

Belonging and gifts

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Date: 29 October 2017

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[0 : 00] If this is your first time here, let me just say what's going on. This is number five in a series of six. It's going to be six because I decided not to try and squeeze everything into this one, but we'll do some more next week.

Number five is in the series six about the nature and the way the communities of Christ fit together, the nature and cohesion of the communities of Jesus Christ, usually called churches.

So, what would, how does this help? To follow Jesus is necessarily to sign up to belonging to his community.

So, if you are not a Christian, you come along this morning, please listen. It's not directly addressed to you, but it's saying what the church is that you might wish to join through Jesus Christ.

This will help you to know what you would be signing up to. If you are a Christian, I hope this will encourage you and challenge all of us with the fullness of what it is to be his church in the way that he wants it to be and the way we should be.

[1 : 16] So, that's just to say where we're going with this. Incidentally, if you read the little blue book that Chris was handing out about church membership, I think one of the helpful things is towards the end.

I think it's towards the end where it says that people in different churches admit into the church in different ways. And it gives a couple of examples, I think of an Iranian church and an American church.

Well, we do it in a certain way. There we are. And with a form of words, and Penny and Matt will be doing that. We trust on November the 26th in the morning.

So, that's just to flag that up. Here's my introduction. How do I find who I really am? How do I find what I was put here on earth to do or what I was put here on earth to be?

There's one set of answers which say, I look within myself. I look at myself. And there's another set of answers that say, you find the solution to those questions by relating to other people, by being part of a community.

[2 : 37] And definitely, the Christian message takes us down that second route. We become the people we're meant to be as we relate in a community of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people will come into a building like this and into a meeting like this and going around in their head is this thought. I'm nobody. I'm no use.

I'm nothing. I'm rubbish. I'm pointless. And those are very destructive and negative thoughts. And in the community of the church, Jesus Christ says to each person in that community, you are someone special to me by grace.

In other words, it's something that comes from him rather than from us. And he says, such is this grace that I have a vital part for you to play.

What a magnificent thing that is to say to somebody who thought they were pointless and nobody and nothing. That Jesus Christ himself says, you are special.

[4 : 00] It's from me. It's not about you. And you have a part to play in this community. So if you're involved with this church, you can look around at the people here.

Some faces you recognize, but most you will. And you can say in your heart, I belong to these people. I matter to these people. They matter to me.

I have a role to play that only I can play. And that's what Jesus wants me to do. That's the thing I want to say this morning.

And if you run out of puff and want to go to sleep, you've heard the important bit already. So just to wind back, what we've been looking at is some important matters from the Bible to do with church membership.

So we looked at love. We looked at doctrine. What teaching is central to our existence as a church. [5 : 06] We looked at service. We looked last time at accountability. And this time we're looking at gifts. And I keep on saying this. It's our conviction that as many as possible Christians should belong to a local community of real Christian people.

Real as opposed to just Facebook. You may say, and you might say for good reasons, well, such and such a church, maybe Calvary Church, is not the one for me. There are fundamental differences which mean I can't wholeheartedly join in.

But hopefully everybody will be able to say with a good will, there is a church for me. There is a place for me. There might be superficial differences, matters of freedom and individual conscience. But on important things, we are agreed. And I can say these people belong to me and I belong to them. That's what the New Testament holds out as what church is.

I've completely forgotten where I was going with this one. Okay, yes, this is the picture one, isn't it? What is Christianity like?

[6 : 15] It's very clear in the New Testament that Christianity is about a functioning community that is ordered. It has an order, but the order comes from outside this world.

So are Christians like grains of pepper spread from a pepper pot? No. Are Christians like snooker balls that bounce off each other every so often?

No. Are Christians like water drops, which actually a little bit like water drops, because when water drops get near to each other, they form one blob.

And that's a bit like what Christians do, and that's a reasonable approximation. But in the Bible, one of the big pictures of the Christian community is like a body with many parts.

And you know I didn't try and draw the internal organs. I think it's a very handsome person that I have drawn. But hands, feet, head, all the different parts, muscles, sinews.

