

Vision for Giving

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[0 : 0 0] Now today I want to we're doing something we're not doing our study in Acts today we're taking a break from that we have today a vision and giving Sunday where I'm going to kind of split the sermon into two today and I'll explain a little bit more of what we're doing as we go along. I want to read a passage first from Romans chapter 12 it's on your bulletin sheet the reading I'm actually going to read from a verse previous to that I'm going to read the doxology at the end of Romans chapter 11 and then move on to Romans chapter 12 through to verse 8 so in verse 33 of the previous chapter it says, oh the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are His judgments how unscrupable His ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor who has given to Him that He might be repaid for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things to God be glory forever amen. I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect for by the grace given to me I say to every one of you that you must not think of himself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment each according to the measure of faith that God is assigned for as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us let us use them prophecy in proportion to our faith service in our serving the one who teaches in his teaching the one who exhorts in his exhortation the one who contributes in generosity the one who leads with zeal the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness I'm in and may God add his blessing to that reading this morning now what I'm going to do this morning is split the sermon into two bits so the first part we're going to look at vision our vision as a church and I've done this before don't fall it's going to be hard today I'm battling already I can tell because the heating system is like pumping out boiling hot heaters we can't stop it it's gonna hold building will explode by three o'clock this afternoon unless we can unplug some things somewhere so it's really hot sun's beating down and I've just told you you've heard it before so there has to be a work of the Holy Spirit to keep us all going today but what I want to do first of all is talk about vision and then we're gonna sing and we're gonna take up an offering for church planting I'll say a little bit about that and then I'm going to speak about giving for a short while today all in the context of the gospel and the work of the gospel and our responsibilities that we have here so Romans chapter 12 is a kind of passage that embedding these thoughts in and what I'm hoping to do and trying to do is remind us of why we're here really why we're a community why we're together and what our if you could call it our gospel DNA is what what it is that it's not that sets apart from anyone else I don't think that's the case at all but it's the kind of things that we focus on in the leadership kind of things that are important to us not just because they're important in a congregational life but I think they're important in our personal lives as

Christians and we seek to understand and know these priorities because they the the effect how we treat one another as well the effect how we come together and worship the effect our whole attitude to being part of the body of Christ and we have always sought to maintain simplicity by so doing you know if you have a clear vision if you have a clear understanding what we're about then that does aid us in trying to keep things simple and as the church has grown that is very difficult to do but it's important that we do have at least an understanding of the vision that we share and what grounds us in the truth for our own unique situation that God has placed us in and there's that as people join us and as we grow as a congregation then we want to remember and have a little bit of continuity of vision so I'm going to say four things very quickly you know what they are there the four G's that we have that we've looked at before a kind of the pillars the spiritual pillars that undergird the work that we do here the glory of God the gospel the grace of God and growth these are four things that are really important very quickly remind ourselves of these today the glory of God that's why I read from the previous at the end of the previous chapter in Romans which reminds us of this great doxology of the greatness of God and then it finishes with with him to him be the glory forever and ever amen and that's just a reminder to us that we can become really self important we can think that it's all about ourselves and it's all about what I do and it's all about not what I do but what each of us do but there's more to it than that for us and I was speaking on Monday evening at Napier Christian Union and this passage was being children of light from Ephesians chapter 5 and one of the things I said and it kind of struck me at the time was that when we understand the glory of God it's about recognizing that we're more serious about God than we are about ourselves and that's that's a really challenging thought that you know so often we are bedded and our lives are grounded in me in my life and and me kind of been I guess symbolically on the throne of everything and yet understanding who God is through His Word and through Jesus

