

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-28-21

This morning we come to Ephesians Chapter 4, and our target is Verses 7 through 10. And since we've been away from Ephesians for a few weeks, I thought maybe a quick refresher, in some different words than we've done it before, might be helpful for you.

This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment in Rome, which you read about in Acts Chapter 28. During his three Missionary Journeys, Paul had spent more time in Ephesus than any other place during those times, a total there of about three years. And during that time, several other churches in the Roman province called "Asia" were planted as well. When you see "Asia" in the Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, don't think the gigantic continent where China is; think of a Roman province of Asia, in what we would now call "Turkey"; it's sometimes called "Asia Minor."

Ephesus was the main city in that area, but you get an idea of how the Gospel spread during those three years; we are not told the exact logistics, but it's almost a certainty that it was members of the team of the Apostle Paul who went on and planted churches in that circle around that trade route: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. Those are among the churches that were planted there; there was also Colossae and Heirapolis where those were. And it was to those seven churches that the Book of Revelation was addressed (Rev. 1:11)—the last Biblical book written to the New Testament Church. It is *very much* a part of what Paul did when he was in Ephesus.

Ephesians happens to be the book that contains the majority of the New Testament revelation concerning the Church—what the Church is all about—the Body of Christ (Eph. 5:23; cf. Col. 1:18, 24; 3:15), and using that metaphor for the Church.

By the time this was written, Christ had been building His Church (Matt. 16:18) for about three decades. It began after the resurrected Jesus ascended to the Father, and sent the Spirit to indwell believers, just as He had promised that He would (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4).

The Gospel first spread, of course, through the Jews; and it spread very rapidly to begin with. Because it was in Jerusalem that Jesus was crucified and resurrected, it was in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit first arrived to indwell believers. It was in Jerusalem that Peter preached that first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and the "three thousand" Jews believed (Acts 2:41). In Jerusalem at that time, the message of the resurrected Christ could not be refuted by anyone in town because you could take them to the empty tomb, and there was no body—and nobody ever *produced* a body. It was astounding! It was miraculous.

Then, just exactly as Jesus promised in Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, the Gospel continued to spread, not only in the city of Jerusalem but around Judea, the southern region of the nation of Israel. And then, it spilled over into the Samaritans; and we made a big deal in Ephesians Chapter 2 about what a *big deal* that was. Samaritans *hated* Jews! Jews *hated* Samaritans! The *only* solution to that kind of hatred is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, where the walls of separation are knocked down (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). And then, the *biggest* wall of separation was Jews and Gentiles—and then, just as Jesus promised, the Gospel spread to the Gentiles.

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Meanwhile, as you read along in the Book of Acts, as God was doing those things He also miraculously called the chief persecutor the Church—a man named "Saul" from Tarsus" (Acts 9:11); He called him to Himself and made him the special "apostle" to the "Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; cf. Gal. 1:15-16). He changed his name to Paul—Paul the Apostle.

Same message, same salvation—to the Jews, to the Samaritans, to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 15:11); and it was bringing all of those together in Christ that is one of the main themes of the New Testament epistles.

Now, Paul was trained by God supernaturally for 14 years; we are not told what other instruments He may have used during that time. Then he was sent out from the church at Antioch to begin to plant churches among the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3). Every place he went, Paul modeled what he taught—that the Gospel is the same "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16), and also to the Gentile. Every city he went to—if there was a synagogue, that's where he started. If there wasn't a synagogue but he could find a group of Jews, that's where he started. He would evangelize them, as many as would believe would come with him; and eventually, there would be no more fruit to be had among the Jews, and he would turn to the Gentiles.

One of the amazing and wonderful things about the Gospel, then, is how from the *very beginning*—and you see it in *every* place Paul went—it *unites* anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus Christ into *one spiritual family*. This family is called the "Church"—the "called-out ones"; it is also called "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13); it is called a spiritual "building" (Eph. 2:21); it's called a spiritual "family" (Eph. 3:15); it's called the "bride" of Christ (Jn. 3:29; Rev. 19:7). But the most unique metaphor—that is not like any of the metaphors used for Israel in the Old Testament—is calling the Church "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). The walls are all down; in Christ, we are all one.

The chapter that we are in—Ephesians Chapter 4—contains much about the metaphor of "the body" as a way to describe the Church. What had been playing out now for about 30 years in actual ministry was now being described theologically, so that we, and all who have followed Christ since the First Century, can know our identity "in Christ"—remember that theme of the Book of Ephesians: "in Christ"—we can know what it means to be "in Christ," and know how to serve Him.

