

# Tenth for Strength

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I want to look back for a little while. I'm going to split the service into two or the sermon into two today and I want to look initially at the grace of giving and say one or two things in general terms about that and then look a little bit more directly at our needs and what we're asking about today. I think this marks a very significant and important day in the life of the congregation. I think we're at a stage where we're giving thanks to God for his goodness and grace and for his past blessings so that in 2001 when we met together here there was probably about 30 of us in the church and we're grateful to God for the way that he has blessed us and he's been with us and almost sometimes despite ourselves that he has poured out his blessing on us. But it's an important day as well because we're looking forward. We're looking forward to the work of the gospel progressing and developing we hope and pray. We're trusting in God and there's a little bit we talk a lot about godly fear but there's certainly fear as we trust him. By that I don't mean reverence and all which I hope there is as well but also just that sense of moving forward into the unknown and developing the gospel work here and as we seek to plant churches in the city also and the commitment of that and the cost of that in lives and in time and in energy and in finances and in everything else. So we recognise from that point of view it's a really important day but it's also I think an important day because we're embarking on a week of prayer and we've done this separately in the church over the last number of years and we hope and pray that that will be for us not a ritualistic week. I also hope and pray that it will not be something that you will leave to others.

We believe in this church very much in the power of prayer probably not enough but we do believe in the power of prayer and we believe in praying together. We believe that's important, we believe that's biblical, we believe that's what the New Testament church did that they came together and they prayed. It's a great benefit and a great value in praying alone but there's a huge benefit also in praying together and in sharing prayer and in sharing testimony and in needs together in prayer. So corporate prayer for us not just in city groups but as we gather together is really important to us and maybe you're new to the congregation maybe you come from a different church where that hasn't been the emphasis but that hasn't been important. You've never thought of coming together and worshipping in prayer with the people of God and we would really encourage you. It's so encouraging and uplifting for us to pray together and to believe in the corporate sense of praying at God's will. But I want to look briefly for the first half of this grace of giving and primarily look at the motivation behind it and look at grace itself because a very real biblical truth for us is that grace should transform us. That's a fundamental truth of the gospel for us. We believe that Jesus Christ who comes into our hearts and lives takes us and he uses the illustrations himself from death to life. He takes us from that position of not knowing him to knowing him and loving him and it can't be more radical than that that we come under his living power and living grace and grace should in our lives transform us. Now we see that radically in the story that we read. It's a great picture isn't it because it's very immediate and it's very clear and it's very simple to us.

Here's the case and the case is radically and quickly changed by grace. Grace changes him from the inside out. His whole nature is changed. The thing that was most important to him is radically changed and radically different. Poor as the case was isolated. Money was his idol. Wealth and riches is what mattered to him. He would sell his granny in order to have money for himself. He sold his kind of cultural loyalties in order to make money, to cheat and to lie in order to get more money. So he was wealthy. He was hugely rich. He was miserable in his life. Small man, big bank account, miserable, shrunken heart as he abandoned the reality of who he was. But the claims of Jesus Christ and we don't know how they came about for him. He must have heard, would have potentially heard them as he collected the taxes of this man, Jesus Christ. What we find in this story is irresistibly drawn to Jesus. There's a great sense isn't there which he forgoes all, he abandons

everything, forgoes all dignity and his lack of popularity as it would have been. He climbs a tree in order to be seen by Jesus in this well known children's story that we know and we sing about, or we did used to sing about it in Sunday schools. He was irresistibly drawn and was willing to make a fool of himself to hear the message of Jesus Christ. What he heard that day was something far greater than he could have expected or that day itself was far greater than he could have expected because not only did he get to see Jesus as

Jesus passed by but Jesus stopped directly at him and spoke to him. For us that's not a shock because we know this story like the back of our hands but for Jesus that was for Zacchaeus that must have been a great shock. As Jesus Christ who is popular and who is well known and who had crowds around him stops at the base of his tree and tells him, Zacchaeus I need to come to your house today. What a great shock that must have been for Zacchaeus but a beautiful and exciting and great shock for him. And we're not told the conversation, it's like it goes behind closed doors. There's no media conference, there's no expectation of what is said but we do know that Jesus says about Zacchaeus that salvation has come to his house this day. He understands and he knows and he accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and as his God and he knows forgiveness and he knows joy and he knows, what does he know? He knows riches. He senses all kinds of different riches, spiritual riches that he'd never had before in his small shrunken prune-like life which was devoid of real living and real joy and real fellowship and all of a sudden he sees what he's been missing and he values true riches for the first time and he knows what he has found. Immediately he opens his home to Jesus, may well be that others came in, we know that Matthew the tax collector did the same Levi that when he became, when Christ met him and transformed to such, he immediately opened his home to all his friends and all his fellow tax collectors and Jesus went and sat with him and ate with him and more than that he made reparation as Zacchaeus here, he gives back, he begins to just let the money flow out of his life because his priorities have changed and he sees things differently and he understands what life is about. Now Zacchaeus lived a long time before the famous missionary Jim

