

The Light of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you Derek for the opportunity to speak tonight. People kept asking me, are you preaching this evening? And the answer is I don't really know. It's supposed to be a kind of cross between a sermon, a church planting talk and an explanation of cornerstone.

So we'll see how it goes. I do want to say thank you very much. I haven't worshipped St. Columbus for a long time, certainly not since before the pandemic. And just singing there with you guys tonight, I have so many great memories of God working in my life here. So quite moved to be back, Don and Derek and many of the rest of you who have been such good friends to me and to the cornerstone crew over the last decade almost. So we are indebted for your friendship, your prayers, your encouragement for sending us out, for cheering us on, cheering us up sometimes and looking after us. I've really struck that Derek was talking with the children earlier about God making something out of nothing.

And Anna Lauren picked up the same phrase about cornerstone that really God made something out of nothing. And that is our story. It's a story of our own absolute frailty and weakness and just repeated stories of God's incredible kindness and generosity. There was about a 12 of us who lived in EH 10 in Brunnsfield in Morningside who got together, prayed together, talked together, plotted together and started cornerstone. We met in our flat just beside Brunnsfield links initially until there was about 30 of us meeting on a Sunday morning in the home and then the old Schoolhouse Christian Fellowship kindly gifted us an incredible building right opposite Waitrose, the most perfect Morningside location imaginable. And there we've been since we launched in 2014. Cornerstone now is a congregation probably of about 150 people roughly. It's hard to sort of know exactly. And one of the things that you learn as you start churches and lead churches is that you've no idea what you're doing but thankfully the Lord does. And one of the things we never anticipated was that one very lovely Colombian woman called Bernie who lives in Morningside started bringing along other Latino people to our church. And so Spanish ministry, Latino ministry, the Latino community has become a really big part of our mission at Cornerstone. And so once a month we have a bilingual service where we sing and speak in English and in Spanish.

Once a month we have a service that's purely 100% all in Spanish. And that's just an incredible gift to us and we have a real indebtedness still to St. Columbus because Israel who's part of the St. Columbus church family helps lead that Latino ministry too. One of the things we wanted to do as we started Cornerstone was to be a church that planted churches and we're going to say more about that in a little while. But we've always picked up from St.

Columbus a training ethos so we've sent off Allie and Haddington work to Cornerstone for a while before he went and planted there Chris Davidson who's now in Inverness. And there are other people training up for ministry with us right now. Jeff is here tonight and Jeff is hopefully going to off to plant a church in Fife. You may think that's a redundant process in the most godly and wonderful part of the Scottish nation but anyway we are going to hopefully send Jeff to plant a church in Fife this summer. So our story is just of a God who's kept providing all along in every way and it's a story of God's mercy. So I thought I would just look at the story of the Good Samaritan as well because that's another story that's based around mercy. We're celebrating tonight God's mercy to us as a church at Cornerstone. Your mercy towards us in our needs. And we really want to acknowledge above everything else that God has been our help. This part of Luke's Gospel is about mission. God has sent his son Jesus into the world to seek and to save the lost. And now the son of God is sending his people into the world to bring the good news of the kingdom.

[4 : 57] And that's as true tonight for you and me as it was back then when Jesus sent out the 72 earlier in Luke chapter 10. He's still ascending God, sending you and I out on mission to bring the good news of God to new people, to new generations, to new cultures. It's a great vision that God

gave to Derrick and the leadership of St. Columbus. That they would be a church that sent people out into the city on mission for the sake of the kingdom. And St. Columbus now is a great story to tell of sending out people to start new churches. One of the guys who mentored me as I thought about church planting used to talk about different kinds of churches as lighthouses and streetlights. And he said a lighthouse is a larger church usually in the center of a city and it's got a big powerful light that it can sort of shine around the city bringing the light of the gospel. And streetlights are smaller. They're not as bright. They don't shine quite so widely. But we need lots of lighthouses and we need lots of little streetlights scattered through the city as well to light up the city for those who live there. And when I think about it St. Columbus is like a lighthouse in the center of the city. And what it's done in Cornerstone and with Haddington and

S Valley and now Winchbury is it's planting streetlights across the city to light up the city with the good news of Jesus Christ. Part of what I do is work for the free church of Scotland as a denomination leading a project called 30 by 30 which is the cunningly inventive way of saying that we're going to plant 30 churches by 2030. And the St. Columbus and Cornerstone are part of that process. And again we just want to see the light of the gospel spreading out, lighting up right across our nation. Churches are good things. We did a survey about 2014, we did a survey of Scotland and 82% of Scots in 2014 thought that a church was a favorable thing for a community to have. Most of them didn't want to go to the church but they did think that church was a nice thing for a community to have. And it's true, churches bring so many blessings into a community in the way that they serve, care, love and help people as well as in the good news proclamation that's at the heart of who we are. So what we really want to do in the life of the church of course is to share the light of Jesus with people who are really determined to live their life without God, who really see no need for