Christ and our relationship with them reminds us that we're more serious about the living God in our lives than necessarily we are about ourselves and that immediately changes the way we think it may it changes the way we look at other people it changes the way we worship it changes the way we respond to things because we see that God has a purpose and His glory is something that matters to us we put His honor we put His grace we put His glory and we put His name before our own I did a wedding yesterday just along the road in the Sigthet library and I read from the song of Solomon which speaks about the jealousy of love and I was speaking about that jealous jealousy can be a really bad thing we were jealous in a bad way but it can also be a good thing when we we care about someone's person their name their honor their character where we're protective of them and in many ways that's what the glow knowing about the glory of God is and putting it first in our church not necessarily our personal desires and likes and and the longings but we want to do things our decisions and actions and our relationships aligned to the will of God to bring Him glory and that's a constant challenge for us it's a challenge in our leadership meetings it's a challenge in your city groups it's a challenge when you meet one another it's a challenge to your commitment it's a challenge to lots of things that we recognize who God is that He is there as the one worthy of our worship because of who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ we love Him and we seek because we've been made by Him to bring Him the glory so that's the first thing and the second thing the second pillar our foundation I guess of our church is the gospel itself and the whole of Romans is about the gospel this chapter is about the gospel of God and it's a gospel which transforms our lives as Paul says in verse 2 it renews us and the gospel we recognize and see is good news Romans chapter 1 verses 16 and 17 remind us of that at the beginning of this book that Paul writes when he speaks about the gospel I'm not ashamed of the gospel it's the power of God for everyone who believes for the

Jew first and also for the Greek for the righteousness from God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith and so we recognize that the gospel and what it means is foundational to the way we relate to one another and the way we relate to God that gospel being founded on historical fact that the root of the problems we face congregationally relationally in our families in the workplace in society and what a week this has been again in society isn't it what brokenness what brutality what pointless suffering and death and misery not just when it hits home in our own capital city but throughout the world and that we believe and we hope in the good news of the gospel that our judicial guilt before God the brokenness and the selfishness and the pride is dealt with by Jesus Christ by what he came to do it speaks into the evil of the world in which we live not just a third person everyone else's problem point of view but into our own needs and into our own sins and our own feelings and our own faults and that perspective and that challenge also is foundational to our church life it's foundational to the way we think about what is a priority and how we speak to people and how we deal with one another it's a gospel that is to bring joy and peace in other words it's to be tangible in our community and tangible in their decision-making and in all that we are it's a gospel of peace God lives in us and with us and among us and is changing us and we seek to live the kinds of life that reflect that we will teach Jesus here and we will keep teaching Jesus here no matter the temperature in the congregation building heat-wise or your longing to do or say or think or focus on other things we never move beyond the gospel because the gospel is shallow enough for infants to paddle in and deep enough for elephants to swim both meets the needs of the newly converted person and the needs of the long standing mature believer it deals with the child in nursery and the PhD student at New College or whatever else they might happen to be because the gospel permeates the news from God from Genesis to Revelation we don't graduate from that truth and we never become aloof beyond that truth I'm not to say that we just preach a narrow and simplistic gospel all the time but we allow the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ to interpret and to be at the core of all we understand in the Christian faith and sometimes you have other priorities sometimes other things seem more important to us in church life or in our personal lives at best it can be secondary to us at worst it can be absolutely insignificant and our car our call our clarion call is consistently to return to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the glory of God so it's the second thing the third thing is grace again all of Paul's teaching is permeated by grace and starts verse 3 by saying for by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you and so on and therefore that gospel of Jesus Christ reflect is

[12 : 59] reflected in the grace that we have received and in the practice of that in our lives so in St. Columbus here we seek not to be defined by race or by status or by education or by your relationships or your marriage or your singleness but by the indwelling of God's spirit by the reality that we are people who have been changed by grace and we seek that profession among our people that we are a people who have recognized our need of God's grace and are molded and transformed and their lives are permeated by his grace we want our city groups to be grace incubators and indeed the church on a Sunday as well to be grace incubators we don't just want it to be a kind of spiritual petrol station where you come along get filled up and go away again we don't just want it to be a gathering place where you occasionally dip your character and your personality into we don't want these Wednesday evenings simply to be a Bible study but to be a place where we develop our understanding of grace in meaningful relationships that we allow time for that and that we are a people who have tried we're a congregation have tried not to be program based but rather relationship based working out grace and giving each other time to live not just with one another but to build relationships with those who don't know

