

4. The Church's Fruitful Partnership: Provide the Gospel Money

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[0 : 0 0] Well, do you have a seat and you might like to turn up that first passage we read at Matthew chapter 10. We'll be referring to it and other passages also this morning. In our study of the series, the thematic series we're on at the moment, on the Church's fruitful partnership in the mission of the Gospel.

Now, we saw last week that although we're not all, all of us, called to a speaking ministry, that is, a public preaching and teaching, all believers do, in fact, have a preaching ministry, a proclaiming ministry.

Because, you remember, we saw that our prayers are part and a very vital part of the Gospel's proclamation. Ephesians 6 verse 17, Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit.

The ESV translation that our Church Bibles are brings out that very clearly. The NIV rather obscures it, puts a full stop right in the middle of that, which shouldn't be there. But the point is, you take the sword of the Spirit, praying at all times.

Prayer is vital so that the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, may actually be wielded by the Church whenever the Gospel is proclaimed. And remember, we saw that we're commanded in the New Testament to pray continually.

[1 : 3 3] Pray for the world, for those who need to hear the Gospel. Pray for the workers, as Jesus commanded us. Those who will proclaim the Gospel. And also, perhaps above all, pray for the Word itself, for its proclamation, as it is proclaimed.

But the sword of the Spirit may truly be at work. And we've all got a role to play in that, through our prayers, our concerted corporate prayer as the Church of Jesus Christ.

Well, today we're looking at another aspect of that partnership in Gospel mission that, again, we are all called to. And it's something very tangible, something very practical. Giving the Gospel money.

Now, sometimes when we think about Christian giving, we tend to be thinking about it as a very personal thing, a very private thing. We think of it as something that we personally do.

That we give very personally and privately to the Lord. It's an act of worship. And in one sense, that is absolutely true. And you'll remember how Jesus commended the widow's might.

[2 : 4 1] Do you remember the widow who put two little coins into the box? He said it was more than the great bags of gold that many put in. Because she gave everything she had. She gave it out of a heart of love to the Lord her God.

And that's right. And giving is, in that sense, an act of response, of worship to God. But that's not all. In the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, not only the New Testament, there's another side to our giving.

A very practical side. Because giving, real and generous Gospel giving, is essential for the mission of the Gospel to the world.

Without adequate giving, there will not be adequate mission. It's just simple and plain, isn't it? I remember once traveling in a car to a preaching workshop with Dick Lucas.

And somehow we got talking about this. And Dick, in his inimitable way, said to me, Yes, brother. He said, I discovered very early on in my ministry that the widow's might, though pleasing to God, will not run the church. And that's absolutely right, isn't it?

[3 : 55] And that is, in fact, the point that Jesus is making, right here in Matthew chapter 10, in a very practical way. Matthew 9 and 38, he commands his people to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers.

We're to pray to God to send out workers. But in the middle of Matthew chapter 10, he makes it equally clear that when God sends out those workers, we are to pay for the workers, having prayed for them.

Let's look again at verses 5 to 10. These 12 disciples Jesus sent out, instructing them, Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Proclaim as you go, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff, for the labourer deserves his food.

Now we've got to be careful here, obviously. In a sense, this is a very unique situation. Jesus is not speaking directly to you and me here, is he?

[5 : 10] He's speaking to his disciples. Not only his disciples, as verse 5 says, but specifically to his 12 apostles. So it's a unique word to them.

It's also a unique ministry. It's a temporary ministry. He is giving them particular commands to share in his own unique mission to the people of Israel at that particular time in history.

A unique moment in history. And so obviously, we cannot simply lift these words and apply them universally to ourselves or the church today. Sometimes people do that very mistakenly. And so they assume that we also should be expecting the things here that we read about in verse 8.

That we should be expecting as Christians today to be going out and raising the dead and cleansing lepers and so on. Well, if that's true, then also I would have thought verse 6 must be just as true for us today.

Mustn't it? We're not to go to Gentiles. We're not even to go to Samaritans. We're only to go and do our mission in Israel. And obviously, verse 9 would apply to us too, literally, wouldn't it?

[6 : 20] Christian missionaries being sent out should have no provisions, no money, no spare clothes, not even a spare pair of shoes. No, we can't read the Bible in that way.

