

# Faith Loves

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 11 May 2014

Preacher: Sam Orr

[ 0 : 00 ] Wonderful. Good morning, everyone. Thanks. It's great to be here. Thank you for your fellowship for the service. It's good to meet up with our friends again. Let's pray, shall we, before we get into today's passage. Heavenly Father God, we thank you and praise you for who you are. We thank you for what you have done. We thank you for your word. Thank you that it is good for us. Thank you that it is our very bread and our meat. Lord, I pray that you would bless us as we eat of this today. May we be learning things that we need to learn. May we go away from here feeling changed. May we act differently and may we also enjoy grace. May we fall more in love with the beautiful, attractive person of Jesus Christ. We praise you that you are here with us. We pray that your spirit would be moving. We pray that we would be open to what you have to say. And we pray all these things in the mighty name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As a start of a ten, I wonder by a show of hands, how many people have seen the musical Les Mis? Anyone else? Yeah? Good. Great. That would have been a very awkward sermon if you hadn't. Good. Let's do a recap. I just want to pull out a few characters. I'm not going to go through it all. I just want to bring out a few characters before we look at our passage today. Jean Valjean, the main guy, a beggar man, jailed for stealing a loaf of bread. He's freed and he finds himself in desperation with nothing to his name at the Bishop of Dean's house. The Bishop, a truly godly man, welcomes Valjean into his company without question, feeds him, clothes him and gives him rest. Then as we know, in the night Valjean ups and leaves with half of the Bishop's silver. On being rearrested, Valjean is placed before the Bishop, utterly bound to rights, with his knapsack overflowing with the silver that he has stolen. And without a moment's hesitation, the Bishop tells the police that he in fact gave the silver to Valjean as a gift. And not only that, but Valjean had forgotten to take with him the silver candlesticks, two beautiful and enormously expensive ornaments that had been in the Bishop's family for years. Valjean is freed to live his life as a free man. But then you have a very different kind of character in Les Mis, Javert. Valjean's old prison guard and his arch enemy, a man who finds the underclass, the poor, to be no better than dirt. And he sees Valjean, a product of this underclass, as someone to whom mercy simply cannot be shown because a law has been transgressed. In the book, Javert famously takes the word of a wealthy man in a court of law as being utterly true simply because he is rich. And time and time again, he throws the poor into prison without representation.

So you have two very different kinds of characters, don't you? Two very different men that treat people in very different ways. The Bishop of Dean versus the Judge Javert. The man of grace versus the man of legalism. The man who seems beyond the clothes and the crime, the poverty in the past versus the man who simply cannot, who simply will not. And if we were to do a character reference of these two, who would we rather be? That's a very obvious answer.

Javert is hideous. He is bent by discrimination beyond reckoning. He is an exaggeration of everything that the world tries to rally against, everything that the gospel shows, and it's against everything that grace demands. But here in this passage, James seems to imply that we are not that different.

James chapter 2 verse 1, my brothers, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. The themes in Les Mis are obviously dealing with extremes of poverty and wealth and incredible prejudice and deep discrimination. It's easy to walk away from that and not to feel convicted.

[ 4 : 07 ] To look at Javert and say, well, I'm not that bad. But the Bible doesn't let us off so easily. Because you see in this passage, as James is rallying against exactly this kind of mindless discrimination, he's not talking to Javert. He's talking to believers.

And as we read through this passage, we find that this is very sobering stuff. Shall we do that? Shall we read it together? If you've got your Bibles, follow with me. It'd be great for you to have this open

as we go through the whole of the talk. And we're going to read from James 2 verses 1 to 13. James chapter 2 verses 1 to 13. My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man, you stand here or you sit on the floor by my feet.

Have you not discriminated amongst yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin, and you are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said do not commit adultery also said do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you've become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Amen. These are three points this morning.