Christ Christ and Christianity and show them grace show them grace both in our own responses to them and as we introduce them to our Christian friends who we seek to know and act in a graceful way so the the passage beyond Romans 12 that we read from verse 9 onwards is just a very practical out working of that grace you know and we do have time to look at it but it's a hugely significant out working of grace and that this the kind of people that you are to be and I am to be both privately in our home on our own with other people we're to be those yours I'll just listen to very quickly sincere who are devoted or zealous joyful who share with one another who are hospitable who bless those who curse us who are rejoicing together mourning together in harmony with one another humble at peace and these are practical everyday challenges that we seek to that we hope our pillars of our church we don't want to be a people who know the truth intellectually and who revel in that truth but don't live it in the tough realities when we are hurt by fellow Christians when they are insensitive when they are careless when we fail as leaders when other people in our eyes fail when we lack showing common sense to one another and that's difficult because very often it's not how we're used to living and it's not how we're used to responding to one another in our lives because so much of what we do is defending who we are defending our position because we feel that that is important I think I don't know if I said this on Monday night at Napier as well if I do I forgive ask the guys that were at Napier to forgive me again but very often that whole thing about the glory of God or being Christians and living out Christianity in our lives is that we we feel that God is on our side you know

God's in our that's Christians think God's on our side and that what that means often is that when people disagree with us either in the church or outside of the church or in our lives we we're very defensive because or we're very protective of our position because well God's in my side because I'm a Christian and yet I think that the angle we should take in these things is not so much as God in my side because you may be arguing with fellow Christians or it may be a matter of not great significance but rather in our lives our perspective is am I on God's side rather than God being always on my side am I on God's side am I am I acting gracefully here am I doing what God would want me to do am I living for the glory of the gospel for the glory of God and with grace in my heart and that was will always be a challenge because it moves the center of gravity from us again towards him there's a spiritual family we seek to live out grace to put it another way let's institutionalize grace and that seems a paradox we can't you can't do that can you but let's make it something that really motivates and moves and drives all we do okay very briefly we've looked at glory gospel grace and then lastly growth for spiritual pillars that

I think are important to us as a congregation and second Peter 3 18 also speaks about that at the end this great duxology but growing the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to him be the glory both now and forevermore and so we want to be growing okay made that statement right here and now we want to be growing both personally and as a church we don't just want to stop we don't want to be treading water we want to be growing we want to be learning more we want to see more people coming to faith we want to see Edinburgh transformed for and by the gospel we want to have spiritual ambition in other words by faith we're not content I'm not content for us just to stay the way we are comfortable and neat and we know most people here I want a holy restlessness within us a holy restlessness for more personally in our Christian lives but also for more spiritually driving us into the place of impossibility all the times are be quiet stop this nonsense let's just hold on at what we've got let's just stop now and hold on no let's move forward with the with the gospel currently we're wrestling with the concept of growth we're longing I'm longing to see more conversion growth people coming to faith in Jesus Christ if we understand our calling to the city and to the gospel in the city we want to see that and we want to plant more churches that we're reaching into communities want to be multiplying churches and carrying on doing that I want us to be part of that movement that's happening in Edinburgh and to continue inspiring others in the same way in partnership I don't think we can stop here for to be ascending church if we're to move forward with the gospel we're probably going to be twice as big as we are now if not more when I fill all the galleries with people who will resource growth both in themselves and with their gifts and with their prayers and with their money and with everything that they are at the moment we are here in St. Columbus we're stretched to the limit in terms of stuff coping with our capacity to look after and protect and lead the congregation at the size it is and we're undergoing a review we've got a Christian consultant from outside the congregation giving us practical advice this is our spiritual pillars but we need practical advice to how best we can use the resources we have and how to multiply these resources and how to communicate that need to you by way of vision and I think over the next few months we'll explain a little bit more about that but there's such a great need and such a great need to pray and such a great need to trust both pray together and pray on our own so these are our pillars the gospel the glory of God the grace of God and the growth that comes from him that is that they are the 4g pillars on which we want to build strategy and vision and all that we are and I just want to remind you of that today okay briefly just vision was the first part giving's as the second part and nobody wants to hear this part of any sermon no preacher wants to preach it to be honest I don't any preacher that likes preaching on giving's and that's kind of a false humility really isn't it because we're not preaching but I guess part of it is because you know in the world the church gets a bad name for trying to get money off people and stuff like that and so it makes it difficult area to deal with but the Bible does deal with it and speak about it a lot and it is it is a spiritual thing and it's again a reflection of our understanding of God and of grace and of the gospel and of who he is so I guess for for this Sunday only this is a fifth