That theme, "in Christ," occurs 27 times in the Book of Ephesians, and the book breaks itself down conveniently into two almost equal halves. Chapters 1 through 3 are deep theological truths about our identity in Christ. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are very challenging and deep exhortation about how to *practice* our position—or, our identity—in Christ.

The first part of the second half of this book has a strong emphasis on unity. I have already shown you this several times. The first 16 verses of Chapter 4: 1 through 3 is the Ingredients of Unity; 4 through 6 is the Theology of Unity; our target for today, Verses 7 through 10, deals with the Diversity among our Unity; 11 and 12 is the Functioning of Unity; and 13 through 16 is the Fruits of our Unity.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 11-28-21

We learned at the beginning of this chapter that this unity that we have in Christ is *not* something that we are called to create—*because we can't!* We couldn't if we wanted to! It is *done* by what Christ has done. We *are* "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28); and so the exhortation now is: You have been called to this *exalted* position, "blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3); *that is who you are in Christ*, so now, "walk"—or, "live"—"walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). How do you do that? Paul says: "being diligent to *preserve* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vs. 3). We *preserve* this unity. It's a supernatural thing; we can *damage* it, but we can't create it. We "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Now that tees us up for the next verses that we have already looked at; as a matter of fact, we spent a couple of weeks looking at them: Verses 4 through 6—The Theology Of Unity—where there is a very obvious theme-word: the word "one" occurs seven times in Verses 4 and 5. Twice it occurs in a triad: Verse 4—"one," "one," "one"; Verse 5—"one," "one," "one"; Verse 6—Well, you're all "one"; you all belong together in Christ.

So now we move on to what I've labeled as "The Diversity of our Unity"; it is also appropriate to say this is one of the explanations of Why We Are One In Christ. It's not because we are so cute and fuzzy, and we just can't resist each other; it's because of what Christ has done *for* us.

If Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives, and He died to save us and make us one Body (Eph. 5:25-27), then the point is: We should be putting out *significant effort*—you might even call it "being diligent," which means: Make it your highest priority; make haste to do this—we should be "diligent to preserve" that "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (cf. Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; Gal. 5:13; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 Jn. 5).

Now I also understand: If God wants us to manifest our oneness, the enemy of God—Satan—wants to do *anything* he can to *fracture* us! And I realize, there are *so many distractions*, so many attacks on our unity, so many things that just move it out of first place in our lives, we *really* have to fight that battle to keep the priority right.

The moment I gave my life to Christ—in my case, I was one of the very rare ones; it was at the *first time* that I heard the Gospel—I *knew* there was a profound change, I *knew* something had happened to me; I suddenly had this desire to read the Bible, I suddenly had this desire to pray, I wanted to be with Christians. But it took me almost *two years* to realize that it was *even better than that!*

I had thought, "This is better than *any hobby* I've ever had before! This is the *best* thing that you can do!" And I had to realize: No, it's way more than that; it has to be *the* most important thing! This is *who we are!* Christianity is not a hobby; it's not an after-market add-on accessory; it's not a new "app" that you put on your phone that you can use whenever you want to. It is *who you are!* You are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), and that is *profound*.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Something spectacular about this "oneness" is that the oneness is composed of a whole bunch of *different* ones. We are *all* different; none of us have *exactly* the same genetics; none of us have *exactly* the same experiences; none of us have *exactly* the same perspectives on things. We are all unique individuals, and yet He has made us "one in Christ." It is *one* body, comprised of *countless* distinct individuals.

So today, we're going to look at how the finished work of Christ is part of the basis for the unity that is comprised of this incredible diversity. I'm going to get a running start at the passage, and then I'm going to invoke my privilege as the guy that goes verse-by-verse—I'm going to deemphasize one of the verses this morning, and kind of keep it in my back pocket for using it later, because it's going to tie in to what comes after that in this chapter.

We are collectively "one body" (vs. 4), but here is an instruction now: Having said, "You're one, you're one, you're one, you're one. Do you get it? You're all one! 'One,' I said—I mean '*one*'! Now, *each* individual one of you, I want to talk to you for a moment." That's what he does here.

