

The Church's Corporate Provision

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[0 : 00] Good. Well, let's turn to our readings for this morning. And we're going to be in two books of the New Testament. So perhaps first turn to Philippians. And once you found Philippians, stick a thumb in there, and then we're going to turn back to Matthew.

So Philippians, page 980, if you've got a visitor Bible. So once you found Philippians, put a finger there, and then we're going to turn back to Matthew's Gospel.

To begin with. So find Philippians, and then we'll turn back to Matthew. And we're in Matthew chapter 9, page 814.

Okay, Matthew chapter 9. I'm reading from verse 35. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, Look down to verse 5.

[1 : 37] Look down to verse 5.

These twelve, 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, and proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand, 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 or 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. We'll turn over with me to Philippians now, and we're going to read from Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 00] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. And now turn over with me to the last chapter, chapter 4, and reading from verse 14. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you, Philippians, yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Well, amen.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word this morning. We do take up your Bibles and perhaps if you could turn first to Matthew chapter 10.

[4 : 32] But we will be ranging around a little bit as we have in these last weeks as we've been looking at some of the different aspects together of the church's corporate mission.

Now, we saw last time that although not all are called by God to a ministry of public preaching and teaching and proclamation, nevertheless, all believers, all the church do share in that proclamation. And they share in it through their prayers. Because their prayers are a vital part of that gospel proclamation. Remember Ephesians 6, verse 17.

Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit. So prayer is a vital part of the sword of the Spirit being wielded in the church among the people of God.

So we're to pray constantly, Paul teaches us, and Jesus teaches us. Pray for the world, for the people who need the gospel.

[5 : 43] That's the focus, isn't it, at the end of Matthew chapter 9. Pray for the workers. Very specifically, Jesus says there, those who will proclaim the gospel.

And also, as Paul frequently urges us throughout his letters, pray for the word itself as it is proclaimed. That it would speed ahead and be honored, as he says to Thessalonians. So we're all involved in the proclamation, in the gospel ministry of the church through our prayers. But today we're looking at another aspect of that partnership that we're also all called to as a church.

And it's a very tangible, a very practical thing. The church's corporate provision. That means providing real gospel money. Now some people like to think of their giving to the church, to God, as a very private thing, as a very personal thing.

Something that we personally give to God as part of our worship. And of course it is an act of personal worship to give to the Lord. Remember the Lord Jesus' words about the widow's mites in Luke chapter 21.

[6 : 57] He commended the widow, giving these two little coins. And said it was worth far more to God than all the gold that the wealthy were pouring into the offering basket. Because she gave everything that she had.

Every last mite. Out of sheer love to God. But of course, as well as that aspect of giving, there's another side to the church's giving.

And that is a very practical side. Giving, that is real, generous gospel giving, is essential for the mission of the church of Jesus Christ in the world.

Without adequate giving, it won't happen, will it? I'll always remember Dick Lucas saying to me that early on in his ministry in the city of London, he realized that the widow's mite, though pleasing to God, will not run the church.

Well, that's right, isn't it? And in fact, Jesus himself makes exactly that very practical point in Matthew chapter 9 at the end. In Matthew chapter 9, verse 38, he commands that we pray for God to send out workers into the harvest field.

[8 : 10] And in Matthew chapter 10, he is equally clear that as well as praying for those workers, the church is to pay for those workers. Let me just read again these verses from verse 5 of chapter 10.

These twelve 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, and proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the 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 laborer deserves his food.

And he talks about going into towns and being received as worthy. In other words, being looked after, being provided for. Now, we've got to be careful here with a passage like this, because in one sense, Jesus is describing what is clearly a unique situation.

Jesus is not speaking directly to us here, is he? Look at verse 5. It's these twelve, it's his apostles, that he's just called and sent out. And this is a temporary mission.

[9 : 26] It's a unique mission to Israel at that time, at that moment in history. We can't possibly just take this, a passage like this, apply a blanket to ourselves today, as though Jesus was talking directly to us.

