

Acts 10:38

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Preacher: Donald Macleod

[0 : 00] Pastures clothed be, the veils with corner clad.

And now they shout and sing to thee, for thou hast made them glad.

Amen.

Amen. I'm taking these words this morning because our service is linked to the work of Tear Fund. And I want to link that work with the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And I want to focus in particular on this great statement that Jesus went around doing good.

[1 : 31] But I find that the verse, in fact, brings before us three great truths, each of them focused on the person of Jesus.

We find, first of all, that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. We might ask, when did this anointing occur?

We might say perhaps at his baptism. Or perhaps at his birth. Or perhaps in Nazareth when he began his preaching.

It doesn't matter. The important point is that Jesus was anointed with and filled with the Spirit of God.

And from the Spirit came all his power and all his effectiveness. We sometimes speak as if Christ did certain things because his divine nature enabled him to do so.

[2 : 45] Now, of course, Jesus had a divine nature. He was both God and man. But in the Gospels what we find is that Christ, the Son of God incarnate, keeps that divine nature in abeyance.

And he performs all his works, all his ministry, in the power of the Spirit who fills him and who leads him.

In other words, he had the same Spirit as we ourselves have. He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And all the graces of Christ. And all the gifts of Christ. And all the compassion of Christ.

And all the wonderful power of Christ. And all the marvelous power of Christ. All of these are the consequence of this great fact that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and with power.

[4 : 00] The second thing is that he was one of whom it was said that God was with him.

God was with him. And God here means, of course, God the Father. He himself, in John's Gospel, reminds us that he is not alone and he is never alone.

Because the Father who sent him is with him. Every moment of his pilgrimage, every moment of crisis, God the Father stood beside him.

God the Father encouraged him. God the Father helped him. God the Father guided him. In some ways, it's like any son embarking on a great work.

And his father saying to him, I will go with you. And I'll be your helper. And your guide, your support and strength. And so it was. When God sent his son into the world, he did not send him alone.

[5 : 17] Not only did God's Spirit dwell upon him, but God the Father stood by his side. And that was true every single moment, except that great climactic moment on the cross when he cried, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why have you gone? Why? But apart from that moment, God the Father was always with him. And he was never alone. Now those two points, I'll come back to again.

Here we see that first of all, that Jesus was anointed with God's Spirit. And then we see that God was always with him.

And then we see thirdly, that he went around doing good. He went around, he was no recluse.

And he went around doing good. He went around as a benefactor. And everywhere he went, he did good.

[6 : 32] Now we've tended, I think, to lose sight of this. We have sometimes seen Jesus as a great teacher, as a preacher of those great discourses.

We find, for example, in Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, or the great discourses on the Gospel of John. And of course, Jesus was a uniquely competent theologian. and Jesus was a uniquely talented and effective preacher. And of course, too, preaching was very central to Jesus' ministry.

And yet, there was more to it than preaching alone. And we've also, of course, remembered often that Christ came above all to lay down his life as a ransom for many.

And we have thought, often, I'm sure, and spoken often of the sacrifice of Christ and of his great moment of climax on the cross of Calvary where he showed how much he loved us by laying down his life for the world.

[7 : 59] And of course, all that is enormously important. And the Gospels devote huge amounts of space to the story of the passion of our Savior.

But we must remind ourselves that Jesus did more than teach and that Jesus did more than die. That there was also this crucial dimension to his life and ministry. He went about doing good. And in a very important sense, he is still going about doing good.

He was a great teacher and he was a great redeemer. But he was also a great benefactor who brought joy and gladness and comfort everywhere he went.

And when he began his ministry at Nazareth, he announced his own great program. And he said, it was this. God, he said, anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

[9 : 12] God sent me to liberate the captives. God sent me to bind up the brokenhearted. God sent me to comfort those of old, to give them the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

That was his program. That was his great mission statement. God sent me to the very letter.

And if you look at the pattern of his ministry, yes, there was great preaching. And yes, too, there was that great climactic act of redemption.

But there were also those great miracles, those great mighty acts, where he healed the sick and delivered and delivered the demonized.

And where he fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, gave mobility to the crippled. That, too, was central to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 24] There was a teaching ministry. And there was a great redemption ministry, unique to himself. But there was also a great central ministry of compassion as Christ went about doing good.

And that was true, also, of the early church. That church, we might say, majored on preaching. That church majored on evangelism.

That church spread the gospel of Jesus Christ turning the word upside down. And this great message spread like fire all over the Roman Empire.

And yet, those apostles never said, preaching is our task and preaching is our only task. But where they went, they healed.

And where they went, they brought with them the compassion of Jesus Christ. How often have we heard allusion to those great words of St. Paul's?