G if we've looked at the 4g's in our kind of vision this is the other one and it really is in a sense I hope it's a product of the other four because with the Bible does talk about giving but it also broadens a great deal it's not just about what we give financially it's about giving ourselves and that's really at the core of it so it does reflect our understanding of God and who God is you know verse 15 of this chapter 9 that we didn't actually read it's the end of the chapter but he says thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift so it is reflected again it stems from our understanding of God and of grace and of who he is the way he treats us what a God he is in Christ his incredible generous grace that it consistently forgives us it consistently accepts us he consistently takes us back he consistently says I know I understand you're sorry and I accept you because the price has been paid because he has gone and dealt with everything that we were culpable towards him about and he has dealt with that and he shows that not just only to us as Christians but to our friends and neighbors who aren't Christians he pours out everyday grace every breath they take every smile that they show every gift that they receive in this life is because God allows them to live and receive and he's patient with them but as he holds nothing back not only in his life and in his death and resurrection but in his continued giving of himself and the Holy Spirit in our lives and his ongoing intercession for us in the inheritance he's holding for us looking forward in his relentless and ongoing forgiveness to us and I do think that in terms of giving sacrificial giving that is our lives or whatever it is our material possessions or whatever it reflects our understanding of God so if he's a miserable tight-fisted grumpy horrible sort of a person then that's how that's reflected in the way that we live our lives as Christians if he's small and narrow and bigoted and insular and that's how we that's reflected in what we give back to him in our lives and it reflects our understanding of this generous God the prodigal son forget it it's the prodigal God that that should be called that great prodigality of the father it is what we're reminded of in scripture so generosity comes from our understanding of who God is in our lives and also it therefore reflects the attitude of our heart in terms of giving whether it's serving or however in our offerings or giving it's to be done as David read from that passage cheerfully each one must decide what in his heart to give not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver and isn't that good isn't that great that that's what God asks of us and reminds us of that the attitude of our heart is reflected in the generosity of our God and therefore in the generosity of what we do we want to give him the best because he is the best for us we are people of the second chance so we open our homes and we open our hearts and we open our lives and we open our wallets even we share our gifts and our characters and all that we are and humanly speaking our lives have been enriched hugely by the generosity of people to us both as a church and I'm

[26 : 19] sure many of us as individuals and it's a great thing to receive that but it's also a beautiful thing to give and to be the person who brings light into other people's lives so it's an attitude of heart it's also something that harbours no loss you would know that you will not be God's debtor when you serve and sacrifice and give to him from what he is given God's grace will abound to you and will abound to us all he's given he's promised us all we need and he will supply for us as he says in verse 10 a rich spiritual harvest you know it talks elsewhere of being generous to God because the Catalan a thousand hills are his and he root constantly is reflected as one for whom we cannot be in debt to in our lives and this generosity is we are given a biblical example we didn't read it here it's in the previous previous chapter where the generosity is encouraged by giving an example of it and Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church he's given the example of the Macedonian churches who were in great poverty but who gave as they could generously happily willingly to help other churches at the point of their need and beyond their ability to help it was that whole kind of generous voluntary spirit and he uses them as a great example they saw giving as an opportunity to serve I'm not sure if we often feel like that sometimes if we see as an opportunity of serve for some people in biblical and Romans the passage we first read speaks about that there are some that have a special gift of generosity a unique gift of generosity that isn't there for everyone and that's a wonderful thing but the biblical example is for us all to recognize and to learn from so I think it's a challenge for us now with this I close as you can see rather uncomfortable with this whole concept of from my position sharing it but I have to get over that because it's for I believe for the gospel and for the gospel sake and for the growth of the gospel the challenge is for us to think of the needs that will allow us to move forward with the gospel Charles Spurgeon great preacher the 19th century tells of receiving a wealthy man's invitation to come and preach at his rural church to help the members raise funds to pay off a debt that they had and the man also told Spurgeon that he was free to use his country house his townhouse or his seaside home to stay in Spurgeon wrote back sell one of the places and pay the debt yourself and that was the challenge to that man in that situation and in that Christian community in which he was and the challenge for us is to rise to what God has brought us to here we want to see the gospel flourish we want to be generous people of our time of our homes of our love of our giving's we want our hearts and our lives to be focused on that kind of loose sacrificial reckless liberating generous hearted spirit giving of ourselves to all who are around us