[7 : 27] That's the thought of the Christian community, a functioning, ordered community. So what am I going to talk about this morning?

I thought I'd try and do, I think it's four questions. Number one, this simple question, does Calvary Church believe in spiritual gifts? Just make a statement on that. Number two, where do they come from?

Number three, what are these gifts and what are they for? And number four, how does this affect me? That's all we'll try and do this morning. See how we get on.

Could you turn me down a little bit because I feel I'm a little bit loud. And I will talk louder to make up for it. Okay. Those are the four questions we'll look at.

Does Calvary Church believe in spiritual gifts? Where do they come from? What are they? How does this affect me? Okay, you ready for that? So number one, does Calvary believe in spiritual gifts?

[8 : 27] Now, have a Bible open. I think we're going to go to Romans. So first, a fact from the Bible.

The expression spiritual gift, as far as I could find from my computer, is only used once. And spiritual gift is what it says in Romans 1.11, where Paul says to the Romans, I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong.

That is, you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. So in that text, I think what it means is, I want to bring you a present. And the present might be that he's going to give them a course of lectures.

Or the present might be that he's going to sit with them and do a Bible study course. He seems to be thinking, I'm going to bring you something. And the thing I'll bring you is some form of encouragement. A present that is spiritual.

So that's the only reference I could find that says spiritual gift. Anyway. And when the Bible talks about gifts, one thing that it always focuses on is in Romans 5.16, the gift of God is not the result of one man's trespass.

[9 : 59] And the great gift he's referring to in Romans 5.16 is Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. So the New Testament doesn't go straight for little gifts.

It says the big gift of Jesus. Let's never forget that. And it also talks about gifts that he's given to us in the sense of Romans 11.29.

In Romans 11.29, he says that God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. And the gifts he's talking about there are the privileges that were given, particularly to the Jews.

They have still got, they're the people who received most of the Bible, the Old Testament, and other privileges like that.

And you have received a gift, even if you're not Jewish, but if you've been brought up in a Christian home. You have gifts that other people don't have. You've learned the Bible.

[11 : 01] Your mum and dad have shown you what it's like to pray. You have a gift in that sense. But I think the question is really getting at gifts meaning the ability to serve that is a blessing to others.

And if you say, do we as a church believe that God gives the ability to serve so that we can bless others? The answer has to be absolutely. How on earth could a church run without God giving the ability to serve that is a blessing to others?

And if you look in Romans 12.5, Paul makes the connection, which I'm going to come back to, but I'll notice it here, between being part of the body of Jesus Christ, in other words, belonging to Jesus Christ, and gifts.

So he says, you're part of the body. That is what it is to be a Christian. If you're part of the body, you are, you have a gift. Of course, that's just two ways of saying the same thing.

In verse 5, Romans 12, verse 5, he says, We in Christ who are many form one body. And he said in verse 4, Just of each of us has one body with many members, many parts.

[12 : 27] These members or parts do not all have the same function. So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to us.

And it's pretty clear that those are two ways of saying the same thing. You belong to the body. You're part of the body. Whatever part that is, that's the same thing as saying you have your particular gift.

So in answer to that question, does Calvary believe in the gifts of what it is to be part of the body of Jesus Christ?

The answer is absolutely yes. Absolutely indispensable. There is no way that a church can run without each member being gifted and using that gift.

Okay, that's a simple answer to that question. And I shall now go to the second question. Where do gifts come from? My answer to this question is, they are achievements of the conquering, risen Christ, generously distributed.

[13 : 39] And please can we go to Ephesians, which Corinne read to us.

And the bit I'd like us to look at is chapter 4. And there's a quote in verse 7 or 8.

And I'll just read what Paul says. The writer of the letter says, This is why it says, That's an unquote. The quote is from Psalm 68. And Psalm 68 is the song we sang right at the beginning. It is a song about God conquering.

And likening that to what conquerors used to do in those days when they went to conquer another country. So let's imagine the Swiss go out to conquer the Italians.