[ 6 : 26 ] If you're taking notes, the first one being favoritism in community is wrong. Genius. I know. Spent hours over that point. But to a certain extent, there's nothing to hide behind in James chapter 2. It's very much exactly what it is that says on the tin. This is what we've got.

Favoritism in community is wrong. What does this look like? Let me give you an example. On the 25th of December, Christmas just gone, my wife, Jen, and I, along with my parents and my brothers and my sisters and all attached children, who had invaded us for a week, attended our normal Christmas day service at our normal church here in Edinburgh. Now, Christmas day services are a bit weird, aren't they? They sort of vary in quality. It depends on who's visiting who. You either have no one at them or thousands of people at your Christmas. And this was one of those days we had thousands and my family making up about half that number. And as the service draws to a close and the teas and the coffees started trundling out and as people started twirling in their seats, talking and greeting and meeting each other, I scanned my eyes across the crowded room and I caught my breath as they landed on a very familiar face. It was Marius. Marius from the recent film version of Les Mis, just to stick with the theme of my talk, or rather the guy who plays him, Eddie Redmayne. I'm a huge fan. His grandmother comes to our church and I heard that he comes sometimes. I daren't believe it, but now I can because I saw him.

I realised that Eddie, Ed to his friends, was on his own. No one had spotted him yet. This is my chance. I would go over, welcome him warmly to the church, show him around, walk him to the coffee queue, chat over our shared interest of all things musical and French. In short, it seemed perfectly reasonable that he and I were going to become close friends. It just made sense. But suddenly I realised I had a decision to make.

Do I stay talking to kind, old, slightly deaf, very blind Mrs. Ross? Or do I break off the conversation and just go for it? Catch quality time with my hero and a superstar? Meeting Eddie would be great, leaving the conversation would be so rude. What do I do? I'm walking away from Mrs. Ross while she was still talking. I was already working out my direct route to Eddie and I was doing so well. Only a few more feet and he was mine. With arm thrust out, ready for the strong arm of fellowship handshake.

And with my well-rehearsed, I'm talking to you because I know you're new and I haven't clocked at your famous yet face. Out of nowhere, a gaggle of girls cut right across my path, exploded all over the boy in fits of joyful glee and ecstatic abandon, laughing, giggling, asking him stupid questions, thrusting iPhones in his face and giving their Santa hats for him to sign. I don't think I have ever hated a group of people so much in my life. My golden opportunity was ruined. My lifeline to the rich and famous severely cut off. My hope for a true lasting friendship with someone with such a voice, never to be. Well, all the while, Mrs. Ross drank her tea, still talking very loudly to herself.

[ 9 : 33 ] My brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. I'm guilty of making distinction between Mrs. Ross and Eddie Redmain. I have, with no knowledge of what Eddie is like, placed him on a higher standing, of higher importance, of someone who is more worth my time than Mrs. Ross's. Names have been changed, just in case anyone's

listening to this.

And I flaunt this quite unashamedly whilst I'm standing in the community of believers. And as much as this story is exaggerated, it is unfortunately true. And it doesn't even have to be this extreme.

This favoritism doesn't fall into just concerning famous people. The reality for us is a lot more subtle. What is our reaction, for example, to the odd people who wander into our churches?

Where do I take my seat in regards to the man that smells, or the woman that makes the uncomfortable noises? Or the family that is always very late and very noisy? The student that wears the tattered holy jeans?

Or the guy that, quite simply, just looks really unattractive? Dare I say it, what do we think of the English? The Scottish? The American? What is my immediate preconception of these people?

[10:51] What is my automatic response to these people? Let's take it further. Who am I drawn to? Who do I go to speak to at the end of the service? Who do I want to be seen with after the service?

Who am I going to invite home for lunch? During the sermon, have I clocked the doctor, the architect, the medical student, the head teacher, the minister himself, or the visiting speaker, are these the people that I want to be seen as being associated with as soon as the last prayer is said? Have I clocked the attractive girl, the new hot guy? Will I make a beeline for them? Can you see what's going on here? We kind of do this without thinking.

