

EPHESIANS #57 4:7-10

THE GIFTS AND THE GIVER

(Ephesians 4) Over the last several months we have been engaged in a study of the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We continue that this morning as we move out of a section that emphasized the oneness of believers into a section that emphasizes the diversity of believers. Our oneness is established on the Magnificent Seven, those great bonds of our spiritual unity described in verses **4-6** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* Our text for today will be the next four verses which begin a critically important section about how the church is supposed to operate and about how dissimilar believers are to work together in the dynamic of Christian community. **7-10** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore 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.)* Let's sit on this a while and see if we can't gain some helpful understanding and some practical application of it.

My sermon title is *The Gifts and the Giver*. Verses 7 and 8 talk about the gifts. Verses 9 and 10 talk about the Giver. So, we begin by looking at this word about certain gifts. **7** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Three subpoints here folks. The first is that these gifts are given to every believer. Every true member of the church receives what is called here a *grace*. The Greek word is *charis* from which we get *charismatic* or *charisma*. Some of you girls may be named *Karissa* or *Charisse*. The word is the same as we read in Ephesians 2:8 where it says we are saved by grace, but the meaning is different. This verse is not talking about the grace of salvation but an additional grace that we normally refer to as a *spiritual gift*. You read similar language in I Corinthians 12: and in I Peter 4. In both places, like our text in Ephesians 4, you read the phrase "each one." There is some special ability granted to each part of the body. I Corinthians 12 is clearly talking about spiritual gifts **1** *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.* And we are looking at the same subject in Ephesians 4. And whether you read it in I Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4, it is clear as day that this spiritual gifting belongs to whom? Who gets the grace, who gets the

gift? The gift goes “to each one.” (RR) To each what? To each member of the body of Christ? If you are joined to Jesus this is talking about you! It says that you have received from Christ, a certain gracelet. You are a gifted man or woman. Some of you, I know, aren’t aware of this. Your view of yourself does not include this New Testament teaching. That changes today. No matter what you thought of yourself when you came in here, if you are a Christ-follower, you leave knowing that you have been graced by God with a certain gift. That gift may be waiting to be discovered and employed but it is there. And that gift brings with it a responsibility. You are not allowed to sit around saying, “I can’t do anything. I don’t have any abilities by which to help the church.” God says he is in the gifting business and who in the body gets left out? The New Testament everywhere says that nobody in the body gets left out. In that we are all the same.

But the next part of the verse, which marks out our second subpoint, reminds us that we who are the same are not completely the same. *7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.* In I Corinthians 12 there is an emphasis on the different types of giftedness. There it says that one Spirit works different gifts in different people. There is unity in diversity. Christians don’t look and act exactly alike. When Ford Motor Company got its start they figured out how to make cars inexpensively, but they all were exactly alike. Henry Ford used to say that you can have your Model T in any color as long as it was black. Nowadays you can buy Fords that are small or large, vans or trucks, and in any color you want, but there are still some things the same. I got into someone’s car last week, saw the temperature controls and said, “Oh, this is a Ford.” In many ways, all Fords are going to be the same, and in other ways they will differ. Unity in diversity is the same principle we see in the body of Christ. But in Ephesians 4 Paul doesn’t mention a diversity of type or kind, but of degree and magnitude. He refers to our gifting being according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The implication here is that not all of us are equally gifted. Two believers may both have the gift of teaching, but one may have a much greater gift than the other. In spite of popular opinion, God is not the type who deals with all of his creatures in exactly the same way. In our country we say that all men are created equal, but we know that refers to one’s value under the law. No thinking person assumes for one moment that all have equal abilities. Nor would that be true in the kingdom of God. We receive Christ’s gift in measure. Some have more. Some

have less. But all have something. What appears obvious in observation is also obvious in the word.

The third thing you should see from our text is that these spiritual gifts are not only given to each believer, and given in differing measure, but that they are given by Christ Himself. Who is the Giver? It is Jesus. It is the gift of or from Christ. There isn't some central committee somewhere, making secret decisions that determine your level of giftedness. The nature and the measure of my giftedness is determined by Jesus. I Corinthians 12:**11** *one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.* This is so important to understand. Since it is Christ who is the Giver, two things must be true of our attitudes about our gifts. First, we don't see them as a basis for pride, but as a basis for responsibility. The fact that we call them gifts, graces, should tell us that there is nothing here for our glory - only God's. We have nothing that we were not given. So then, where is boasting? It is excluded. It is replaced with a sense of humble responsibility. I Peter 4:**10** *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* You see what he's saying? You got a gift? Don't sit around patting yourself on the back, get busy. Employ it. Put it to use. With that gift comes not pride, but responsibility.

