

I Have Nothing to Offer

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- [0 : 0 0] Okay, for the last three Sunday mornings, we've been looking at the theme of being ordinary Christians, and this is the last in the short series of being an ordinary Christian.
- We looked at it being ordinary the first week. Second week, we looked at my life as a disappointment. Last week, we looked at I am a spiritual failure, and today we're looking, lastly, at I have nothing to offer.
- You may have low self-esteem or low self-spiritual image. You may blame God for having what you perceive to be no gifting in His service.
- You may be blame God when you see how gifted other people are in His service. You can't really sense anything spiritually that sets you apart in terms of your gifting.
- Maybe in the church here, you think, I don't contribute. I don't feel part of any of the programs. What is it that you do as a church anyway that I can block it?
- [1 : 1 6] That's probably the most common question I get when people come to church, to the area of the church for the first time. Say, we want to get plugged in. We want to do something. We want to serve in some way.
- I'll maybe say a little bit more about that later, because we've really kind of gone out of our way trying not to be a programmable church, a church full of programs.
- Rather, we've sought to be relational and organic in many ways. But maybe that makes you feel unwanted. Maybe you feel unasked, as if somehow your worth is only realized if you're given a task, or if you're given a position, or if you're given recognition.
- But then maybe you think, well, even if I am asked, I've got nothing to give. I have nothing to offer. Okay. So I want to read two passages of Scripture.
- One is an example, a great Old Testament example. It's kind of the Old Testament prodigal son. And we've read it quite a bit in the last while.
- [2 : 2 4] And then the New Testament one is a New Testament truth reality. So the Old Testament reading is from 2 Samuel chapter 9. And it's a well-known story to us of David and Mephibishith.
- David is now the king, and Mephibishith is his predecessor, Saul's grandson, just to put it into perspective.
- And David said, is there still anyone left of the house of Saul that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake? Now, there was a servant in the house of Saul whose name was Zeba, and they called him to David and the king said to him, are you Zeba?
- And he said, I am your servant. And the king said, is there not still someone of the house of Saul that I may show kindness of God to him? Zeba said to the king, there is still a son of Jonathan, he's crippled in his feet.
- King said, where is he? And Zeba said to the king, he's in the house of Machir, the son of Amiel in Lodobar. And King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir to the house of Amiel at Lodobar.

- [3 : 30] And Mephibishith, the son of Jonathan, son of Saul came to David and fell in his face and paid homage. And David said, Mephibishith, and he answered, behold, I am your servant. And David said to him, do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore you to you all the land of Saul your father. And you shall eat at my table always.
- And he paid homage and said, what is your servant that you should show regard to such a dead dog such as I?
- And the king called Zeba Saul's servant and said to him, all that belong to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce that your master's grandson may have bred to eat.
- But Mephibishith, your master's grandson shall always eat at my table. Now Zeba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Zeba said to the king, according to all that my Lord the king commands his servants, so will your servant do.
- [4 : 35] So Mephibishith ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. And Mephibishith had the young son whose name was Micah. And all who lived in Zeba's house became Mephibishith's servants.
- So Mephibishith lived in Jerusalem for eight, eight, all was at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet. Okay, so that's a fantastic story, isn't it? It's one that we've known.
- And I think Corrie mentioned it several times and preached on it when he was here, one of his favorites. And you know Mephibishith is a grandson of Saul. He lost his father, Jonathan, and his grandfather the same day.
- And as he was, because there was a rebellion between the two generations of that family. And as he was escaping for his life with his young nurse looking after him at the age of, he was at the age of five, not his young nurse.
- He was the age of five and his young nurse was, I don't know if he's young, I don't know why I'm saying that, his nurse, she was probably ancient, was running away with Mephibishith.
- [5 : 42] And she dropped him and he fell on his feet, on his legs, and became crippled in both his feet. And he really was someone who was therefore handicapped all his life physically.
- He was poverty stricken. He was an outcast in many ways, living in a little way on the run, living away from his, from David the king, because as someone who had the bloodline of Saul and the next in line to the throne, it was very dangerous for him to still be alive.
- And what usually happened in that day and generation was all the descendants would be, a wiped out would be annihilated. So he lived in fear and he lived in poverty and he lived in the land of nothing.
- That's what Lodabar means, it means the land of nothing under the sentence of death. And we have this great story, you know, this great story of David who comes to him and David says, I want to show you kindness for the sake of Jonathan, this great brotherly love and friendship that they had had, and he said to him, first, don't fear.
- And you've got nothing, but I'm going to give you everything, I'm giving you an inheritance. And I'm going to give you a daily audience with the king, you're going to sit at the king's table and all that that meant, you'd be protected, you'll have the richest of fare, you'll have royal company, you will be provided for with servants, everything that you will have.
- [7 : 14] And he said, look, you have nothing, or you had nothing, I'm giving you everything. I'm giving you everything. Okay, that's the Old Testament story, I will come back to that.