Sometimes people have done that. They look at a verse like verse 8, about raising the dead and cleansing lepers. And so on. And think, well, that's Jesus' command to the church today. Well, if that's the case, verse 6 must also apply directly to the church today, mustn't it?

That we're to take no mission anywhere to any Gentile peoples, only to Israelites. And verse 9 would apply literally. That no gospel worker is to take any provisions, no money, no wallet, no spare clothes, not even shoes.

So no, we mustn't read this stupidly. We must read this sensibly and in its context. And in fact, verse 9 there is explicitly superseded by Jesus himself later on.

You can read about it in Luke chapter 22, verse 36, where he talks about this time when he sent them out. But now he says, no, you're to take these things with you. That all shows us this is a particular incident at that time in history.

[10:34] But nevertheless, the principles that Jesus gives here in verses 9 and 10 are key principles. And we know that because they are taken up and they're applied later on by the apostles very clearly for the whole church.

Paul quotes verse 10 about the laborer deserving his food in 1 Timothy 5, verse 18. But he changes the word food there to wages. The laborer deserves his wages.

He's showing you how to apply clearly Jesus' teaching in the new situation of the church. He speaks about it again in 1 Corinthians 9. We'll perhaps look at that later. Look what Jesus himself is really saying in verses 9 and 10 about gospel workers.

Do you see this? Firstly, the first thing he's saying is that gospel workers are not to be people who can constantly be concerned about what they can get, but about what they can give.

You received without paying. You've received God's grace given to you freely. So give freely is what he's saying. Verse 9 is saying, don't be people who are taken up with material gain, with gold and silver, with wardrobes full of clothes.

[11:48] Rather, be focused on the work of the kingdom of God. Now, that's a word to the Christian worker. And that needs to be a constant word.

Because love of money, love of gain, will kill your life of mission. That's why Paul, when he's speaking to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2 and talking about looking for those who can be leaders in the church, he says, not a lover of money.

If you're out for gain, that will kill your mission. So it's a word to the gospel worker, not to be a getter, but to be a giver. But there's also a strong word, too, to the whole church, isn't there?

Because gospel workers can only live like that, not concerned with material things, if the church is likewise taken up with proper responsibility to provide responsibly for those gospel workers who are set aside for that work.

They can only be liberated for their labor if the church takes its obligations to them seriously. The laborer deserves his food.

[12:58] You see, the laborer can only live by faith if the church lives by responsibility. And sometimes the so-called faith mission means that individuals are left in great hardship because the church is living in disobedience, not in obedient faith.

So Jesus says, pray for workers, for the Lord to send out laborers. But then when he does, he says to the church, you must pay for the laborers. You must send them out properly equipped for their task.

And that's Jesus' clear principle here, isn't it? God provides the gospel ministers while we are to provide the gospel money. Very straightforward. Now, our situation is obviously much more developed than that of the apostles here in the time of Jesus in Matthew chapter 10.

But already, when you read the New Testament in the New Testament church, it's clear that these same principles are taken up and they're applied. I want to briefly look at that under two headings. Firstly, the Bible is so clear that giving must be practical.

It must give sufficient provision for gospel work, kingdom work. And I think we can think of two aspects of this that the New Testament emphasizes for us.

[14:17] First of all, providing what we might call for the established ministry of the church. In 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 14, you might like to just turn there actually and have a look.

I think it may be page 957, but I could be wrong. 1 Corinthians 9. Paul applies these words from Jesus in Matthew chapter 10, and he says that by these the Lord has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

That is, they should be supported by the church that they serve. 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 8. Do I say these things on human authority?

Does not the law say the same? For it's 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 the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

[15:33] Look down to verse 13. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

In the same way, the Lord, that's Jesus, commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

In 1 Timothy 5, verse 18, don't look that up now, but he says exactly the same thing about those who labor in preaching and teaching in the church. The laborer deserves his wages, he says.