[14 : 55] If they're not thinking of that, why do they have an army? We ask ourselves. But anyway, so this nation goes to conquer this nation.

And the leader, when he is victorious, he brings all the money that was in that conquered nation. And he brings the valuable people. And he brings them in his victory procession, brings them back home to Zurich or wherever it is.

And takes the money that he's gathered and scatters it round. Here we are, fellow citizens of Geneva. All the money that we got from the pizza factories in Italy.

There we are. And here are all the people that we've brought from Italy. And they're now at your service. Please forgive the illustration. It was just a joke.

[15 : 50] Psalm 68 is of the conquering king bringing captives into his service and bringing booty to his citizens.

So there's the king. And here he is flinging around gifts of treasure and people. And as Paul gets into the subject of gifts, he says that's the way to think of the gifts that Jesus brings.

To each of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says when he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. And then he says something about Christ ascending and descending.

But the idea is of the conquering king distributing gifts. So where do gifts come from? Answer. They are achievements of the conquering risen Christ generously distributed.

So that teaches us that we're not to think of gifts, whether we are thinking of other people being gifted or ourselves being gifted. It's not to the praise of the person, not the human person, but it's to the praise of the king, the savior, the three in one, who has conquered and distributes gifts to his church.

[17:22] There's no room for pride. When we're gifted, we don't say, well, look what I've done. We say, look what Christ has achieved. We don't say, look how important I can make myself.

We say, here's a way of showing my shortcomings, but Christ's magnificence. Here's a reason to thank Jesus.

When the apostle Paul was converted and brought to serve in the church of Jesus Christ, it wasn't to the credit of the apostle Paul. He was a very clever man.

He was a very capable man. He was a very energetic man. But the praise goes to Jesus, who conquered him, who defeated his pride, who humbled him to love the savior, and brought him to serve in his church.

So, no room for pride, just humility, thanks, and praise. Where do gifts come from? They come from the conquering of Jesus Christ.

[18:28] That was the second question. Third question. What are gifts, and what are they for? Now, we're going to look at some passages to answer this slightly longer question.

And one classic passage we will save till next time, which is the 1 Corinthians passage. But let me give you my answer to this. What are gifts, and what are they for?

Answer, they are varied, God-given, capacities, and abilities to bless others, and to build Christ's kingdom.

That's what gifts are. They are varied, God-given, capacities, and abilities, to bless others, and to build Christ's kingdom.

That's my answer. You can see whether the Bible says that, or whether you think I've got it wrong. There's a particular role in building up the body. So, we had that in Ephesians chapter 2, where it says, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

[19:38] In him, the whole building is joined together, and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together, to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

So, that was, that's the, I'm sorry, I've got ahead of myself. So, the reference I'm working on is Ephesians 2, verses 20 to 22.

And it says, there is a building going on. And it talks about the role of the apostles as being the foundation, where he links together apostles and prophets.

So, let's put a foundation. Now, this is, it's called hardcore, isn't it? It's rocks and stones that you put down first.

And when I had an extension built on my house, it says, blinded hardcore. What's blinded mean, David? It's like a little bit of sand, and it talks to make it smooth.

[20:41] Aha. Ooh, interstices. That's a long word for a Sunday morning. Yeah, so we've got a smooth, a foundation that's made smooth, and then let's put a sort of block of concrete on that.

So, there's a foundation. And he says, there's a foundation of the apostles and prophets. And then he says, Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. So, let's put a chief cornerstone there.

And then he talks about the building being joined together and rising to become a holy temple in the Lord. And you then begin to realize it's impossible to do the diagram because we've put Jesus Christ here, but the whole thing is in the Lord.

So, it's just, the picture is just a clue to help us. So, let's put some more bricks being built up. Let's put a doorway.

And it's going upwards. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

[21:51] Verse 2 says, And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

So, he puts together all these things. He says, the foundation, that's the first thing you lay, the hardcore, the blinded hardcore, the concrete, the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

And then you're building up. And you too are part of that. And the building, the purpose of a temple is that God lives in it. And he says, we're building a community in which God lives.