Elliott but Jim Elliott says as well, doesn't it, in a very famous phrase which I'm sure many of you have heard, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. That's exactly where Zacchaeus was and that's exactly what he recognized and knew. So in many ways for us in our lives and beyond this gift day, the challenge for us is what kind of givers are we going to be? I want to broaden that out to just really about our whole life, what kind of givers are we? In other words, when we see Zacchaeus and the value he immediately was able to place on grace and on the change that grace made to him, the question is for us, what value in our lives do we put onto grace and onto forgiveness and onto rescue and onto the change and the transformation that Jesus makes in our lives and onto the freedom of being forgiven and redeemed by Jesus Christ. [ 9 : 24 ] You know what, and I think what I think for many of us who are brought up in the church, who are brought up not really knowing anything other than God's grace and goodness and maybe our lives and hearts, it's much harder. I think for us and it's, if you can ever talk about the disadvantage of being brought up in a covenant home, and I don't think you really can, you'd be very careful with language, but one of the challenges is that it's easy for us to take for granted what we have and it's easy for us to cheapen it and not to value it and not to allow it to mould and transform and change the way we are. So it's, a lot of today is really looking at our own hearts about the motivations that we have and the desires we have and the understandings that we have about grace and our own heart.

The first question I want to ask is about our motivation to ask in Romans 8, it's actually I think Romans 8 32 not 42, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things. So I want to just start and speak about seven days of prayer for a moment because that corporate prayer life is very important to us and when we come together to ask and to pray together, it's because we recognise our Father and we recognise that he has already not spared his son and therefore when we come to him and ask him, he will graciously give us what we need, give us all that we need and that is what we're looking for. We're looking as we come together corporately to recognise that as a congregation we can't do anything of any lasting spiritual value unless Jesus Christ is at the heart of it, unless the Holy Spirit is the one in whom we rely on. We're going to be praying for renewal and revival, we're going to meet at 7 o'clock tonight as I can introduce today one and then 7 o'clock every morning this week without the extra hour of sleep and at 12 noon and then at 7 in the evening. Now no, everyone's not going to

make everything but between us is a big group that we can come together and that we can pray, we're going to pray for different things every day, we're also going to pray every day for three of our friends. I hope we can pray for more, we're not limiting it to three friends, I hope you've got more than three friends who aren't Christians or family members that you plead for, that you long for, that you would love to see coming to Christ and you'll not just do it in the privacy of your own heart, you'll do it with others and they will see your burden and they will share your burden and we will share that burden together for Jesus Christ and for the cause of Jesus

Christ and the gospel because that's what we do because we're a family and it seems strange, I mentioned this last night to the elders and deacons, it would seem strange, isn't it, that we have a family gathering that we meet together and we don't pray, we don't include our heavenly Father in our times together and that we would just pray only privately to our Father when we're a family, that we do these things together and alone because we recognise the significance and importance and the willingness of God says it here, He has not spared His own Son and so we know He's graciously given Him up for us all, therefore we can go to Him with our requests and we can ask Him for His help and for that He would change that, we're living a hard, secular, dark day and it seems difficult for us to understand how people will become Christians, we know we need God, in any day we need God but we recognise and need to show Him that, that we recognise we need Him to soften and break the hearts of those that we plead for and long for to come to faith.

As a story told about Alexander the Great, those of you who are in the congregation know I'm not very good at stories, I usually get the punchline wrong and something very simple, I hope you'll get the point of it and I hope I remember it because Alexander the Great was known for his wealth and his, I don't know if he was known for his generosity but he was certainly known for his wealth and he had a general who was very loyal to him and who served him over many years whose daughter was getting married and the general didn't have enough money for the wedding so he went to Alexander the Great and said, look I have served you for many years and my daughter is getting married, I don't have enough money to pay for the wedding, will you help me, can I come and ask you for the money so that this wedding can go ahead, Alexander the Great said yes, of course you can, go to my treasurer and ask what you need and I'll make sure that he pays it.

