

Evangelists

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[0 : 00] Three weeks ago, we began a study on the gifts of the Spirit, and we're going to continue that tonight, looking at this great theme of how God has given certain gifts to His church in order to fulfill His purposes.

Tonight we're continuing our study, and I want to just begin by asking a question. Who is the most important person in here tonight? You don't need to answer, but what springs to your mind?

You ask that question. Who is the most important person in church here tonight? Because when we think of gifts, we often tend to think that the people who have great gifts, the people with amazing abilities, these talents make these people very, very important.

So if somebody came in here who was a world-famous preacher, like Tim Keller came in, we'd all be a bit struck by their importance. Likewise, if a gifted leader from the business community here or from Hollywood came in here, we would all feel perhaps a bit tense because we'd be struck by their importance.

Very often people who seem very gifted are the ones we regard as very important. Well, it's important to think about that because when it comes to the Christian church, who's the most important person in here tonight?

[1 : 27] Well, I'm not going to tell you yet, but hopefully we're going to discover as we look at the gifts of the Spirit together. And this is a wonderful topic to look at because it's telling us all about how Jesus can use people like you and me to do wonderful things for him in our day-to-day lives.

We're looking over this topic over a number of weeks, and as we do that, there's four fundamental truths that really we want to make sure we remember regarding the gifts of the Spirit, no matter which specific gift it is we're looking at.

These are four big principles that we want you to remember, and we want to make sure you write on your hearts. Number one, gifts of the Spirit are given by God for his glory.

That means we don't earn them. They're gifts from God. It also means that they are exercised under Christ's lordship. When Neil read from Ephesians, that's a passage all about different gifts, but Paul associates that with the fact that Jesus is exalted as king over everything.

And as king, Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power, but he doesn't keep that power to himself. Through his Holy Spirit, he empowers others so that we can serve him, so that we can be like him and we can glorify him.

[2 : 44] So the gifts of the Spirit, they connect us to the exalted Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit, they empower us to connect with the world around us.

And through these gifts, God spent the last 2,000 years doing amazing things through the Church of Jesus Christ. And that means these gifts are really, really, really exciting.

So the gifts of the Spirit are given by God for his glory. Number two, gifts of the Spirit are for the building up of the church as we all work together. And that's something that we want to really, really emphasize.

It's a crucial biblical truth that the gifts of the Spirit are for the good of other people. They are not self-centered. They are not self-glorifying.

They are not self-exalting. They are others centered. It's all about helping build up the church. And these gifts unite us together as a team, as a church with one body, with many parts.

[3 : 44] We've all got our part to play. We all need each other. Number three, gifts of the Spirit have common elements for all believers, but unique aspects only for some.

Now, I'll explain what we mean by that. At one level, what we are highlighting here is the fact that these gifts are for everyone. There's no one who's lacking. Derek emphasized that in the first sermon we had two weeks ago.

No one is lacking. Every believer has a gift. No believer has no gifts. No matter what your feelings tell you, we are all able to contribute to the work of the church together. But we also want to recognize a very, very important point.

And that is that the gifts of the Spirit, all of them, are reflecting principles of behavior that are expected of all believers.

So yes, each believer has a particular gift in a particular area that's unique to them. But even if you are not particularly gifted in a certain area, we should still strive to exercise that gift as best we can.

[4 : 47] Calum highlighted this brilliantly last week because he was talking about apostles. Now, very, very, very few people in the Christian church were apostles. But Calum highlighted the fact that yes, only some are apostles, but all of us are sent out because that's really what the word apostle means, to be sent out.

Likewise, not everyone has the gift of being an administrator, but everyone is to do things in order. Not all have the gift of mercy, but we're all to be kind and compassionate. In other words, all the gifts of the Spirit correspond to aspects of behavior and service that should characterize all believers.

And this is going to guard us against a dangerous misunderstanding. And with every doctrine that the Bible sets before us, it's easy to kind of go to an extreme interpretation that really misses the point of what God is saying.

Because we must be very careful not to think that just because you don't have a gift, a special unique ability in that area that you can't actually serve in that way. For example, I don't have the gift of hospitality.