[11 : 40] We preach Christ crucified. And how often have these words been misapplied and misused as a pretext for the church doing nothing but preaching.

As if we had no vocation and no responsibility but to preach. And as if that preaching itself could be done from pulpits that most of our fellow countrymen can easily ignore.

You look at St. Paul. Yes, he preached. And no man ever preached more zealously or more wisely or indeed more profoundly.

No greater theologian ever walked this earth. No greater evangelist ever opened his mouth in witness to Jesus.

And yet here was a man who remembered the poor and a man who in the midst of all his innumerable obligations yet took time to organize a collection for the poor victims of famine in Jerusalem.

[12 : 59] He organized that collection. He administered it and he took it personally towards destination. And in the course of doing so he observed the most meticulous rules of accountancy and of financial property.

And he never said I'm too busy preaching to remember the poor. I'm too busy theologizing and providing defense for the gospel to condemn my pedestal and think of all those mundane things. No. The Lord he served went about doing good and the church he belonged to went about doing good.

And he himself remembered the poor and served the poor. And when the Reformation came to this land of ours and John Knox sat down to formulate its discipline in the great first book book of discipline then he made specific provision for an aaconate that was mandated that was given the very precise task of remembering the poor and providing for the poor.

John Knox wanted those great lands of the church lands donated by the often mistaken piety of medieval nobles in an attempt to save their souls by making donations to the church.

[14 : 53] And over the centuries the church accumulated massive properties and Knox wanted those properties to provide some form of social security for the poor of this land.

Instead the powers that be our apacious monarchy and nobility they wanted those lands for themselves one third to the king and one third to the nobles and only a poor residue to the church for the sake of its ministries and its mission to the poor.

That's where our foundations lie. That's the soil we rooted in. Our tradition that did indeed give priority to preaching that loved to engage in reflection of the person of Christ and on the great work of atonement but which always knew that its ministry was not simply one of preaching not simply one of proclamation but always knew it was called upon to go about doing good.

And I believe today that the church of God as the representative on earth of the risen saviour and of this man of Galilee has the same responsibility as our Lord himself had to go about doing good.

Yes we too must teach and we too must suffer in our own way for the world salvation but we must never make either of these a pretext for evading this aspect of our responsibility.

[17 : 14] we too must go about doing good. I mean that as individuals we must do it and I mean that as a church we must do it that it must be organized to do it.

I mean that as a congregation as a congregation we not only preach we not only reflect on the theology of incarnation and atonement but as a congregation we go about doing good.

What does that mean in detail? Let me mention just two or three points. It means first of all that we are called to engage in a ministry of encouragement.

the church very often has confused faithfulness with denunciation with false finding.

I'm saying that if we look at Jesus' ministry he was filled with the spirit the spirit who was the comforter who was the encourager the spirit of consolation he defined his own role did Jesus as one which involved binding up the brokenhearted and bringing comfort to those more and giving reason of praise to those weighed down by a spirit of heaviness.

[19 : 16] he had no compunction about making people feel good and I'm saying that as we go about fulfilling our own task as benefactors in this world that surely is a large part of our responsibility to make those we meet with feel good to make our community feel good there are those around us who are weak those who are feeble minded those who are disconsolate those who mourn those who can't cope those who live in appalling loneliness and sometimes what they need is not things or finance or what have you but someone will make them feel that they're not doing so badly someone to tell them we admire you for coping someone to make them feel good feel dare I say it feel a little proud give them back some self-esteem to make them feel that they matter

I heard a parish minister record the story some time ago visiting pay to one of his parishioners at Christmas time and he found a solitary Christmas card on the mantelpiece and he said cheerfully I said I see you have a card and she looked down and said yes he took the card and looked inside and he saw the inscription to Annie from Annie in her loneliness she had sent herself a card of course we don't meet people like that and I'll come back to that later I think it's hugely important to remind ourselves of I dare say so every human being is a poor soul and don't you envy any of them and all of them need encouragement in Edinburgh yesterday at the

