

Jesus and his gifts to the church

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[0:00] So we're going back to basics on this matter of the Church of Jesus Christ and we were thinking! what is the Church? and we'll start off with that what is the Church? Well all sorts of answers to that huge old building needing repair some people would say that's a church or a collection of irrelevant aging people well actually all people are aging aren't they?

or a bunch of weird loonies happy clappy completely in a world of their own making misleading claims to gullible people and no use to anybody I'm sure there are churches like that or a church as a branch of social services that we just churches just help people get by on earth or is the Church the people who know and experience the risen Christ?

are these the people of God's favour? the ones who have had their sins forgiven? the only people who see the world as it really is? are these the people of the future?

who of all the people on the earth are setting their eyes on what God has purposed? their eyes set on the world to come? something beautiful and better?

are these the people who are God's project as he forms a new humanity being made ready for the glory of the world to come?

[1:29] is the Church the place where God is? if you want to find a place where God is you go to this community and you find that God is there and he is at work amongst these people well I'm going to go for that second page as my description of what the Church is so let's sort of go back to basics and I'd like you to think of the dead parrot sketch this amuses me I think of it as a contemporary cultural reference but actually it's ages and ages old it's the man who goes into the shop and complains that the parrot that he bought not just half an hour ago is dead and he's got that's his John Cleese with oh no you can hardly see it can you?

that's the parrot that's supposed to be John Cleese it shows on my screen but I'm sorry about that and he says this parrot is dead it does not respond it does not squeak or squawk it does not move and the man says oh no no it's fine it's just stunned they stun easy Norwegian blue is what he says it don't fly it would be fallen on the floor if you hadn't nailed it to its perch well and John Cleese complains that the parrot is dead which it plainly is I think it's a very funny sketch but you have to see it on some historic medium like YouTube anyway the parrot wasn't being a parrot it wasn't doing parrot it wasn't doing the things that parrots do wasn't squawking wasn't moving wasn't flying wasn't anything it wasn't doing parrot it wasn't being parrot and my question is oh dear I think I've clicked too far how do we do church?

if church is the place where the living God is present and where God is at work what should church be?

in the dead parrot sketch the parrot does not do parrot it's not doing it it's not being parrot and the churches of Jesus Christ well unless they're dead they ought to be doing church and being church and that's what I want to look at this morning the churches shouldn't be dead parrot churches but they should be living churches where God is at work and doing and being church so what is being church and what is doing church?

and I'm going to take us to Paul's letter to the Romans so we had a reading from Ephesians so let's go to Romans in case you don't know this is a letter by St. Paul he wrote a letter to the church in Rome it gets called Romans for short it's his letter to the Romans and he spends the first it's a long letter it's a very classic letter it subsequently got divided into chapters he didn't write it in chapters but for convenience it got divided into chapters and the first 11 of the chapters are all about how

amazingly God saves people and then in chapter 12 he says therefore I'm just going to read Romans 12 and the first 13 verses 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 do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will for by the grace given me

[5:25] I say to every one of you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you just as each of us has one body with many members and these members 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 us if a man's gift is prophesying let him use it in proportion to his faith if it is serving let him 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 if it is leadership let him govern diligently if it is showing mercy let him do it cheerfully love must be sincere hate what is evil cling to what is good be devoted to one another in brotherly love honour one another above yourselves never be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord be joyful in hope patient in affliction faithful in prayer share with God's people who are in need practice hospitality and so on so that is what I'm going to look at this morning in the subject of how to be church in connection with God's gifts and I had an agenda of what I wanted to say but then I came to this passage and the passage had a slightly different agenda so I'm going to follow the agenda of what God's put down in his words seeing as that's probably more reliable than what I had in mind to say and I'm going to say do it this way number one the fountain of being church which is God's mercy the response of being church offering ourselves as a living sacrifice the attitude of being church a new humble mind and fourthly

I'll just look at what it says how it works this out in the illustration of the body and the gifts so those are the four things I'd like us to look at so number one the fountain of being church God's mercy click it starts therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy so notice each of those is important notice the I urge you so I want us to notice he's urging us he's saying I want to motivate you I want to get you going on this I want to I want you to feel this is something I'm up for and I'm going to do it and I'm I'm motivated in this so he starts off I urge you and there's a therefore and the therefore connects with by the mercies of God so this is the starting point the starting point is not the pastor thinking people aren't working hard enough therefore do more give more work harder the starting point is