We've got to read it sensibly. And we've got to understand its context. For example, verse 9 is explicitly superseded by Jesus later on at the end of his ministry. You can read it in Luke 22, verse 36.

He clearly says, I once told you that, now I'm changing. You can take spare clothes. You can take a money bag with you. So this is a specific word for his 12 apostles at a very particular time in the unique ministry of Jesus.

But nevertheless, there are principles that Jesus is teaching about mission which are unchanging. Key principles which we know are unchanging because the church and the apostles themselves later on in the New Testament take them up and apply them to the church.

So as we'll see, Paul quotes these words of Jesus in 1 Timothy 5 and 18 where Jesus says, the workman deserves his food. He quotes that verbatim, although he just changes it to the workman deserves his wages.

[7 : 30] He's clearly saying that the principle here is that the person working for the gospel needs to be supported. But let's just look carefully at verses 9 and 10 at what Jesus himself is saying about gospel workers.

First, he's clearly saying, isn't he, that gospel workers are not to be concerned about what they can get out of their mission, but about what they can give to it.

You received without paying. God's grace came to you freely. So give freely. Don't be, as Christian missionaries, don't be people taken up with material gain with things like gold and silver and huge wardrobes and lots of clothes and shoes.

No, be focused on the work of the kingdom of God. That's a very important word, isn't it, to any full-time Christian worker. It needs to be a constant word to any Christian worker.

Don't be taken up with thinking that you can gain out of this. Love of money, love of possessions, being taken up with material things will ruin any Christian ministry.

[8 : 44] What Paul says in 1 Timothy 2, doesn't he, one of the marks, one of the characteristics of a Christian leader has got to be somebody who is not in love with money. I've known people in Christian work who have been in love with money.

You don't have to have lots of money to be in love with it. In fact, it's very easy to be in love with it when you don't have lots of it. Resent the fact you don't have. That can ruin your Christian ministry. That's what Jesus is saying here.

Don't be that kind of person. You're a giver, not a getter. Christian mission is about giving, not receiving. So there's a very powerful word to the Christian worker, but equally, there is a powerful word for the Christian church, isn't there?

Because you see, your workers, Jesus says, can only live like that if the church very clearly takes up its responsibility to provide properly for gospel workers.

They can only be liberated for their labor like that if the church takes its obligations very seriously. It realizes the laborer deserves his food, so you've got to give it to him. See, the laborer, the Christian worker in the harvest field can only live by faith if the church is living by its responsibilities.

[9 : 59] That's very important for us as the church. Sometimes we talk about faith missions. But you see, often what that really means in practice is individual Christian workers and missionaries having to live in a very great deal of hardship because the church is living by disobedience.

The church is not obeying faithfully the commands of Christ to realize that the worker deserves his wages. So Jesus says, pray for workers, pray for the Lord to send out laborers into harvest field, but when he does, you've got to pay for them.

You've got to send them out properly equipped for their task. That's Jesus' clear principle. God provides the missionaries, but we're to provide the gospel money.

Now obviously our situation today is much more developed than it was then in the day of Christ and the apostles in Matthew chapter 10 and we've said that was a specific event. But already in the New Testament church it's very clear that these same principles are being taken up and applied to the church.

So I want to look at that this morning under two headings. Two things about giving. First, giving must be practical. It must give sufficient provision for the gospel.

[11 : 24] Now I want to think about two aspects of that that the New Testament emphasizes. First of all, providing for what we might call the established ministry of the church. You might like to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 8 and following.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul applies the words of Jesus from Matthew chapter 10 and he says that by them the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

That is, that they should be supported by the church that they serve. Look at verse 8 of 1 Corinthians 9. Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the law say the same?

For it is written in the law of Moses, you shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain. Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher should thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? Verse 13. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

[12 : 39] In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. As I said in 1 Timothy 5, verse 18, he says the same thing about those who are laboring and preaching and teaching.

The laborer deserves his wages. Now there are repeated references, by the way, in the New Testament to the Christian worker, the Christian missionary, as a laborer.

And it is the word that means a hard-working laborer. The picture is of somebody out in the street in the heat of the sun with their top off with a pickaxe and a shovel working away, laboring hard.

