

Good Evening,

Today, is our vision Sunday where I want to set before you the direction and challenges for our church for the next few years.

This morning I talked about being Partners in the Gospel and tonight I want to about the **same thing**, but to use a different text.

I want to use the opening verses of Luke chapter 1, which Jeremy read to us, but I want to focus on v3 which reads

*I (Luke) have written an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

OK, now as far as ‘uninspiring’ texts in the Bible go – I admit, this has to be right up there with them As a text to preach ‘Vision’ from – this one sounds like I may have trouble keeping you awake!

Yet I have heard Mark Driscoll get excited about these verses for over an hour and he has shown me that “there is gold in them there hills”.

So we’re going to go for it.

Tonight, I want to talk about 2 things:

Our Mission IN Partnership; and

a Method OF Partnership in the gospel.

This is for everyone who considers themselves to be a part of this church.

It is for everyone who wants to love God,

It is for everyone who wants to be a “giver” and not simply “taker”.

Our Mission IN Partnership, and a Method OF Partnership in the Gospel.

### **1. So let’s talk about Our Mission in Partnership.**

Luke’s Gospel is the longest of all the Gospels.

Sadly, someone has worked out that there are 1,151 verses in Luke (*they really need to get out more*) of which 568 of them, are simply the words of Jesus.

So, if we want to know what Jesus said, we just need to read Luke’s Gospel.

Luke and Acts, (written to the same guy) form the largest part of our New Testament written by the same author.

By way of sentences, verses and words, Luke writes more than Paul or anyone else.

He was commissioned to write these two books by a guy called Theophilus.

And we know some stuff about Theophilus.

We know that he was a **Government Official**;

Luke calls him "most excellent Theophilus," which is Title of State.

So he was a Politician, or a Governor.

We know that he was working for the **Romans**

Since his name’s no more Jewish than “Sven” is Egyptian, or “Shamus” is Iranian.

Theophilus is a gentile and therefore part of the Roman set-up.

We know he was **wealthy** because he commissioned two books from someone as preeminent as Luke (an educated, sophisticated and skilled person) - the paper itself would have cost a year’s wages.

And finally we know that he was a **Christian**. His name means “lover of God”, he commissions these two books so that he may know with certainty the things he believed.

So he’s a wealthy, educated, Roman governor, who loves God. and what he’s wondering is this:

*v4 can I be certain about the things I believe*

Is it really true?

Is Jesus really God?

Did he really do all those things?

Did he: walk on water, cast out demons, multiply loaves and fishes, command nature to obey him, die and rise again.

Did he really say he was God?

could he really forgive sins?

did he really die on a cross for me?

He needs to know because he has a lot to lose.

You see

in his Day – the you didn't get Brownie points by saying "Hiel Hitler", you got Brownie points by saying "Caesar is Lord" – and if you want to keep your job you certainly didn't say "Jesus is Lord."

In his Day, A Government Official would say, "My highest allegiance is to the Roman Empire", Theophilus was about to say "My highest allegiance is to the Kingdom of God."

In his Day "All religions were welcome and all gods were equal" he was about to say "Jesus alone is God and Saviour."

So Theophilus needs to know that what he has placed his faith in, is true.

For what he "Believes" - is going to get him into trouble, get him fired, get him imprisoned or something worse.

His faith is going to cost him.

So there's a lot at stake.

So he contracts, hires, funds, supports Luke.

"Luke, I need you to go find the truth".

"Go get the facts".

"Go find out exactly what happened around Jesus and give me a full report."

**Now here's what's so amazing.**

Two thousand years later, thanks to Theophilus' generosity,

We are looking at the largest contribution to the entire New Testament.

One man, in partnership with God,

uses the money at his disposal to further the Kingdom,

and as a result

HIS faith is increased (he got the assurance he was looking for);

OUR faith is increased we get a highly scholarly account of Jesus; and

for 2,000 years, the billions of people who have worshipped Jesus have had – THEIR faith has increased!

- that's amazing!

He could have said, actually, stuff the gospel (there's three of them knocking around already)

I'm going to spend my money on a new camel with alloy wheels

I'm going to hire a new slave to do the dishes

I'm going to go on holiday to the exotic holiday to outer reaches of the empire to a place called Sea-Ford (great beach I hear!)

He could have done that!

But he said, no

I need to find out the facts about Jesus.

I need to find an educated, objective, scholarly, academic historian to write this down

I need to make an enormous financial sacrifice to get this investigated before all the eye-witnesses die.

And as a result you and I, and all the billions of Christians since, have been blessed by him!  
He used the money that he had for mission – and millions of lives are changed.

There is something similar in Luke 8v1.

David Garratt pointed this out to me.