and that is really the greatest need we have and when we grow things will change here things are already things have changed it's harder for sometimes as the church grows it becomes more impersonal and all these things but let's not just not become hedgehogs and look to be defensive about that but to blossom and to rise to the challenge of what growth means for us God has been so good God has been really good to us in St. Columbus materially and I think spiritually also I hope and pray spiritually and it is humbling it's amazing to see this even this building now at the level is that even when the heating doesn't work perfectly but it is good and it is a great resource but that's only a tiny bill how we've managed by God's grace in his generosity to plant new churches to to put people in there and to see the gospel flourish and grow in these places so I go to them and I don't know 90% of the people anymore in these churches because they're new to the gospel and they're new to

Christ and that's a great encouragement we want to seize cornerstone and an Esk Valley to be standing on their own we want to support the potential new church plant in Harrington and another 10 or 12 church plants throughout the city to reach out into communities that we can't reach with the gospel we recognize that there's a cost to that both physically and relationally administratively and spiritually but there's a huge cost so the challenge is for us I think to look at our own lives before God and to seek to be sacrificial and generous according to what we have not according to what we don't have it's great to be regularly financially supporting the work of the gospel here a few couple years ago we talked about 10th for strength and that whole concept in the Bible of giving a 10th to the work of the gospel to teach our children about that and in many ways isn't that great that God says well you know this is a kind of rough guide one 10th nine nine 10ths nine 10ths well it's still mine but you know use it wisely but but for the cause of the gospel a 10th maybe maybe more sacrificially at the moment I think probably in the congregation and this is very practical forgive me we've got 71 standing orders to keep the work let's it would be brilliant to raise it to 100 it would be great to have that ongoing work that would allow us to support ministry here and support growth and support church planting it's a great investment there's no risk on return the return is guaranteed it's incalculable multiplication of the benefit physically that you give spiritually there will be a spiritual harvest if you have nothing to give if you very little to give give from that if you have lots to give give from that but there will be a spiritual harvest and

God will honor that if you make a foundation of your life you will never got God will never be in your debt and he will never let you be in that position that's an eternal investment that we're talking about for the sake of the gospel and the sake of this city that we love and beyond that we understand who he is and that generosity marks who we are in every dimension of our lives and it's a beautiful thing isn't it forget about the financial thing for a moment isn't a beautiful thing to be a generous generously minded congregation generous in the way we receive others in the way we forgive others in the way that we consider others in the way that we share what we have with others in the name of Christ I think that's a great reflection of his grace and of who he is and of what he has done for us amen let's pray briefly

Father God we thank you for who you are we thank you for the remarkable generosity of inexhaustible God inexhaustible in love and in power and in justice and in purity in ways that we simply can't fathom forgive us when we shrink you down so often into the kind of people we think you ought to be and rather than being accountable to you and recognizing your glory we want to make you accountable to us we want you in the dock we want you to justify who you are we want you to be dethroned so that we might be sovereign in our own lives and

[35 : 51] Lord we have been created to think and act otherwise and we thank you for Jesus Christ who enables us by his sacrificial rescue to think and live otherwise and may we do so in a radical way in a way that challenges us each morning as we look in the mirror about our spiritual lives and how we act and how we respond give us generous heartedness generous heartedness towards other people thinking the best of them not passing on gossip not being quick to condemn or criticize but recognizing who we are and being generous in all that we are and do towards one another and give us a generosity towards those who we love who don't know Jesus that we will give for them and share with them and pray for them and spend lots of time with you pleading for their souls and loving them with all the ability that we have Lord forgive us when we are mean spirited and mean in our lives and live only for ourselves because we know ultimately its destructiveness and its brutality so help us today we pray and bless what we give financially to the cause may it reflect our attitude to

Jesus may we have just a great overflow of generosity for the work of the gospel both here and abroad and individual case people that we support and poverty and everything that we are help us Lord we pray and enable us to be a generous church for Jesus sake amen