And the reason that the New Testament uses that word for the Christian worker is that Christian ministry really is hard work. Because laboring in God's word is very hard.

Edward and Bomberi were through in Edinburgh yesterday doing a teaching day for Corn Hill. We had a great day. There was, I don't know, nearly 150 folk that came from a number of different churches. One of the great things about a day like that is that people just sometimes begin, the penny begins to drop and they see just what hard work it is and they have to start working themselves in the text of the scripture.

[13 : 55] It's hard work. People sometimes have this ridiculous idea about people in ministry and say, oh yeah, you just work one day a week, what do you do for the rest of the week? That sort of thing. My first job was as a junior doctor.

My first contract contracted me to 88 hours a week and I probably worked about at least another 10 or sometimes more hours than that. And it was jolly hard work.

But I can tell you that was nothing like as hard work as laboring in the word of God and working in Christian ministry. And any Christian missionary working anywhere in the world will tell you that.

Christian work is hard work and that's why it has to be supported. That's why people have to be set aside to devote themselves full time to it so that it doesn't get the fag ends of their attention but it gets the very best of their week, the very best hours of the day.

That's why it's got to be paid for. There are some traditions in the Christian church that have often despised this idea of having full time paid people in ministry.

[15 : 06] But it seems to me that by and large those parts of the church have suffered for it. It's been to the great detriment of their churches. The quality of Bible teaching and preaching in such places has suffered enormously.

I think it's very good. It's one of the very encouraging things that I see in the churches today that many, for example, in the Breslin movement have come to see that and are seeking to train properly full time Christian workers because they've seen that laboring in the word of God is a hard work thing and it requires the best hours of the week and if you're going to give somebody to do that you have to say to them well you don't have to go and do this other thing to make ends meet.

We'll pay you so that you can do these things. And you see ministry and mission cost money. That's just reality and we as Christians have got to live in the real world not in some sort of fantasy world that thinks that things like that drop out of heaven for us.

It's not going to happen. And therefore that's why the New Testament frequently talks about money in very plain terms in very practical terms.

Now we British we don't like doing that in the church. Our American brothers and sisters have no problem with it. They talk about money a lot. We find it rather crass. But let me tell you this.

[16 : 25] American Christians give much more generously on the whole than British Christians. American churches are much better equipped than British churches. American missionaries all around the world are far better supported than most European missionaries are.

That's simply a fact. In that case I would have to say that Paul is definitely on the side of the Americans. So is Jesus. In this particular aspect don't misunderstand me and take that as a generality.

Please don't tell anybody that you heard proclaim from this pulpit God and Jesus always on the side of the Americans. But on this particular aspect well he's more on that side of the Atlantic than this side.

Because money talk is biblical. Because it's practical. And Paul and the other apostles and the Lord himself knows that gospel ministry has got to be paid for.

It just won't happen or it won't happen properly. There must be sufficient provision both for full-time laborers in gospel work and for all the ancillary people that are needed for administration, for premises, for all the things that are needed.

[17 : 35] I'm sure Paul had to pay to rent the lecture hall of Tyrannus. So we've got to support the existing, what we might call the established ministry of the churches.

But that also is not the only thing that we must be doing. The New Testament also has a great emphasis on what we might call extending the mission of the church. There's a constant need to extend the mission of the kingdom by sending out more laborers into the harvest field.

And that also needs money and supplies. It needs great provision. There's a great emphasis in the New Testament on sending people out equipped with the needs that they have for their campaign.

Well, of course, they're soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ and soldiers need to be properly equipped. If they're not, there'll be major casualties, won't there? We've seen that all too recently in Afghanistan.

The tragedies that have sometimes happened because our soldiers don't seem to have had the equipment that they need. And the New Testament tells us in the Christian church, in our mission, we are not to fall down in that particular area.

[18 : 40] Rather, we are to send them out fully equipped and provided for in every way. So in Romans 15, verse 24, Paul expects that the church in Rome, quote, will support him.

I hope to see you in passing, he says, as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you. In other words, he's saying he wants them to provide for his needs and to equip him for the mission that he's going to have to Spain.