Free Concern Rally Mrs. Alwyn Ford spoke in passing of the coffee mornings in Coat Bridge to which the local women folk come and she spoke of the trouble they took to make the women folk feel that they mattered and it seemed to me deeply instructive she said we provided she said the best baking and tablecloths and flowers it wasn't simply a cup of coffee important though that was but they were so concerned to make them feel important because they are important it wasn't to create the illusion of importance it was an acknowledgement of their intrinsic importance they reserved the best baking and they reserved tablecloths and they reserved flowers and every homeless young man you see on our streets every such one we come in contact with every one of them is important that perhaps is what encouragement means the word of appreciation of thanks that acknowledges somebody else's meaningfulness and somebody else's tribe perhaps over adversity maybe we've got to learn often to bite your own tongue and to say the thing that is kind

the thing that builds up that encourages that makes people feel good and I say again makes them feel proud because you know many of the apparently least successful members of society are perhaps far more successful in their situation than you and I would ever be in their situation he went about giving encouragement and he went about giving relief because everywhere he went there was need there was illness and there was poverty and there was hunger and there was nakedness and there was hopelessness and everywhere he went he did what he could he gave what he had in the same way as Peter and John did later when they said silver and gold have I none but such as I have I give what he said and what we can do and what we can do and what Jesus could do and what we can do and what Peter and John could do and yet you know there is this core principle this essential principle such as I have what can we do for the sick and what can we do for the poor and what can we do for the homeless and what can we do for those who are hungry and naked it's not a question of doing exactly what Jesus did or exactly what the apostles did it's a question of bringing the relief but it is within our own power to bring to the situations that we ourselves encounter and I'm not here today to flage it or castigate because I'm very very conscious that many of you are involved in such benefaction to a degree far beyond what I am and indeed

[27 : 00] I do want to encourage all that is being done in the congregation and to applaud it and I want also to give it a theological mandate I want to tell you it's as important as the preaching I want to tell you it's as important as the theology I want to say perhaps it's even more important I want to say perhaps it's even far more important I'm saying it's fundamental I'm saying it's essential our work in the local community with our own neighbours our endeavour to reach out as best we can to all the problems we ourselves encounter whether on our own doorsteps or further afield through such agencies as here fund I don't need to convince you at all of the obligatedness of this but I do need to convince you that this is not some synbrelity or some secondary thing it's one of the great marks of the church the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline and concern for the poor these were all part of the great

Knoxian mission the mission of John Knox this was not a man who spent his life devising anti-Catholic diatribes he did of course spend some of his life doing so but that was set in a great positive framework which included this concern to bring relief to Scotland's poor and that was not something done by way of tokenism it was regarded as fundamental as administered in the sacraments I'll even dare to say this in the hope that there's nobody who's going to quote me too widely on it that the reformed church in Scotland because of manpower problems often neglected the sacrament a congregation might sometimes in a remote area go 12 years without the Lord supper I'm not defending that for a moment but that's the way it happened but Knox's concern for the poor was immediate and urgent and the machinery was put in place immediately to facilitate this particular responsibility on the part of the reformed church in Scotland and so we go about doing good bringing encouragement we go about doing good bringing relief whatever we need and I'm going to venture a third point and it is this that we go about doing good by engaging in prophetic protest political structures. Solomon, for example, had forced labour gangs, and these in the long term were the occasion of tremendous poverty. Later kings, of course, were oppressors of the poor, and the priests too were oppressors of the poor. And time and again the prophets of Israel, they opened their mouths and they spoke. Yes, you say they spoke, and you tell me, yes, they spoke those great messianic prophecies. And they gave us all those glorious visions of the coming Messiah, and all those great declarations of the glory of the latter days. And of course, yes, sometimes they did that. But you know so often they opened their mouths in protest, protest against the society in which they lived, in which the rich added house to house and field to field, in which powerful men abused their power to aggrandize and enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. When a Lord and Saviour came, this gentle Jesus, his man who was meek and lowly in heart, he came and spoke lovely words, and great words of profundity and consolation. But he spoke too of those who devoured widows' houses, who abused their power to exploit the poor, who ensured that there was no change and there was no social revolution, because the status quo suited them. And time and again the Christian church has confused the means for law and order with the sanity of the status quo. But there have been voices down through the centuries, Francis of Assisi and John Knox, William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury, Howard, all those great champions of the speechless and the powerless and marginalized, our own Thomas Chalmers protesting against the condition of Scotland's poor, and saying, look, it's not merely a matter of

individual character or individual misfortune. It's a matter of structures. It's a matter of the way things are in Zaire, in India, in Saudi Arabia. It's a matter of the prices Western nations are prepared to pay for coffee.

They will insist on prices so low that in Africa, men and women must work in conditions of abject slavery to give us coffee at the prices we need. I'm simply saying that Christ not only encouraged and not only brought relief, but Christ spoke out in passionate and prophetic protest against the powerful and against the structures that they had put in place to maintain their power and to maintain the gap of their power and to maintain their power and to maintain their power and to maintain their power.

[35 : 08] And somehow today, without embroiling ourselves in party politics, the church must continue to speak out its own Christian critique in the assertion of social justice. Law and order is not enough. We want justice for the poor.