It's so subtle. It's so pervasive. We don't have to be like Javert. No, we're far more crafty and insidious. As amusing as my story is, it is a product of something much more serious, and it is genuinely damaging to people.

I wonder how many times you have moved into a new city and started looking at new churches. You know the conversations that you have afterwards. The decisions that you make regarding whether you go to that church are based primarily on how you are treated.

[11:59] And there's a statistic that says you make that judgment call of a new church in seven minutes. You say things like this. No one talks to me.

Not once today. Everyone was far too busy. The person I was talking to always looked like she had someone better to go to, someone more important to arrive. I've had these conversations so many times.

And if we as Christians are feeling this in our own environments, how much more so are people who are already on the fringes of society going to feel? The different, the quirky, the poor, the unpopular, the uneducated, the unemployed, the unhealthy, the quiet.

How are they going to feel in the very place where they should be the most accepted and loved? I've had far too many conversations with far too many students who have come up to university from difficult backgrounds.

With a weak faith and little assurance who have been completely put off by church because of the ever so subtle inherent discrimination they face from a church they should feel completely accepted in.

[13:00] Instead, they find a church they feel they have to break into. And this is perhaps the most uncomfortable application of this passage. Because you see, it may be that we're genuinely not that bothered by the poor or the odds.

Or we don't actually make health or status judgment calls on people. Maybe that's not us. And I get that. But the problem could be is that we're just not bothered at all about anyone.

We aren't bothered by those who we don't need to be bothered about. These people aren't in my clique. Or people who simply are not part of our church structure. We can't end up ignoring anyone. We end up ignoring anyone who's new maybe. Anyone who's different. Anyone who simply isn't us. And by inaction, we deliberately keep them on the fringes of our groups by the power of indifference.

Let's not kid ourselves. We don't need excuses to treat people with silent disdain. I can make up all the reasons on my own.

[14:00] Thank you very much. And in doing so, either by showing indifference in love or by active favoritism, we have, as James says, discriminated amongst ourselves and have become judges with evil thoughts.

It sounds like, that language, that I've become a mini Javert. A judge with evil thoughts. Just not so fat and obvious. We are, at best, not bothered by those we don't need to be bothered about.

And at worst, actively and subtly discriminating on sight. Paul David Tripp, an American Christian author with a huge moustache. You'll know who it is now. Is great on this kind of stuff. He deals a lot with this kind of stuff in the church. He likens this attitude of, like, being on a ladder. There are people we place higher than us on this ladder. And there are people that we place lower than us on this ladder.

And we're not happy until we've walked into a room and worked out where on that ladder I fit. And as soon as I've worked it out, as soon as we're happy with the people above us and the people below us, then we begin to settle into our routine of treading on the hands of those beneath us and grabbing onto the ankles of those above.

[15:07] And upon walking into a room, this whole selection process can take but a second. I've found my place on this ladder of favoritism, and I've become a hand stamper and an ankle grabber almost effortlessly.

And not only does James talk to believers in isolation in a worldly environment when our guards are down and when we're more susceptible to sin. No, he's saying that we're prone to this, this favoritism, this ladder stacking, in the place where the stranger, the poor, and the disenfranchised, should feel the most welcome.

Our churches. The people who come into our meetings. And if we're not careful, we can get to the end of this passage and have the same reaction that we do when we look at Javert's character.

I honestly don't think I'm like that. I don't really think our church is like that. But upon deeper inspection, we can see that we can really easily fall into the ugliness of favoritism quite quickly. My brothers, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. But the question is this. Why does James spend so much time detailing a specific scenario for us?

[16:20] Why does he seem to focus on this particular sin here and now? Well, because not only is it wrong and hurtful, not only does it make people feel judged, it is quite simply not how the kingdom of God works.

And this brings us to our second point. Favoritism in community is wrong because it violates the kingdom law of love. Read verses 5 to 7 with me.

Listen, my dear brothers. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?

Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? Jesus is saying that God has never worked like this. There is almost a hint of incredulity here from James. It's the other way around, guys, he's saying. The kingdom has always worked in that it is the unseen, the poor in heart, the weak, the last, the lost, the smallest, the short, the frightened, the wrong one, the incapable, who have been given the lead role in the kingdom.

[17:30] The kingdom has never been about picking out the greatest and the best. Tell that to Samuel in the Old Testament, who was desperate to choose a brother other than David to be anointed as king. No, Samuel.

Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks at the heart. The whole of redemption history and the pinnacle of the salvation narrative is summed up in the fact that it is those who are lost, least, and last, are those who are loved, accepted, and drawn into this fantastic countercultural kingdom that completely turns the twisted norms of society upside down.

And we see this kingdom style everywhere we look in scripture. Abraham, the childless pagan. Moses, the prince who had to unlearn being a prince to become a stuttering shepherd. Jacob, the wrong twin.

Rahab, the prostitute. Gideon, the petrified. David, the youngest. Judah, the least. Nazareth, the infamous. Jesus, the baby. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom?

You bet. And Jesus is the perfect example of this. I have come not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.

[18:48] In human terms, Jesus was crucified because of the very people he hung out with. The sinners and the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the filthy, the contagious, and the forgotten. And the very people who were meant to keep the law by protecting the fatherless and the widow were the very people, the priests, who had set up a religious empire that could not accommodate people such as these.

Has not God chosen the poor? Can our churches accommodate these people? If not, then we are no better than the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

James also says here that favoritism just doesn't make sense. Verses 6 and 7. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones dragging you into court? In essence, why are you pandering to people who will only eventually crush you?

The rich don't care about who they step on. It simply doesn't make sense to esteem them without looking at their character. And don't hear what I'm not saying. Discrimination can work the other way around as well. In that I shun the rich because they are wealthy.

I'm just dealing with someone else. Okay, this works both ways. But here, this is a really good point. Why are you trying to esteem people when you don't know their character and you're just looking at their riches?

[ 20 : 06 ] But, and here's the kicker. Not only is favoritism simply not how the kingdom of God works. Not only does it not make sense. But it finds us to be lawbreakers.

Verse 8. If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you're doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said do not commit adultery also said do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, well you've become a lawbreaker.

If there was any way that we got to this point in James' thought process thinking that we got away with it, James lowers the boom. He's saying if you've committed murder but not adultery, it doesn't matter, you're still a lawbreaker.

We get that. If you've fallen into favoritism, you're the same lawbreaker. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty. We know that. This is very much the language of Jesus, isn't it?

[ 21 : 09 ] Especially in regards to murder and adultery, which I think is why James uses it here. If you simply looked at a woman lustfully, you have committed adultery in your heart. If you have hated your brother, you have committed murder in your heart.

Favoritism is one of those sins that we put under the bracket of acceptable. Murder is not, we say. The law says something different. Going back to our ladder analogy, where we're all ranked. Me somewhere about the middle. Don't want to be too presumptuous. People beneath me. People above me. As soon as I face the law, this ladder gets turned sideways. Suddenly, I'm not looking up to or down on anyone.

I'm looking across at people. As I've suddenly seen that I'm placed on exactly the same footing that they are. If I look up, what do I see before me? The words law.

When I face the law, I am the same as everyone else. Does that make sense? The law does not discriminate. The law does not show favoritism.

[ 22 : 15 ] This is the uncomfortable irony of James and the brilliance of his arguments. Can you see you are no different, he says. As the football commentators on this very day like to remind us, or like to remind any relevant football fans, when talking about the last do or die day of the premiership, they say we have hit squeaky bum time.

And we have in this passage. Because not only do we find ourselves on a level pegging with everyone else's lawbreakers, but which specific law are we actually breaking? The one that says all of it.

Verse 8. If you keep the royal law, love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. But if you show favoritism, you sin. Love your neighbor as yourself? Isn't that the summary of the whole law Jesus himself preaches?