And now, secondly, our attitudes about Christ's gifting must not be marked by jealousy, but thanksgiving. Here we get into the old human problem of comparisons. Because our gifts differ in measure, we are going to find around us in the church those who are more gifted and those who are less gifted than we are. Don't waste time comparing. Do mature adults sit around at Christmastime comparing who got the best gift? No, kids may do that. You can give an immature kid a \$300 present but if you give sister a \$400 present he's gonna be mad, and feel deprived. And we look at that and think, "how ugly, and ungrateful and immature." You know, I've done that as an adult. I've heard some speakers who could just hold their audiences spellbound, and I think, "Wow, Lord, why didn't you give me that guy's ability to preach, or that man's ability to lead, or that person's creativity?" And I start to feel sorry for myself as I compare until the Spirit rebukes me for that wicked thinking. Do you ever do that? Cut that out! When you understand that you deserve nothing you will simply receive your gift with gratitude and you will give thanks for the gifts you see in others. Boy, that's a sign that the Spirit of God is really moving in your life, when you can rejoice in the greater gifts of other men and women,

especially, if you are a competitive person like me. This is hard for some of us. You watch athletes at the Olympics or the Super Bowl and you'll find a lot of them offer thanks to God for the ability to win the gold medal or the big game. How many of them can watch the other guy wearing the medal and say, "Thank you, Lord, for the measure you have chosen, in your wisdom and pleasure to give me." You see, this comes when we understand that Christ Jesus, who loved us so much He died for us, that He's the one who measured out our gifts to us. Some got a little, some got a lot. But all got more than they deserved. It is a gift. It is a grace. And when Christ is the Giver we receive it with thanks and with a sense of responsibility for what we do with it.

That is our first point, all from verse 7. Now let's move to the second half of our meditations, to look at what our passage says about the Giver. It's almost as if the apostle who wrote Ephesians takes three verses here to follow a little rabbit trail. From verse 7-16 is all about gifts and their function in the body, but for three verses Paul gets off on talking about Christ. Again I have three subpoints to note. Stay with me § *Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."* The connection in thought is the last part about the giving of gifts, but look at what we learn about Jesus. First thing is that Jesus ascended as conquering King.® To ascend means to go up and when we talk about the ascension of Christ we refer to what happened forty days after His resurrection. Acts 1:9 says the Lord was lifted up as the apostles looked on and a cloud received Him. That is the ascension. And let me tell you, it is a big deal. The Roman Catholics have a holiday called *Ascension Day*. Some of their churches are named *Ascension Catholic Church*, but most Protestants, and maybe Catholics too, don't get the significance of the ascension. But Paul wrote as much about the ascension as he did about the atonement and the resurrection. It was that day in which Jesus was established as Lord of heaven and earth. The imagery here in Ephesians 4 where we find a quote from Psalm 68, is that of a victorious warrior. It says He does two things as He ascends. He leads a host of captives and he gives gifts. In ancient Rome, this was precisely the practice of conquering generals. When they came home from a successful military campaign they would ride into the city with all their troops as the people of their city lined the streets in honor. The General would ride in on his horse displaying behind him, in chains, the officers of the defeated army, and distributing among the crowd gifts that he had taken from the spoils of battle. Paul takes this military imagery and applies it to Jesus.

Now think with me. In the case of Christ, who would the captives be? Who has He defeated? His captives would be the forces of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness. Look at what Colossians 2:15 *having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.* (NIV) Some people describe the cross as if it were Satan winning round one against Jesus, but that is not the New Testament's angle. Instead, we read that Satan was beaten on the cross. That is where Christ triumphs as He disarms the accuser by removing our guilt. So, the demonic hordes would be the captives. What would be the gifts? Well, they would be these gracelets of which we have spoken. The gifts are the gifts of the Spirit. When we read the New Testament we find this connection made between the ascension of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit and His giftings. John 7:39 *this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* And so, just a few days after His ascension, on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out, listen to what Peter said Acts 2:33 *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.* From His position as Conqueror, as King, Jesus dispenses to His servants special gifts whereby we might serve Him more effectively. And who gets these? To each one He gives them.