If you read later on 1 Corinthians chapter 16, you'll find it's a chapter all about money and giving in very practical ways. And he says in verse 6, help me on my way wherever it is I'm going to be going.

Verse 11 of that chapter, he says you're to do exactly the same thing for Timothy when he comes. In 2 Corinthians 1, verse 16, he says they're to send him on his way to Judea. Now, Paul is not saying come down to the key and wave me off with a smile.

He's saying bear the cost of my missionary trip. Not just Paul, John says the same thing. 3 John, verse 6.

[19 : 48] He's writing to them and speaking about brothers in the church that they've never even met, they don't know personally. This is what he said. You'll do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

for they have gone out for the sake of the name. It's supremely practical, do you see. There must be sufficient provision for the gospel, both for the established ministry of the church, but also for the extension of that mission of the church.

If there's no money, there won't be much mission. But God is not short of money. In fact, he's made abundant amounts of it, very freely available, and in very practically useful ways.

He's arranged for lots of deposits to be made in the bank accounts of all his people right here on earth, so it's readily available. It doesn't have to come directly down from heaven. And we're all called, says the New Testament, to provide in a manner worthy of God.

The God who, as Paul reminds us, though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, that we, by his poverty, might become rich. That brings us to something deeper than just the sufficient provision for mission.

[21 : 07] Giving is a supremely practical matter in the New Testament, but also it's more. That kind of giving, as the Bible sees it, is also our great privilege. It truly is a spiritual partnership in the gospel.

Turn over to Philippians, and first of all to chapter 1. Philippians is this wonderful letter speaking about the great love and the joy of that bond that Paul has with this particular church.

It was a church that had fellowship with him, partnership, right from the very beginning. And now he's writing this letter from prison in Rome, where once again this church and Philippi were the very first ones to send help to him, to send him gifts of money and food and so on, to help him in very practical ways in his trouble.

They sent Epaphroditus, one of their key leaders, to take that to him and to be with him. No wonder he writes with so much thanksgiving. Look at verse 3 of chapter 1.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the very first day until now.

[22 : 19] Partnership in the gospel. A very tangible provision for his needs. Supremely practical. But, you see, Paul is saying it's deeply spiritual.

That word partnership is our word communion or fellowship. In chapter 2, verse 1, he talks about the participation, the fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 3, in verse 10, he talks about that partnership, that fellowship, that sharing in Christ's own sufferings. And both Paul and the Philippians rejoiced in this deep bond of fellowship and communion that they shared with Christ and with his spirit for the gospel.

It's deeply spiritual. And the whole letter makes that plain. But, you see, in the Bible, there is never any divorce between the practical and the spiritual.

So often as Christians, we divorce those two things, don't we? Often there's a lot of pious talk about gospel mission and so on, but very little practical help. But not in the Bible.

- [23 : 27] The practical and the spiritual are absolutely united. The partnership that Paul is talking about with the Philippians here isn't just prayer and love and a common purpose, although of course it is all of those things, all of those things.

But also a very practical expression of that deep spiritual communion in terms of the tangible provision of support for his bodily needs in terms of hard cash.

Look over to chapter 4 and these words that we read earlier on. See how he uses that wonderful spiritual language of fellowship, of communion, of partnership, about the very visible practical partnership and the needs for his own body.

Notice the words there in verse 14. They shared. Again, that's the word fellowship, partner, communion. They communed with him in his trouble by giving him what?

Well, verse 15. Giving and receiving resources. They gave him gifts, verse 17. Payments, verse 18.

- [24 : 34] They supplied what he needed. All kinds of tangible support. They weren't just writing him letters saying, Paul, we're thinking about you. Paul, we wish you well in prison. Their letters actually gave him tangible help in his need.

See what he's saying? He's saying, you see, that giving to gospel work, funding gospel work, isn't just supporting gospel work. It's doing gospel work.

Just as praying for the gospel mission isn't just supporting the gospel mission, it's being involved. It's actively being part of it. So giving in this way is an actual participation.

It's a spiritual communion. It's a fellowship with the work. Because what you give to, you are part of. It's important that we realize that because the obverse is also true.

We want to be giving to things that are supporting the true gospel of Christ, not to things that are opposing the true gospel of Christ. Otherwise, we're part of that. That's why, as verse 18 of chapter 4 says, doing these things is a direct offering to God.

