some of you know but it was when I was asking beginning to ask lots of questions about God and I hopped on this bus and another nurse thought I was my twin sister and she'd been working with her on her ward and she said hi there would you like to come to my baptism and I didn't know her so but I tweaked and I said to her what does your church believe in and I honestly thought she was going to start saying oh well we do this but we don't do that and all she said to me was we believe in the Lord

Jesus and it so spoke to me it just so spoke to me that it was it was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords so yes I'm so grateful to him so I wonder if that nurse had got on that bus and just thought I prayed for an opportunity to say something today this looks like an opportunity I need to say something and I'm thinking of our vast city 250,000 people we were hearing the other day about the statistics in East Brighton so East Brighton would be everywhere to the right hand side of the line here East Brighton over here so we're just about we're up here somewhere 80,000 people live in that area the number of Christians we don't know but it's very very small as it is in Brighton generally and I'm thinking there might be a church in South Korea Seoul Korea this morning which is thinking I look at the statistics and it seems to me like the UK is a desperately needy place let's just set apart two Christian couples to go out from South Korea to Brighton to live in White Hawk bless them and I'm thinking there's a room full here of us we don't have to learn a new language we don't have to actually move heaven and earth to get from one end of the world to another we just go on a bus we walk to our supermarket we interact with these people they're not aliens and we're not aliens either we live in the same city we have the same concerns we know the language and Jesus says you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world so we should be saying to every single one of us you are commissioned you are commissioned because Jesus has commissioned you to be doing this great work for God well there's warnings here isn't there because Jesus says if the salt lose its saltiness how can it be salty made salty again how sad if we have just got out of the habit of being a preservative in our world we don't pray that prayer in the morning anymore when people misbehave in our workplaces we just shrug and go the other side of the road an opportunity rises to say something we just bottle it is hard but Jesus says you be salty make sure you're salty because if you lose that it's quite hard to get it back and he says be shining be shining I'm not ashamed of Jesus Christ I can't be ashamed of him can I he who died for me upon the cross he who is the lord of all not some strange weird mini god idol thing but the creator of all I'm only telling you the truth I'm only telling people what the reality is that he's upon a throne he's ruling the world and one day he's coming back and one day he's going to judge the world he will never die his glory will become greater and greater I'm only telling the truth it's a truth that I know but you need to know as well and in that moment at the school gate or the meal table and so forth you're probably only going to be able to say a small thing but I noticed that when

Jesus Christ went about his business he often only said small things and just left the seed there the seed planted by the Holy Spirit brings fruit so brothers and sisters I think this is what Christian mission looks like and I applaud and there's such a need for people to be going out into many places of this world because the whole world needs to hear but there's equal dignity and right and responsibility for us all to be saying it's not just them it's us we are all in the business of Christian mission what a revolutionising thought that is how much the church of Jesus Christ needs to recognise that so that we should be salt and light so I thought what should be closed as we sing songs to close and

[49 : 38] I thought we'll sing this song we'll sing facing a task unfinished which is always a song that's sung for people who go thousands and miles away but actually we're going to sing it today because within three miles of this we're facing a task unfinished so let's sing that song together ending