And by the way, we should notice that in the New Testament, such people are called laborers. who labor in preaching and teaching. And that word means hard labor.

It's the image of a laborer out on the road, working in the hot sun, digging, sweating, putting in the real hard work. Because what Paul is saying, and all the apostles are acknowledging, is that real Christian ministry is hard work.

[16:39] It's labor. It's labor. Some people have this ridiculous idea, you know, ministers just work one day a week. Well, wouldn't that be lovely? My first job was as a junior doctor, and my first contract, I was contracted to work 88 hours a week.

In the actual fact, we worked far, far more than that. And I probably never worked less than 70 hours a week in my life, but I can tell you this, that all those hours I put in as a junior doctor were nothing, nothing in any way as hard as the work of real Christian ministry.

You may not believe that, but I'm telling you, that's the truth. And that's why the church has to support full-time ministry. Because if it's done properly, it is hard work.

It's labor. It cannot be done as a hobby, alongside another full-time job. If ministry is going to be any use at all, it has to get the best hours and the hardest labor of those who are doing it.

And that obviously then has to be paid for, because that person can't go out and do another job, and then they're living by it. There are some Christian traditions that have tended to despise the idea of any full-time pastors and teachers, but the truth is, they have suffered for it.

[17:57] It's been to the great detriment of their churches that have lacked very often proper, solid, coherent teaching ministries. That's the story of the Brethren movement, which is largely dying out.

Fortunately today, many churches that were from that background have seen the need to train men properly for ministry and to pay them so that they can be set aside to do ministry, to devote themselves, devote themselves, which is what Paul tells Timothy and others that they're to do. Ministry, therefore, and mission obviously costs money. That's just reality, isn't it? And the New Testament wants Christians to live not in a fairy tale world, but in the real world.

It's the only world there is. And so the New Testament talks very frequently about money. It's very plain. It's very practical. Now, we British, we don't like talking about money like that in the church. Americans have no problem. They very easily talk about money, which is probably why they are much better givers as Christians than Christians in this country are.

[19:06] That's a simple fact. Their church is a far better resource. Their work is far better provided for. A simple fact. And I'm afraid, I have to say to you, that Paul is definitely with the Americans on this.

I don't take that as a blanket thing. I don't mean on every aspect. But on this thing, Paul's with the Americans. Because money talk is biblical. Because it's practical.

The ministry of the church must be paid for. Otherwise, it will not happen. There will be no growth. There will be no outreach. It won't happen properly at any rate. So there must be sufficient provision, both for full-time laborers in gospel work and for all the ancillary people, the other things as well that we need.

Administration, premises, facilities, all of these sorts of things. The maintenance of any established ministry needs provision. But it isn't all that we need to be doing because the New Testament also has a very great emphasis on what we might call extending the mission.

of the church. There's a constant need, isn't there, to extend the mission of the kingdom. If God is sending more workers into the harvest field in different places in answer to the prayers of His people, which is what He tells us to pray for, well, that too is going to need money and supplies and all kinds of provision.

[20:31] And again, that's a great emphasis in the New Testament on sending people out who are equipped and provided for for their campaign. And again, that's a great emphasis because they're seen as, well, like soldiers, soldiers of Christ.

And soldiers need proper equipment, don't they? Otherwise, well, there'll be major casualties.

There'll be a disaster. We've seen that sometimes in the past, haven't we? We're probably seeing it at the moment in the embarrassment about our own nation's armed forces, which the American

president calls toy ships and so on.

Well, most of our ships don't seem to be able to sail. That's not how the Christian church should think about their forces. And the New Testament tells us very plainly not to fall down in these areas, but rather to send people on their way fully equipped and provided for in every way.

In Romans 15, verse 24, Paul expects that the church in Rome, he says, will equip him. I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and be helped on my journey there by you.