- [25 : 45] It's a fragrant offering, a sacrifice, pleasing and acceptable to God. Now, Paul often speaks about his own gospel preaching in exactly those terms. In Romans chapter 15, he talks about his proclamation of the gospel as a priestly service to God, as an acceptable offering to God.

Well, what he's saying here is giving to gospel work is just exactly the same thing. It's a fragrant offering to God himself because it's part of that very work. Somebody's put it this way.

Paying for gospel work isn't like being supporters on the sidelines, cheering on the team who are on the pitch, the actual gospel workers. No, it's being a player on the pitch yourself, right in the midst of it.

See, if prayer is a part of the ministry of gospel proclamation, then so is paying. It's a communion. It's a fellowship. It's a partnering in Christ's mission of grace to the world.

And Paul honors that. He commends the Philippian church as a great example when he writes to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Listen to what he says of the church in Philippi.

- [26 : 52] They gave according to their means and beyond their means of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing, communing, partnering in this service to the saints.

The Philippian church saw that giving to the mission of the gospel was a real privilege, a gift from God to them. And as well as being supremely practical and necessary to pay for the church's mission in the world, it really is a spiritual partnership in gospel work.

It's being involved and playing a part in the joy of making Christ known. And what can be greater than that? And Paul is telling us, and Christ is telling us, that it's something that we're all called to be involved in, even if we can't all be involved physically in frontline mission or be frontline workers like Paul.

Or even if we're now not able to be involved so much in that as we used to be because of age and of frailty. Prayer can be done when you can't do very much else.

Well, so can giving. Now, I dare say not many of us have substantial wealth in the Christian church.

[28 : 11] But some do. You know, when God has given us wealth, he's given it not primarily for the sake of our own earthly comfort. He's given it to enable such people to be real partners in the fruitful mission of the gospel.

Because, in practical terms, the widow's might, though pleasing to God, will not run the church. Just practical sins. But also because it's a wonderful spiritual partnership.

It's a ministry that God has called some to be able to do. To be generous benefactors in the church's mission. And you know, where things like that have done and where people have seen that as a great ministry, amazing fruit has been the result.

I can testify to that personally in my own experience. I spent five years, as you know, working for the Proclamation Trust in London.

That was established to mark the 25th anniversary of Dick Lucas' ministry in St. Helens. And he didn't want a wall clock or a gold watch. So when people said, what can we do? He said, well, start a trust to train gospel workers for the future.

[29 : 20] That's how the Proclamation Trust came into being. And many generous benefactors caused that to happen. We've seen a very similar thing happen here in Scotland with Cornhill Scotland being able to be established through the amazing generosity of a very few able people.

And without them, none of it would have happened. There'd be no Bob. No Edward. None of the benefits that we have here in our church of their ministries. No 34 students trained over recent years.

No 26 students training this year. No night classes. No teaching days. It's come from the generous giving of some who have seen it as a great ministry that they've been able to be involved in.

By the way, it's just worth noticing that those who have given in that way are all Englishmen. We've had a much greater vision for gospel ministry in Scotland through that than anybody in Scotland has yet had.

So think about that next time you want to shout about the English. That's just one example. I could give you many others. In my father's own ministry and the ministry of William still, it was the great generosity and the insight of two American ladies, again, not Scots, who gave money to get new technology in those days, which was reel-to-reel tape recorders, to enable the beginning of a ministry of tape recording and later on of printing.

[30 : 50] The same two who gave money that enabled the establishment of a trust to allow ministers to meet together regularly for encouragement and for training. And that goes on to this very day after their death in the pre-fellowship meetings.

Because people didn't want to hoard the treasure that they've been given on earth, but said to themselves and said to the Lord, how can I use this to build treasure in heaven?

To invest in things that will last for eternity. Not just what will be spent on my heirs when I die, or worse, grabbed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer when I die in death duties.

Many people do think death duties are a scandal, don't they? You know, I wonder whether we ought to think of it as a scandal, especially for Christians.