The New Testament reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 13. This is the classic wedding reading, very often read at weddings, people would like to choose this at their weddings, not exclusively but sometimes.

And I'm just going to read this passage from the end of chapter 12 through to chapter 13. You know this, most of you, I'm sure.

And I will show you it still a more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast.

[8 : 19] It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease.

As for knowledge, it will pass away for we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. Now as a child, I spoke like a child. I thought like a child.

I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, and I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

So now faith, hope and love abide. These three, but the greatest of these is love. Okay, this very well-known passage in the New Testament. The New Testament reality that's spoken of here is God's gift of love.

[9 : 19] The only time we genuinely have nothing to offer God or the church of God is if we have not received and as if we have not accepted God's gift of grace.

That's the only time we have nothing to offer in spiritual terms. And what I want to say and what I want to go on to say is that you already as a Christian, speaking to you as a Christian today and myself, that you already have the greatest gift that there is for anyone to have as a believer.

It may be that we don't appreciate or realize that that is the case. The context here is that Paul is speaking about the body of Christ.

He's speaking about the church. And he is speaking about all the different gifts that are appropriate in the church and the diversity of these gifts. I'm not going to look at that today, but we are in a couple of weeks going to start a series on the gifts of the Spirit.

We looked at the fruit of the Spirit before the summer. Now we're going to look at the gifts of the Spirit. We'll do that in the evening services in a couple of weeks' time.

[10 : 25] But we are to eagerly desire this gift that is the context. The love is greater than all the other gifts. His love is the most excellent way. There's a great word that he uses there at the end of chapter 12, you know, that you are to earnestly desire.

So I'm missing a page. The greatest gift, you know, earnestly desire is a word of hyperbole that literally means throwing beyond.

Have you ever watched Happy Gilmore? You remember he was a bad ice hockey player, but he became a really good golfer. And he became a really good golfer because when he hit the golf ball, it went miles further than any of them has ever hit a golf ball, four, five hundred yards.

And that's exactly the picture that is something we're to absolutely reach out for, stretch out for, throw beyond to aim at and to get and to keep and set our hearts upon this greatest of all gifts.

Therefore, in this question of, I don't have anything to offer, I'm encouraging all of us to cultivate this, the gift of the Spirit, which is the grace of God.

[11 : 37] You know, I believe that you all here, as I know you and love you, have many gifts. And if you don't have certain gifts, you're free to ask God for these gifts, because there is.

But if you do feel that you have nothing to offer, I want to remind you of the two very important gifts that you do have this morning as Christians.

I do want to remind you and challenge you to think about them. First is your place at His table. Your place at His table.

The grace you've already received. And Mephibosheth is a great picture of that. It's an Old Testament picture of what it means to be accepted by grace.

It's a lovely Old Testament prodigal son story. And it's reminding us of what we possess as Christians, our familial experience.

[12 : 38] That is, it's a family experience. We belong at the Lord's table. We belong at His feast. We belong in His company where He nourishes us, provides for us, protects us, where we belong to Him, where we're secure in Him, where we hear and listen to the words of the King, where we have His ear and where we have His voice and His guidance and His help.

And that is the great thing about being a believer that the picture of Mephibosheth gives us. And I encourage you to think of the gift that you are in yourself as you take your seat at His table metaphorically.

In other words, as you accept His gift of salvation, your presence is a gift to the church.

Your person is a gift to the church. The experience you share as a believer in the presence of the King is a gift to the church. Your unique self, nobody is like you.

Your story, what you have known and what you've received and learned from Christ, that's a great gift that you give the church. You're very being as a Christian, tasting the company of the Lord Jesus Christ at His table with His people.

[14 : 11] It's something special, something important. So your company at church in the Christian community, you're being here, you're worshiping, your care and sharing of yourself with one another is a tremendous gift, your presence as a person.

And that knowledge of your experience of knowing the King of kings is something that as a gift you share with your fellow believers and with others as well, call and spoke about that, about the importance of sharing what we experience.

Now, it's a very dangerous thing to say. I'm not really a tremendously passionate royalist. I'm not anti-royal, but I'm not a hugely passionate royalist.