God's mercy and what is God's mercy so it's his kindness and it's his compassion and it's his pity and that is what he's been talking about in the first 11 chapters in a most marvelous way describing the enormous amazing quality of God's mercy and I'd like to try and summarize the first 11 chapters in three little points I think the first thing that he sets out saying in these first chapters is about the human condition and he says human beings fall desperately short of God's glory that's what human beings are like we are born in a sad and sorry and lost condition we were made to fit with God's glory because God is glorious and we were made to be part of that but sadly tragically we're nothing like that we fall short of

God's glory and we have become creatures where it's endemic for us to be idol worshippers we make up our own gods we have foulness in our systems instead of purity we have selfishness instead of selflessness we have rebellion instead of submission submission to God and submission to what is right and this vileness puts us in a different place altogether instead of being fit for God's glory we are in a different place altogether a place of death and sin and lostness and condemnation and Paul the writer was a real Jewish expert and he knows that God has worked through all the Jewish history and the Jewish scriptures and he says a bit about the Jewish law of Moses the Ten Commandments etc the whole paraphernalia of the law of God and he says that didn't help the Jews didn't help them to be saved it doesn't help us either what the law

basically does it says do this do this don't do this don't do this without lifting a finger to help us and as he goes on through he says what really what this does if it gets to your conscience it just kills you because you can't do the things that you know you ought to do and this is our sad and sorry condition and then he says the human fall the law is powerless but God has stepped in to change this and he says that God most remarkably and most amazingly hasn't left the human race in that lostness and sin and condemnation but God has decided that he'll do something about he didn't have to but that's what he decided he will do and his intervention and his rescue takes the form of sending

[12:08] Jesus God's own son come down to be like us and to live a human life and in particular to bear the consequences of our fall that is to say death because the wages of sin is death and he died and he came to die like a sacrificial animal he died paying the price for the sin of others that's what God did an atoning death a death that puts things right with God and whatever it took to heal this enormous injury to pay this enormous debt to put back this enormous fault Jesus did when he died on the cross not only did he die on the cross but God raised him from the dead and vindicated him and said you condemned him but I vindicate him he is the greatest he is the most glorious he is the most brilliant he is the most right person and he deserves to be put in the very highest place and God raised him from the dead and brought him from that place of condemnation and sin and guilt and lostness and shame and brought him to the place of honor and glory and exaltation and greatness and that's where Jesus is now and he is the risen glorious

Christ and he imparts to his people his risen power through the Holy Spirit and Christians live a new life because Christ rose from the dead do I have an amen amen and this which I've briefly encapsulated imperfectly but I've tried to give you the outline of it this is total undeserved kindness this is what God gives people this is good news this is brilliant and it is the mercy of God and if you know that in your own life then there's an amen there isn't there there's a thank you Lord and if you don't know it this is the offer that God is making in this day and age you could have that that could be you you could have forgiveness you could have new life you need to ask God for that you need to go and sort that out with him and he's very willing that's the whole point of this age of history that God is willing to bless you in this same way anyway it started off number one the fountain of being church is God's mercy so let's get that in place that's how come church can be church because God has done this in his mercy for people second thing about church being church 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 so second thing is the response of the response of being church is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices so there's a body and the logic of this is he's done everything for me and I give everything to him he's shown me total kindness and I respond with total gratitude he offered himself without reservation and I what else can I do but offer myself to him totally without reservation without holding anything back such mercy deserves my life my soul my all and that's what Christians do isn't it we come to the Lord and say

I give my whole life to you and whether whatever you want to do with me wherever you want to lead me whatever you want to make of me or withhold from me I give that all to you and that's what Christians do am I right that's what being a Christian is and like the old animal sacrifice which was totally offered to the Lord our lives are totally offered to him but as it says here it isn't sort of a once thing and then you know like an animal sacrifice can only last an amount and then the animal is gone but it says offer your bodies as living sacrifices so there's a continualness about this I would say there's an everyday about this that every day whether we say it out in so many words but the principle of it is every day Lord I'm giving myself to you every day

I'm offering myself to you as a living sacrifice every day whatever you want me to do I will do it wherever you want me to go I will go I am yours today and that's right isn't it this is how Christians this is how we're supposed to live this is how we do live maybe imperfect but the principle of it is that our bodies are living sacrifices and it says such sacrifices are holy and pleasing to God the idea of this being a holy sacrifice that even our lives offer to him that can be seen to be holy something that pleases God I find that rather amazing actually that he could be interested in my little offering or my imperfect offering think about the feeding of the 5,000 they looked around and found what have

you got to feed this large number of people and they found a boy with

[18:26] I can't remember how many was it he bought five loaves and two fishes was it and the Lord said oh I'll take that that's fine I can do a lot with that and I think it's us offering our five loaves and two fishes!