I'm not a very good cook. Buller corn flakes is kind of my limit. But if somebody came to me starving, it would be absolutely grotesque if I said to them, well, I don't have the gift of hospitality.

[6 : 08] I'm not going to help them. And even worse, if somebody came to us and said, how do I become a Christian? And we said to them, I'm not an evangelist, so don't ask me.

So we must remember that there's common elements for all believers, but unique giftings for some. And then number four, the gifts of the Spirit are worthless and useless without love.

So you can be incredibly talented and incredibly busy. But if that's not grounded in a love for God and a love for our neighbor, then it's no use.

So we want to highlight these four things as we go through this study. We want to remember it. Last week, those of you here here, Callum looked at apostles, which was fascinating to look at.

Today, we are moving on to the next gift, as you can see, in your order of service. We are going to look at evangelists, and we can turn back together to Ephesians chapter four, verse 11.

[7 : 16] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

I want us just to ask three very simple questions. What is the gift of evangelists? Why is Jesus given this gift, and how is this gift to be exercised?

So question one, what do we mean when we talk about evangelists? Well, that looks like a really easy question. You ask what's an evangelist? It seems quite straightforward, but it's actually quite complicated because there seems to be a lot of different answers to that question.

People look at passages like this in the New Testament where evangelists are mentioned, and lots of people seem to have lots of different ideas as to what exactly it's been referred to.

So some people say evangelists are like deputies to the apostles. So you can see the apostles listed there. The apostles were the foundational teachers of the Christian church, used by God to lead the church, and many of them were used to write key parts of the New Testament scriptures.

[8 : 25] Now I'm arguing that the evangelists were like helpers for the apostles, and they served alongside them, and just like the apostles no longer been here today, so do they're not here.

But not everyone says that. Some people say they're traveling missionaries. Other people say itinerant preachers. Other people say church planters. Other people say people who are good at engaging with unbelievers.

There's more options. Some people say that it's an office in the church, so just as you can be ordained as an elder and as a deacon you could be ordained as an evangelist in a similar category of office.

Other people regard evangelists as a role, so sometimes people are employed as evangelists. That happens in the free church in various places, perhaps working in a specific area or region.

So we've got all these different answers. Which one's right? Well, I think we could probably say all of them, because I think the best way to understand the word evangelist is just to focus on what the word itself means.

[9 : 25] So you look at that word evangelist, what is the definition of that word? Well, it's got a very simple, clear definition.

Someone who tells good news. That word, evangel, at the start of evangel, comes from the Greek word for gospel. So you could translate it gospelist if you want, which is basically talking about good news and evangelist is someone who tells the good news of Jesus Christ.

Now I want to stop there because that slide is highlighting an incredibly important point.

An evangelist is not someone who converts people. We can so easily think that. We can so easily think an evangelist is someone who can bring loads of people to faith in Jesus Christ.

And we feel like we are a complete failure and that we are rubbish evangelists because we can't convert people. We try and try and try and we seem to fail and we think, well, we are useless evangelists.

[10 : 33] Just don't convert people because the only person who ever converts anyone is the Holy Spirit.

An evangelist simply announces the good news and it is always, always, always God the Holy Spirit who does the work of conversion.

So that's what an evangelist is. Who spreads the good news about Jesus and therefore I think all the options that were listed there, church planters, missionaries, preachers, all of these options are valid because they are all people who are striving to share that good news.

And even if they were deputies to the apostles, the command to share the good news of Jesus still applies to all believers and we do that through God's grace working in and through us.

An evangelist is someone who tells good news and I would say that the New Testament is really deliberately general and broad in its use of this term to convey the fact that sharing that good news is done by lots of different people in lots of different ways.

[11 : 45] So that's question one, what's an evangelist? Question two, why has Jesus given this gift? Well there's three key things I want to say and they're very simple but they're really important.

Why does Jesus give this gift? Well three reasons, number one, God wants people saved. First Timothy 2.3, this is good and it's pleasing the sight of God our Savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

In Peter 3.9 the Lord's not slow to fulfill His promise of some kind of slowness but is patient towards you not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.