Last year as moderator, of course, Katrina and I were invited out to Holyroos Palace to this great feast, this great meal with Queen's representative and all these big shots of which I was very little shot.

And we were given silver service and we were shown all these things and we had a pleasant meal and all these things. And coming away from that, you want to share that experience.

[15 : 30] It was different, I wouldn't want to do it regularly. So it's an imperfect illustration, therefore. But nonetheless, you share that. You want to tell people about, oh, I've never done this before.

This was unusual. Yeah, to watch my peas and queues and all these kind of things. And so you share that experience. But you know what it's like if you have a great meal with great company, you share that.

And you say, I was there and it was tremendous and I loved being there. And we have this permanent audience with the King of Kings as believers. We are Mephibisheths. That's who we are. And we have this great privilege because the King that is at the head of this table was crucified so that you could sit there.

He's the crucified King of Kings. So as we sit at this table and our presence is there, there's always atonement, there's always sacrifice. There's always sin that is to be extinguished but grace to share and his wisdom to pass on and his beauty to experience, the beauty of his company.

And that is the first that I would like to say today of the greatest gifts that we have as Christians, your presence in his...your place at his table.

[16 : 52] The fact that you belong, it's a great encouragement. There's nothing greater, is there? And there's nothing greater when someone comes to faith to sit at that table with us.

That's the greatest thing. Another presence. Another presence taken from darkness to light. Another presence who comes to know Jesus with all their uniqueness and with all their specialisms, whatever they may be, your place at the table, okay?

Another thing is what we looked at in 1 Corinthians, the most excellent way. So that's the other gift that we have.

Not only our presence at his table through what he's done but we have been gifted the love of Christ in our hearts.

That's the greatest gift, can I say, that you offer to the church? It's in the context of the body of Christ. The greatest gift, I don't really care that much if you can prophesy.

[17 : 55] And I don't really care that much if you can do lots of amazing things with yourself in terms of your gifting. The greatest gift that we can all offer the church is his grace, is walking and living in his grace.

You are a member, as a member of the body of Christ, that's the greatest gift you can offer the church and the world, your redeemed presence, your redeemed self, living out this gift, this great gift.

I'm not saying there's lots of other important gifts, I know we'll discuss that in the series. But God clearly says in this passage, by the, through the Holy Spirit, that this is the greatest way and it's the one we are to most earnestly develop and mature in our lives and seek as Christians, okay?

God slays the loveless giants, giant gifts in this chapter. He says you can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if you don't have love you're nothing. You can have all kinds of insight.

You can have amazing gifts of wisdom and gigantic faith. You can be reckless in your generosity, giving everything that you have.

[19 : 10] You can have it all. But He says if you don't have love without the greatest of these gifts, it is nothing. But I think we misunderstand so often this gift of love, we say, well, everyone loves.

Everyone is able to love that, everyone in the world loves. It's not quite as simple as that, because it's beyond natural affection.

It is something greater, something deeper, something transformational. It's His gift, it belongs to Him. We lost it when we rebelled against Him.

Sin has taken up that gift. We can have natural affection, and that's a great thing. But this is different. This is the love that He promises to instill in our hearts when we come to Him by faith, recognizing we don't have it, His grace.

It's not merely natural. What we have here, what we experience in our human loves for one another and in the world is a temporary taste of what we've lost and corrupted, and will one day be taken from us as a just act of God's judgment.

[20 : 25] It is temporary. It's meant, the flavor of it is meant to push us towards Jesus, the author of the grace we don't have, and the relationship of love we've lost with Him.

So practically, you have no gifts or me have no gifts. What is it that you have to offer? What is it we have to offer? We have God's gift.

Every single believer who has come to Jesus Christ has God's gift of love to offer the church and to offer the world.

You have no excuses, and I have no excuses. We are to earnestly, eagerly, passionately desire to develop and mature and seek this most excellent way.

That's what is to set us apart as a congregation. It's the greatest gift, and we all possess it. We just sometimes don't realize it. And I want you to think about that as you look around your life in St. Columbus, in this church, or if you're visiting in the church you belong to, as you mingle at coffee time, as you dig deeper at city group, in your friendships that you deepen over many years, as you challenge to welcome new people and love and serve those who are part of the worship here.

[21 : 45] When you're faced with hurt and with let down and with trouble and with discouragement, for this great gift that you have that sets us apart as a community, from any other community in the universe, that we have this gift of love.

It's the gift, it's the gift, T-H-E in big capitals, it's the gift, and we all possess it. Please don't say, I have nothing to offer.