we're offering what we have that's how we do it and he says this is your spiritual act of worship and I looked in the books and there's all sorts of ways of interpreting that logikos that's the word translated spiritual it's from which we get logical looks like it doesn't it logikos does he say does it mean logical that this fits rationally I mean one thing that I read in the commentaries which I rather liked actually was the idea that behind the universe is the logos that means the word in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and he says that the idea that under the universe is the word God's word some meaning and depth and absoluteness and rightness under the universe is the logos and this sacrifice is logikos it's like that it fits with that so

I think that's why people struggle to translate it it doesn't mean spiritual or in touch with ultimate reality or fits with how things really are but anyway whatever it is there this is a great thing to do and the next word is latria which means priestly worship so when it's translated worship that's right it is what priests do offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices day by day is worship so just saying that singing isn't the only worship I mean singing is worship but it's when you go into the office and you say it's going to be a tough day Lord but I'm giving myself to you that's a spiritual act of worship as well and when you try and help your neighbour who's got their drains blocked or their roof leaking or whatever and you say I'm doing this for the Lord that's a spiritual act of worship too so we could have a time of worship going out and clearing the leaves from the gutter

I suppose! Anyway so I ask this is number two about being church number one was God's mercy and number two was offering ourselves as living sacrifices and if we're going to be church we need to understand God's mercy and be deeply impressed by it and we need to offer ourselves in response as living sacrifices so I say is that us I hope it is and I urge you like Paul does I urge you to be this number three the attitude of being church the new humble mind so he goes on to say now I only got as far as verse two do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will he says be transformed be metamorphosized be transformed by the renewing of your mind so this is transformation that comes from the inside outwards it's not an imposition by force or coercion or human effort or unaided human effort this is something that starts on the inside the renewing of the mind now when it says mind he's not saying this is just for students and clever people when he says mind he means the way we deeply think the way we deeply feel and react the way we value things and weigh things and the way that we plan in our hearts and minds

I could aim for that if I did this so that's what he's meaning by mind you know it's quite a deep thing it's not just doing crossword puzzles it's how you look you live in the world so I've done a little thing there supposed to be thought that's supposed to be heart and that's supposed to be what direction you go from look at chapter 8 verse 6 if you wouldn't mind chapter 8 verse 6 where he talks about mind and the translation sort of slightly obscures it because what he says is the mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit and flesh means as I shall say in a moment the power and the system of thinking and living without God and the spirit is the spirit that I referred to earlier the spirit of the risen Christ and in chapter 8 verse 5 he says those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature death but the mind of the spirit is life and peace the sinful mind is hostile to

[24:12] God it does not submit to God's law nor can it do so so this mind there's the mind of the flesh or the mind of the spirit and he says if you're a Christian the mind that you have should be the spiritual mind should be the things that desires the things of spirit and is led by the things of the spirit and sees the things of the spirit and longs for the things of the spirit to be spiritually minded is life and peace so just going back to 12 he isn't still talking about the mind isn't he be transformed by the renewing of your mind and he says don't have a mind of the flesh mind of the flesh sees things are this grid of self and it was

pointed out to me that if you take an S and an E and an L and an F from flesh and move them around a bit you've got an H left over you end up from the word flesh you get the word self and of course they're very you know that's a helpful linkage to make the idea it's all about me and he says don't think that way don't be have that thinking going on inside you and he says don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world don't let the world squeeze you into its mold but be transformed by the renewing and this world as I said before is a system with everything but without

God and that's a powerful system and it presses and pushes in a certain direction and it presses and pushes on us and just to put on an anecdotal level it presses and pushes and what we think is a good time what do you think is a good time I know that in the student world I guess going out and having a good time might mean something completely different what is a good time what is having a laugh is that having a good time well we know that the world might have a very different view of that and on a more sort of profound level on a more philosophical level or the thinking about gender and the thinking about identity and so many other things that the world has without God can squeeze us into a mold of thinking and change us and he says don't let that happen but be transformed by the renewing of your mind to have new ideas from the gospel new ideas from the

Bible new ideas from the scriptures about what is good ah this is good what is beautiful what is worthy what I live life for be renewed in your mind as to how you think about these things and be transformed so the new and humble mind and he says in verse two do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world don't think the way the world thinks be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve that's three words for one word in Greek then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is so just picking out things that it said here this works you will find you can test it and approve!

it that's an interesting thing isn't it it's not just a claim that doesn't really live up to experience there are many things that the Christian world claims and they're not all they don't all live up to experience I mean the claim that God will always make people healthy and wealthy is not one that the Bible makes but some Christians sadly make that claim but this is true you will if you offer your lives as a living sacrifice to God you will find that you can test and approve God's good will it does work in real life you can test and approve it you can find that it works and it's good Christian life isn't always immediately pleasant but at bottom of it I don't think any Christian would say I wish I'd never become a Christian I don't think any