That is a foundational biblical truth, God wants people saved. Now that can sound so simple and I'm sure it's something that we all know and yet it's easy to forget and yet it's crucial because the whole of the Bible's message, the whole of redemptive history of the way God has worked out His plan of salvation across the generations of history, the whole of systematic theology, the way we piece the theology of the Bible into a framework, a system that we can understand and explain, the whole of the history of the Christian church stretching back over 2,000 years.

All of these things are grounded on one fundamental truth. God wants people saved and sin has wrecked this world and wrecked humanity.

[13 : 21] Our lives are broken and we look at the world around us and we see people whose lives have been wrecked and who are ravaged with sorrow and suffering and pain. We see and know, I'm sure you all know, broken families where relationships have broken down and where people suffer that awful hurt.

We see broken bodies, even your own body is probably a bit broken with illness or pain. We see people whose minds are broken and they're crippled by fear and anxiety and depression.

We see broken hearts. We see people's lives ravaged by addiction. We see humanity constantly battling against the damage that sin is causing and ultimately we see the fact that every single person on this planet is living under an unstoppable shadow of death.

And God looks at the people who are trapped in the midst of that wreckage and He says, I want to rescue these people.

And that's why Jesus came. That's why we have the Bible. That's why we have the gospel message because God is a God who wants people saved. Now that means that when you look out on Edinburgh tonight, when you walk out the door in half an hour's time or whenever it is and you see hundreds of people wandering around, you've got to ask yourself the question, what does God want for these people?

[14 : 48] The answer is He wants to save them. And so whether it's your boss at work tomorrow or your friends at school or the people you play football with or your neighbor or the homeless guy sitting on the corner of the street, the person, the member of the public you have to serve at work, the crowd marching down the royal mile for pride or independence or whatever it is, the tourists, the motorists, the workers, the children, the pensioners, all these different people are one thing in common.

God wants them. God wants them saved. And perhaps even more amazing is the fact that that also means that God wants to save you.

Now I don't know everybody here tonight and if you've come in here tonight and you're not yet sure if you're a Christian, maybe you've never heard the message of the Gospel before, maybe you're not sure who God is, maybe you've got loads of questions about everything, maybe you're searching, maybe you're curious.

If that's you tonight or maybe you've been here for years and you're still not sure, if that's you tonight, please, please write this truth on your heart.

God wants to save you. He wants to rescue you out of the wreckage that sin can bring. He wants to free you from the power of death. He wants to adopt you as his very own child and he wants to hold you and guide you and protect you and love you forever.

[16 : 22] And so first and foremost, when we ask the question, why does Jesus send evangelists, the answer is because of you.

Because God wants you saved. So who's the most important person in this building? Is it me or Derrick or the elders?

No. It's the person who's not yet a Christian. And if that's you, please make no mistake, God wants you saved.

And that salvation comes through a message. And that's the second key reason why God gives the gifts of evangelists.

Christianity is grounded in a message of good news. For centuries and up until the present day, Christianity has been on the receiving end of a huge amount of misunderstanding.

[17 : 24] Even if you were to go to all the churches in Edinburgh and ask the question, what lies at the heart of Christianity, you may very well get a lot of different answers. Some people might say it's about living a good life.

It's about doing your best. It's about loving one another. It's about following the example of Jesus or something along those lines. And of course, at one sense, these things are accurate.

But the truth we have to recognize is that at the heart of Christianity lies one thing, a message of good news about Jesus Christ.

Christianity is grounded on a message, an expression of information that needs to be communicated to the world. Now, within that message lies our wealth of wonderful teaching, both theological and ethical.

But at its heart, we must remember that Christianity is a message. That's why it's grounded on a book. It's grounded on words, conveying information. That's what the Bible is, the record of the message that God's communicating to us in order to save us.

[18 : 29] Now, this is reminding us of the fact that everything that God does makes perfect sense. And so the foundation of the church is a message, the good news of Jesus Christ.

And so Jesus gives a gift called the apostles to make sure that that message is accurately laid down for us. That's the foundational role of the apostles, played the Holy Spirit, worked through these men in order to lay down the core teaching of the gospel message.

That's why the only true gospel is the apostolic gospel. With that apostolic gospel, the gospel of the apostles set out, that's all we mean when we say apostolic gospel.

