

054 - He Ascended on High and Gave Gifts - Ephesians 4:8-10 - 2015-08-09

Call to Worship: Psalm 68:26, 32

Scripture Reading: Psalm 68:1-18

Sermon: "He Ascended on High and Gave Gifts" Ephesians 4:8-10

Benediction: Psalm 68:35

## INTRODUCTION

Part of what it means to "endeavor to maintain the unity" in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to think rightly about the church's essential oneness, in that the church has one Lord, one hope, one faith, etc. Another part of what it means to maintain the unity is to think rightly about the church's diversity---that God deals with each of us individually in the church, that He gives blessings of His grace to each one, and that those blessings, that grace, is measured out to each one by the Lord Jesus Himself.

These things, you recognize, have been taught to us by our Lord through His servant, the apostle Paul, in this letter to the Ephesians. As we take up the study today, we see that when Paul has laid down the premise of verse 7, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift," he then sees fit, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to do two things:

1. prove from the scriptures what he has just said about Christ as the giver of gifts to His church
2. explain to us how it is that Christ is the giver of gifts to His church

**See how the Lord Jesus Christ as the giver of gifts in His church is proven and explained from the Old Testament scriptures.**

## TEXT

Ephesians 4:8-10 Therefore He says: "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (9) (Now this, "HE ASCENDED"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

## BODY

**See how the Lord Jesus Christ as the giver of gifts in His church is proven and explained from the Old Testament scriptures.**

- I. First, Christ As the Giver of Gifts to His Church Proven
  - A. An Old Testament Reference to God Giving Gifts to His People (verse 8)
    - 1. Paul cites Psalm 68:18, which you heard read a few moments ago
    - 2. The Psalm is about God defeating His enemies, who are also the enemies of His people, and then everyone praising God
  - B. The Logical Proof that this Old Testament Scripture Refers to Christ (verse 9)
    - 1. This Psalm is about *God* defeating His enemies, as verse 1, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered."
    - 2. The verse Paul cites refers to *God* ascending
    - 3. In order for God to ascend, He must first have descended into the earth
    - 4. God cannot properly be said to descend, as God,
    - 5. This must, then, refer to Christ, the Son of God become flesh---His incarnation
  - C. The Conclusion that the reference in the Psalm to God ascending indeed refers to Jesus Christ (verse 10a)
    - 1. In Jesus Christ is how God can rightly be said to have descended
    - 2. Therefore it is only in Jesus Christ that God can rightly be said to have ascended
    - 3. So, this verse from the Psalms proves Jesus Christ as the giver of gifts to God's people
  
- II. Second, Christ As the Giver of Gifts to His Church Explained
  - A. He was in heaven in the first place (verse 9)
    - 1. He descended shows that He was originally up in heaven
    - 2. He is not just a special man whom God chose; no, He is the very Son of God by divine nature
  - B. He came down here as a necessary preliminary to giving the gifts---He had things to do down here
    - 1. He needed to provide righteousness for His people
    - 2. He needed to break the power of sin and death for His people
    - 3. So He became incarnate
    - 4. As the Man Christ Jesus, God and Man in one person, He did what had to be done for the salvation of His people
      - a) He provided righteousness from God
      - b) He broke the power of sin and death
        - (1) He conquered all the forces of evil on the cross, taking them captive
        - (2) You see this in how He was dead and in the grave, then came back to life and out of the grave
  - C. A picture is invoked here of military conquerors (we don't see this picture very often, so let's think about it a minute)
    - 1. enemies threatened the people of a certain country or city; they were defeating them and taking them captive

2. the king or other army commander would go out of the city (often down, including in the case of Jerusalem) to fight the people's enemies
  3. when he had conquered the enemies, he would take them captive, especially their kings or generals
  4. then the victorious commander would return to the city (often up, including in the case of Jerusalem) leading those who previously were his people's captors, having them now in captivity to him
  5. Paul Bayne mentioning 1588
  6. the victourious commander would then take his exalted seat in the city and distribute gifts to his army that had fought with him and to the residents of his city
- D. This conquest complete, He ascended back to heaven; not the sky or outer space, but beyond all of that to heaven, where God is manifested; there He was seated on the throne at the right hand of God the Father
- E. From His lofty place in heaven, He gives gifts to His whole church in the form of gifts to each member of His church
1. He gives them; He measures them out
  2. But they are worked in each of us by His Holy Spirit
- F. In this way He "fills all things," that is, He fills everyone in His church, and His whole church, with everything we need for life and godliness

### III. APPLICATION

- A. Recall this whole section is about walking worthy of the high calling we have received by adoption through Jesus Christ
1. a major priority in that walk is keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in God's household, His church
  2. you see other people in the church with gifts different from yours,
    - a) perhaps different in kind;
    - b) perhaps of the same kind, but in greater measure
    - c) especially, as we will be coming to in verses 11-12, some who are given to the church as pastors
  3. your flesh will tempt you to be envious; and to think and say and do things that will disrupt rather than preserve the unity of Christ's church
  4. the best remedy will be right thinking about how we all came to have the gifts we have---they were measured out to us by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself seated on the throne of heaven above all else
- B. Be reminded of the way God exalts someone to a position of honor
1. the pattern
    - a) often He gives someone honor at first
    - b) then sends Him down into a very low situation of humiliation
    - c) only then does He raise Him to honor
  2. examples
    - a) Job

- b) Joseph
  - c) David
  - d) the Lord Jesus Himself
  - e) the apostle Paul who wrote this letter
3. yourself?