I am ordinary. I am plain. We have this greatest of all gifts. What, briefly, briefly, what does it shape?

What does it look like for us? Well, just think for a moment of what it encompasses. We'll just touch in one or two things here. It reveals itself in patience, you know?

It reveals itself in patience. Love is patient. I'm not going to go through all these, don't worry. But it simply means don't retaliate with anger.

[22 : 55] It literally means being long-tempered. We are often short-tempered, naturally, even in our loves. The grace of God enables us to be long-temper-patient.

What a great gift to offer in Christian company, in the church, where we're so often snappy and short-tempered.

What a great gift to offer to an angry world where revenge and getting even is the principle of motivation that we live with patience, that we live with kindness, acting benevolently.

Isn't that, I think, that has to be one of the most attractive and powerful gifts known to humanity is kindness, motivated by the kindness Jesus Christ has shown to us.

You will have many opportunities going into this week, and I'm sure I will, to have, in all of our ordinariness, to reveal kindness, to show kindness.

[23 : 57] When it will be, will we be given the choice? Will we be across roads and I'm going to be unkind here, or am I going to be kind? I'm going to walk away, or am I going to show this great gift of grace, acting benevolently in kindness?

And it also has always, in the Bible characteristics, this negative element. It's not envious. That is, that burning desire for something or someone that it doesn't belong to you or you don't have.

Jealous longing setting your heart on what is not rightfully ours. And you say, well, yeah, okay, what's that got to do with gifts? And it causes us to respond, doesn't it, negatively to God and to other people if we have this envious spirit, wishing we were someone else or wishing God would make us someone else.

But we're gifted differently, and you can rejoice when we are living in that love. We can rejoice in the gifts of others and not be envious of their gifts and be thankful for what we do have rather than what we don't have.

So often we spend our lives wishing we had something else, envious of other people and annoyed with God at what He hasn't done. But this gift of grace enables us not to be like that.

[25 : 18] Not envious and also goes on to say, not boasting, not arrogant, not boastful. Not, you know, the problem sometimes with gifts is that we boast about them, isn't it?

It's very difficult to boast about God's grace. It's counterintuitive, maybe not counterintuitive, but it's just wrong.

We can't do it. We don't like show-offs generally anyway in life, do we? The business, media, the sports careers, ladders are full of gifted people who are big heads, who love their gifts and who are quick to boast about them, not exclusively of course.

But what a privilege is for us to seek progress in these same areas and in every other area, including the church, where we don't see people as competitors, as ones we need to push off a ladder, as we don't make them our benchmark because we're not the standard, as Jesus Christ is the standard for us.

Not is it rude, this great gift, the ability to act well. It's not rude, an old-fashioned word here, it's not unbecoming.

[26 : 33] I don't know if we use that word much, it's a good word. Rude itself, you know, not, even rudeness I think is seen as a bit old-fashioned, the old idea today of rudeness.

We've broken that particular barrier. But yet we have the grace, the gift of recognition that shapes our lives so that we aren't unbecoming and rude in our lives, living not impolite or dishonorable.

But you have that great gift to offer the church and the world. I'm sometimes so discouraged and disappointed, not by the congregation, but generally the Christian community, that it is so quick to be rude and to be dishonorable when we should be the most gracious and beautiful community, and I'm not being soft or sentimental when I'm saying that, but absolutely gritty and true to God's word, that we should submerge these things.

I was going to say subsume. I mean, submerge these things, we should deal with these unnatural or unnatural in our Christian context, responses.

It's the gift, this gift of love that we all possess is the gift of being different, so I can't go through all the rest of them, but they all speak about being different. You walk from here today as Christians who are different and live by a different calibration to the rest of the world, we're not selfish insisting our own way, we're not easily provoked.

[28 : 16] We can choose, we choose not to be wrong, not to be fragile about ourselves, not to be irritable, it's often a control thing, isn't it? We want things done exactly our way.

We choose not to celebrate sin, rejoicing and wrongdoing. We don't accept that revengeful, cheating, illicit gain is good.

We don't rejoice in making money that way, we don't rejoice in getting one over our recalcitrant ugly neighbors for the way they've treated us.

We choose to rejoice in the truth, to take God as word, to live with hope and endurance. That's what this great marital passage that is often read, it is speaking about.

You think, and I think, we have nothing to offer. We think we have nothing to offer. The church and the world needs you and needs me to understand the greatest gift we already have, the greatest gift we do possess, you and Christ, consciously walking on this most excellent of ways.

