

Session 1 – Gospel Ministry in Small Places

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 April 2025

Preacher: Stephen Witmer

[0 : 0 0] Hey, so, so great to be with you all. It's an honor to be here. It feels like one of our small town summits in New England. We do one a year in each of the six New England states. And I'm already seeing connections between place over here and some hospice folks over here.

And that's half the benefit of these summits is getting to know people connected with other brothers and sisters. Thank you for having me here. We're going to start this session by going to the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6.

So I'd love for you to take the Bible. And as you turn over to Mark 6, I just say I'm really thankful for my friendship with Walt. And I have been encouraged by him and his intentionality and just a vision for connecting folks.

Very encouraging for me to see you all here and thinking carefully about what it means to do ministry in small places. I pray that that vision will spread and grow in this part of Tennessee.

Lord, do it for the glory of your name in small places in Tennessee. Let's read Mark, Chapter 6. And I'll read verses 1 through 6. And we'll spend a few minutes talking about this passage.

[1 : 1 1] I've been praying that this would be an encouraging time for you. As Walt said, I know you're coming out of the realities of church ministry and life.

And you probably have a whole bunch of things on your mind and in your heart. So as we open the word, may this be an encouragement to you right where you are, and just for you right where you are today.

Mark, Chapter 6, verses 1 to 6. Jesus went away from there and came to his hometown and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath, he began to teach at the synagogue.

And many who heard him were astonished saying, Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?

Is not this the carpenter, son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?

[2 : 1 0] And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, and among his relatives, and in his own household.

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbeliefs. And he went about among the villages to Nazareth.

So, Holy Spirit, I pray that you will be present here as we open your words, as we think about this ministry to which you've called us. That you will be encouraging us, and equipping and strengthening us, and giving us a vision for the ministry you've given us.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, I do want to share a few thoughts based on those verses to help encourage us as we live and minister in our small places.

Places that are not major world-class cities. And I'll do that by making three very simple points from these verses. So, here they are. Number one.

[3 : 19] First point from Mark 6, 1-6. Jesus loves small places. I take a lot of encouragement right off the bat in this passage from verse 1.

Jesus went away from there and came to his hometown. And his disciples followed him. Mark does not need to name Jesus' hometown in this verse.

Already in chapter 1, verse 9, he's told us that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee. Jesus in chapter 1, verse 24 has already been called Jesus of Nazareth.

We know that Nazareth was a tiny, insignificant place. Had a population of maybe two to four hundred people. That's even smaller than Monson, Maine. Where I come from, population 666 at a recent census.

And I heard that and I thought, could someone move in or move out? Or can we just get off that number? It was despised. Nazareth was despised by other communities. We all know that passage in the first chapter of John's Gospel.

[4 : 23] Where Nathaniel asks, can anything good come out of Nazareth? And the New Testament scholar, Richard Bobcom, I read him a number of years ago. And he pointed out something really interesting about that verse.

We learned later in John's Gospel, in chapter 21, that Nathaniel's home village was Cana, which was nine miles north of Nazareth. And Cana was more prosperous.

And it was a bit larger. Excavation showed out about 1,000 people. And Richard Bobcom says, well, maybe Nathaniel's comment expresses the disdain of a prosperous community for its smaller and poorer neighbor.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? I'm from Cana. I think we're all probably used to that sort of attitude. Verse 1 shows that Jesus does not share it.

Jesus came to his hometown. And he brought his disciples with him. He was not ashamed to do that. He wanted to spend time in this tiny, unimpressive community.

[5 : 28] Not to spend time there, actually, but minister to people there. Verse 2 says he's teaching in the synagogue. So just think about it. This is the son of God, the Messiah. He could go anywhere he wants to.

And he's choosing to spend time in duty ministry right here in this little village. This is not exactly our contemporary evangelical reach the city center, trickle down approach.

Jesus is going to Nazareth. Actually, in the Gospels, Jesus never manifests desire to transcend Nazareth, to get out, get bigger. Of course, he also spends time in Jerusalem.

But he doesn't do that in order to escape a small place, in order to escape his hometown roots. You know, I really love what Jesus says to Saul when Saul's on the Damascus Road.

And this is Acts 22. And he asks, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul says, who are you, Lord? And then do you remember how Jesus identifies himself that way to Saul?

[6 : 34] What's his name? I am Jesus of Nazareth. So this is the risen, ascended Christ.