So this general goes to the treasurer and he asks for an inordinate amount of money, way beyond whatever anyone has ever asked of Alexander the Great before and way beyond what you think you would ever need for the marriage of your daughter and the treasurer says well look I can't, I can't sign this out, I'll need to speak to the great leader and see what he thinks and he did so in fear and trepidation and he goes to Alexander the Great and says look, your general who you asked to come, he's come and he's asked for this amount of money and Alexander the Great smiles and he laughs and he says yes of course, give him that amount, give him it all and the treasurer says why, why and he says because this general is great for me because this general recognises that I have the resources that I'm rich and he also recognises that I'm generous and so the same is true of the way we approach God and the meagerness sometimes with which we ask of God because we think he's mean, because we think he's not interested, because we think he won't care and won't give to us.

[ 15 : 53 ] Now someone was praying last night and saying that 90,000 which is kind of what we're looking for in terms of the building, it's not a great deal to God, of course it's not, it's a great deal to us, fear fills us with fear and trepidation but God is a willing God, he's a loving God, he's a caring God and we are to be motivated to ask him for our friends, for their salvation, for the amazing reality of them coming to know Christ and also for the resources that we need, will he not graciously give us all things, so we should be motivated to ask and then we should also be motivated to serve, sorry to share the gospel through our lives, broadening it again beyond in a sense a simple gift day because we loved you so much, we were delighted Paul says to the church in Thessalonica to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, is that a great thing, in fact you really can't do the opposite, you can't share the gospel with people meaningfully and significantly without sharing your life because our lives are to be a reflection of the gospel, so before any financial sacrifice that we can ask of anyone here today and of ourselves, the giving of our lives to God in the gospel to others is our response to his glorious grace, to his outstanding provision to the fact that he has done this for us and we have eternal life in him, so we look for our lives to be lives of generous obedience, generous grace in our homes, in our hearts, in our relationships, in our conversations that we share the gospel through our lives, just like 200 people here, think of the power of grace and testimony of you all in your lives as we are motivated to share the gospel with

his grace and with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, think of it as the 200 of us plead small members but we plead for lost souls and plead for renewal and rebirth, what a motivation that is for us, that we go from here sharing the gospel through our lives and also of course we are looking today that we are motivated to share our wealth and maybe some of us don't feel that that is an adequate description of our financial situation and it may well not be but nonetheless we are asked to recognise the motive behind that.

Second Corinthians 8 verse 9 says, I say this not as a command but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that for though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty, oh there we go, might become rich.

So we are motivated to share our wealth, that is the story of Zacchaeus isn't it, that is the theology behind Zacchaeus' conversion, because even if he didn't truly understand that point, he would have come to understand that Jesus Christ though he was rich, for our sake he became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich.

And Zacchaeus understood that, he had been looking for riches in the wrong place, he had been looking for the financial security that actually doesn't go with us beyond the grave and even when it does will not give us the security in life that we need which is that relationship with God in Christ and the riches, spiritual riches of grace that he gives to us.

And as he shares himself in costly, extravagant, abandoned love and commitment to us, divine largesse, then we begin to appreciate that we can share with him from our financial abilities and gifts in a generous and blessed way.

[ 20 : 41 ] So in a sense this is an appeal day and you know I sit uncomfortably with appeal, be linked for money in the church but I recognise it's important and part of our wider theological understanding of who we are.

It's much bigger today than in a sense in an appeal day, it's about understanding the law of grace that makes us a generous people, just generous, you know, generous in forgiving, generous in the way we treat other people, generous with our time, generous with every gift that we've given and including our money so that we hold on to it loosely and as you know the New Testament would speak of that we give sacrificially and cheerfully and regularly and proportionately.

So what kind of givers are we? That's one of the questions, there's an interesting illustration that I read this week about the kind of givers that we could be, the kind of material that we could be likened to in order to get something out of.

And there was three illustrations, one was flint, which you need to hammer to get anything out of and even when you do it chips and sparks. Or we can be sponges which if they're squeezed and pressured you will get more out of them but it will be a great cost and they'll lose their shape and they'll eventually rip up and die.

