

Sermon #10

Ephesians Sermons

Title: **The Great Gathering Together**
Text: Ephesians
Subject: *The Restitution of All Things*
Date: Tuesday Evening — July 11, 2006
Tape # Z-03a

Introduction:

The title of my message is — **The Great Gathering Together**. Our text will be Ephesians 1:10.

(Ephesians 1:10) “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him.”

I cannot imagine a better way to begin my message than by reading to you Robert Hawker’s opening comments on this rich, instructive verse. Hawker wrote...

“There is not perhaps the fellow to it, in relation to the vast subject it treats of in all the Bible. It opens to us the very heart of God, as it respects his whole designs of grace, toward the Church. It shows us, how, from all eternity, the mind of Jehovah hath been occupied on this grand concern. And...it most plainly and decidedly shows that the whole designs of Jehovah, are to glorify the Lord Jesus. All is said to be decreed *for* him. All things are to center *in* him. The dispensation of (all) events, and the fulness of times, are all directing their several pursuits to this one termination. And, like the numberless rays of light, converging to one center, all are to meet *in him*. I admire the repetition, *even in him*. There is a blessed emphasis in it, and so designed to be, in order to intimate the importance of the thing: *even in him*. We have another beautiful example of the same kind (Col. 1:20). *By him I say*, saith Paul. As if (and which is in reality the case,) the glory of Christ, (which is the only visible manifestation of Jehovah,) became the one and only object, for which the Lord went forth in acts of creation (2 Cor. 4:16. John 1:18).”

With that as my introduction, I acknowledge at the outset that I have no hope of entering into the depths of this vast declaration of God’s eternal purpose of grace in Christ. I have studied it with ever-increasing awe, reverence and gratitude for nearly forty years. The more I study it, the more I realize that I have not yet begun to enter into the wonders of grace here set before us. All I can do is give you a brief sketch of what I see of our God’s infinite wisdom and prudence along the shore lines of this great ocean of grace.

Proposition: Everything that God has done, is doing and shall hereafter do is moving toward the accomplishment of this one great end. — “*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he*

might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

THE DISPENSATION

First, Paul speaks of a period of time that he describes as “*the dispensation of the fulness of times.*” What period of time is this talking about? And what is meant by “*the dispensation of the fulness of times*”? As in all things, we must seek the answers to those questions in the Book of God alone.

The word “*dispensation*” simply means, “stewardship.” It refers to the management of a household, or the management, oversight and administration of another person’s property or business. In Ephesians 3:2, the Apostle speaks of the ministry God had given him as a “*dispensation of the grace of God*” (Eph. 3:2).

(Ephesians 3:1-2) “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, (2) If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:”

That is what is to be called into the ministry. It is to be given a “*dispensation of the grace of God.*” It is to be given a stewardship of grace in the house of God.

Specifically, in Ephesians 1:10, the word “*dispensation*” refers to the universal dominion of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he executes the will of God in time (John 17:2; Rom. 14:9).

(John 17:2) “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

(Romans 14:9) “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

As Paul states it in verses 20-22, the Lord God gave his Son, our divine Mediator, the reins of universal monarchy “*when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.*” All power in heaven and in earth has been given to the God-man, our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might execute his eternal purpose in the salvation of his people, to the everlasting “*praise of the glory of his grace.*” That is the meaning of the word “*dispensation*” in our text.

THE FULNESS OF TIMES

But what is meant by “*the dispensation of the fulness of times*”? Again, let’s look into the Word of God for the answer. Our text tells us that God’s eternal purpose of grace is to be accomplished in the fulness of times by the gathering together of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. The only other place in which we find a similar statement is in Galatians 4.

(Galatians 4:4-6) “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (5) To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (6) And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

The “*fulness of times*” obviously began with the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, his incarnation. Yet, Ephesians 1:10 tells us that it is something not yet fulfilled. So the fulness of times refers to the whole gospel age. It began with our Savior’s first advent and will continue until his glorious second advent, culminating in the fulfillment of God’s everlasting covenant and the full salvation of all his elect in Christ. This is what Paul speaks of in Romans 11:25-29.