In Luke 8v1 we read that

*Jesus travelled from town to town proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.*

*The Twelve Disciples were with him,*

*and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:*

*Mary from whom seven demons had come out;*

*Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household;*

*Susanna; and many others.*

*These women were helping to support Jesus and the disciples out of their own means.*

Did you see that?

*These women were helping to support Jesus and the disciples out of their own means.*

Many of these women would NOT have been wealthy,

they would have been the main bread winner in their family –

yet their lives had been touched by the gospel and they gave what they had to support Jesus and his mission.

And without them – the disciples would never have been able to stay with Jesus.

And without the disciples where would the gospel be?

These women were partners in Mission

They used the little wealth they had to support others to do a job.

They were givers and not just takers.

Theophilus was a partner in Mission

They used the wealth he had to support Luke to do a job.

He was a givers and not a taker.

If you are a part of this church then we are in partnership together for mission.

Whether we are wealthy or poor

young or old

new or established in our faith

We are all called to use the wealth we have to support others to do a job

we are to be givers and not takers.

We have a job to do...

to save souls from the chaos of life, to rescue them from the grip of death, to divert them from the darkness of hell.

We are partners in this mission.

to show people the love of God in Jesus , to help them find him, to bring them home.

And I am asking us all to use the wealth we have to support others to do a job.

Today, we stand at a cross-roads for our church's ministry

Today, we decide in our hearts

whether we go forwards or backwards,

whether to grow or shrink,

whether we listen to God's word for us, or just let it pass us by

David Garratt is coming to the end of his curacy with us,  
He has to decide now where he should go.  
Up to now his costs have been met mainly by the Diocese.  
His and Helen's ministry are hugely valuable to us and  
they have been part of some of the most exciting growth in our church.  
They are key players,  
and The PCC would like them to stay here,  
and they would like to stay here,  
and I know many, many of you would like to them to stay too  
– but if that is to happen we will need to pay for David.

Chris has been our Youth Minister now for over 6 years,  
he is at the point where he should either move on, or be given new responsibilities.  
We all know that Chris has outstanding gifts beyond delivering great youth work.  
He is shaping up to be the best preacher we've got  
He is an outstanding musician  
He has great skills in modern modes of communication.  
Ali is also a gifted worship leader, she is key to the youth work in her own right, she is now heading up our  
new Social Justice initiative.

We need these gifts.  
The PCC would like them to stay and take on these new roles,  
they would like to stay,  
many, many of you would like to them to stay –  
but if that is to happen we will need to pay for Chris' replacement.

The vision of Southover is to strengthen every area of our church's life –  
but its also to establish a new congregation; and  
to develop a town-centre, town-wide ministry  
We want to reach the whole town and just this week the other Anglican ministers have given us permission  
to do so.

The reality is that the other Anglican churches recognise that they cannot do this sort of outreach themselves  
and they have said that we can and Bishop Wallace agrees.  
People are dying all over this town we have the opportunity to help them.

But we can't do this if we lose David & Helen and Chris & Ali.  
If we lose them our ministry will shrink.  
Lets be clear: Jeremy Bamber and I will not be able to cover for what these guys are doing.  
Without them our ministry will go backwards.

To keep them and to appoint someone new to run our Youth Work under Chris  
we need to find an extra £64,000 every year.  
This is a BIG ask, but it is do-able,  
We need Men like Theophilus,  
Women like Mary  
We need young and old  
We need New and established Christian's  
to be partners in Mission  
to use our wealth to support others to do a job  
to be givers and not just takers.  
Will you be that person?

You ask, how are we going to do this?  
I'm glad you asked because that is my second point

## **2. What is the Method for our Partnership.**

### **2.1 Well firstly it needs to be personal.**

There's no point even thinking about this challenge unless it is personal.

#### **Unless the gospel is a personal joy to us, we'll only ever give to God our loose change.**

Do you think Theophilus' regrets his huge investment in Luke?

Do you think he gets bored when another person finds God through the words of Jesus which **he** commissioned to get written down by Luke?

Do you think he ever wonders if this was NOT the greatest investment he ever made in his life?

What about the women who supported Jesus?

Do you think they ever regretted their sacrificial investment in the disciples?

Do you think that they didn't have a personal sense of joy when Peter preached at Pentecost and 3,000 became Christians?

Do you think they didn't turn to another and say "do you remember when he was so raw, when he had no-idea, when he fluffed his first sermon?.. and now look at him - that's my boy!"

To invest in the Kingdom of God.

You have to want God to be glorified

You have to want people to be saved

You have to have a joy to see the Kingdom of God grow in other people's lives.

And the best way of doing that is to give.

For where your treasure is there your heart will follow.

#### **Not only that but unless the gospel has won your life, you'll only give from what you can spare.**

You see if we haven't given our life to Jesus – then we'll see the money that we have, as ours.