Look at Verse 7. We'll read the whole 4-verse pericope, and then we'll break it down. Paul says: "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." That's the verse we're not going to say a lot about; I'll tell you why in a minute. "Therefore it says"—the "it" is the Old Testament; the reference is Psalm 68:18—"Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.'" (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)" (Eph. 4:7-10; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Now, as I said, I'm going to *minor* on Verse 7 and *major* on Verses 8 through 10. But understand: There is something that has happened "to each one of us." "To each one of us"—individually—"grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." To each one of us, something has been given; it's called: God's grace. Well, we're all "saved by grace through faith" (Eph. 2:8), but there is also a *special* manifestation of His grace, which is a gift given to each member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

This "grace...given" to us can be, if you will, measured or described by three things that Christ accomplished. So I'm pulling an outline from Verses 8, 9, and 10—especially, Verses 9 and 10—to say that when it comes to our unity, it's based upon these three things, in part: The Captives Are Captured; The Gifts Are Given; and then, The Proclamation To The Prisoners.

Verses 8, 9, and 10 is a fascinating little section that seems sort of cryptic. In reality, it describes a big part of the basis for our unity; it's the finished work of Christ. So, look at it again: "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' "

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Date: 11-28-21

I remember reading that for the first time, and my thought was: "Huh? What is *that* about?" Well, it's a quote from Psalm 68:18. And interestingly, like many of the quotes from the Old Testament used in the New Testament, it has an inspired application, or, an inspired additional twist to it in the way that it is applied to the New Testament setting.

The background of this, as it is used in Psalm 68: This is a verse that is based upon a custom of a conquering general returning in triumph from battle; and he brings with him, to a victory parade, the enemies that he has captured in the war, in the battle. And he mentions "gifts" there. In the context of Psalm 68, the "gifts" refer to what the victorious general gets for winning the battle; this is the spoils of battle; these are now *his* prisoners of war; but in this context, Christ is the One who *gives* gifts because He has won the battle. So the idea is: You go win the battle, you win the gifts; and now he's saying, there's an even *higher* application of that principle: You win the battle and you *give* gifts.

In the Old Testament, you have an inspired application of that, before Psalm 68 was written. That application, or illustration, is from Abraham. Remember in Genesis 14, Abraham was in the habit of cleaning up after Lot; he went out and he defeated Chedorlaomer; and on his return from the battle, along the way *he gave gifts away* which he had won in that battle. He gave ten percent to this guy named "Melchizedek king of Salem" (vs. 18). *That* becomes a great picture of Jesus: the "King of Salem," or, the "King of Peace" (Heb. 7:2), the "Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6)—and you can read about him [Melchizedek] in the Book of Hebrews. And Abraham also gave repayment to the kings "Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre" (vs. 24) for their portion of contributions to the battle; and then the rest was given to the "king of Sodom" (vs. 21).

So Abraham sets the pattern that is now applied to Christ: He went out and won the battle, and then he *gave away* what he had won! Jesus went and won the battle for our souls, and then He turns around and He gives "gifts" to us—we are the ones who receive the gifts of the Spirit in the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Verses 9 and 10 is an explanation of something that lies *behind* the giving of those gifts. At this point, we interrupt this sermon for an important message from its author: I am about to do my best to teach you what this passage says, and what it means by what it says. This is based on *countless* hours of research and study. It started long ago; the Flood was drying and I was working on my Master's Thesis at that time, and I was dealing with something that was ancillary to this passage; and Marsha will tell you: For months and months and months and months—I got two extensions on my thesis—I just kept adding and adding and adding to this *pile* of things; and so, finally, I got to the end.

I am utterly confident of my view on this; and I believe that what I'm going to teach you harmonizes with key passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. But, in full disclosure—and the reason I'm pausing here: I want you to know that there are many godly fellow expositors and theologians who interpret this passage differently. And at the risk of bringing down a bolt of lightning, I will tell you that you will find the *other* interpretation in your MacArthur Study Bible.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Date: 11-28-21

Most teachers and preachers who identify themselves under the banner "Reformed"—this would be most in the believing wings of the Presbyterian Church and other groups such as Lutherans, where there are true believers among them—they say that the word "ascended" refers to Jesus ascending to the Father, and He is above all. I absolutely agree with that; I think that is what "ascended" means there.

They say the word "descended" simply refers to the fact that He took on humanity and He came to Earth, and that's *all* that it means. In their view, the phrase "into the lower parts of the earth" doesn't add anything to the word "descended." In other words, "lower parts of the earth" equals "the earth, the lower parts"—that Christ was in Heaven, and He came to Earth.