A place where God lives. That's the picture of the church. We'll enlarge on it in a moment. But let's just see the particular role of the apostles and prophets, the presence of Jesus, everybody being built into this together, and God living in such a community.

It's a very beautiful picture, isn't it? It's a very wonderful picture. It's not simply an organizational picture. It's not simply an institutional picture.

[23 : 06] It's a relationship picture. It's a God picture. Something that is done with God and for God and in God.

Let's just stop and realize what a special thing it is to belong to the church of Jesus Christ. We use the expression, we come to church.

That can be quite a misleading way of putting it. And people will say, oh, this is Calvary Church, meaning the building, even if nobody's in it.

That's a misleading way of thinking. The church is us lot. We're the church. And this community of us is we're built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone. God comes. We pray this. We find this, that God is here as his community is gathered.

[24 : 07] What a special thing that is. What a wonderful thing to be part of. So I was going to go now to look a little bit more closely at Ephesians 4.12 because he talks about the same thing again.

So what are gifts? What are they for? Ephesians 4.12, he lists the gifts that the conquering Christ has brought. And I think I should have meant verse 11.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for the work of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

He said, so here's some specific named parts of this body, if you like, specific named roles. So who are they?

The apostles. Now, it's pretty clear in the Bible that the apostles are the foundation. We don't expect the foundation to keep on being laid in each new generation.

[25 : 22] It's laid once. And the apostles are those people who say, we saw Jesus, we touched him, we heard him, we were there, like John says at the beginning of his letter, we have heard, we have seen with our eyes, we have looked at and our hands have touched.

This we proclaim concerning the word of life. We have seen it, we testify to it, we proclaim to you the life that was with the Father and which appeared to us.

It's that first generation group who saw and touched and heard with their own ears and they put that down in their testimony and that's what the Bible is.

That's why it's a foundation. That's why if we're to build a church, we have to build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. That means the things that they left for us in the word.

They spoke for Jesus. They wrote the New Testament. And he mentions the prophets. What does he mean by that? These men spoke from God.

[26 : 31] They are foundational, as he says. As you get further on into the New Testament, you find that prophecy becomes something, rather than that you write down in the Bible, you weigh it up.

So there's a little bit of thinking we need to do about that which we'll do next week. Apostles and prophets. And he talks about evangelists. What's an evangelist?

An evangelist is a gospel speaker, a good news bringer. And the risen Jesus conquered some people and turned them into good news bringers.

and they travel the length and breadth of the ancient world telling people about Jesus. And people still do that today. So there's the foundations. And then he says, some to be pastors and teachers.

And of course, that is a very relevant gift today. In the New Testament, we'll find that as we go on through the New Testament, the emphasis becomes more on passing on the apostolic word to faithful people who will be pastors and teachers in the succeeding generations.

[27 : 39] Pastors and teachers are shepherds, the people who look at God's people, people who instruct them and warn them and encourage them and keep bringing them back to the gospel that the apostles saw.

The apostles saw and said. And if we go on through to verse 15, he now, having named a number of gifts, he says to all the Christians, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.

From him, the whole body joined and held together, excuse me, by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

So he moves the thought on beyond those particular people that he named to say everybody. How does the church operate?

It's when everybody does what they've been put in the body to do. Each part does its work. And I'm not medical, so I will, if I try to do it, I'll get it wrong, but your liver does some part of the work, doesn't it?

[29 : 05] Your little toe does something else. Liver doesn't do what a little toe does. Only a little toe can do what a little toe does. Your big toe does something. Your skin does something. Your heart does something.

Your lungs do something. Your ears do something. The hairs in your nose do something. All important. All different. As each part does its work, that's how the body lives and grows and builds itself up.

And somewhere in there is each of us. Am I right? Somewhere in there is each of us. It's a very beautiful picture. And if you had come along this morning thinking, I'm nobody, I'm nothing, I'm useless, please don't think that.

please let this teaching from the Bible remind you that Jesus has a part for you to play. And being in this community is essential to that.