Or we can be honeycomb givers which are overflowing with their own sweetness. That's nice isn't it? There's a recognition there of who we are and another New Testament illustration that's similar to Zacchaeus would be the poor widow, you know Jesus says she put in more than all of them, so it's not about amounts of money, it's about giving as a honeycomb giver.

[ 22 : 39 ] You know it's recognising that we give because it flows out of us because we understand what we've been given. For they, Jesus said all contributed out of their abundance but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

A true honeycomb giver and I guess that's what we're looking for in our lives to be that kind of person. Now we're going to sing together before moving on to just a little bit more practical few words about giving and we're going to sing, this is a Sam, Sam 37 but it's the praise version of the Sam, it's not the version that we normally sing, we still before the Lord and patients learn to wait and never fret crime succeeds and some grow rich and great for jealous discontent tends only to destroy the meek who look to God their Lord a kingdom shall enjoy and it's speaking about finding our wealth and our peace in God rather than in riches.

I just want to make a couple of points here at this point before we sing and take up an offering and the first is about the gift day that this is a one off gift day might stretch but the actual the day is focused on today and then also a little bit very briefly about tenth or strength which is more than about today so I'm sorry you're really getting a double whammy today I don't often preach about these things or speak about them maybe we don't say enough there's a sense of embarrassment maybe that isn't shouldn't be when we think of Jesus Christ and what he's done but nonetheless

today is a gift day and part of that is for the building which obviously we have a special appeal for and a challenge to raise funds for now I have to confess that we probably got some extra bad news that we didn't really let you know because I didn't really think about it because I'm not very good with figures but it is that we've talked and BBC Scotland had this picture of the church which is a very beautiful picture thanks Robin and an article about the church and the building and the appeal being raised looking to raise 90,000 we've got about 200,000 we need to raise 90,000 but what we haven't said is that within that 200,000 that we've raised we've budgeted for this gift day already giving us 16,000 okay so only if we get more than 16,000 will that go towards the 90,000 shortfall no pressure okay but I just thought I'd let you know that that is part of that was we budgeted for this gift day and we budgeted it maybe not on the day but in the days that I had that the congregation would give an extra 16,000 towards this and that the wider church and the wider Christian community which we hope and I hope you will pray will support us because we are looking for God to work in people's hearts to give and support this the work of the church but I want to say just briefly is that it's not we are not engaged and I hope you appreciate this we're not engaged in a vanity project we absolutely believe that we're doing what is necessary and important God has given us this old lady of a building and she's in a very prominent place in the city there's not many old buildings churches like this in the city centre which still are living churches that preach the gospel there are some but not many and we hope and pray that it will be a centre for gospel work in the capital city here and we do need to upgrade her for the next 30 or 40 years it's not a short-term project it's hopefully as we grow that we will find that the church becomes church space becomes more flexible that there is more space for us here we're a bit squashed downstairs now and when we raise the floor to one level it's a bit safer but also we'll have seats in here which will give us more space and more flexibility and more comfort now some people might argue about that and you may argue and say well it's good enough as it is and it's comfortable enough for us that may be the case there are other much more practical issues about space for children and rooms for different things but I do wonder sometimes when we think like that whether we're thinking inwardly or outwardly we want the place to be as welcoming as it can both the people obviously is the most important thing but also the building we want to be welcoming and we

want the building to reflect our saviour just as much as our lives reflect the saviour just as you have in your homes you invite people to your house you want your house to look as good as it possibly can be within the resources that you have you want it to be warm and comfortable for people who come and visit and when they come for a meal you want to give them a feast you want to give them something good you don't generally we don't generally give those who come and visit to us beans on toast now we could argue beans and toast is good enough for me but generally speaking when we have guests and it's not because we're showing off it's because we simply want to give them something really great and we're not content just to give them beans and toast and beans and toast might be all we need but when we've got friends and when we open our homes we want to spoil them and so in the same way spiritually we can be content with beans and toast here in the church and it's good enough for us but I do think sometimes that's an insular way of thinking we're not looking out to the lost and we're not looking out to do simply do the very best for them I think the case is a great example to us that he wanted immediately not just to get rid of his wealth like it was a burden to him but he wanted to share it he wanted to you need to put the verb is to reparate you wanted to give reparation for what he had done and more so and he just got rid of so much of it but he wanted others to share in that and so this gift day is certainly costly and sacrificial but I hope you don't think in any way that it's a vanity project we really do those who are working in the church feel the need for better facilities for the children we're meeting the children are meeting in corridors and in inappropriate rooms and rooms that are small and that are not geared for that they've got expensive equipment in them and things like that so from that point of view