This along with love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That's why it's called the royal law. We know, as Johnny was just saying, actually, anything that in this nation assented by the queen is important.

This is given royal assent by the king. These two laws encompass everything in the law. It is like, in effect, we are breaking the very nature of the law. Favoritism in community is wrong because it fundamentally violates the kingdom.

[ 23 : 33 ] law of love. We are meant to love unconditionally, not love under condition. We are meant to love without want of return or reward, not love with perks.

We are meant to love people like we would wish ourselves to be loved. Or, love like we have been loved.

And this brings us on to our last point. Favoritism in community is wrong because it violates the kingdom law of love from which we have already received mercy.

Read the final two verses with me. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not shown mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Let's, for a minute, go back to the story of Les Mis. Let's pick it up where the police leave Valjean in the presence of the bishop.

[ 24 : 35 ] Upon being immediately released by the police, Valjean stands in front of this man of God as the criminal that he is, gripping tightly to the two precious candlesticks.

And the bishop of Dean leans in and says this. That is the scandal of Les Mis because we know it is the scandal of grace.

The bishop was wronged. Valjean had no right. The criminal was not treated as his sins deserved. Surely, surely, that is exactly like us.

Standing in front of Jesus, pathetic, weak, miserable, hungry, with our bags overflowing with stolen silver, utterly banged to rights. And as we stand in front of the Son of God, as the criminals that we are, grasping tightly to the foot of a cross, Jesus leans in and says, you are forgiven.

God was wronged. I had no right. I, the criminal, was not treated as my sins deserved. Is this not the gospel of grace?

[ 26 : 06 ] The law of love that has set us free? Now, can you see what's going on here? We are the poor beggars that have wandered in and off the streets with nothing to our name. Nothing to show.

Nothing to give. And nothing to hide. But instead of being shafted to the feet of the judge in the way that we should have been, we are called into the loving embrace of the Savior.

In Les Mis, it's interesting, isn't it, to see what Valjean does with this new life. Valjean dedicates his existence to making sure that his life is worth the candlesticks that quite literally have brought him life.

And with it, he gives life to a little helpless girl who can give nothing back to him in return, just as a bishop had done all those years ago to that helpless beggar. Valjean understands that the grace shown to him means that he can now show grace.

In fact, that he must show grace to someone else. So speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom.

[ 27 : 10 ] What is the law of freedom, as we close? It is the law that says no one can keep the law, but it is the law that says someone has, so that the guilty may go free.

This is the law of the cross, the law of grace, the kingdom law of love, but it is also the law that lets me live a free life. Having been treated without favoritism, having recognized that actually against the law and in the face of the creator, we are the poor, the lost, the low, the outcast.

Does it not absolutely make sense then, having been liberated from under this law, we go and treat people in exactly the same way? James takes this further and it fires a warning shot across our bowels when it comes to this point.

He takes it from another angle. This is scary stuff.

It's a warning. Just like in the prelude to this passage, actually, James 1, 26. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep in a tight rein in his tongue, he deceives himself.

[ 28 : 28 ] And his religion is worthless. Just like in Matthew 6, 14. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your heavenly father will not forgive you.

Just like in Matthew 18, 32, the unforgiving servant who refuses to cancel the debt of his friend, even though a bigger debt has been removed. The gospel is always allowing us to live life to the full and it allows us to live the life that we, despite our sin and our shame, have been allowed to live.

Not in a bubble of grateful indifference, but in Christ. Actively in Christ. Forgive like you have been forgiven. Cancel debts like you have had your debt cancelled.

Love like you have been loved. Do not show favoritism against those who look worthless and down and out. Because when you were dead in your transgressions and sins, he made you alive with Christ.

Don't forget who you are. Don't forget what you have been made into. And don't forget what it is that we're meant to be doing. Don't forget what it is this church is here for. To hold out the gospel of love.