That's the way he wants it to work. It's a very beautiful picture. Let's look at another classic passage which is Romans chapter 12.

[30 : 11] And I won't stop to do it all in detail but as you look at Romans chapter 12 it begins, he's explained the gospel at considerable length and a considerable depth and he says, having heard and received and believed this, he says, therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship.

He says, in response to the gospel the Christ who conquers you through the gospel submit to him offer yourselves as living sacrifices. Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind the way you think about things the way you perceive then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will.

Then Paul says, okay, I have a particular role in the church of Jesus Christ as an apostle by the grace given me I say to every one of you okay, don't think of yourself more highly than you ought but think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

So, clicking through, you're saved you offer yourself. That's his definition of worship. Worship isn't just singing all life is worship and offering of ourselves is worship.

He says you have a new mind a new way of thinking and seeing so please do use your renewing mind. We're peculiar creatures, our emotions sometimes rule us and sometimes we need to use our minds to say to our emotions that's just silly, that's ridiculous, this is what God has said so don't, you shouldn't be feeling the way you're feeling or even if you are that's not to rule your behavior.

[32 : 32] We use the renewed mind as it says here and then he says think of yourself with sober judgment. Don't think more highly than you ought but think of yourself with sober judgment.

So there's something about humility there. There's something about humility and there's something about variety. Just as each of us has one body with many members these members do not all have the same function so in Christ we who are many form one body.

So there's something about variety and there's something about unity. unity. And this is where he one of the places where this equation is made between being part of the body and being a gift being gifted.

A gift of course is grace. It's undeserved favor and he says we have different gifts according to the grace gifts given to us.

So let's bear that in mind. Gifts are grace given to us. It's not something we've achieved or earned or because we're very special. It's something that Christ in his mercy has given to us.

[33 : 46] And then he gives a list here. It's not the same list as was in Ephesians but he gives a list and I presume we determine from this that these are not exhaustive lists.

There are many other things that are gifts to the church. He doesn't mention but the ones he mentions are a swallow. Prophesying. He says if your gift is prophesying which let's say is speaking the words of the Lord, let's assume that, then do so in proportion to your faith.

If it is serving, so let's assume we're talking about some sort of service like putting out the tables or washing up or cleaning the church or going around and helping somebody with their garden or doing some shopping for somebody or whatever it is, if it is serving, if you've got a gift to that, then serve.

If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously.

And you notice that this list, some of these things are quite ordinary where to understand that they are gifts from heaven, but in some ways they're quite ordinary, so the ability to give money, you might have that simply because of your job or simply because of the wealth of your parents.

[35 : 12] But now you're a Christian, that becomes a gift from Jesus Christ for you to use and think of in a Christian way. if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously.

If it is leading, so Christian fellowships need structure, they need leadership, govern diligently. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully.

So he gives that list of example things that people can contribute into the fellowship and let's remember that all of these are gifts given by the conquering king who splashes them out on his church.

And these gifts are given in the context of humility. We're not sort of a beauty contest, see how wonderful we all are, it's in the context of humility and it's in the context of worship, of focusing on how wonderful Jesus is.

And we also notice that the possession of a gift is in itself a call to use it. So if you have such and such a gift, then be using it.

[36 : 24] Now, there are all sorts of caveats, all sorts of things to beware of, like attitude, like rightly assessing what your gift is, like letting other people say you thought you're really good at so-and-so but actually you're much better at something else, et cetera, et cetera.

But generally speaking, the possession of a gift is a call to use it. So that was in Romans. We were asking the question, what are gifts and what are they for?

And we're given a list of gifts and seen a little bit about how they're used and what they do. They build up the church. Now, the third text to look at is the 1 Corinthians 12, which we're not going to look at.

We're going to look at that next time. So let's go to the fourth question, how does this affect me?

How does this affect me? What should I think? How should I think?

How should I think about myself? How should I think about the church? So we have learned that if we're Christians, we are part of the body and it is God's will to build us up together.