I think it's very important and the flexibility will enable us to serve God and so it is very much an impossible task but we would ask you on this gift day to pledge if you can't give think about pledging to pray and you're visiting just to pray for us and pray with us God we ask that you pray that God will lead us to generous givers with the church as well who will catch a vision for it can I ask you to pray for the work itself pray that it will go smoothly and well that we'll only be out of the building the least amount of time we need to be because we will need to be out of the building they will have the right place to go and worship they will all cooperate in that and the hassle and the difficulty they'll be can I ask you to pray for the workmen that we'll get the companies that will come and work they'll get an opportunity to tell them about Jesus Christ that they'll somehow catch the importance of what

they're doing and do it to the very best of their ability that they'll really do great work I should pray for these practical things about the building and about the work and turn it into something as it should be that is spiritual and that is significant at that level and that we will give generously I think if figures of 80 of us gave 200 pounds each is that right we'd get the 16,000 so that gives you a kind of rough idea of where we're at and then very briefly just before we finish the second emphasis of today double whammy as it were is this desire to challenge all of us about our giving on an ongoing regular basis 10th for strength and that there's the handout that you have in your own bulletin sheets which take time please take time to read that and to consider it and there's various forms within it or there's forms on these tables that you can take away and fill in it's more about our giving culture and it's about the reflection of the generosity of grace in our lives in our giving and can I ask you to consider and to think about giving a 10th of what you earn to the gospel I believe you're here for such a time of this such a time as this I believe it's a great time for the gospel in the city take and read the principles of giving from the New Testament about sacrificial cheerful regular proportional giving and apply grace to your bank account and to what you receive from God I think in the figures that we have roughly speaking and it's a very rough calculation back of a stamp kind of calculation but if we were giving if there were 80 givers or 70 or 80 givers giving a 10th if we were all on the national average wage then our giving's a congregation would almost cut by 50% and that is not for any other reason than that we can do more gospel work that we can recognise as we grow we will employ gospel workers and teachers that we can have effective missionary support and appeals we can have ancillary staff we've got the added burden I'm scared to mention this but we do have a mortgage as a church on the man's which is an added burden other churches in the free church and we don't have we are getting fantastic help already for particularly for church planting and gospel work from donors from the UK and also from

[ 33 : 41 ] America we have many gospel gracious kind willing open-hearted people who are committed to gospel planting in Edinburgh and who have given us way beyond what we deserve in enabling us to plant churches and we've got young couples who are heading out into gospel work with the financial insecurity that they face Tom and Charlene and others that we will hope to send out into the work and we're really asking that we can step up to the plate as well as a congregation and recognise the important part we can play in that God is absolutely no man's debtor and obviously people are in all kinds of different places financially and God knows that and God understands that and it's not what we give that he's concerned with us in the sense that's what we don't give and it's about our hearts and about our motivations and about our understanding of grace so our hope really is that we will be honeycomb givers here and that tenth that tithe it's an old testament model in many ways and that is what was commanded of the people of God in the Old Testament but with our understanding and knowledge of grace it seems to be a good at least starting point for us where we could maybe give more in our lives knowing what we know and knowing the

God who never lets us down and there's that great verse from Malachi 3 which speaks about bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house test me in this says the Lord Almighty and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there's not room enough to store it is that not one of the greatest verses in the Bible that speaks of the heart of God and of his willingness is willingness it's the kind of God we we're going to kind of God that we think about it's more about his willingness than our asking in many ways and that can apply to us in our personal lives absolutely in the way we deal with all of what we are there is not enough room to store the blessing when we are generous towards God spiritually practically financially in relationally in every way God pours out a blessing as we serve and follow him it might sometimes not be immediately recognizable but as we as we know who we are and is like Zikias we recognize what we've been given and it changes our heart and it loosens our grip on the material things that can so often become idolatrous towards us so I commit these things to you I didn't say any more but ask that as we sing together a great song that we've just learned recently and but very appropriate my worth is not in what I own that we will do so thinking about God's grace in our lives and maybe you've come today and you're not a Christian and you may think they're well there's the church just screwing us for money again I hope you haven't thought that and I hope you don't think that but I hope rather that you think about the one who gave himself so and became poor so that you might become rich and the amazing reality of that that will transform your life and your heart