And he's still a small town boy. He has not transcended his roots. Remarkable to me that he still identifies himself. This is Jesus in heaven. He still identifies himself by this tiny little community.

A number of years ago, I was at a conference for small town pastors from around the country. It was a great conference. Among other things, I think I really valued and honored small town pastors and ministers.

And I met a lot of hardworking, skilled laborers in that conference. At one point, I was sitting at a table eating dinner with two other men, pastors.

So between them, they had 80 years of pastoral ministry experience. So I was just trying to absorb everything I could from almost a century of small town ministering experience.

[7 : 37] So it felt really jarring to me when in one of the main sessions, a plenary speaker shared that he talked about how he has excitement for small, small churches.

And then the reason he gave was that many small churches minister to people who become well-known and influential in Christ's kingdom. And he named a famous evangelical leader who's a friend of his who grew up in a small town attending a small church.

And then he said, and I think this is an exact quote, Great men who have done incredible things started in churches just like ours.

And that was the reason he gave for being excited about small churches. And I just squirmed in my chair when I heard that. It sounds to me a lot like a version of the old Billy Graham argument.

You ever heard the Billy Graham case for being faithful in ministry? Let me read you something here from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Basically, this approach is work hard and be faithful to small things because your hidden labor might eventually lead to Billy Graham's conversion.

[8 : 46] That's the Billy Graham argument. So let me read you something I found on the web here. It all started with the Sunday school teacher. What God can do with an ordinary life.

Have you ever been tempted to doubt the impact you can make for the kingdom? Have you ever thought, God can't use me. I'm just a simple Sunday school routine sheriff, beacon, you know, greeter, usher, whatever.

Most people have never heard of Edward Kimball, but the results of his faithfulness to God are known across the globe. How? Read on and see what God did after his Sunday school teacher dared to share his faith with others.

A Sunday school teacher named Edward Kimball won a shoe store clerk to Jesus. His name was D.L. Moody. D.L. Moody traveled to England, awakened the heart of a young pastor, F.B. Meyer.

F.B. Meyer became one of the great Bible expositors, came to the USA, and preached on college campuses. I was used to convert a student to Christ, Wilbur Chapman.

[9 : 52] Wilbur Chapman attended one of Moody's meetings in Chicago and became D.L. Moody's co-worker. Wilbur Chapman employed an ex-baseball player as his assistant, Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday became a great evangelist and preached in Charlotte, North Carolina, at a meeting organized by the Billy Sunday Layman's Evangelistic Club, renamed Christian Business Men's Committee of CBMC.

CBMC invited an evangelist to Charlotte. His name was Mordecai Ham. Mordecai Ham preached in the tent meeting where Billy Graham was saved. Billy Graham has proclaimed the gospel to millions across the globe, and many lives have been changed forever.

But the other people were saved forever. Perhaps you are one of them. What will God do through you if you faithfully share your faith in Jesus Christ? And I dislike this argument very much because it denigrates what it seeks to elevate.

It says your little unknown mystery is significant. It really matters. And I like that part. But here's the reason.

Because you may possibly minister to someone who will possibly go on to impact someone else who will become significant by doing great things in the world.

[11 : 09] So notice that in making this case, it's implied that what you're doing is not significant in and of itself, but rather because you might serve someone who actually becomes significant.

What you're doing matters because it might lead to the conversion of someone who does something that really matters. You might convert a D.L. Moody and that might lead to Billy Graham's conversion.

In other words, I think this argument buys into the very view of significance that denigrates the small places, that denigrates small churches.

The view of significance comes from converting large numbers of people and moving rapidly and being deeply impactful and influential from doing things that are known and celebrated around the world.

And remember what the speaker of that conference I attended said. Great men who have done incredible things started in churches just like ours. The problem is, I think, it's just a worldly view of success and significance.

[12 : 19] And it would be as at home in the Walmart corporate offices or the Uber corporate offices or Facebook. And I want to say against this view that small churches in small places are significant, not because they may lead to the conversion of a few famous people who do great things, but because God sees them in and of themselves as significant.

It's incredibly important, incredibly important, deeply valuable. The glory of small places, here's another way of saying this, is not a reflected glory. It's not like the small places are the moon and the big people in the big places are the sun.

Ministry in small places to ordinary people is itself glorious because it's a ministry of the gospel to human beings created in the universe.

And the image of God. So we should reframe the Billy Graham argument this way. Work hard, even at small things, not because you might be D.L. Moody's Sunday school teacher.