Now, there is no heresy in that viewpoint. Those who hold to it do not corrupt the Gospel. I would say I am unworthy to untie the sandals of many who hold to that view. But I think there is more to it than that, and that the combined impact of this passage, in concert with several others, paints an even more profound picture. We now return to our regularly scheduled sermon, in progress.

Okay, here's this fascinating parenthetical statement, and it was good of the New American Standard translators to put it in parentheses; there are no parentheses in the Greek manuscripts, but grammatically, this stands on its own.

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

Now, as I said: The one view is that "descended" means He took on humanity; He came to Earth. I say to you: Why then say: "into the lower parts of the earth"? That phrase has *no significance* if all that "descended" means is the Incarnation. The reference here to "lower parts" refers to a place of spirits. In the Bible, it is referred to as both the place of the spirits of dead *people*—the nonmaterial part of them; your body is dead, it's in the tomb, it's in the ground; and yet, you continue to live; your soul, your spirit, the real you continues to live—and this same term is used to describe a place of residence of some *demons* who are imprisoned, awaiting their final sentencing; and they're not going to be released, except for the time of final judgment.

And these verses tell us these three things that Jesus has accomplished to make the unity in the Church a reality. So, back to the outline: The Captives Are Captured—Verse 8: "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' " He went to that place and He brought back with Him those who had died already. Then, The Gifts Are Given and The Proclamation To The Prisoners.

But, The Captives Are Captured is the first part of it. It says Christ went to this "lower" place. You probably know it by the term "Sheol" (Ps. 16:10)—that is the Hebrew word—or "Hades" (Acts 2:27)—that's the Greek word; they are exact synonyms for each other in two different languages.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Date: 11-28-21

And this is saying that while His body was in the tomb, Jesus wasn't taking the weekend off; in His spirit, He went and brought those who had died in a state of faith—they were believing, they were trusting—and He brought them into Heaven. Why was that? Well, they could not come into the presence of God because their sins had not been atoned for. How do we know that?

Well, let's go to the Book of Hebrews: Hebrews Chapter 10, Verses 10 through 14. This is *very* important: "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*." *Very* crucial phrase: "once for all"; *all* who ever enter the presence of God get there because of what Jesus did for them *once*.

It goes on to say: "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered *one* sacrifice for sins *for all time*"—same phrase—"sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by *one* offering He has perfected *for all time* those who are sanctified."

No priest in the Old Testament era *ever* "sat down," because their work was never done! Jesus made *one* sacrifice *one* day *for* all—and He sat down. Now, there is more of the story to unfold: "His enemies" will "be made a footstool for His feet"—that's a guaranteed *promise* now, but it hasn't happened just yet.

So, this place of their waiting—called "Hades" in the Greek, or "Sheol" in the Hebrew"—Paul calls it here: "the lower parts of the earth." Within the place of spirits, there were different places. This place called "Sheol" or "Hades"—I do a little Bible study that I say is "Biblical *Unreal Estate*"; you can't find the address of it, you can't give a GPS coordinate for it—*very* real places, but not *physical* places. This is a realm that we cannot *perceive*, if you will; and it has different parts within it.

There is a place where *believers* are; it's called "Abraham's Bosom"—you read about that in Luke Chapter 16, the record of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Abraham, according to Romans, is the prototypical "believer" (Rom. 4:11; cf. Gal. 3:9). If you have a faith like Abraham, and Jesus hasn't come yet, and you die, you are with Abraham. It's a place of blessing; you can read about it in Luke 16—that's about the only hint we have of it. It's the place you want to be.

And then, remember: There is this huge "chasm" (Lk. 16:26), and separated from Abraham's Bosom is a place of torment, where *unbelievers* are (cf. Jn. 3:18, 36; 8:24). And then, in Luke Chapter 23, Verse 43, you also have Jesus calling Abraham's Bosom "Paradise"—I think that's a synonym for the same thing—and He said He would be there *on that very day* with that thief who repented next to Him.

So, everyone from the time of Adam, up until when Christ "led captive a host of captives" and brought them safe into the presence of the Father—they were all in that place. Jesus went and recaptured the POWs from death. Stay tuned for more details.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Then, The Gifts Are Given—He says that in Verse 7: "each one"—this is our individuality. The Savior has done this; He has given us gifts, and they are given to us. When we get to Verse 11, we will begin the section on how the Body of Christ is meant to function *in light of* all of these *diverse* individuals working together as "one body." So we will expound much on what is in Verse 7 at that time.