In other words, you are going to provide what I need, the money, the equipment. You're going to equip me for my mission to Spain. 1 Corinthians 16 is another chapter all about money and giving, full of practical commands.

[21 : 48] And he says there in verse 6, help me on my way wherever I go. And again, he says, they're likewise to do exactly the same. For Timothy when he comes, it's your responsibility. Same in 2 Corinthians 1, verse 16.

They're to send him on his way to Judea. Now he doesn't mean there you to wave him off and say, bye Timothy. That's not what he's talking about. He's saying, bear the cost of his ministry trip to go there.

You, pay for it. Not just the Apostle Paul. It's not just Paul who's a monetary fanatic. Apostle John, 3 John, verse 6. He speaks about brothers that the church don't even know personally.

And he says, 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, the name of Christ. You don't know these brothers, but I'm telling you, you've got a responsibility to support their mission.

Supremely practical, isn't it? There must be sufficient provision for the gospel, both for the established ministries of the church, and for extending the ministry of the church.

[22 : 57] If there's no money, there'll be no mission. Well, that's obvious, isn't it? Fortunately, Almighty God is not short of money.

In fact, he's arranged already for massive amounts of cash to be easily accessible on earth for a mission. Isn't that terrific? In fact, do you know what he's done? He's already put it right into the bank accounts of his people.

How convenient is that? I mean, what more could God do? And so, Christ and his apostles tell us we are called to provide, as the apostle said, in a manner worthy of God.

The God who, as we sang about, and as Paul reminds the Corinthians of, though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, that we, by his poverty, might become rich with the riches of heaven itself.

The church's corporate provision for the gospel comes as every one of us shares in providing real gospel money.

[24 : 08] It's a practical matter. And we're told repeatedly we're to give sufficient provision for the gospel. I'm sure we're all encouraged by the many partnerships.

Well, we heard about so many, didn't we, in our annual meeting the other week. The many partnerships that we have in this country and many countries of the world for the gospel, but all of that is only possible because of what we give.

It's what we vow, isn't it, to God. It's what we vow to one another when we become partners, when we become members of the church fellowship here, to give a fitting proportion of our time, of our talents, but also of our money for the Lord's work.

But, you know, there are not a few people among us who break that vow from the very start who don't give or who give very little. And, that's wrong, isn't it, because it's breaking our vows to God. It wrongs God, but it also robs God. And it robs our brothers and sisters who are left picking up the part of the work that we should be doing.

[25 : 19] We're to play our part in real gospel giving. Not token giving, but real giving. Because giving is more than just sufficiently providing permission.

It is a practical matter, but it's much, much more than that, you see. And this is the second thing, as the Bible sees it, such giving is our great privilege. It really is a spiritual partnership in the gospel.

Turn over to Philippians chapter 1, and we'll look at some of the passages that we read there, because Philippians is a wonderful letter full of love and joy about Paul's deep, deep bond with that church in Macedonia.

It was a church that had real fellowship with him right from the very beginning, the very beginning of his European mission. And now Paul's writing to them from prison.

He's in Rome. And again, they were also the ones first to send money to him, to send provisions to him, to give him real practical help.

[26 : 22] They sent gifts, they sent food, they sent money, and so on. In a real practical way, in his trouble, they'd sent one of their leaders, Epaphroditus, to take that gift and to go and to be with him.

So no wonder he writes, expressing such thanks for such real and tangible fellowship. Verse 3 of chapter 1, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always, in every prayer of mine, for you, making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. If you go back all the way to Acts chapter 18, you'll read that when Paul was in Corinth, battling away in a tough place, Timothy and Silas arrived from the church in Philippi with a gift for him so that he could stop doing his daily work and have enough provision to give himself full time to gospel ministry.

Right from the start, they were with him in that. Verse 5, partnership in the gospel, should really be read partnership for the gospel. What that means is the tangible provision that they've given him that is supremely practical, but yet at the same time is deeply spiritual.