(Romans 11:25-29) “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: (27) For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. (28) As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are* beloved for the fathers’ sakes. (29) For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.”

The contemplation of Christ’s dominion, executing all the will and purpose of God in providence, and that culminating in the complete salvation of all God’s elect, and the final gathering together of all things in Christ was glorious in Paul’s eyes, and ought to be glorious in ours (Rom. 11:33-36).

(Romans 11:33-36) “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (34) For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (35) Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? (36) For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.”

A REUNITING

The word translated “*gather together*” suggests many things. As I showed you Sunday morning, it might be better translated “**gather together again,**” “**reunite,**” or “**restore.**” There was a time when all things were one. In the original creation, the angels of God were one; but they were divided by sin. Adam was one with the heavenly angels; sin divided men from the angels of God. All creation was one with Christ the Creator. How horrible and sad, how far reaching the consequences of sin are in God’s creation!

Sin has separated man from God; and sin separates men from men. We were created as one; then sin entered. And since the day sin entered, man has been divided. We are divided by race, by face, and by place! And the more we appear to try to unite the human race, the more we are divided!

After the fall of Adam, our parents were expelled from the Garden of Eden and fallen man was scattered as one race over the face of the earth. After the flood, mankind was divided into three races, and scattered through the earth. Since that day, the divisions and scatterings have constantly multiplied. No culture, no society, no civilization has ever stopped, or even slowed the divisions.

I grew up in the deeply segregated South during the tumultuous civil rights struggles of the 50's and 60's. In the last 50 years we have seen legislation after legislation, "The Voting Rights Act," "Forced Integration," "School Busing," "Affirmative Action," literally hundreds of laws, by which the courts of our land and the legislative branches of government, both State and Federal, have tried to bring men together; but all have been miserable failures. There is more racial division in the United States today than ever in our life time. The goal is good. How blessed it would be if men and women could live together as one! But such a goal is not attainable by human effort. I do not mean to suggest that we should not try to attain it. We should. But I do say that it is unattainable. All of human history and experience verifies that fact. But our text speaks of, and assures us of a reuniting of all things in Christ.

The word translated "*gather together*" also conveys the idea of "**recapitulation**," or "**summarization**." For example, sometimes in preaching I will summarize a message by going over the main points of it. It also suggests a **mathematical sum**, the total of things added together. Taken in this sense, it refers to the final summing up of all things in Christ.

- All the Blessings and Promises of the Covenant.
- All the Types, Shadows and Sacrifices of the Law.
- All the Prophecies and Promises of the Old Testament.
- All the Revelation of God in Holy Scripture.
- All the Hosts of God's Elect.

Christ is the Sum Total of all.

Again, those words, "*gather together in one*," might be translated "**reduce to one**." In a word, when all is said and done that must be said and done, "*Christ is All, in all!*" Everything shall at last be reduced to this, that he might have the pre-eminence, that he might be the Firstborn among many brethren.

- What is grace, but Christ?
- What is redemption, but Christ?
- What is salvation, but Christ? — (1 Cor. 1:30)
- What is heaven, but Christ?
- What is the Church, but Christ?
- What is the glory of God, but Christ?
- What is the will of God, but Christ?
- What is God, but Christ? — (Col. 2:9-10)

(Colossians 2:9-10) "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

SCATTERED TO GATHER

(Ephesians 1:10) “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him.”

I have no doubt that the primary thing intended by Paul’s declaration in this verse is the gathering together of all God’s elect in Christ. The fact is, our God according to the abounding wisdom and prudence of his grace has scattered his elect across the face of all the earth in wrath that he might in his great mercy gather them all together in one in Christ, for the everlasting praise and glory of his own great name. We see this fact stated so commonly through the Scriptures that it is astounding that it is so commonly overlooked (Deut. 30:3; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; John 11:49-52).