But I want to get to The Proclamation To The Prisoners. That's the *hard* part here. "Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things." Now, as I said, most "Reformed" interpreters say that those two verses mean: Jesus took on humanity and came to Earth; then, after His resurrection, He ascended to the Father, "far above all the heavens"—and all of that is true. But if that is *all* that these two verses mean, *they don't need to be here!* They could be here, and not do any harm. But this refers to *something else* that Jesus did while His body was in the tomb. And it's important because it explains the unity, *not only* that we have in the Church, but the unity of *all* believers of *all* the ages. Now, is the Church distinct? Oh, yeah; that's a *big deal*. This era of the Church—that's a big, big deal (see Rom. 11:25-29). But you understand: Jesus, *before He even sent the Holy Spirit*, He went and got all the believers of all of the ages before that, and brought them into the presence of the Father; and we are *one with them* for eternity! Who do we think we're going to be with in the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Is. 65:17; Rev. 21:1)? All who have believed for all of the ages (cf. Rev. 21:12, 14).

So, Verses 9 and 10 are a parenthetical statement related to—built upon, if you will—Psalm 68:18. The best explanation—the most *thorough* explanation of this—is over in First Peter Chapter 3. And I would commend to you, if you are not familiar with this—or if you are, and you'd like to review—go into our sermon archives on our website and find our sermons on First Peter 3:18-22; it's three or four parts devoted to this, and that was the time that I had tried to look at it in its details. I'll try to rein myself in now, and just give you the tip of the iceberg here.

Look over at First Peter Chapter 3, Verses 18 through 22—"For Christ also died for sins *once for all*"—sound familiar? Yes! Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10: He died for sins "once for all"—"the just for the unjust"—sound familiar? Yes! Romans 3:26: He is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"—"so that He might bring us to God"—you get to God no other way except that Christ died for your sins, "the just for the unjust"—now here, it's going to describe what it meant that He "descended into the lower parts of the earth"—"having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." There is His ascension—He is back in the presence of God, He is above all, He is over all.

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Now, notice that phrase "made alive in the spirit"; "Christ" was "put to death in the flesh," "made alive in the spirit." We should read that word "spirit" with a small "s" on "spirit"; it's not talking about the Holy Spirit, it's a contrast between His flesh and His spirit. *Physically*, He was dead; but in His *spirit*, He was very much alive.

When you die—if you die before I do, and if I am tasked with doing your funeral or your memorial service or whatever it is, and even if there is a casket there, I'll say, "He is not here today. This is just an empty shell." (see Jas. 2:26a; cf. Ecc. 12:7) The flesh is dead, but He was "alive in the spirit."

Verse 19 refers to these "spirits now in prison" to whom Jesus "went and made" a "proclamation." After studying that for a *very* long time—including *endless* months, it seemed like, in writing that Master's Thesis—I came to understand that these "spirits in prison" are mentioned several times in the Bible. They are demons—or, fallen "angels" (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9). They are "bound" (e.g., Rev. 20:2)—that is, they are imprisoned, awaiting judgment. Some demons are bound temporarily, and they're going to be set free, within the last seven years before Jesus returns (Rev. 9:1-11). Some are bound permanently, and the only time they are going to be released is for their final sentencing at the "great white throne" (Rev. 20:11).

In Genesis Chapter 6, they are called "the sons of God" (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7); in First Peter Chapter 3, they are called "spirits in prison"; in Second Peter Chapter 2, they are called "angels" who "sinned"; and in Jude 6, they are called "angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode." All of those passages interconnect; and like a barnacle attached to them is Ephesians Chapter 4, Verses 9 and 10, giving yet another description of that.

First Peter 3:19 is the clue to what Jesus did when He went to this place: "He...made proclamation" to these "spirits." "Made proclamation" is a crucial word. There has been a lot of confusion about this passage because the King James Version translated it: "he went and *preached* unto the spirits in prison," and around that translation has grown up many ideas: like, He preached to the dead, or you can get a second chance at the Gospel after you're dead. Most people don't believe that, but that has come to be a belief because of the word "preached."

There is a word that means "preach the Gospel": *euangelizomai*—"evangelize" comes from that word. That's *not* the word here. This is the word *kērussō*, which means: "on behalf of the King, you make a divine proclamation." You are *stating* what is so. It is not an invitation to salvation.

Jesus "went and made" a "proclamation" that was, in essence, a victory speech. He was giving these spirits—or, these prisoners, these rebels—the absolute assurance that they were *not* ever getting out of that prison *until* they would be sentenced to "the lake of fire" forever (Rev. 20:10). I call it "The Divine Raspberry." He told them, "It's over! It's done! There will be the playing out of some things in human history, but you're toast."