That message is not a secret. And it's not confined to these apostles as though they're some sort of elite group. That message needs to be spread.

And so as well as giving the gifts of apostles, Jesus has given the gift of evangelists, the two go hand in hand. The apostles have taught us this life-giving message, the evangelists are announcing it to the world.

[19 : 42] And that is the message that makes the difference between life and death. And that's why a false gospel is so, so dangerous.

And if you look in the New Testament and read through it, you will see that the apostles, whether it's Paul or Peter or John, they go absolutely ballistic whenever there is the threat of a false gospel or false teaching creeping into the church.

And this is where we have to, in a way, try and maybe almost reset our priorities in a sense because we today can get so hung up on the mistakes that people make in their lives.

So somebody comes along to church and they muck up. So maybe they fall into addiction or they get caught over the driving limit or maybe they even fall into sexual sin.

And these things are a massive scandal. And yes, these things are serious, but we must never forget that far, far, far more serious is the danger of a false gospel.

[20 : 50] Because if somebody falls into addiction or into moral failure, then yeah, that will be a scandal for a while. But if someone preaches a false gospel, it will lead you all to hell.

The apostles gave us the message of eternal life. The evangelists need to announce it. I often think that a good illustration of this is a vaccine. And maybe you've heard this illustration being used before, but not long ago we saw the massive Ebola outbreak in Africa, which was devastating.

Imagine at Edinburgh University, they developed a vaccine. That would be brilliant, wouldn't it? It would be amazing if they were able to do it. It would be a wonderful thing. But it's no use sitting in Edinburgh.

It would be crazy if we just said, oh, well, that's great. There's a triumph for the Molecular Science Department of Edinburgh University. Let's just put that in the records and sit it there and move on to the next thing.

That would be ridiculous because the vaccine needs distributing, doesn't it? And while it's being distributed, it also needs to be kept pure.

[21 : 57] Because if the distributors thought, oh, well, we'll just add a wee bit of extra into this, or we'll just dilute it a wee bit so it'll go a wee bit further, then it wouldn't work.

It would be crazy if they were to corrupt and pollute that vaccine in exactly the same way. In fact, no, not in exactly the same way, in a far, far, far more serious way.

The apostolic message of the New Testament is the cure for the problem of sin. That cure needs spreading. That cure needs to be kept pure.

Christianity is grounded in a life-giving message. Evangelists have been given to spread that good news.

So God wants people saved. It's grounded in a message. Number three, God uses people as his channel of communication. The key tool for spreading that good news is people.

[22 : 59] So from the New Testament to the present day, God has used people to spread the message of Jesus Christ. And I'm sure that for all of us, or certainly almost all of us, we can think of people that God has used to bring the message of Jesus to it.

It might be people who've spoken to us, but even to the person who's maybe had no contact with anybody else and just picks up a Bible, that's still through the medium of people because God used people, the apostles, to set that writing down.

He's used people to translate it. He's used people to print it. Whoever it is, parents, friends, preachers, teachers, writers, God uses people to spread the good news.

And at one level, we are all involved in that if we are Christians. So mums, dads, grandparents, brothers, sisters, friends, classmates, employees, bosses, teachers, pupils, neighbors, volunteers, in all the situations that you find yourself in as a Christian, you're a missionary.

You are called to be salt and light, called to stand out as being visibly distinctive as followers of Jesus. That's why every day, every day as a Christian is incredibly exciting because tomorrow might well be the day when you are used by God to share this good news.

[24 : 17] So at one level, we're all involved in it, but at another level, there are those who are particularly gifted in this area. And sometimes these people don't even realize it, but it seems that they can speak about the gospel in a way that's so natural and so engaging and so clear.

Sometimes these people can be particularly good at speaking to certain groups, so some are really gifted at explaining the gospel to children, some are great at working with students, some are great at speaking, shading the gospel with people who are sick, some are great at dealing with professionals.

Some people have this wonderful gift of being able to share the good news. Lots of different people in lots of different ways. The key point is that God's primary tool for spreading this good news is people just like you.

That's how he's done it for the past two thousand years, and he's going to keep on doing it. And all of this is pointing us to a big theme that runs through the whole of Scripture.

