

Opening Words

We should not be indifferent toward our gifts. Can you imagine giving a gift to someone, someone you love, and then they just set the gift aside and don't care for it?

55 Eph The Gifts of the King 2

Because Jesus Christ is Lord, He maintains unity in the Church and gives gifts that enable us to build up his church. Hello everyone and welcome to our teaching as we continue through the book of Ephesians. As we explore this section in Ephesians 4 where Paul talks at great length about unity, we find that Paul breaks off his primary thought on spiritual gifts just for a few sentences to talk about the enthronement of Christ.

We have discovered that Paul tends to do this. In chapter 2:1 he started talking about the spiritual deadness of the Gentiles as the backdrop to God's great mercy, but before he spoke of God's mercy, he decided to elaborate on what it meant to be dead in sin. In 3:1, we find an even greater interruption of thought. Paul is going to pray, but before he gets to his great prayer in verses 14-21, he decides to elaborate on his status as God's steward of the mysteries of Christ. Here, in Ephesians 4:7 Paul starts talking about spiritual gifts and it would seem logical to go right into the kinds of gifts he has given which he finally does in verse 11. But before he starts listing the gifts, he decides to elaborate on an important event in the life of Christ – his enthronement. Let's listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:7-10.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says,

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

⁹ (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

In these verses, Paul is talking about the ascension and enthronement of Jesus and one of the ways that we know Jesus is enthroned is that he has given gifts to men. There is so much going on in this passage, and I don't want you to miss it. I believe the enthronement of Christ is one of the least taught and least understood events in his life. Let's dig into this passage right now.

First, I want you to notice that in verse 8, Paul is quoting from Psalm 68, a psalm of David. Psalm 68 celebrates the victory of God over Egypt and his leading the children of Israel to Mt. Sinai where he gave them the Law. It pictures God as a triumphant warrior leading his people. Listen to verses 7-8, "O God, when You went forth before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness. ⁸ The earth quaked; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God."

When God his people in the wilderness, it was to take them to a mountain, Mt. Sinai and there, God gave Israel his law. But Mt. Sinai was not the ultimate destination for God's people or for God Himself. God had another mountain in mind and when he led his people into the promised land he led them to Mt. Zion and there revealed his glory and majesty. Then David says this in verse 18, "You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there." This is the verse Paul quotes.

The imagery of Psalm 68:18 is rich. David pictures God as a victorious warrior who has returned from battle. In the ancient world, when a general or king would return he would always have his enemies in his train behind his chariot. This showed his military victory. Then, those who were defeated would give gifts to the conquering hero, and the conquering hero would in turn give gifts to his people as a sign of good will and solidarity with them.

David used this ancient imagery of a conquering hero returning from battle to speak of God ascending Mt. Zion. Paul uses the same imagery as a fitting description of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Christ went to war on our behalf. And the first thing he did, according to the passage, was to descend into the lower parts of the earth. In the ancient world, the "lower parts of the earth" simply meant earth. When Paul uses this phrase, he is referring to Christ's humility in emptying himself by leaving the glory of heaven and coming to earth. Then, after he emptied himself of his outward glory, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. And this is where the battle was supremely fought and won. There, on the cross, when Jesus spilled his blood for our sake, he cancelled the certificate of death and disarmed the rulers and the powers that used our guilty status before God to advance their evil in the world. Then, three days after his victorious death he rose from the grave and then a few weeks later he ascended back into the heavens from which he came. When he ascended back into the heavens all rulers and powers were subjected to him.

Thus, we have a picture of a victorious warrior who descended into a battle, emerged victorious from it, and then ascended to fame, honor, and glory with his enemies in his train behind him. Listen to what Paul says about this in Ephesians 1. "God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet."

Jesus, as the conquering king now gives gifts to his people just as a conquering hero in ancient times would distribute gifts to his people after returning from battle.

Paul has another picture in mind as he quotes from Psalm 68. The ancient Jewish synagogues with their worship and reading of Scripture associated this psalm with the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost was 50 days after Passover and celebrated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Well, what happened 50 days after Jesus died. He gave his Spirit to his people. In the first Pentecost after the first Passover, God gave His law written on tablets of stone through his prophet Moses. In the first Pentecost after the Passover in which Jesus died, God gave His Spirit through his Son Jesus so that the law of God could be written on our hearts.

When Peter, in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost preached to the Jewish people, he said that God had poured out his Spirit upon his people and that this pouring out the Spirit was the evidence that the Messiah was ruling on the throne of David just as David and the other prophets said would happen. Listen to these words from Acts 2.

because David was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. ³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Do you see the parallels – In Moses' time, the Passover and Exodus and 50 days later the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai through Moses to his people.

In Jesus' time, the true Passover where Jesus was the Passover lamb, the exodus from sin, and 50 days later the giving of the Spirit on Mt. Zion through Jesus to his people.

And so, we have an image from biblical history, the exodus and Mt. Sinai, and we have an image from ancient warfare, the victor in a triumphal procession who then distributes the spoils of war to his people.

Paul uses both images to tell us that the giving of spiritual gifts to us is evidence that Jesus has triumphed over all enemies and that he is enthroned as Lord.

Now let's ask a question – when we see our spiritual gift in this light, as evidence that Jesus is Lord and enthroned over all, how does that make us feel? What perspective does it give us?

1. We should not be indifferent toward our gifts. Can you imagine giving a gift to someone, someone you love, and then they just set the gift aside and don't care for it? What if you worked very hard to make something for someone, you spent a lot of money on it, and a lot of time to put everything together and then when you gave it you received a feeble thank you and then indifference at the value of what you had passed on. How would that make you feel? You would be hurt by it. I would be hurt by it. How does our Lord feel when we are indifferent to the gifts he has given us when he sacrificed so much to give us those gifts and then gave the gifts to us gladly? With these thoughts in mind, let's ask God to help us understand the treasures he has given us and use our gifts to bring him glory in the world. That leads to the second point.
2. We should not be selfish with our gifts. I fear that some Christians can use their gift to show off and say, "look at me. Look at me." But our gift is given to us that we might say, "Look at him. Look at him! What I have is proof that Jesus is Lord over all. He is the conquering hero."

There is one more wonderful phrase Paul uses in this passage. Paul says that Christ ascended far above all the heavens so that he might fill all things. Remember in our previous broadcast where we talked about heavenly places and said this was not referring to "heaven" in the way that we normally think about it. It refers to the spiritual realm where spiritual forces – good and bad – reside and engage in warfare for the souls of men and nations. Paul says that Christ has ascended

far above this place which is his way of reinforcing the truth that Christ is Lord over all. He is not just another prophet of God or another angel in the battle between angelic forces. He is the Lord of glory who is high over all.

What is the goal of it all? The goal is that he might fill all things! The world –invisible and visible – is filled with many things that are contrary to the will of God. One day the world – invisible and visible – will be brought into perfect unity under the feet of Jesus and in that day only the Spirit of God and of Christ will fill all things. Christ descended into the depths, fought and won the battle, and ascended back into the heavens as Lord looking forward to the day when every knee will bow to him and all rebellion will cease. Evil will be expelled, the universe will come into perfect harmony, and the glory of Jesus Christ will fill all things.

May it happen soon! And until it does, may it happen in our hearts and in our churches!