God in their lives. And I was quite interested in the Good Samaritan because he's a man, or the story of the Good Samaritan is about a man who really doesn't think that he needs God in his life. He's religious but he doesn't have much time for God. He's an expert in the laws of Israel, the Mosaic Law and he stands up to teach, to test Jesus and he says, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And the clue is in the question, isn't it? What do I have to do to get eternal life? So he's a man who is religious, he's spiritual, he's interested in questions of eternity and life after death and he somehow thinks that that's got everything to do with him and not very much to do with God. He thinks that it's what he does that's going to make the difference. His life, his efforts, his actions, they're the things that will make sure that he gets himself the future that he wants. So he's got the irony with which you may be familiar of somebody who's at church a lot, is religious, but actually uses that to hide from their need of God. His approach to religion is one that avoids God rather than relies on God. Tell me, he says, Jesus, what I need to do to make all this happen? And so often, of course, you and I will approach God and approach religion the same way as if everything hangs on what we do and how we've lived and how we can balance out the bad with the good. Even those of us who would confess ourselves to be Christians tonight may often live without any real sense that we need God in our lives.

No real felt dependence on Jesus Christ. And the way that Jesus responds to the man is to try and reveal to him that without God in his life, he has no hope. Jesus tells him this, he says, what's written in the law? And the man is chuffed because of course he's an expert in the law. Love the Lord your God, he says, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. You've answered correctly, Jesus replied, do all that and you will live. And the man then says, well, who is my neighbor because he wants to justify himself? And again, the word justify is really important because it's about him trying to work out how he makes his life right with God, how he can ensure his acceptance with God. And he wants to do that by limiting the idea of neighbor. So love your neighbor, he tries to shrink down to a small group of people as he possibly will. And so Jesus tells him the story with which you may be familiar. It's quite a proverbial kind of story even in our culture, the story of the Good Samaritan, a man who's been beaten and robbed and is lying on the edge of the road. And a priest comes by, he's probably been up in Jerusalem leading worship in the temple, sacrificing offerings to God. And now he's on his way back and he sees the injured man on the road and he swears to avoid him.

And then comes a Levite, somebody from the tribe of Levite again, somebody with great religious tradition and heritage. And they see the injured man and they also avoid him and finally becomes, comes along the Samaritan. A suspicious figure, a despised figure even in that cultural setting.

Somebody who is viewed as an antagonist, as an enemy, as a lesser kind of human in every way. And it's this Samaritan of course who goes and helps the man in need and shows them such incredible kindness. We read about the Samaritan, he sees the man and he takes pity on him, he has compassion. The word there, the languages of just been absolutely torn apart inside as he sees the suffering of the man on the road. He goes to him, he bandages his wounds, he's gentle and loving, he pours oil on him and wine. And then he puts the man on his own donkey, takes him to a place of safety and a place of recovery and an inn and pays generously for the man to stay there, saying, look after him and I'll come back and I'll pay you anything I owe when I return. Jesus says, which of the three was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?

[13 : 39] And the expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him and Jesus says, go and do light wise. So Jesus is showing the man, isn't he, the expert in the law that his sort of shallow grab at justifying his life before God isn't going to work. Because what the telling of the story does is it reveals that at the depths of our being, we can never live up to be the person that God has called us to be. We will never find a way in our own strength to love God as we should or to love our neighbour as we should. We'll never find it within ourselves to answer everything that God asks of us. And so Jesus is trying to say to the man, you can't justify yourself. You can't make your own life right before

God. And that's the same thing that Jesus wants to say to us tonight. If you're relying on yourself to make your life right with God, you're always going to come short and you're going to crush yourself with the effort and you're probably going to crush everybody else around you. So if we can't make our own lives right with God, what hope do we have? Who will be the one who has mercy on us? Who's the one who's going to cross the road to find us in our woundedness and gently heal our wounds and take us to a place where we are able to recover and be restored? And of course the answer to that is that Jesus is to us as the Samaritan was to the man on the road. Jesus sees us in our need, our brokenness and our lostness. And instead of turning away, He has moved. He has moved to weep for you, to cross over to you, to reach out for you and to heal you. To lift you up, to wash you clean and to make you whole again. Jesus is the perfect neighbour who'll never turn away from you in your need. And it's that experience of the mercy of Jesus. It's the way that Jesus is willing to neighbour us that makes us want to learn to be a better neighbour to others. It's experiencing the mercy of Jesus that forms mercy in our hearts.