Christian would ever say that I don't think any Christian would ever say I trusted God and he let me down I've been through difficult times but that's not the same thing as saying God let me down God's will looked at maturely is something I test and approve and it's not my will but God's will and it's not a bad will but a good will it's good and pleasing not horrible but pleasing and perfect will an interesting word used there for perfect I think it's saying it's not pointless but purposeful God's will is not pointless but purposeful it's perfect will so the new and humble mind which transforms us and I just stop to ask ourselves we're all in motion we're all changing and I trust and hope we are going forward sometimes

[29:51] Christians slip back but we want to be transformed and changed in this good way and maybe a prayer when we go home to say Lord please do be changing me and please be letting me find your good pleasing and perfect will in my life and I'm just carrying on in this matter of the mind verse 3 for the grace given me you notice there's a lot of giving going on here it pops up in a number of ways but by the grace given me I say to every one of you so here's some more thinking do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober thinking I just put that rather clunky translation in there so the thing he says don't overthink yourself now don't not overthinking in the sense of thinking too much but thinking too highly don't big yourself up in your own thinking but think with sober thinking with healthy thinking about yourself and he says that's how

I live God's given me certain grace and by that grace I say and he says you should think according to the measure that God has given you so God's given you a certain measure he says a measure of faith I think it comes down to the same thing as grace as he referred to earlier God has given you

certain grace think about that soberly don't big yourself up and don't put yourself down God has given me this is what it says God has given me something God has given me to be somebody I'm not the same as the person sitting next to me not the president of the United States or the owner of Amazon I'm me but God's made me to be me and he's given me what he sees fit to make me me and

I think what Paul is saying here is be the somebody that God's given you to be Spurgeon the Victorian preacher once said be yourself if you don't be yourself nobody else is going to do it sort of slightly amusing thing and I think the way Paul is coming at it here is you don't have to big yourself up make yourself something you're not don't have to be puffed up but don't put yourself down either just think of yourself with sober judgment what has God given me and in terms of puffing oneself up and putting oneself down it's actually possible to do both of those at once people make both mistakes at once because they're insecure about what God has given them they puff themselves up and pretend they're bigger than they are and you get this sort of complicated thing with the ego going on and he says don't do that just think with sober judgment and gratitude is what God has given me and be that person and play that part by

God's grace there are lots of things I can't do I can't juggle I can't remember everything so let me just be the person that I am by God's grace I can do some things I can care for people I can listen to them I can contribute something I can give something I can love and I can be secure that that's a real thing of value that I can do in God's church so the third thing the attitude of being church the new humble mind so let's come to the fourth thing which is to look at this matter of the body and gifts which is the bit I wanted to do a lot of but the scriptures seem to push me in direction of just adding this as the fourth point so Paul says it's like a human body and he says in verse four just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so that's what it's like in the church so let's think about the human body there's a human body it has many parts all belong together so arms legs one body and each bit does something different so it would be a very strange thing if your nose attempted to chew your food for you I think it would be rather strange or if your feet attempted oh I don't know yeah each bit does something different there's hearing bits smelling bits digesting bits bits that bend they all do something different that's how bodies work and Paul says this is how it is with Christ and his churches there is one body of Christ but many parts that's what he says so in Christ we who are many form one body so he he's moved you've noticed from God's mercies and offering ourselves into community and there's a chain there isn't there and I want to encourage us to see that and to say that's obvious and that's what

[35:43] I'm living from my receiving of God's mercy to my offering myself as a living sacrifice to being a contributing functioning part of God's community now the way God does communities he does it in little communities doesn't he called churches but it's one great church which operates in little bubbles of community and he says as we do that we have this interdependence we have unity we have diversity we have interdependence and all the parts work together and they will need one another so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others so I mean young people need young people but they also need old people so I think it's such a pity when you get student churches that are only for students because the church is meant to be a family of all sorts of people with all sorts of ages young people need older people