And that might lead to Billy Graham's conversion in three generations. But because you will certainly be Joe Nobody's teacher. And Joe Nobody's soul is of massive importance to God.

[13 : 43] And when he's converted in your Sunday school classes, the angels rejoice. There is celebration in heaven. Amen. Yes.

There's a time at a ministry gallery a few years ago, I met an older woman named Carol. And I'm guessing at the time she was at her eighties. She was a pastor's wife for many years.

She just had this, you know, you meet certain people on their infectious, exuberant personalities. And she told me there'd be people who came up to her in grocery stores and just started sharing their life stories with her.

There's something about it that just captivated folks. And Carol told me when she was very young, her Sunday school teacher taught her a song about how if God loves a little bird, he also loves her.

And she was telling me this story. She actually sang the song for me on the spot as we stood there after this ministry gathering. She told me that song had been a help to her. It had reminded her of Jesus's love.

[14 : 44] She recently taught it to two of her great grandchildren. So think about this. 70 or 80 years after the investment of that nameless Sunday school teacher, that investment was still bearing beautiful fruit in the third generation.

After Carol, would you love to know that your work, your ministry, really anything good you have ever said or done was being repeated and was bearing spiritual fruit almost 100%.

100 years later. I mean, wouldn't that be amazing? That would be amazing. I wonder, will that be the case for any of us? And this Sunday school teacher who had faithfully served Carol was still serving Carol's great grandchildren living 80 years later.

Is that significant, ministry? Yes. Yeah. Not because Carol's in that, I mean, or because they're great grandkids around, but because they are created in the image of God and they matter.

Thank you. So when you preach a sermon of 40 ordinary people and you strengthen their souls for another week of joy in Christ and gritting perseverance, obedience, that's an eternally significant investment.

[16 : 04] Very good. And when you teach an adult education class to five people in a not so nice Sunday school room, maybe it's kind of drafty, maybe it doesn't smell good, and they learn more about the Bible, that pleases God immensely.

It is. It is. The significance of our small town ministry does not hang on connecting it to some famous person outside our small town because the significance of our small town ministry rests on the miracle that Jesus himself comes to our town just as it came to Nazareth.

By the way, I'm going to preach this to myself all the time. I really do. I feel like we are so drawn in by our culture. And I know I am.

I'm a child of my culture. And I've been thinking about these things and seeing them in the Bible for a long time. I've been in pastoral ministry at my small town for almost 17 years.

And I've been writing about this stuff. And I still feel my heart drawn, you know, drawn to the siren song of our culture. I was visiting a pastor friend with some other pastors recently in a university town.

[17 : 20] His church is probably a mile, less than a mile from the best, the top liberal arts college in the country. And we were standing there on campus with him and a tennis player walked by and was in his congregation.

He said 13 nationalities attended this church. By the way, I'm so glad that God calls people to cities. I'm glad he calls people to suburbs. I'm glad he calls people to influential university towns.

But you know what? Maybe that's not what he's called you. But he's called you to people who are internally significant.

That's the way. And I'm glad he calls many different kinds of servants to many different kinds of places. And I just want to say, Jesus, the son of God, came to Nazareth.

I don't think there was a University of Nazareth. And the people in that lieutenant mattered deeply to God. So that's the first point. Jesus came to Nazareth.

[18 : 23] Number two, Jesus knows how difficult small place ministry can be. This one is actually very encouraging to me. Jesus knows my struggles.

He himself had a difficult small town ministry, according to this passage. Frankly, I think things just did not go all that well for him in Nazareth. You might imagine a group of small town pastors sitting around a table on folding chairs, eating pound lunches in a church basement.

And they're sharing their struggles. And Jesus is right there on one of those metal chairs. And he said, yeah, I couldn't do any mighty work in Nazareth that healed a few sick people. Their unbelief was great.

That ground was hard. Let me tell you. He begins teaching in verse two. And the townspeople of Nazareth respond with this flurry of questions.

And the first three questions in verse two, I think, express genuine bewilderment. So they ask, where does man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How is its mighty works done by his hands?

[19 : 26] Those are genuine questions. But then their bewilderment is explained by the next set of questions in verse three. And they actually think they know the answer to those next questions.

Is not this the carpenter and the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas assignment? And are not his sisters here with us? And they're expecting an answer in each case.

Yeah. Yeah. He's the carpenter. Yes. He's Mary's son. Yes. We know his brothers and sisters. And they can't fit together the fact that the one teaching such amazing things is the Jesus they know.