It's one of the many amazing things about the Bible that there are great themes running through the whole of Scripture. This whole question of evangelists is pointing us to the great theme of the temple.

[25 : 45] Now you're probably thinking, Thomas, what on earth has evangelism got to do with the temple? Well, let's look at this together because the temple in the Old Testament was a key part of the religious life of God's people.

It was the place where God dwelt. That's really how we define a temple, the place where God dwelt, the place where he was worshiped. And one of the key purposes of that temple built in the middle of Jerusalem was to be a light to all the nations.

Isaiah 56 tells us it's to be a house of prayer for all people. It was part of this distinctive identity of the people of Israel, which was to make them stand out as a light for all the nations.

In other words, the temple was a great missionary tool in the purpose of God. And we actually sang about that in Psalm 46, and there's a really interesting verse that talks about it.

It says, there's a river whose stream is made glad, the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. Now, when we talk about holy habitation of the Most High, that's talking about the temple.

[26 : 54] Remember we said the place where God dwells. So we're thinking in terms of the temple, and we're thinking in terms of streams, according to this verse here.

So I want you just to picture that in your mind, picture the temple, picture streams all around it. And for some reason, this is a source of joy.

What's all that about? Well, the word for streams in that verse is really interesting because it's actually the word that means, now wait for it, irrigation ditch.

Now, we lose a wee bit of the poetic flair here. When we say there's a river whose irrigation ditches make glad the city of God.

But that's what the word actually means, irrigation ditch. So now you have in this image of the temple, place where God dwells, and we can picture irrigation ditches connected to it.

[28 : 01] Now, you might be thinking this seems really weird. What are you saying? And certainly irrigation ditches doesn't sound as nice as streams. Stream sounds very poetic, but there's a really, really important difference.

Streams flow into something. So streams flow into a river. Streams flow into a loch. irrigation ditches flow out.

And here in Psalm 46 and in various other places in the Old Testament, such as the latter chapters of Ezekiel, especially Ezekiel 37, there's this imagery of water flowing not into the temple, but out of the temple.

And so this source of gladness is the fact that water is flowing out. In other words, it is for the benefit of others. These streams are not supplying the temple.

They are flowing from the temple and supplying the needs of the world around. The temple was a key tool in God's plan to reach out to the nations of the world.

[29 : 16] Temple outreach, that's key part of temple theology. Okay. Where is God's temple today? It's you because you are the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. And part of our role as the temple of God is to reach out.

That's part of the reason why the giftings that come from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which makes us the temple of God, part of that gifting is evangelists whose work is to reach out to those around us.

The Holy Spirit has come to make us his temple. Therefore we are a key means through which he's going to reach out to other people. In other words, when it comes to sharing the gospel, God can use you, and it is a theological fact backed up by the whole of Scripture.

And yes, some people have a clear gift in that area, and it's wonderful to see people who can naturally speak about Jesus to other people. But for many of us, when it comes to evangelism, we don't find it easy.

[30 : 34] And I'm sure every one of us feels a sense of failure in regard to all that. But there's two important things I want to notice in terms of thinking about this.

First of all, there's a brilliant verse about evangelism in Colossians chapter 4. Paul says, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the Word to declare the mystery of Christ.

That's reminding us that you can pray every day that God will open doors for the people who are gifted evangelists.

There are people who I'm sure you know who are really good and gifted at speaking about Jesus. Every day, pray that God would open a door for them. That's one of the great things about being in the Christian churches that we join in the work together through prayer.

Pray that God will open doors for his evangelists. But I want you to notice something else as well that's very important and interesting from Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11, which was the verse we read at the start.

[31 : 43] Here we've got a list. Now often you'll find in the Bible there's lists in verses. And if you're anything like me, sometimes when you go through a list, you can in a way lose sight of exactly what's been said.

Because as you go through the list, by the time of each the end of the list, I've forgotten the first two or three items on the list. So when we look at a verse like that, that's got a list of stuff in it, we need to make sure that we recognize how the statement being made in the sentence applies to each item on the list.

And a good way to do that is to simplify the verse. So we're going to simplify the verse. So here it says, he gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, church procedures, etc. Let's simplify it and focus on evangelists.