[29 : 32] That's your privilege, that's our privilege, that's our responsibility, and He gives us the Holy Spirit to walk with us this way, and you will need to walk this way in Christ.

It's what's by a million miles, it's what St. Columbus needs most from you as a Christian. It's brilliant and important and significant to serve in Bethany and to serve in all the different needs we have that are so important in making even our Sunday worship work together.

But it must be coupled with this great knowledge and this great gift of God's love. The world that you inhabit week to week, you're only here for an hour out of how many hundreds of hours a week that you have.

We're only a gathered community for a tiny amount of time. I know we meet in other micro communities as a church and in city groups. But in the world that you inhabit most, the greatest gift you can offer that world in the workplace, in the student world, in your neighborhood at home is this gift that you have and that I have.

Don't believe the lie of Satan that says you have nothing to offer and that you're ordinary. Now, I'm just close with this, again I know I'm morphing into Cory by using this Lord of the Rings illustration.

[31 : 02] I can't help it. The return of the King, the Hobbits, don't realize their gifts and their heroism and their humility.

And as all the crowds in all of the kingdom come to gather honor to the new King Aragorn, and as they were set to bow, he says, my friends, you bow to no one.

And I'm saying to you who thinks that you have nothing to offer. You are at the table of the King. You share his greatest gift of all, and as you look around, you bow to no one, except King Jesus.

That's where the illustration falls down. We bow only to King Jesus, but we have this great privilege of being gifted.

Don't blame God and say you have no gifts. Don't blame Him and say you wish you were like somebody else, and don't say you have nothing to offer.

[32 : 13] Remember what we are, remember what we have. Constantly go back to the foot of the cross. That's where the Lord's table is such a great picture, isn't it?

Of the, an illustration of what we are and what we have. It is the table of the King. It is the nourishment. It's the unity. It's the bull.

You know, here we've got, we don't have them up, but you know, we've got these tiny wee tables. They are tiny wee tables, square tables that they put some of the Bibles on for the Christian Heritage Center. Do you know, only one person could sit at it.

That's not the kind of table that we have. It's a marvelous, banqueting table, and we are all in it. We are all sitting at it together. You don't come to Christ and He gives you a wee private room, we are a private audience with Himself, and a little table where you are eating on your own.

We are the Kings, and we are in it together. And that, you know, we're, that's hard because we're ugly and we're, we're graceless by nature, and it's not as easy to sit with a King.

[33 : 13] Not as easy to sit with a citizen, is it? We find that, don't we, all the time. And yet the greatest gift we have is this gift of grace which encourages to act and be different and be a community, therefore, that reflects Jesus in this way, which is impossible, which is counter-cultural, which we need to be saved to do and to be living in connection and contact with a living God daily at the fruit of the cross in order to recognize this amazing thing that we are to earnestly desire the highest and greatest gift, the greatest of them is love.

Amen. Spare our heads briefly in prayer. Father God, as we intercede at the close of the sermon, we ask that you would protect us as a congregation from the sin of lovelessness and from the sin of disabusing ourselves of the greatest gift that we all possess, that sometimes we just don't realize that we may be just equate with something natural that's just stirred up within us.

We fail to see that it takes us on a completely different road, that we sit at a different table, that we respond with different choices and different behaviors, that we persevere in this great love because that's the great love that we've been gifted.

And we know it's tough for us and we know we struggle and we know that the ideal is something so often very far from us, but we ask that we would live one day at a time calling out to you for your grace, for your mercy.

Help us not to see our faith and even our involvement in this church as something that is distant or individualistic, purely. Maybe not see St. Columbus as a filling station that we come to and we get filled and we leave again on our own, untouched by the table, untouched by the company, and uncommitted to the body of Christ.

[35 : 29] Not just here but beyond St. Columbus of course. We pray that you would help us to reach out into this world with this gift of love which will speak powerfully to a world that isn't convinced by argument and by apologetic even though there is great value in these things, but needs to see that Christ has changed us, changed our priorities and changed the way we think and the way we act.

Give us Lord God when we fail to see the greatest gift that we've been given and may we see the beauty of that gift today and live it and recognize its impossibility, driving us to the foot of the cross, to your company and to prayer, to be the beautiful people, the individuals with the presence that we have as individuals, help us to recognize that, help us to know that we can disappoint one another or discourage one another.

When we are not present in prayer and love and life and worship that we separate ourselves. Lord God help us we pray to see that our very presence in worship, in the church, among our people is of immense value.

Lord bless us then we pray and bless us as we return our praise and thanks to you as the King of Love who is our shepherd. Amen.