They're so confident of what they think they know that they're confused by what they don't know. So they respond in this disastrous way at the end of verse three.

They took offense at him. You know, this is this is especially stunning in the story flow of Mark's gospel, because if you read Mark's gospel recently, you remember, Jesus has been performing increasingly great miracles as he got gone through the early part of Mark.

[20 : 34] He's a miracle that demonstrates his authority over the spiritual realm and over sickness and nature and over death itself. And up to this point in Mark's gospel, the word amazed has been used often to refer to the amazement of people at Jesus and what Jesus is doing.

So his teaching is healing is healing. His exorcisms is raising the dead. But in chapter six, verse six, Jesus himself is the one amidst. He marveled at the police.

He finds that his hometown. And I think this is an example of how the unique realities of a small community. In fact, often the very things that we love about small towns can create hindrances for the gospel.

So this particular small town of Nazareth, everyone knows Jesus. Remember, it's a small town of maybe two to four hundred people. Not a great big city. You don't have anonymity.

Like like one sociologist said, when you're in a small town, all your life is lived on stage. There's no backstage in a small town. So everybody sees you. They know you as a pastor or a Christian.

[21 : 46] So Jesus is coming as a baby. His growth as a normal child in this little town is not an encouragement to faith, but really actually a hindrance to.

We often rightly think that what people need if they're to trust in Jesus is familiarity with who he is. But in this passage, Jesus's friends can't get past their familiarity becomes an obstacle for them.

Familiarity breeds contempt. They know him too well to really know him. And the great Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryle once said, familiarity with sacred things has an awful tendency to make men despise them.

Sure. I think that is true. There are rural parts of America, areas that just aren't as progressive as the great big cities, where Christian belief and culture is still acceptable.

And I was talking to the body of some folks this morning about how that could be the case. Often that accepting attitude toward Christianity is more of a veneer than a deep reality.

[22 : 54] It's more about going to church or traditional values or kind of cultural Christianity. And it misses the real power and presence of Jesus. I have a friend who plays at a vibrant gospel centered church in a small town.

He told me he's received the most pushback from his ministry from other more traditional churches in town. Another friend involved in a Christian ministry to school kids in this poor rural area of the U.S.

said that the non-Christians in his area haven't given him any opposition. So it's all the opposition he's received has been from churches. Wow. So familiarity with the cultural heritage of Christian tradition can breed contempt, contempt of the real, vital, lived out faith.

And it can do that in our small towns, just like it did in Nazareth. So, Jesus may be known as his Sunday school answer, rather than the Lord who makes his claim upon our lives and give whom we owe everything.

The one who alone gives us lasting joy, who merits our worship. In Nazareth's case, there is a feature of small town life that can make it great. Familiarity, and that's a good thing, familiarity in a small town creates an obstacle for the gospel.

[24 : 12] I bet we can all probably think of areas where in our communities, if we live in a small community, things that we might treasure can also lead to obstacles and hindrances to the gospel.

A few examples, the tight knit bonds of small town life can create a sinful resistance to outsiders who might show up at church.

The valuing of the status quo can lead to an unwillingness to change or adapt. The desire to resist the rat race and innovations of the city can lead, ironically, to a pride in what is mediocre.

So the very things we love about our small towns can make ministry in them more difficult. And Jesus understands that because he encountered it himself. He knows how difficult small place ministry actually is.

He empathizes with us. He identifies with us in our challenges. So here's one more point from this passage, and it's very good news.

[25 : 19] Third point. Jesus means to win followers in small places. I find verse 6b, the very end of this passage, very encouraging because it shows that Jesus' love and concern for Nazareth was not an aberration.

It was not a one off exception. It was part of his larger concern, part of his larger care for places of every size, big and small. And in verse 6b says, Jesus went about among the villages.

Teche. The Greek word for villages is kome, and it's the word for a country town or village, a relatively unimportant community.

A little bit later in Mark chapter 6, Mark tells us that wherever Jesus came, in villages, kome, cities, that's the word polis, or countryside, and that's the word agros, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch you in the fringe of his garden, Mark 6.56.

And that word agros, it's translated countryside, you can hear agriculture in that word. It can equally be translated as farms or farm settlements.

[26 : 34] Numerous English translations translate it that way in Mark 6.56. So think about this. Mark says that Jesus went to farms.

