

**Ephesians 4: 7-10; “Christ Ascended – Its Meaning”, Message # 27 in a series
entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, A Bible Study
prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 14th, 2021.**

We want to think at this time about the grace that has been given all of Christ’s people as a result of His having accomplished redemption and His having ascended on high. When Christ ascended on high, what did it mean for His Church? It meant that each and every person who who received Christ would not only be receiving the gift of justifying grace leading to salvation, but they would receive the gift of sanctifying grace leading to a better knowledge of what it would mean to be a part of Christ’s spiritual body, and what it would mean, then, for each Christian to grow up into Christlikeness. Because Christ ascended on high 3 very great blessings are granted to each and every Christian. 1st of all – The blessing of grace, being given to each one of us, according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 2nd – The blessing to us, of captivity being led captive. And 3rd – The blessing of His filling all things. Let us receive the truth of these great blessings with the joy of realizing that it really is a great blessing to be a part of Christ’s body, the Church.

1st of all – The blessing of grace, being given to each one of us, according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

Verse 7 says – “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” If we ask what God’s grace is, we are often told that it means unmerited favor being shown to us by God. And this is very true. We are unworthy and undeserving sinners before we come to Christ, and so it is only because of the greatness of God’s mercy that we were shown unmerited favor, on the basis of Christ having suffered and died for all of our sins on the cross. It was unmerited because we could never have worked so as to please God in order to earn this blessing. The reason that salvation is not by works is because our works would have to be perfect and they are not, at many points. Rather, salvation is something bestowed upon a sinner; given and granted to them, on the basis of God’s grace in Christ. Ephesians 2: 8-10 says – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Paul goes on to say in verse 10, that – “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” So, our being shown unmerited favor, our being made a new spiritual creation, and our doing all of the good works that we will do in serving God, following our conversion to Christ, all of this comes to pass in our life because of God’s grace. We should see that God’s grace is more than simply His bestowing unmerited favor upon us. Justification is a very great blessing indeed. God’s unmerited favor covers us completely. We are accepted in the Beloved. We are covered with His robe of righteousness. But being justified by faith in Christ leads to God’s bestowing upon us the enabling grace which will give us the wisdom and the power to live the Christian life; to serve God through good works which we will do in obedience to God’s word.

Sanctifying grace, in other words, requires enabling grace. And in this regard, God gives it to us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. This gift of grace leads the Christian to greater sanctification and usefulness in service to Christ as they make progress in righteousness and holiness. It is directly related to the purpose for which God created us, and the works which He would have us to do for Him. Not all Christians have the same measure of grace bestowed upon them in this regard. To establish the truth of this to you, I would have you turn over with me to 1st Corinthians chapter 15, verses 9-11. “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet , yet not I but the grace of God which was with me.” “Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” Here we can clearly perceive the truth of this sanctifying grace being given to Paul according to God’s good pleasure and appointment. By the grace of God I am what I am.

Paul begins by deprecating himself in the sight of God and his readers. He says that he is the least of the apostles, and yet, as we read the New Testament, we know that this is not true. He was perhaps the greatest of them. But what Paul wants us to see was that it was God's grace that had worked in him to bring great things to pass in his ministry to men. Let us understand that sanctifying grace leads us to have a right view of ourselves, as having been given the measure of grace that we have been given, or the spiritual gift that we have. Paul desired, and we should desire also, that God would have all the glory of what is done and accomplished by us in ministry and service to Him. Paul states that he was unworthy of this grace because he persecuted the church of God. It was only because Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus and struck him down to the ground with blinding light, that he was physically humbled to behold what a great sinner that he was. He was on an errand of persecuting the church when Christ did this.

But, he says, by the grace of God I am what I am. He was commissioned shortly after this, as "a chosen vessel of the Lord's to bear his name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Paul goes on to say that he did not receive this grace in vain, but he labored more than all the other apostles in his calling. He received this appointment, this calling to preach as an apostle, and he worked hard at what he had been given. He did not receive God's grace in vain. Is it possible for a true Christian to receive grace in vain? Yes, it is possible, but not continually. Because God will only strive so long with a person. A true Christian will respond to God's grace and bear fruit to Him. It may be only 30% and not 100%, but there will be a response.

If there is no fruit unto righteousness and holiness, no real working at the holy calling that you have been given, you are not a true Christian. In the life of the true Christian, God will work with that person to bring them to better understand their responsibility before Him, in relation to their being sanctified and being useful to Him. If they never really take up their responsibilities as a Christian, then it can be concluded that they never really knew Him. Do we have proof for this? Yes, I believe that we do. It is found in Philippians 2: 12-14. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Notice how this is worded here. These true Christians in the Philippian church had always obeyed Paul's instructions to them. He was their apostle. He had brought the gospel to them initially. But he uses their good response to the gospel and their past obedience to the word of God, to exhort them to go on to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling". Why? Because it was God who was working in them, both to give them the power of will and to give them the desire, interest, and power, of actually being able to go about to do what God was commanding them to do. God was working in them, it says here, "for His good pleasure". That is, He had an individual purpose for each of their lives. He has the same towards you. He is striving with you by His working, to see it fulfilled; that is, to bring it about, to the praise of His glorious grace.

