

Gifts Unto Men
Ephesians 4:7-10

INTRO: Our subject is the mighty ascension of Christ. What a wonderful doctrine this is. After the death of Christ for our sins, after His burial and resurrection, Christ made a triumphal entry into heaven leading captivity captive.

He ascended far above the blue sky where the eagles fly. He ascended above the second heaven past the moon and stars, Jupiter and Mars. Then He entered into the heaven of heavens where the throne of God is and where the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, is being prepared as a bride for her husband.

When we think of our Lord's mighty ascension, we need also to remember four other great events in His life:

1. The virgin birth,
2. The death of Christ, as the sinless substitute for our sins.
3. The bodily resurrection of Christ for our justification.
4. The grand, majestic, second coming of the conquering king.

Yes, Christ is the virgin born Son of God. Yes, He did die for sinners such as you and I. No, the grave could not hold Him for after three days and nights in the grave He arose a mighty triumph o'er His foes. Yes, He did ascend up into glory. And yes, He is coming again.

I. VS. 7, A GIFT FOR EVERY BELIEVER.

- A. First of all, I want us to look at the word "gift" in this verse. "Gift" is singular in the English, and it is singular in the Greek. So this refers to a particular gift.
 1. This particular gift is the Holy Spirit.
 2. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to carry on a work through His people:
 - a. John 14:16-18,
 - b. John 16:13-14.
 3. If you do not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, you are not saved (Rom 8:9).
- B. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit immersed the church for service. He empowered it as an organism (Acts 1:8; 2:1-3).

C. Not only has God given the Holy Spirit to His church, He has endowed each believer with a grace gift to use in the local body. Some believers have more than one gift, but I believe each believer has one primary gift and possibly other secondary gifts.

1. Because the gift we receive is a grace gift, meaning it is not a product of your skill or smarts, we should humbly use it in the kingdom work. Others may not be as gifted in an area as you. Please thank God that you are gifted in that area and be patient with those who are less gifted.

2. Be eager and excited to use your gift for the benefit of the entire local body and to glory of God.

a. John Calvin in his sermon on this passage said:

For we are so taken up with ourselves that there is none of us who would not be alone were it not that necessity constrains and binds us to those whom we need. God, therefore, to correct the pride and presumption that are too deeply rooted in man's nature, has so dispensed his gifts in certain proportion that every man well perceives that he is bound and indebted to Him for things he has received, and that there is no such perfection in himself that he can do without other men. (336)

b. Like it or not, church member, you need me, and I need you. And we all need God's grace!

3. The Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 12 gives us the very best commentary available on this verse.

a. Vss. 4-6, The different gifts bestowed upon Christians for service come from the Holy Spirit. He is the gift used in bestowing the gifts.

b. Vs. 7, Whatever gift you have, it is to be used for the common good of the church.

- 1.) Some overestimate their importance and give themselves credit for their gift.
 - 2.) Others, not so gifted, underestimate their importance and fail to use their gift. Both viewpoints are wrong (James 1:9-10).
- C. The power that energizes our gift is none other than the Holy Spirit Himself. He is God's gift to empower us to use the gift given to us for service in the church (Eph 3:20). Every believer is important for each has a gift to work with. Some are more visible, others work in the shadows, but all have a grace gift to use in the church.
1. It is tragic indeed to lay our gift on the shelf and not use it for the work of the church. You and I need to realize that this gift was very costly. For us to have spiritual gifts to be used in the local church, Christ had to suffer in life on earth, He had to bleed and die so we could have the gift of ministry bestowed upon us.
 2. Gifts and talents are not the same. The regenerated and the unregenerated have talents, but only the redeemed by the blood of Christ have the gift of the Spirit and the ministry gifts given by Him (Rom 12:4-8).
 3. The church has no lack of spiritual gifts to carry out the work of the ministry. If we have any lack of spiritual power, it is because of our lack of faith in the resurrection power of God.
 4. The church will only be as strong as our faith to exercise our gifts. What are you doing with the gift God has given to you? At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not be asked how much money we made, or how far up the corporate ladder we climbed. The question will be: "What did you do with the grace gift I gave you."

II. VSS. 8-10, THE REAL TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

- A. Vs. 8, This verse is an adaptation of a Messianic Psalm, Psalm 68:18. The scene in Psalm 68:18 is that of a king victorious in battle. A victory given him because God

stepped in. Psalm 68:18 says that the conquering king received gifts, but we see in Ephesians 4:8 that our conquering King, Jesus, gives gifts to us, His redeemed.

1. "When He ascended up on high...." This is the real triumphal entry.
 - a. When Christ ascended to heaven, He ascended as Conqueror and Victor forever.
 - b. "Having won the victory over death, sin, and the grave, he ascended to heaven, his capital city, in triumphal parade..." (Hobbs 77).
2. Leading "captivity captive" pictures a defeated foe led by a conquering general, and the conqueror sharing the spoils of war with His followers.
 - a. The captives spoken of in this verse are not the enemies of Christ. They are His people, those He has redeemed.
 - 1.) These are sinners who were once the captives of Satan and sin.
 - 2.) Believers are no longer the captives of Satan. We have now been taken captive by Christ.
 - b. The particular captives spoken of here are primarily the Old Testament saints who were in paradise, a place in the center of the earth, awaiting their journey to heaven at the time of Christ's victory over Satan.
 - 1.) When an Old Testament believer died, he went to paradise. When Christ ascended, He took these believers with Him.
 - 2.) When a believer dies today, he does not go to paradise. He goes into the presence of the Lord (II Cor. 5:8).
3. What a wonderful procession that must have been. Christ leading the saints of old out of paradise. What a glorious occasion in heaven when He arrived. The Son who had gone out to conquer had come home the victor.
4. He "gave gifts unto men." When He ascended, He gave gifts to men. I believe these gifts are gifts for

living believers in the church. Psalm 24:7-1 vividly describes the triumphal entry of Jesus, our Captain, into glory.

- B. Vss. 9-10, The one who ascended also descended. There is no doubt as to who this is. Christ is the one who ascended; so He is the one who descended. Descended, what does this mean?
1. He descended when He left heaven's glory to come to this sin cursed earth, emptying Himself and becoming obedient to the cross (Phil. 2:5-11).
 2. What does it mean when we are told He went into the lowest parts of the earth?
 - a. On the cross, He suffered the very agonies of hell (Matt. 27:46).
 - b. I believe Jesus went to the paradise side of Hades.
 - 1.) He told the thief on the cross: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."
 - 2.) From the paradise side of Hades, Jesus proclaimed to the unregenerate that their doom was sealed.

CONCLUSION: It is a fact He ascended, and it is a fact He is coming again (Acts 1:9-11).

Dr. Cecil A Fayard, Jr.
June 8, 2008