Certainly no need for Christians ever to pay death duties, is there? Is any money that you leave to gospel work? Well, it's charitable, it's taken right out of your estate. There's no tax paid on that. Far better, don't you think, to be in that position, if you are in that position to leave everything above your tax threshold to gospel work, instead of leaving 40% of it to Alistair Darling, to invest in the Royal Bank of Scotland so that their executives can have huge bonuses at Christmas.

[32 : 08] Which is what he's just done with another how many hundreds of billions. You don't need that much money, by the way, these days to end up paying tax, tell us, to Darling, when you die.

Probably just a house is enough. Think of the horror of that. You don't have to be Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. But, you know, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are actually a jolly good example, although neither of them are Christians.

They're giving away all their money even before they die, aren't they? And I say good on them. Doing marvellous work throughout the developing world. But, you know, however much you might have, or however little, think about this.

Think of the joy of being able to continue as a real partner in gospel mission in this world, even after your death. Because you've left your money to go on proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

It's a great example, isn't it, of death bringing forth life. Such a blessing when Christian people think and plan that way. We were greatly blessed here just recently when somebody who's not a member of this congregation but comes on Wednesdays, came to me and wanted to leave us a generous sum of money to the Lord's work.

[33 : 19] Give it to us, rather, from the estate of a loved one. I heard just recently of another church where they've been greatly blessed because somebody left their house to the church to use for ministry and mission purposes.

It's opened up huge avenues for them to be able to do that. Wonderful thought, isn't it, to just plan to be involved in gospel ministry. Not only by giving throughout your life, but even beyond your death.

Somebody was talking to me about this just the other day and brought it up and they said to me, I find it really liberating. It's a wonderful thought to think that when I die, the work of Christ is going to be greatly blessed financially.

I thought that was a wonderful attitude. That's Macedonian church thinking. That's partnership in the model of the church at Philippi. Begging, eagerly, as they did, for the privilege of showing this service to the saints.

Of course, by the way, don't get me wrong. Paul's not suggesting here, and I'm not suggesting, that we leave all our generosity till we die and think that would be terrific. Remember, Edward was preaching the other day about how we need to be practicing for dying now.

[34 : 31] So the more we practice now, the better we'll be at it when we die. I wonder if you think it's all a bit unseemly for me to be talking about such things in church.

Talking about money in that rather crass way. Well, if you do, don't blame me. Blame the Lord Jesus. Blame the Apostle Paul.

Blame the other apostles. They keep bringing it up. You start to read the New Testament. You can't avoid it. They speak about it frequently. Speak about it very frankly. But they do so for these two reasons.

Because there is a practical need. Gospel mission needs sufficient provision from God's people. But even more importantly, because it's a real privilege.

It's a spiritual partnership that we're all called to, however much or little God has given us. Whether our reserves are great or whether they're small. Because paying for gospel work is participating, sharing in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in his great outpouring of love to this world.

- [35 : 39] That people might come to know his grace and his mercy. Being part of that. And we've been blessed, haven't we, as a congregation in these recent years, to share something of the joy.

As we've partnered together financially in giving, sacrificially, to remake this building and make it much more suitable for gospel work. Think of the joy that we've had. We've made sacrifices.

Sometimes it's been painful. But hasn't the joy overflowed? As we've seen God at work among us here. As we've seen people coming into this building and finding the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've tasted, haven't we, that joyful partnership, that privilege of sharing in that way in the gospel of Christ. Let me leave you with Paul's encouraging words to the Corinthians about cheerful givers.

You, he says, will be enriched in every way for your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

- [36 : 45] For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but overflowing with many thanksgivings to God.

It's not just a practical thing. It's a marvelous privilege. It overflows with a sweet sacrifice of praise to God.

Well, let's ask God to help us to be cheerful and joyful givers pleading for this partnership in his gospel ministry. Let's pray.

Lord, how we thank you that you enable us to share with the means of your good gifts to us in the greatest task of the whole wide world, making Jesus our Savior known.

Help us, we pray, to be like the Macedonian churches who rejoice to share not only in the sufferings and the proclamation of the gospel, but in that sweet partnership of practical provision.

- [37 : 53] Help us, we pray, to have hearts filled with genuine thankfulness that flow out not only in praise from our lips, but in the substantial confession that comes from sharing in this way in the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

For we ask it in his name. Amen.