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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Date: 11-28-21

There is another place, another reference to this victory over Satan and his demons, also from the pen of the Apostle Paul; also, I believe, alluding to this same proclamation: Colossians 2:15—"When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities"—in other words, He defeated Satan and his demons—"He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." So this is God, having triumphed over these demons through Christ; and He has displayed it publicly. That's not because you and I were there that day to hear Him make that proclamation, but it was in the view of all of the angels and demons of all time.

Now, when you go back to Ephesians Chapter 4, Verse 10—"He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things." "Fill all things" is a phrase we have already had in Ephesians—back in Chapter 1, Verse 23, where it is a reference to all of His blessings and His power to sustain all things as the Creator and as the King.

Alright, you have now visited the Unreal Estate. Let's get real. This passage has important ramifications for us understanding our unity in Christ. We cannot create this unity, we can only be "diligent to preserve" it, because it is the work of the Spirit of God, based upon the finished work of Christ.

Let me summarize the events described in Ephesians 4:8-10 in different words. Start with the Gospel: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). We start there. As the One who conquered death, the Gospel is the "Good News" that *you can get in on this!* You, too, don't have to be the victim of death! You can be saved from death. And so, the salvation that you have in Christ is part of the victory that is secured by Him; and since you are "in Him" (Eph. 1:4), it's your victory.

If you think about what that means, then: The Body of Christ is where you want to be! (Phil. 3:9) It *is* our identity! We are "in Christ"—there is *nothing* more important about you than the fact that you are "in Christ" if you believe in Him! There is nothing that is *second* most important about you! That is *you*—that is *who we are!* So, the Body of Christ is the thing that we should *want to be part of* more than anything else! This *is* the "in crowd"! This is the group you want to belong to.

And if you were to go over and study that parallel passage in Colossians Chapter 2, especially Verses 9 through 15, you'll see that Jesus—there's a lot of emphasis there—has "triumphed" over the enemies of our unity. We can, indeed, be one in Christ—we *are*, indeed, one in Christ—because of the victory of Christ over Satan being a done deal.

Now, our text teaches us that, having accomplished *all* that we need for our salvation, He has given us "gifts." And by those gifts that He has given us—by us *using* those gifts appropriately—now, we are enabled to live out, in practical reality, the demonstration of our oneness. It's because of the finished work of Christ that a *motley crew like us* can be redeemed, and we can be one in Christ. We *are* one in Christ! (Jn. 17:21)

Sermon Title: Why We Are One In Christ
Scripture Text: Eph. 4:7-10 (Ephesians #22)

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So, in case you need a reexamining of your priorities, let me suggest to you: Go right back to the finished work of Christ, and what that actually means. You might want to read the great "Resurrection Chapter"—First Corinthians Chapter 15. After you've read about it in all of its details, and your mind will be overheating with the glories of all that you've seen, you get to the end of that chapter, and it could *just as well be* right there after Ephesians Chapter 4, Verse 10.

Paul wrote this: "Therefore, my beloved brethren"—you are *beloved* in Christ!—"be steadfast, immovable"—that's like...oh, I don't know: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all"—"be steadfast, immovable"—don't let *anybody* ever get you to think for *a microsecond* that there is anything more important than this!—"always abounding in the work of the Lord"—well, how am I going to do that? He gave you a gift that you can use, that He *wants* you to use, that He will *enable* you to use—"always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

It's worth *toiling* over! It's worth *sweating* over! (1 Tim. 4:10) We are *commanded* to be "diligent to preserve" it! This is *who we are!* (1 Cor. 6:19-20) It doesn't get any better than to be "in Christ," and we are "fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17)—everything that is coming His way is coming our way (see 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 1:6; 3:21). Read everything about the Kingdom, read everything about the "new heavens" and the "new earth" (Is. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-7)—it is all ours because of the finished work of Christ, and that's Why We Are One In Christ.

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You. As we sang: Thank You for sending us Your Son, and for sending us Your Spirit to make us all that You have created us to be in the Savior. Lord, we live in a busy world, a distracting world; so many things around us would turn our eyes, turn our attention, dilute our commitment—but we want to "be steadfast, immovable," by Your grace "abounding" in our work for Your glory. Have Your way with us to that end. Sweep away whatever needs to be cleaned out. Encourage where there is discouragement. Make us what You mean for us to be in Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.