That word partnership, the word koinonia, it's our word communion, fellowship. It's used again in chapter 2, verse 1, the participation, the communion we share in the Spirit.

[27 : 54] Used in chapter 3, verse 10, of sharing, of having fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. And both Paul and the Philippians rejoiced, you see, in this deep bond of fellowship, this communion that they shared in Christ and for his Spirit, for the gospel.

it's deeply spiritual, this giving of money. And the whole letter makes that plain. But you see, in the Bible, of course, that which is spiritual is not at all at odds with what is practical.

Some Christians want to divorce the spiritual and the practical. Some folk are full of all sorts of pious talk about mission and God's mission and so on, but actually don't give much practical help at all.

But that's not the way in the Bible. The spiritual and the practical are united. And the Apostle Paul talks not just about prayer and love and a common purpose. There is all that all the way through Philippians.

But there's also, isn't there, very practical expression of that deep spiritual communion in terms of tangible provision for his own bodily needs, in terms of hard cash if you want to be crass about it.

[29 : 11] Look over to the end to chapter 4 verses 14 to 18 that we read. See how this wonderful spiritual language of the fellowship, the communion that unites their heart, see how that is visible in the practical partnership that cares also for his body.

It was kind of you to share, to have partnership, to have fellowship in my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church entered into partnership, into communion, into fellowship with me in giving and receiving except you.

Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Verse 18, I received full payment and more.

I'm well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, acceptable and pleasing to God.

Notice the words they shared, they partnered with him in his trouble. He's saying that they were involved directly partnering with him in his frontline ministry, even in his suffering in prison.

[30 : 26] How was that so? Well, verse 15, in giving and receiving resources. They sent help for his needs. Verse 17, they sent gifts. Verse 18, they sent payments to supply what he needs.

All kinds of tangible supports. Not just well-wishing, not just lovely cards saying, we're thinking about you, Paul. But inside the envelope was actual mullah, money, things he could use to buy things that he needed.

Not just sweet words. See, what he's saying is that giving to gospel work, funding gospel work, isn't just supporting gospel work, it's actually doing gospel work.

It's doing it. Just as prayer is not just supporting gospel proclamation, it's part of it, it's being involved in it. It is participating, having fellowship, communion, communion in it.

It's a spiritual communion, a fellowship with the work. What you give to, you are part of. That's why, of course, we don't want to give gospel money to things that are against the gospel or acting against what God wants for his church.

[31 : 43] You can't be in partnership with that which is destructive to the gospel. And that's why, look at verse 18. Doing such, giving in a tangible way to help Paul to help gospel partners like him, especially when they're suffering, is a direct offering to God.

It's a fragrant offering. It's a sacrifice that is pleasing and acceptable to God. And Paul often talks about his own gospel preaching in exactly those same terms.

Again, in Romans 15, verse 16, he talks about his preaching, his proclamation of the gospel, his evangelism, as being a priestly service to God, an acceptable offering to God.

So giving to support real gospel work is also exactly that, a fragrant offering to God because it is part of that work.

It's not just supporting it, it's doing it. Somebody's put it this way, paying for gospel work isn't like being supporters on the sidelines cheering on the team on the pitch, it's being a player on the pitch yourself.

[32 : 53] Well, that's right, isn't it? If praying is part of a ministry of gospel proclamation, then so is paying. It's a communion, says Paul, it's a fellowship of partnering in Christ's mission of grace to the world.

And Paul honors that, he commends that. He commends the Philippians here to themselves, but he also commends the Philippian church to others. In fact, in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, no need to turn it up, but let me read to you from 2 Corinthians chapter 8 because he gives the example of the Philippians to the church in Corinth.

Listen to what he says. We want you to know, brothers, you in Corinth, further along the coast, we want you to know about the grace of God that is being given among the churches in Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God for us. They gave according to their means, they gave beyond their means of their own free will.