## CONCLUSION

**We see in these verses how the Lord Jesus Christ as the giver of gifts in His church is proven and explained from the Old Testament scriptures.**

Ephesians 4:1-10 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, (2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as 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 above all, and through all, and in you all. (7) But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. (8) Therefore He says: "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (9) (Now this, "HE ASCENDED"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

Bayne:

Christ is the giver of all grace, verses 8-10

**Verse 8 Therefore He says: "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."**

Bayne:

The scope of the verse is, to prove Christ the distributor of all graces.

the sum of it setteth down Christ's ascension, and the fruits of it

- one in regard of his enemies, he took them captive
- another in regard of his friends, he gave them gifts

This, that I tell you of Christ giving grace, is no new doctrine, but such as the psalmist did by spirit of prophecy foresee and teach of him, viz. that he, when now coming from his abaement to glorious state, he did leave the earth, and go above all heavens; that he, I say, should victoriously lead captive all the enemies of his people, and plentifully pour out all spiritual graces on the sons of men, that belong to him.

That Christ is the giver of all grace . . . is proved by a testimony taken out of the prophet David

1. the differences betwixt this place and that in the psalm must be reconciled
  - a. the psalm saith "Thou art ascended on high" this saith "He ascended"
    - i. the psalmist speaketh more prophetically, as foreseeing a thing done afar off
    - ii. the apostle more historically, as of the same thing now accomplished
  - b. the psalm saith "He took gifts for men" so the Hebrew word signifieth

who **saith**?

either the scripture, psalmist, or Christ may be understood

what is it to **ascend**?

-either figuratively or properly moving from a lower place to a higher

-the latter is here chiefly pointed at, though the other is to be understood together with it

-God may be said locally to ascend, inasmuch as he caused the local ascent of his human nature, Christ man ascended in regard of state, by receiving glory he before had not in regard of place, properly leaving these lower seats, and going to those upper mansions above these heavens

-which should teach us to have our hearts lifted up to him

-It is a pledge to us of our ascension into heaven. Where the head is, there the body must follow

What it is to **lead captivity captive**

-He took captive those powers which did hold us captive: the world, sin, the flesh, and devil

-Here is one thing only fastened falsely on this verse, viz. the taking the fathers out of limbo, to which we answer: The thing itself is a fable, the souls of the fathers being in heaven with Christ.

**giving gifts to men**

is the bestowing all spiritual blessings on his church

like as captains, when they make any warlike expedition, they first bid battle to the enemies, till by fight they have subdued them.

we see that the apostle, proving that he spake of Christ out of the old Scripture

Acts 26:22-23 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come-- (23) that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

and in this we must much more imitate the apostle, not to speak without a text, seeing we have the rule of Scripture more enlarged.

why have we peace from the world, sin, death, the devil, but that we should serve the Lord without fear? Great are these spiritual powers in their nature, but to those that are in Christ, they are disarmed, so that they cannot hurt us.

we have our weapons and Christ accompanying us; their weapons are taken from them, they are bound, the Lord bids us not fear.

what we must do if we will prevail over these enemies: look to Christ, who hath taken them captive for us. Let us by faith mount into this chariot of Christ his triumph, and we are safe.

What is meant by **descending**

1. His incarnation and manifesting in the flesh
2. the abasing himself in condition
3. the yielding of his body to the grave. This last is here principally meant

**the lower parts of the earth**

-the grave, which was lower than the other earth

some construe it of limbo, some of Christ's descent to hell, but these are things without authority of scripture

-the Lord doth make great abasements go before the exalting of those that are his; he letteth his own come to the lowest ebb, bringeth them to the dunghill, that his hand may be manifested in their advancement

**above all these heavens**

he went above all these visible heavens, into those heavenly mansions, where God sheweth his glorious presence, where the angels and spirits of the just have their abode.

**that he might fill all things**

false: to fill all places with his body

true: to fill all his church with his gifts

- I. Consider the Lord Jesus Christ as the giver of these gifts
  - A. He descended
  - B. He ascended
    1. far above all the heavens
    2. that He might fill all things
  - C. When He ascended
    1. He led captivity captive
    2. He gave gifts to men

Carroll:

Our text declares that Christ is the author of the preacher gifts. The continued supply of these gifts results from his exaltation to the mediatorial throne and this exaltation results from the previous humiliation. The one who ascended to bestow the gifts is the very one who first descended to make the expiation which is the basis of the gifts. He was dead, but is alive forevermore

Jesuroga:

a reference to the incarnation and his death and burial (Ps. 63:9, 139:15)

Christ

Vincent:

I believe this refers primarily to His incarnation, and especially His subsequent death.

### **He led captivity captive**

Gill:

meaning either such who had been captives, in which sense the word is used, Psa\_126:1; and so may design either those who had been prisoners in the grave, but were set free at Christ's resurrection, and went with him in triumph to heaven; or all his people, whom he redeemed by his blood from that captivity and bondage they were in by nature; or rather those who led them captive are here meant by "captivity"; such as sin, Satan, the world, death, and every spiritual enemy, whom Christ conquered and triumphed over; the allusion may be to public triumphs, when captives were led in chains, even kings and great men, that had captivated others: the words seem to be borrowed out of Jdg\_5:12;