I don't think it's nice to have a church that's just single people or just married people or just middle class people but a mixture of all sorts of different people with different functions different characteristics that function together each member belongs to all the others capable people need people who think things more simply clever people need down to earth people we need a whole range of different types of people to make up the richness and beauty of God's church and I'm grateful to God because I think in our church here we by and large have a good example of that that's by God's grace so the human body and he says that's one way of looking at it we're all parts of the body we all function and work together and then he changes the picture but he's talking about exactly the same thing and he talks about gifts so in the same breath verse six we have different gifts according to the grace given us he's talking about the same thing but just using a different

picture so this is gifts and the word for gift is charismata

I don't know where you put the emphasis where you say charismata charismata and what does that word mean it means a free gift that's what it means a free gift I know we have the charismatic movement which puts a particular use on that word meaning taking it to mean supernatural but it doesn't actually charismata doesn't mean supernatural it just means free generous gift and we have generous gifts it's not supernatural so much as super generous and at back of this is Jesus gives generous gifts to his church it's the nature of Christ's victory and his resurrected power I read Psalm 68 at the beginning and you might not have spotted that Psalm 68 is the one that Paul quotes in Ephesians where he says having ascended on high he gave gifts to men and Psalm 68 is almost like military conquest isn't it this triumphant king takes people as gifts and then gives them as gifts and that's what Paul is quoting in Ephesians 4

Jesus the king gives generous gifts to his church and what gifts does he use he says if the word man is not in the original but if the gift is prophesying let him use it in prophesying sorry let him use it in proportion to his faith if it is serving let him serve and that's the word deacon there 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 if it is leadership let him govern diligently if it is showing mercy let him do it cheerfully he's not giving an exhaustive list of all the different sorts of service that people can do but he is giving a list and he says all sorts of different things and if you if this is your gift to do them then do them and yeah prophesying speaking God's word in a in a edifying perhaps in a fresh way serving teaching encouraging inspiring that parakallot parakallot to encourage and motivate to share stuff contributing to the needs of others to what do you say to lead govern leadership yeah it means to sort of stand before take responsibility showing mercy let him do it cheerfully so he's got that list and these are a list of gifts which are abilities to bless other people and in some ways a person's gift is noticed perhaps first of all by other people how is that person blessing me what way does this person bring blessing into the congregation well that's their gift and he says if it's prophesying prophesy in accordance with your faith

I don't know why I put that if you're able to serve serve if you're able to teach teach if you're able to encourage encourage I think he's just saying do the thing that God has given you to do the way you can bless people do it be a blessing use your gift and then when he talks about sharing what's it the translation here contributing to the needs of others let him give generously yeah if you're a person who can give be generous in giving if you're leading do it diligently wholeheartedly give your good care and attention to that do a good job of it be being who you are be doing what you do and do it and do so wholeheartedly and willingly it's one of the things that's cropped up in our week of prayer isn't it may people be willing may be a willingness within our church to be what God wants us to be so those are the gifts that he mentions there and perhaps this evening we could take that particular thought on some more but I'm just going to mention the context so it isn't just a sort of mechanical thing if you've got a teaching gift just spew out information to people it's in a context and the context is in verse 9

[43:04] I put a subtle context in which gifts are used and I'll just mention what it says without going very much further it's in the context of love love must be sincere genuine care hate what is evil cling to what is good so there's a moral framework and a moral clarity and verse 10 be devoted to one another in brotherly love honor one another above yourselves there's a sort of a devotion to this I put a deeply consistent motivation and a humility and verse 12 it says be joyful in hope patient in affliction faithful in prayer never lacking in zeal keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord be joyful in hope patient in affection faithful in prayer there's a certain sort of tenacity to it and a certain not done with resentment but done with willingness and I just put etc because there's a whole lot more which

I won't try and bring in this morning so what have looked at how does church do church how can church be not like the dead parrot which is dead he is dead not just stunned it is an ex parrot this parrot is gone how can church be church the fountain of it is God's mercy the wonderful heart changing mercy of Jesus Christ the response of being church is to offer myself as a living sacrifice that is not something only super Christians do that is every Christian does that all to Jesus I surrender I surrender all one of the old songs the attitude of being church the attitude the new

humble mind the new way of thinking the new way of feeling the new way of acting and reacting and the community

I'm part of a body I am a particular part with a particular contribution so contribute that God has made me something and given me some grace and some faith and some gift that's what he's given me he hasn't given that to somebody else that's for me and I want to play that part and I want to be that blessing in that fellowship the best I can and Paul as I said to begin says I urge you and I want to finish by urging us let's do this let's be this church let's in this particular season which is going to be a tricky one for us let's at least decide this I will be in the church the person that God wants me to be I will be the best blessing I can be I will offer myself in his service the best I possibly can and may

God bless that may God build up his church may God show that the church of Jesus Christ is not a dead thing but a living thing shall we hear his urging shall we say yes shall we be this sort of church shall we be the very people that the church of the risen Jesus Christ is not dead but alive amen we're going to sing a song to close we're going to sing what a gift of grace is Jesus