[34 : 25] They were begging earnestly for the sheer privilege, Paul says, of serving the saints because they understood that by doing that they were giving gladly also of their hearts to God.

The Philippians saw this giving to gospel work as a privilege. As well as being supremely practical and necessary for the church's mission in the world, it really is a spiritual partnership in gospel work. It's being invited to be part of the joy of making Christ known. It's hard to imagine is that there could be something greater than being involved in that glorious eternal work of Christ's kingdom.

And it's something that we're all called to be involved in. Even if we're not all called to be frontline workers like Paul. Or even if we're not able to be in frontline service in the way perhaps that we used to be because of age, because of ill health, because of other sorts of things.

Prayer can be done when perhaps you can't do very much else anymore, but so can giving. Now not many of us have got substantial wealth, but some of us do.

[35 : 42] And when we do have wealth, when we do have possessions, God has given us that not primarily for our earthly comfort, for our ease.

Nothing wrong with that. But He has given it to us so that we are enabled to be part of His wonderful gospel mission to the world. Because, well, the widow's mite, though it is pleasing to God, won't run the church, will it?

That's just practical sense. But also because it is this real spiritual partnership that God has called us to play that role. And God has called some people to play the role of being extremely large and generous benefactors for the church's mission.

And where people have done that, sometimes amazing fruit has been the result. You can read stories of many of the great ministries through history. You know the great names, but what you often don't know is the people behind them who funded those things and made them possible.

I've seen that myself personally when I was working for years at the Proclamation Trust in London. That was formed because at some anniversary of Dick Lucas' mission, I think it was perhaps his 25 years at St. Helens, he said, well I don't want a gold watch, I don't want a new clock, I don't want something like that, let's start a trust that will be devoted to training more gospel workers to preach and proclaim the scriptures.

[37 : 10] And wealthy men gave substantial amounts of money to establish the work of the Proclamation Trust. And later on somebody gave a huge amount of money that was given from selling property to enable a building to be bought so that the Cornhill Training Course in London could have a home.

Twenty years ago when we started the Cornhill Training Course here, again, very generous people gave money so that Cornhill here could be established. And without them none of that would have happened.

There would have been no Edward Lobb, no Bob Fyle working there, none of those who are there now. No 300 and some students trained over these last 20 years.

no one being trained there at the moment because there wouldn't have been any of that real provision that enabled these things to happen.

And I might just say for the record that all of that money nearly came from English men who were far more willing to give money for the vision for the gospel in Scotland than anybody in Scotland was willing to give.

[38 : 15] So let there be no scorning of the English or any of this horrible anti-Englishness that we have I'm afraid so much in our nation today.

These are the English who largely pay for most of our public services too and then get the blame for everything else. So save that for the six nations it's okay then. But that's just one example I could give many many others where just a few folk a very significant means have made a huge huge difference to the work of the kingdom.

I was speaking a few weeks ago about the ministry of William Still and in those days back in the 1960s there were two wealthy American widows who came across that work through contacts with somebody who was at a conference in Germany where my father was speaking at a conference at an American base and one of the chaplains there was so taken by the ministry he wanted to know more about it and get some of the materials published and he knew these two wealthy women in America he introduced them to my father to William Still and they provided what was in those days the latest new technology which was reel-to-reel tape recorders so that their preaching could be recorded and sent all over the world and later they provided secretarial help so that Bible reading notes could be printed and the Bible reading notes that we have many of you take every day from our website now were produced and all of that happened because those two women saw that this was a ministry worth promoting and worth supporting financially and through that an enormous impact was had all around the world these are just a few examples