The Son of God preached at farms. It reminds me of something I read about the great 18th century small town English pastor, Henry Venn, in this biography says, much of his time was spent on horseback as he rode to distant corners of his sprawling parish.

He would hunt out obscure parishioners who dwelt in tiny homes and lonely farms and would preach as often as 10 times a week to many who would not come to church. So Henry Venn, when he did that, he was being like Jesus.

He was preaching at farms. Here's the reality. People came to Jesus from all over. And Jesus himself went all over to see them.

He regularly ministered in cities and towns and villages and hamlets, the countryside and farms. In fact, we're told in Matthew 9.35 that Jesus visited all the towns and villages of Galilee.

[27 : 44] And Eckhart Schnabel, scholar Edward Conwell has said in a massive book he's written on early Christian mission that there were 175 towns and villages of lower and upper Galilee during Jesus's life and ministry.

And says he could have easily visited all of them during his ministry. Likely that a major proportion of the 200,000 people living in Galilee personally saw Jesus during his public ministry.

And these were tiny, unimpressive communities. Remember, Nazareth was 2,400 people. Capernaum was 600 to 1,500 residents. My wife and I visited Capernaum a few years ago.

And it is tiny. It just perched right there at the edge of the seat of Galilee. And it's very small. There's a great little encouragement for us buried in this passage in Mark.

And it's this. Jesus means to win some of his fellow small town Nazareth residents. In fact, members of his own family. So four of Jesus's biological half brothers are named in verse 3.

[28 : 53] Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon. To the four, Jude and James, later wrote New Testament letters.

And both knew Jesus intimately as half brother for many years. And both would have presumably spent lots of time with him in Nazareth. But Jude begins this letter like this.

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ. And here's how James begins this letter. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Jesus was their brother. But they came to know them as their Lord, their Messiah, their master.

They were transformed through the gospel. Isn't that amazing? Yeah, Nazareth was a heart. But Jesus came there and did the gospel minister. And he drew people, took to himself, and he transformed their lives.

[29 : 57] He means to win followers from small towns. Not just that he himself went to small towns. He sent out his 12 disciples and he anticipated that they would go to the towns and villages of Israel.

Matthew 10, 11. And that's where they, in fact, went. Luke chapter 9, verse 6. Eckhart's novel says that the early Christians certainly would have regarded Jesus' ministry as the model for their own ministry.

He says that as early missionaries considered Jesus' commission, they must have decided that their assignment included reaching as many people as possible in all the towns and villages in the regions that they would visit.

So it should not surprise us to read that after Paul and Barnabas were expelled from Iconium, they preached to the cities of Lystra and Derbe, as well as to the towns and villages those cities controlled.

Acts 14, verses 6 and 7. And in his address to King Agrippa, again, in the book of Acts, Paul claimed that after his conversion, this is Acts 26, 20, he preached to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout the countryside of Judea.

[31 : 07] And I'll close here with the suggestion that we will be strengthened as we're part of Jesus' work in small places by training ourselves to look in four particular directions.

You might call these the four gazes of a pastor, the four gazes of a small town pastor. Not glances, but gazes. That's a long, careful, slow look, a ponder.

Where are you looking these days? What are you gazing at? And I think our call is to look in four directions. Number one, look up to God for the righteousness of Christ in the midst of our own inadequacy.

I mean, we see weakness within and without. And we can't be drawing our ultimate strength from the success of our ministry, from the size of our budget, from attendance on Sunday mornings, from our ability to add staff or whatever.

I mean, that's such a common place to look, isn't it? But instead, God calls us to look up to God for the righteousness of Christ. Number two, second glance gaze of a pastor. Look out as our church serves on mission.

[32 : 31] Just continue to be on mission. It doesn't matter how small your church is. Don't get insular. Don't just look at yourself. Stay looking outward.

And that's individually and as a church. Number three, look at our people and our place. Jesus was fully present in this town of Nazareth.

We ought to be fully present in ours. Sometimes we can be tempted as small town pastors, ministers, to look around or past or beyond our flock, our town.

Try to find something more significant. And I think Jesus would say, be where you are. I came to Nazareth. I want you to be where you are. And then finally, look through our people.

And I want to linger on this one as we end. One of the small town pastors I admire, I've been very inspired by over the last maybe four or five years, is a guy named George Herbert.

[33 : 31] And some of you may be part of George Herbert, the poet. But you might not even know that he was ever a pastor. Herbert was born in 1593 into a wealthy, powerful family.