Let's move on now in our text to verse 9. We have seen that Jesus ascended as a Conqueror. Now we read mention of His previous descension. 9 *(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?* If you understand that Jesus Christ is no ordinary man, that Jesus is God incarnate you have to wonder how He could ascend anywhere? I mean, can Bill Gates get a promotion? When you are at the top you can only go one direction. God is in the highest heavens. For one who is God to ascend, something has to happen first. You know what that is? He has to descend. I never hear anyone talking about the descension of Jesus. There is no holiday called "Descension Day." But in our culture it actually is the biggest holiday of the year. We just don't call it *Descension Day*. What do we call it? We call it *Christmas*. It's at Christmas we sing *Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand. Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in His hand, Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand. Rank on rank the host of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way. As the Light of light descendeth from the realms of endless day.* Why did He come? *That the pow'rs of hell may vanish as the darkness clears*

away. Descension Day, or Christmas, is all about the Son of God coming down as a man, coming down to the earth. Our text refers to the lower parts of the earth and scholars dispute over what exactly this means. Some think it refers to a descent into hell, after His crucifixion. I Peter 3:19 speaks of Jesus going to preach to the spirits in prison. That could be, but I doubt that is what Paul has in mind here. Some think that the lower parts should be equated with the earth, meaning that the earth, in relation to heaven, is the lower part. Some think it refers to the womb of Mary. In Psalm 139 David refers to the womb in that way 139:**15** *My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.* Maybe that is it. Whatever exactly this means it refers to the humiliation of Christ. How he forfeited the glory which He enjoyed in heaven in order that He might become a man, not even a mighty rich man, but a baby, carried by a young woman. In terms of status He came way, way down. Philippians 2 is the classic passage on the humiliation of Christ **5-7** *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* He who was with God came to be with men, so that men might come to be with God. Or as II Corinthians 8:9 puts it **9** *you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.* I remember in college that I was deeply stirred by the movie *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. It was about Saint Francis of Assisi who was the son of a wealthy merchant, but one day, sickened by the money---lust he saw around him, he stripped off all his fine clothes and walked naked out of town to start a ministry to the poor. The great American success story is one of rags to riches isn't it? Do you see how different is the success story of the Bible? Not rags to riches but riches to rags.

Ahh, but that is not the whole story is it? It's not just riches to rags, but riches to rags to riches. Our text goes on one more verse and says **10** *He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.*) Paul adds this sentence to remind us that we must not view Jesus simply as the descended Suffering Servant, nor simply as the ascended reigning king, but as both. This is my third subpoint. We are called to see Christ in His completeness, and here is where many of us fail. In South America you may see everywhere pictures and statues of Jesus and how do they depict him? Frail, bloody, gory, hanging on a cross. Same in Europe as well. These portrayals shape their image of Jesus and

Christianity. What a sad, dreary, religion we have if that guy on the cross is our leader! But that cross scene tells only one part of the story. It tells of the depth of the descension, but we must remember equally so the heights of the ascension. We must keep both in view. I don't wear jewelry except for my wedding ring. But if I did I would wear this. It is a little silver throne that someone gave me. I could hang it around my neck and when people asked about it I could explain that my Jesus is no longer on a cross, but is on a throne of glory from which He offers to sinners eternal life as a gift. Paul said he preached not just the cross, but the glory of Christ. We need to keep both in our minds and our hearts. When we look at the glory of the risen Christ we are lifted up in hope and in joy. We are energized to go forth in triumph. But when we look too upon the cross we are challenged in our commitment. We are affirmed by Christ's love and we are energized to go forth in humility. One of my favorite hymn says this: "O Living, dying, let me bring my strength, my solace from this spring, that He who lives to be my King once died to be my Savior." I love that line because it points us to the complete Jesus who lives as King, but died as Savior. Listen, if our view of Jesus is wrong, our Christian lives will be wrong. We will become what we believe our Lord to be. That's why we must see Him as He is, according to His word, in order that we might love Him as we ought. Our text reminds us that He humbled Himself, but it majors on this image of Jesus: Conquering Warrior King, ascending to glory, who distributes rich gifts to His servants. We'll learn more about those gifts in the weeks ahead. Let's stand for prayer. (Hymn 173 sung to 163 into majesty)