I've told you but isn't that an inspiration of the involvement that we can have through what God has given us and we should be thinking like that friends what can I do with what God has given me how can I build not treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal and ultimately it's all left behind but treasures in heaven how can I invest what God has given me on earth so that what is paid as dividends from that will last for eternity not just what will be spent by my heirs when I die or worse because your heirs will get very little of it grabbed by the chancellor to waste and profligate things many people think death duties are a great scandal but you know here's the great thing there's no need for Christians ever to pay death duties because any money that you leave to gospel work because it's charitable is removed from your estate no tax far better if you've got that position far better to leave everything above your tax threshold to the work of the gospel instead of 40% of it or more going to the government and you don't need that much money these days this is not for billionaires they don't pay any of that they've got clever accountants who can avoid it but if you have a house modest savings well beyond a small amount these days nearly half of it is going to the chancellor how much better no matter how much we have or how little we have how much better to be able to continue gospel work isn't that a great thought to be a partner in gospel mission even after your death because you've left money to gospel work to go on proclaiming the message that's just one example isn't it of death bringing forth life but of course that kind of thinking doesn't suddenly come upon you the minute before you die that kind of thinking is shaped by a life lived now by the privilege of being involved in the mission that God enables us to do through what we have and it's such a blessing when Christian people do live that way and do think that way as a church we've been blessed greatly when people have sometimes left generous legacies like that to share in the work of the gospel when they don't need their earthly houses anymore the reason that we can have so many trainees in the church today is because we can house them in properties some of which we were able to purchase because people left us their

houses or left us money for ongoing gospel work some of it's come from other equally generous people elsewhere who wanted to support the training of gospel workers who trusted us to do that thought we were able to do it and we thank God for that of course we do and I remember speaking to somebody

I've forgotten who it is now but somebody was telling me that they'd been making their will and they found it just so liberating to know that the work of Christ when they die is going to be greatly blessed financially so it's almost encouraging me to think I'll be quite glad to die soon I don't think you have to think quite that way but it's a great spirit isn't it that's Macedonian church giving that's the kind of attitude that Paul is encouraging and is writing to other churches about and saying look this is your example be like Macedonian Christians begging earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints and of course as I said we're not to leave generosity until we die no it's a blessing in life to live that way to be liberated for generosity to know that we have the real privilege of that spiritual partnership in the gospel providing for real gospel ministry is participating in real gospel ministry well let me conclude perhaps you feel it's a little bit unseemly for me to be talking so frankly about money and giving like this in church well perhaps it is but don't blame me blame Jesus and his apostles because they talk about it a lot if you read the New Testament it's they who bring it up it's they who talk about it it's they who write about it and they do it very frequently and they do it very bluntly and they do so because there is a real practical need gospel mission needs sufficient provision for real gospel workers but even more importantly they do it because it's also a real privilege a truly spiritual partnership that we are all privileged to be given the opportunity to share in whether our reserves are great or whether they're small it doesn't matter because paying for gospel work like praying for gospel work is participating in gospel work and that is the work that is close to the heart of our great savior the lord Jesus Christ what could be a greater privilege for his people a greater joy than to be brought in in real fellowship partnership communion with our lord Jesus Christ in his mission for the world it can be no greater joy and we've known that joy so many times as a congregation I'm sure as we've we've participated in giving to all kinds of ministries all kinds of projects here and abroad we love it don't we when we have the opportunity in our Christmas offerings and our Easter offerings especially and to think of some of these things that we are partnering we're part of well there's no greater joy let me leave you with Paul's encouraging words to cheerful givers in Corinth you will be enriched in every way for all generosity which through us will produce thanksgiving to God for the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but it is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God so friends may that be true of us as a fellowship as we seek to give joyfully and gladly of what God has given us to participate to share in communion with his great purpose for this world let's pray heavenly Father we bow before you our great God and savior who being rich nevertheless became poor for our sakes that we through all that you have done for us might know the riches of eternal joy in our Lord Jesus Christ

[47 : 06] so Lord may his spirit the spirit which so animated the church in Macedonia may that spirit fill our hearts also we pray as a fellowship that we should live giving gladly and joyfully and thereby sharing communion participating in the glorious unstoppable everlasting work of your kingdom of joy and peace so help us we pray for Jesus sake Amen