Let me make two or three remarks briefly in closing. I want you first of all to be conscious, or to remind you, I should say, of the cost of this. He went about doing good. And that meant that Jesus was constantly accessible and in many ways He was constantly beleaguered by those who wanted to accost Him and wanted His help and wanted His advice.

And you know, it's a great, great, great strain having to be available. And it's very easy not to be available. But He was available. He went about doing good. He went about, you see.

Jesus knew for the poor, and Jesus knew for the sick, and knew for the homeless, and He could very, very easily have avoided all contact with them.

He could have avoided those places. He could have said, I'm a preacher. I need to study. I'm a churchman. I need to prepare. I need every hour of the day for preparation and for prayer. And so I must live in my closet.

[37 : 04] And I must live in my closet. And I must not waste my time by going to use Chambers' great word by going abroad. Because if I go abroad, I won't be able to move or people pestering me and asking me questions.

Or I must disconnect my telephone to give myself some privacy. I must have some barrier to keep me from the poor. But I must have some barrier to keep me from the poor.

He went about. You can always avoid going down the road to Jericho. When Chambers was in Glasgow, the great problem was that each parish had to provide for its own poor.

The East End parish in which Chambers worked, it had to look after its own poor. And the great West End parishes, they had to look after their own poor.

But Chambers said, there are no poor in the West End. And what you're saying is that the poor of the East End must look after the poor of the East End.

[38 : 25] And the poor of the West End had no responsibility for the poor of the East End. The rich of the West End have no responsibility for the poor of the East End.

I'm sure all of you know the story of the day they opened, a famous church in Glasgow, Lansdowne Parish Church. And that church that day had the most expensive seat rents in Scotland.

You couldn't enter, you couldn't be a pew holder unless you could afford the annual seat rent. And the day it was opened, of course, it was a very important day and there was great public activity.

And some wise man pinned notice to the church door. And the notice said, this church is not for the poor and needy.

It's for the rich and Dr. Eady. It is very easy for us to avoid going about.

[39 : 34] To avoid the contact. Jesus deliberately structured his day so that he met those to whom he could do good.

He did not avoid the hassle. He was prepared to be interrupted. Often when he himself was more stressed, even on the cross, we find him ministering to somebody who is sharing the agony of crucifixion.

So, the cost of it. We go about. We are available. We are accosted. We are pestered. We are questioned.

That's the cost of going about doing good. And secondly, I want to say this. And secondly, I want to say this if I can. We are never going to make an impact as church or congregation if we disjoin preaching from going about doing good.

The early church turned the world upside down. And you say, yes, by preaching. And I say, no, by preaching and healing.

[40 : 58] By preaching and by caring for the poor. And I believe that what we've been doing for so long, trying to turn the world upside down by preaching alone, that that is an exercise doomed to failure.

If you even go back into the more recent history of evangelicalism, you will find that all its great impactful figures have allied social action to gospel proclamation.

You think of Charles Spurgeon and his orphanage and many other similar enterprises. You think of Thomas Chalmers. Yes, these men believe passionately in the primacy of preaching. And they were preachers first and foremost. They were preachers who went about doing good. And so I close.

What outcome do I desire from this sermon? I desire a passionate commitment to a synthesis.

[42 : 21] The synthesis of preaching and benefaction. I want you to come to believe that the obligation of this particular congregation is not only to preach the gospel but to go about doing good.

But I want you to believe that not only are individuals obligated to go about doing good, but that as a church and congregation, you are obligated under God to structure and organize yourselves, not only as a preaching station, but as an organization that goes about doing good.

You should, as a congregation, be going about Aberdeen, going around doing good.

Not only preaching as you are doing and will do in the years that God promises you that are to come. Years which I'm sure God will richly bless.

But that alone will not suffice and does not deserve to suffice. God had only one son, it has been said, and he made him a preacher.

[43 : 51] But I would also say, God had only one son, and he sent him to this earth to go around doing good.

He preached, and he went around doing good. That's what I'm called upon to do. That's what you're called upon to do.

And that's what Bonacord Free Church is called upon to do. Preach and go around doing good.

May God help us so to do.

Let's pray. Amen. O Lord, we ask that your Spirit would bless your word to us.

That those of us involved in going around doing good may be encouraged by the word you have spoken to us. And those of us who are remiss in this respect may be convicted by what your word has said to us.

[45 : 05] And help us now, Lord, to give our minds to working out ways in which we may achieve this synthesis between preaching and going around doing good.

that honor may come to your name and relief to many in this city. For our Savior's sake. Amen. O Lord, closing praise of Psalm 23.

The children of St. Columba, we shall sing the whole psalm. The Lord's my shepherd, I not want.