(Deuteronomy 30:3) “That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.”

(Jeremiah 31:10) “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd *doth* his flock.”

(Ezekiel 11:17) “Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.”

(Ezekiel 20:34) “And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.”

(Ezekiel 20:41) “I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.”

(John 11:49-52) “And one of them, *named* Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, (50) Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. (51) And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; (52) And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

In redemption, by the sacrifice and blood atonement of his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord God gathered together all his elect in one in Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world of his elect unto himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us, but imputing all our sin to his darling Son who was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

In the redemption of our souls at Calvary all God’s elect were brought together before his holy law and justice in one Head, the Lord Jesus. And all the sins of God’s elect were gathered together in him, made to meet on him, punished in him to the full satisfaction of justice, and put away by him, “*in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace!*”

In regeneration and effectual calling, by the omnipotent grace and almighty mercy of God the Holy Spirit gathers God’s elect one by one into his garner, by the preaching of the gospel (Matt. 13:24-30; Mark 13:27; Luke 3:17).

(Matthew 13:24-30) “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: (25) But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. (26) But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. (27) So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? (28) He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? (29) But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

(Mark 13:27) “And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”

The gospel we preach is the fan by which the Son of God purges his threshing floor, separating the chaff from the wheat, the precious from the vile, and gathers his wheat into his garner.

(Luke 3:17) “Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.”

Being gathered out of every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue, gathered from all the divided peoples of the earth, in Christ we are made one (Col. 3:10-13).

(Colossians 3:10-13) “And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (11) Where there is neither Greek nor Jew,

circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all. (12) Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye.”

Then, when our blessed Savior comes again in his glory, he will gather all his elect together in resurrection glory. Paul calls this “*our gathering together unto him*” (2 Thess. 2:1). He describes the majesty of it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

“*Our gathering together unto him*” — What a blessed prospect! Let those five words echo through our souls. — “*Our gathering together unto him*” What a gathering that will be! No wonder Paul calls this “*the blessed hope*” of every believing heart.

This gathering will take place **at the end of the world**, in the day when Christ returns to earth the second time, when “*the fulness of times*” is finished. Our Savior went away in the clouds of heaven, and in the clouds of heaven he will return. Visibly, in the body, he will return. And the very first thing that Christ will do will be to “*gather together*” his people (Matt. 24:31).

(Matthew 24:31) “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The sleeping saints will be raised first. Then the living saints will all be changed, “*in a moment,*” “*in the twinkling of an eye!*” It is written, “*The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*”

(1 Corinthians 15:51-52) “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

When every member of Christ is found, and not one is left behind, when soul and body, those old companions, are once more reunited. That will it be a great “*gathering.*” — All gathered to gather in one, in Christ, even in him!

- Adam and Eve
- Abel and Abraham
- Abraham and Lot
- Isaac and Isaiah
- Noah and Simeon
- Rahab and Ruth
- Tamar and Bathsheba
- Paul and Barnabas
- Peter and John
- David and Don!

Children of God, we have no reason to fear in the day of gathering, however fearful the signs that may accompany it. Before the final destruction of all things begins, we will be hidden in the secret place of the Most High.

What miracles of grace will be revealed in that day! We will see some in heaven whom we never expected would have been saved at all. The confusion of tongues will finally be reversed, and done away. The assembled multitude will cry with one heart and in one language, “See what God has done” (Numbers 23:23). We shall be gathered by Christ, gathered unto Christ, gathered in Christ, and with gathered Christ!

- All the family will be gathered (2 Pet. 3:9).
- We will all be of one mind in all things.
- We will all be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy!
- We will never part!
- And all sorrow will be gone forever!

Then, when all the saints are gathered to glory and all the wicked forever cast into hell, our Lord Jesus Christ will make all things new, and we shall see all things reconciled to God in that glorious day called “*restitution of all things!*” — “What a day, glorious day that will be!”

Amen.