[ 29 : 40 ] Again, James 1, 27 at the end. This is the simple gospel. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. To look after the orphans and widows in their distress.

And to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. Massive gospel themes. God is this. Jesus is this. Isn't the cross wonderful? This is what we've been saved to. What does that look like? Simply look after the person next door to you. That's what the gospel is. It doesn't have to be massive. It can be simple. But in the simple ways that we love each other, it is a beautiful gospel. And this is the heart of the gospel. Favoritism is the abandonment of the very heart of the gospel. Just as the beauty of the law that brought people into a relationship with God was meant to be seen, shown, and promoted by the priests in Jesus' day.

In reality, all the people could see when they looked at the temple of God was a rich clique of legalistic abusers steeped in prejudice and segregation. Favoritism is dangerous because, as we've seen, it is an affront to everything the gospel stands for.

[ 30 : 50 ] In showing favoritism, we are not showing the gospel. And more dangerously, we are not living out the gospel of grace that has been shown to us. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many of you were influential. Not many of you were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. So that no one may boast before him. Because we have been so loved. Because we have been shown so much grace. Because we have been shown unimaginable mercy. And because we are not treated as our hearts deserved.

So we love each other. Holding out the gospel and inviting people in. This is the very thing that makes the gospel attractive.

[ 31 : 53 ] The fact that people aren't treated in the way that they usually are. This should be what draws people to our churches. When they go away saying, they look different. They speak to me. They take me home.

They sit next to me. They love me without seeming to want anything back. Can you imagine what our communities would look like if we were doing this? This gospel attractiveness is shown perfectly.

In the person of Jesus Christ. As we welcome the way from the stray. The hurt. The downcast. The desperate. And the lost. And each other. Let's enjoy holding out this gospel of grace and mercy in our actions.

Our thoughts and our words. In our everyday, very normal experiences of life. Just as it has been shown to us. I think the only way that we do this well.

Is by remembering Jesus. Is by remembering the cross. Remembering the incredible sacrifice. That was paid for a wretch like me. Who was only ever good enough to die on a cross.

[ 32 : 54 ] What's the very last sentence in this passage? Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mr. Moo. A great commentator on this. He says this very simply.

He says, James ends on high. He ends with grace. We are a fickle, blood-bought people. But we. Even as we stumble in this sin.

Are being loved beyond reason. Shown grace beyond compare. And forgiven to the uttermost. Let's pray together as we close. Heavenly Father God, we thank you for your word.

We thank you so much for the way that you treat us. Thank you so much for the gospel. Thank you for the kingdom law of love. Thank you, Heavenly Father, that you sent your son Jesus.

So that he could fulfill the law. So that I didn't have to. And who died in my place that I didn't have to. And who rose against that I may be risen with him. Thank you that it is true for those of us who know you.

[ 33 : 52 ] Thank you so much that this gospel invites people in. Anyone of any standing. Of any social class. Of any race. Of any creed. Wherever they are. Thank you so much that you don't treat us like a ladder.

Thank you that you put us exactly where you want us to be. Thank you so much, Heavenly Father, that you love us despite ourselves. Lord, thank you so much for this wonderful gospel.

We pray that we will be people who are very aware that we want to be living this out. May we be attractive because we are showing Jesus Christ. May we as a community, as a culture in our churches.

May this culture be attractive as we hold out the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we show that we are different to the world. That we don't rank people, but that we invite them in. Heavenly Father, thank you too that the gospel does not have to be complicated.

Thank you that it is so simple. I pray that you would help us as we look after each other. Those we know well. Those that we don't. The rich, the poor. Lord, help us to be people who are going out of our way to living out the gospel of grace.

[ 34 : 53 ] That we have been allowed to live because we have been shown grace. Lord, we praise you for this. May we leave here changed. Thank you so much for your word. Thank you for the goodness of Jesus Christ.

The goodness of the gospel. Thank you so much for being with us this morning. We pray all these things in your mighty name. Amen.