And it's that mercy that makes us look across the city and see the people in need and grieve for them and weep for them and pray for them and cross the road for them to tell them that there's good news not in us but in the Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us. And that's all that church planting is really about, is saying we want our neighbours to know all about Jesus Christ. We want to love them well. We want to show them the goodness of Christ. As we think about the story of the Good Samaritan, I want to say to myself and to you, God is calling us to a life of mercy. Mercy brings courage, brings gentleness, it brings generosity. I think we see that in the Good Samaritan, don't we? The other two guys were probably afraid that whoever kicked a life out of the guy in the road that if they stopped to help they would get the same kind of doing. And so it takes courage to stop and see the people in trouble and give them time. He's incredibly gentle with a man, isn't he? So, so careful with him. And he's also amazingly generous. And to show the mercy of Jesus in our culture does take courage to stand out, to be different, to take personal risks and make personal sacrifices. And if you're going to be involved in church planting and Christian mission locally or anywhere else in the world, you're going to have to give up stuff and have courage to do things differently. But you're also going to need to be like Jesus, full of mercy and compassion and gentleness and generosity.

And one of the things that we really want to happen as we plant churches is for God to bring all different kinds of people together and unify them through the gospel. You know, at the heart of the story of the Good Samaritan is the story of ethnic and religious and racial dislike or hatred, deep seated contempt across cultures. And Jesus is showing how love bridges those differences and divisions. And we live in a culture that is deeply divided and where differences is exaggerated to create conflict. And the gospel gives us a way to cross differences and create unity. Derek was sort of talking at the beginning about a little bit of Pentecostalism.

And we love when we, when at Cornerstone, we sing in different languages together, we love it. Because it's such a beautiful expression of what the gospel does to heal differences, heal division and create a new humanity, one people out of the life of Jesus Christ. And so as we go out, we're

going to meet lots of different kinds of people. And we want to bring all these different kinds of people together and help them find new life in new community through the gospel. And if the story of the Good Samaritan is teaching us something, it's teaching us we depend utterly on God and all of this. The work of the gospel, the work of salvation is His work. And so as we plant churches, we depend completely and utterly on the Lord Jesus Christ. There's no way that I can create a community of light. There's no way that you can create a community of light. But God is the one who creates communities of light, who makes light shine in the darkness. So think about how you can be involved in the mission of God, in your neighborhood, in your family, in your community and in church planting. It's very nice to see. I was about to say the next batch of victims, but the winch for a people, how do I describe you? The next guinea pigs, the next storm troopers, whatever you're going to be. But it's great to have some of the winch for people here because that church gets started. At Cornerstone, we're thinking and praying and trying to figure out about a church plant in Gilmerton in the south of Edinburgh. We want to see, and part of the 30 by 30 plan is another 10 congregations in Edinburgh before 2030. So it's quite a lot to do. We've got a couple on one underway in Winchborough, one in my head about Gilmerton, and beyond that, nothing. And I can't be seen to fail in this plan. So it's very important.

[22 : 36] I think this is the great thing when we started off there. We all knew if God doesn't do this, it doesn't happen. And it's always good to be standing in a place looking forward, thinking if God doesn't do this, it won't happen. And certainly as we look forward to planting another 10 churches in the city, if God doesn't do it, it won't happen. But what can we do?

Well, we can certainly be praying and do keep praying about this because we need a work of the Spirit. We can give money. It costs money to plant in Winchborough or Gilmerton or wherever else. So keep giving. And I know that many of you give extremely generously. And keep going. Sorry, Derek, but I might encourage some of your people to go out and plant a church somewhere else. But yeah, going. As you think about your life and where God might put you, then we have to be ready to go where God will use us for His glory. So that's a kind of half sermon, half memoir, half church planting talk. So it's 1.5 of a talk and I'll finish.

Right. We are just I'll say a short prayer and then we'll sing our last song and that's it. Father, we want to say thank you for the mercy of the gospel. We have no hope without it for ourselves or for our city or for the world we live in. But thank you that you saw us in our need and you had compassion and you came to us and you rescued us. And please, Father in heaven, put that same heart of mercy in us this evening that we will have compassion in our city, that we will weep for it and that we will long for its salvation and that we will do all we can to bring the good news of Jesus Christ. Thank you for this church, for Derek and the other leaders, for the eldership, for all who've led with such vision and generosity to spread the gospel. And we pray that we would see so much more good coming from this church in the future. In Jesus' name, amen.