[37 : 30] And we are on the receiving end, we are being built up and we're also on the giving end. You are to be used as part of the process of building up the body. That's what a gift is. In other words, you can be blessed and you can be a blessing.

And the call of God is for both of those. What is being blessed? Well, sometimes we think it's just a happy feeling.

In his letter, Peter says, if you're persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ, you are blessed. And that is, you think, well, it didn't make me very happy to be persecuted.

But Peter says, well, actually, that's still being blessed. So we have to be careful about understanding what being blessed is. But as we gather together, we can be blessed and we're to be a blessing.

And this means that each Christian person, each of us here this morning as Christian people and those who belong to us who are not here this morning, are significant people in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

[38 : 37] We are not just random evolutionary dust. We are people whom Christ values and has placed into community.

And you may think, well, they had that list of gifts. There was the apostles and teachers and all sorts of people who do their stuff standing in front of everybody else and everybody is impressed.

But that's not what this teaching is saying. It's saying, yes, there are gifts that have different sort of magnitudes if you like, but everybody, every Christian has a gift.

And every, it's like saying, every part of the body has some function that it can do. So for example, a thumbnail, you might think that's a fairly insignificant piece of human anatomy.

That was the word I was looking for. Well, I can tell you that two years ago, when I was sawing through a piece of plastic, the saw slipped and cut through my thumbnail hair.

[40 : 02] You'll remember this, won't you, when you get home. And the number of things that prevented me from doing was amazing because you only realise how important that bit of your body is when you don't have it.

Same thing with the back, isn't it? you go back, what do you do with your back? Don't do very much, just stand there. If your back goes, so many things you can't do, you can't even sleep. And it's, you may think, oh, I'm just, you know, I'm less than a thumbnail.

But you're important. Don't let Satan say to you, you know, because I'm limited, I'm not important. That is not what this is saying.

This is saying you have a part to play. There are things that only you can do. There may be things that only you can see. There may be things that only you can say through some providence of God, but that's important.

Don't back off and think it isn't. Don't say, oh, well, leave it to somebody else. God wants you in this picture. And we're not simply consumers. Now, this whole thing about having churches of 5,000 people and mega churches, it just puts the whole thing in terms of being a consumer, doesn't it?

[41 : 16] Like going to a big concert or something like that. Or going to the cinema, you just sit there, let it happen to you, and you go out again. That's really not the idea of the Bible.

We're not consumers who just go to get blessed. We're there to be a blessing. So how does this affect me? I think we're part of the body being built up.

We're used as part of the process of building up the body. Don't underestimate God's good intentions through us. Put yourself in the way of your gifts being used.

We make sure that we're there on the building site where the building is going on, not dormant or absent. God's going on to be the gift God wants us to be and use the gift he has given to us.

So in conclusion on this matter of church membership, well, that's what we're aiming about, talking about church membership. Number one thing is make sure you're a Christian. Number one thing is not not make sure you're a church member, but number one thing is make sure you're a Christian.

[42 : 31] has Jesus Christ conquered you? Are you one of the people of whom it would be said, he was the king, I was in a foreign land, he brought me back to his country in submission to him, that's who I am.

Has Jesus Christ conquered you? Or are you still fighting against him? Stop fighting and submit to him. Number two, I think being a church member is simply saying, God's made me into somebody, yes.

God's given me something to use him, yes. This is where God's put me to do that, whether it's big or small, yes. It's saying, here I am, send me, which is what Isaiah said.

It's saying, here I am, I might not have much, but use what I have, like the boy who brought the loaves and fishes. Can you use this, Jesus?

Jesus took it into his hands, broke it, and fed 5,000 people. Here I am, Lord, might not be much, but use me. Or as Paul would say in Romans, I offer myself as a living sacrifice.

[43 : 45] I'm not in my hands anymore, I'm in your hands. Use me as you see fit, do what you want to do with me amongst these people, so that it may be to the praise of your glory, to the praise of your glorious grace.

Let's close by singing this song together, 810.