But if you've given your life to Jesus – then you'll see the money that you have as HIS on loan to you, just as your life is HIS on loan to you.

If you think your money is yours then you're not yet a Christian.

It's not **our** money, it's his, we're stewards,

and if that bothers us, then you've just spotted an idol in your life

– something more important than God

and you need to do something about it.

We either worship (our life revolves around) our money, our status and our possessions,

OR

we worship WITH them –

we worship (give to God) our money, our status, our possessions,

And the clearest indicator of whether we have given to God our is to look at our "financial giving" – if we don't give –

then our faith is just all talk and hot air!

So our giving needs to be personal.

### **2.2 But it should also be Proportional**

**In the Old Testament this was proportional to the income we receive.**

In the Old Testament a Jew would give in two ways:

by tithing, by giving a tenth of his income (which was considered compulsory), and

by giving on top of that thank offerings (which were considered voluntary).

Therefore it would not be unusual for a Jew to give, BEFORE paying taxes, an additional 15% of his income to God.

There are no rules about how much Christians should give.

But right back in Genesis (4,000 years ago)  
Jacob the swindler said to God “I shall give to you a tenth of everything that I have”,  
Zacchaeus the tax collector gave away half his possessions; and  
The unnamed widow in Mark 12 gave 'everything she had to live on'.

There are no rules about how much Christians should but attitude is important  
*A woman once asked her husband, “Darling, can you give me a little money”? And he replied “Of course darling, how little”?*

There are no rules about how much a Christian should give  
But if, in the Old Testament, people gave in proportion to the income they received  
then surely in the New Testament we should give in proportion to the **Grace** we have received.  
In proportion to the grace we have received:  
In proportion to the abundant, overflowing, life-changing, sacrificial, unconditional love from God.

So if under law, 4000 years ago, a bronze aged people, who had  
no hot and cold running water, no social services,  
no TVs, DVDs or CDs, no health care, carpets or comforts.  
No anything (that we would call essential),  
if this backward, unsophisticated, uneducated people could give 10% plus, plus, plus **under law**  
then how much more should we give **under grace**?

our giving should be personal, our joy our life...  
it should be proportional to the grace God has given us...

### **2.3 And thirdly, it should be Planned.**

Paul said 1 Corinthians 16v2 “On the first day of every week, each one should set aside a sum of money”.

Do you see, “on the first day of the week” –  
If we don't give from “the first”, then we will give from the left-overs.  
If we just leave it up to: when we remember, when we get round to it, when we feel like it, when there is  
nothing else to spend our money on –  
then it isn't going to happen.

For many “giving” is so low down on their priorities, they are so undisciplined that God gets left with the  
crumbs.

This is dishonouring to God, and it kills our ministry potential.

Our giving needs to be planned and given from the first.

I want to say to our young people  
don't think that just because you have very little you don't need to give  
firstly, God will use everything that you give him,  
secondly, this is part of worship to him, and  
thirdly, if you don't give now (when you have relatively little) don't kid yourself that you will give later  
when you have a lot – you won't.

Good habits start young.

Get yourself organised, even if it is £1 a week.

To keep David and Helen, to extend our Ministry, to keep Chris and Ali we need £64,000 in additional  
regular giving every year.

*The statistics show that only half our membership (counting husbands and wives together), only half our  
membership currently pledge to give regularly to the ministry at Southover. Only half*

That was both a shock to me because I had assumed that almost ALL of us would be giving something  
regularly.

But it was also an encouragement because it means that half of us are still to give!! And that's brilliant!

What would happen if we all gave,  
What would happen if we all took the challenge to tithe, (accepting that some people cannot because of their circumstances)

If we did £64,000 would be like a drop in the Ocean!  
Our ministry would explode.  
People would be saved.  
You would become the most powerful force for good in the whole of Lewes.  
And God would be glorified

So let me close with this Paul says *“Remember: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”*.

We stand at the cross-roads of a new stage in the life of our church.  
Today, this day we decide whether to go forwards or backwards,  
to grow or shrink,  
to make a difference or to let the word just pass us by.

I am so grateful to the many that are already giving sacrificially through time and finances  
But now I am asking us ALL...  
all members,  
all people who want to love God  
all wealthy Theophilus', all non-wealthy Mary's  
to be in partnership for the gospel to make a difference in people's lives.

There are letters for all of us.  
Everyone who is already a member of this church has one addressed to them,  
Anyone who would like to be part of the vision of this church, please take one.

Would you return the Response Form by the 21st November,  
to either Janette Watkins (our Treasurer) or  
to the box at the back of church.

And May God bless us, as we step out in faith, in the stage of the adventure called: Southover Church!