He became the university orator at the University of Cambridge. That was a very lofty position. He addressed the king. He was an all-star and influential.

And it looked like he was on his way to a career in the court of the king. And then there was a period of several years where things went sideways and a number of things changed. And they started to rethink some things.

And eventually, he became the rector of St. Andrew's Church in the rural village of Bemerton, which is a parish of fewer than 200 people. He never had probably more than 100 people in his church.

Probably never preached to more than 100 people. He may. And he lived a pastor there in tiny little Bemerton, not the University of Cambridge, not interesting to king, not in the court of the king, but in Bemerton, this tiny little parish, for about three years.

[34 : 37] He was a humble, devoted pastor. And then he died of tuberculosis one month shy of his 40th birthday. He left behind a wife of three orphan nieces who lived there with them.

He left behind a collection of poems that would be published by a friend soon after his death. And that's the reason, if you've heard of George Herbert, you've heard of him because of that collection of poems that were unpublished in his lifetime.

He sent them to his friend Nicholas Farrar on his deathbed and said, if these are not worth anything, burn them. If you think they're worth something, you can publish them. And Nicholas Farrar did.

And they've not gone out of print. And they've been an incredible blessing to me and to many, many thousands of other people. So why did Herbert leave the prestige of a successful academic and political career for his humble, herald ministry?

There's actually a clue, I think, in his poem, The Elixir. And in that poem, Herbert uses a famous image of a philosopher's stone. Notice the substance that was taught in his day to be capable of transforming ordinary materials into gold.

- [35 : 48] A philosopher's stone would transform the world into gold. And Herbert uses this image to describe the key to performing lowly tasks and serving humble people with joy.

And he says the secret, the elixir, is to see God in all things and to do all things for God. So I'm going to read this poem for you.

It's called The Elixir by George Herbert. He says, teach me, my God and King, and all things thee to say. And what I do in anything to do it as for thee.

Not rudely as a beast to run into an action, but still to make thee prepossessed and give it his perfection. A man that looks on glass, on it may stain his eye.

Or if he pleaseeth, look through it pass, and then the heavens spar. All may of thee partake, nothing can be so mean, which with his tincture for thy sake will not grow bright and clean.

- [36 : 57] A servant with this cloths makes drudgery divine. Whose sweeps of ruin is for thy laws, makes that in the action fine. This is the famous stone that turneth all to gold.

For that which God doth touch and own cannot for less be told. So yeah, we are to look at our people. That's important.

We should study them. We should appreciate them. We should not try to get past them to something better. But we're also to look through them. I want you to see in that poem that Herbert is encouraging us to see God in the places and the people to which we minister.

The first stanza, second line, in all things thee to city. We'll get it. And the third stanza encourages us to look through. A man that looks on glass, on it may stain his eye.

You know when you're driving and your windshield has something on it, a bug, they've got smashed on your windshield? You can look through the windshield or you can look at the windshield.

- [38 : 01] Usually you look at the windshield when there's a dent or a scratch or a bug or something like that. But Herbert's saying, don't just look at.

Don't look just at your tail or at your people. Look through them. And then the heavenly, a spy. In all things thee to say the Lord.

In other words, Herbert's calling us to live our lives, looking at our people and through our people and seeing God, where he's called us to start healing.

And he says, that's the way you can do what you do with incredible joy. And if you do it for God, if you bring God into it, now it becomes a God-soaked, God-entranced reality.

You're doing all those limbo acts of service, not just for that other person. That's the New Testament teaching. But for God. And therefore you can do it with incredible significance and with deep joy.

- [39 : 07] I want to thank God for calling us to the places he's called us to. And, you know, it might be that he calls us somewhere else too.

And the fact that he's called us where he's called us doesn't mean that that's the last to the final call. But there is incredible joy. And there's incredible promise. And going deeper right where we are.

And seeing God in these people and this place. So, Lord, please encourage us with this. 1 Corinthians 10.31 says, we can do all things for the glory of God.

And the elixir of doing things for you turned Bemberton to gold. He saw that you touched and owned that village and that church.

And that his small ministry was not less, was not worse than the glittering career he had been bound for. It was an opportunity for joy. Lord, would you allow us to live that out?

[40 : 14] Would you shape us with the gospel? Not just with the mantras of our contemporary culture. Let me say, get bigger.

Get faster. Influence more. Remind us of the eternal significance of every Parsemme. In our church and in our community. We pray this for you and our sake.

Amen. Amen.