It says, he gave the evangelists to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Now, isn't that really interesting?

The people who are particularly gifted in evangelism are not just there to be the ones who do all the outreach work. They're also there to help the rest of us, to equip us, to build us up so that we can reach out as well.

[33 : 02] It's a great reminder that evangelism is not something that God expects us to be automatically good at. Rather, he wants those who are gifted to help, to encourage, to guide, to teach, to equip the rest of us.

God gave the evangelists not just to reach out, but also to help us all to join in that work. But as I said, it's often where we feel overwhelmed, and evangelism is one of these areas we often feel quite poor at.

That brings up our third question, which is, how do we do it? How can we do it? Well, there's an awful lot we could say, and I would love maybe in the future for us to spend more time studying evangelism in more detail.

Tonight, I just want to say two things. First of all, we're taught a wonderful lesson from the passage that we read about Philip. Philip is known as Philip the Evangelist.

He's referred to that in Acts chapter 21. In that passage, we saw, first of all, he went down to Samaria and he preached to crowds. And then he went up to this man from Ethiopia, and he spoke to him one on one.

[34 : 12] And all I want to highlight is the fact that evangelism can happen in lots of different ways. God has used people as they have announced the good news to great crowds, and God has used people as they've announced the good news in a private conversation with questions, with discussion, with Bible reading.

Now, some of us are terrified about speaking in front of a crowd. Some of us are terrified about speaking one to one. Some of us are terrified of both.

But the great thing about God is that he works through loads of different evangelists and in loads of different ways. And sometimes you don't even know that he's doing it.

Think of the people that God used to bring you to faith. Not just one person. There's very few of us, I'm sure, for whom there's one person.

There's lots of people, family, friends, preachers we've listened to, maybe people we've read. Think of all these different people. How many of them do you think would call themselves evangelists?

[35 : 18] Probably not many of them. And yet they're the ones that God has used, because God works in lots of different ways, and God uses us to spread the gospel.

So we want to remember that, that God can do it in lots and lots and lots of different ways. But I want to close by saying this. If you are working to do, if you are wanting to share the gospel with somebody, or if the opportunity arises to share the gospel, there's three really, really, really important things to remember.

Number one, God wants people saved. So whoever you are talking to, this one thing is through. God wants to save them.

Number two, Christianity is grounded on a message of good news. Never forget that. You are telling them good news. Now, good news does not mean comprehensive information.

We're often terrified of evangelism, because we think that we don't know very much, and they might ask a question that we don't know the answer to, and we're not very good at explaining the whole of theological truth from Genesis 3 to 11.

[36 : 27] Good news is not the whole of theology. Good news might simply be telling someone that God loves them.

It might simply be inviting someone to church. It might simply be just telling them that they're welcome here, and that we'd love to have them with us.

God can do the work of evangelism in 10 seconds, in one sentence.

God can do amazing things. So remember that Christianity is grounded in a message of good news. And remember that God's chosen channel of communication is people, and that means He's going to use you.

So you might feel useless when it comes to evangelism. You might feel absolutely rubbish, but theology is on your side. So go for it, because God's not going to use the teas or machines.

[37 : 40] He's going to use people. He's going to use you. So God has laid a foundation with the apostles. God is spreading that message out with evangelists.

And next He's going to build up believers through the pastors and through the teachers. But you'll have to come back next week if you want to learn about them.

But I hope you can start to see how it all fits together, because do you know when Jesus said, I will build my church? He meant it.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the work that you have done through the gift of evangelists, a gift that is unique in some.

And we thank you for those who have that gift, who can speak clearly and well about the gospel. We pray that you would open doors this week for the evangelists who are here gathered in this congregation tonight and for the evangelists who are in the other congregations around Edinburgh.

[38 : 54] Please open doors this week for them to share the gospel. But for all of us Lord, we want to contribute to that work as well. And we pray that you would help us in our words and in our actions to show that we love you and to show that knowing Jesus is the best thing that can ever happen to us.

So please help us to share that good news. Thank you so, so much that you are building your church. Thank you so much that you are a God who wants people saved.

Help us to never forget that. In Jesus' name, Amen.