What an amazing thing this is, and how we should praise and reverence God for it! Yes, there is a measure of grace which is given to each and every believer. And it is specifically designed for them. "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. I like what John MacArthur says in his commentary on this. (Ephesians 4: 7) He says - "This grace is the enabling power that makes the special gifts function to the glory of God." "Enabling grace is measured out to be consistent with what is necessary for the operation of Christ's gift." "And each believer's gift is unique." "The measure or specific portion given is by sovereign design from the Head of the Church." "The Lord has measured out the exact proportion of each believer's gift." "The exact proportion of enabling grace on the part of God is linked with the exact proportion of enacting faith on the part of the believer; and God is the source of both." "The sum of this is that God gives both the grace and the faith to energize whatever gift He gives to the full intent of the purpose."

Suffice it to say, that God's grace was purchased for us, by Christ, to be applied very particularly to the life of each individual believer, so that His purpose will be fulfilled in their life, as long as they will not receive it in vain, but improve upon what they are given by a sincere and loving obedience to their Lord. To the degree that they exercise faith, and go about to do good works to the glory of God, they shall make progress in righteousness and holiness and fulfill the purpose for which they were called of God. They will in the process of their service to God and to Christ, become more and more conformed to the image of Christ. And this leads us to contemplate –

The 2nd Blessing granted to all believers, when Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father; that He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.

Verse 8 says – “Therefore, He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ “(Now this, ‘He ascended’ – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?” “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens....” Now what does it mean here, when Paul says that Christ when He ascended led captivity captive? Well, it means that He was fulfilling God's good purpose in relation to all of His elect people, freeing them from being captives to sin and Satan by means of His resurrection from the dead, and His ascending to the right hand of the Father. In doing so, He was showing His victory over sin and death on our behalf. His intention and the Father's intention and the Spirit's intention are one; to free every believer in Christ to become the person that God would want them to become; a person who could become righteous and holy, useful and fruitful in God's service, and help in destroying the works of the Devil.

Turn over to Hebrews 2: 14-18. “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.” “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

So, Satan's dark desire, all along from the Beginning of the world, was to take and hold men spiritually in captivity to himself, in His kingdom of darkness. He had the power of death only in the sense of being able to deceive people and keep them from believing in God's good word to them. The deception and the captivity were so great that they were native to man's mind and heart. The Father's purpose was to break that power over all men, through what He would do through Christ. And so, Christ was sent in His Incarnation to partake of flesh and blood, that through death He might destroy the Devil's power to deceive men and keep them in bondage to his own false reasoning. This was the whole reason that Christ came into the world. It was to break Satan's power to hold sinners captive. Christ made propitiation for the sins of His people on the cross. He was raised from dead to show that God's justice was completely satisfied.

But He ascended taking captivity captive. Turn over to Colossians 2: 13-15. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.” “And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” “Having disarmed principalities and power, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” So Christ's triumph over the principalities and powers of the Devil came when He was raised from the dead. They thought that they had succeeded in getting rid of Christ at the cross, when actually He was triumphing over them. Through His death and resurrection He triumphed over all the powers of evil. He brought all their wicked schemes to public shame and disgrace. All of this triumph culminated in Christ's “passing through the heavens”; ascending to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, and from that vantage point to give all things to His people. He descended in His Incarnation into the lower parts of the earth to fulfill

His mission of saving sinners. He fulfilled all righteousness in His righteous life, He made satisfaction for our sins on the cross, He was buried in the tomb for 3 days and nights, and He was raised from the dead with power.

Look over at Psalm 68, verses 17 and 18. “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.” “You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious that the Lord God might dwell there.” The wording is a little different here in the New King James than it is in the King James, and as we find it translated in Ephesians. It says that Christ received gifts among men. It says this in the NAS and the ESV as well. What is the meaning then? The word “among” there, I believe, must refer to the fact that Christ is receiving the praise of all believing men everywhere in every generation for His great victory over Satan, sin, the world, and death.

They give Him praise for His giving them all the gifts of grace and the gifts of spiritual gifts to His Church as being intended for them, and His personally being there among His people, and with His people, in every generation to administer those gifts, and work together with each of His people so that they might personally learn to use their gifts to see the Church become a habitation of God in the Spirit, to the glory of God. This is what this picture suggests. In those Old Testament times, when this Psalm was written, when David the king conquered one of his enemies and theirs, he would bring their captive prisoners back to Jerusalem and Mt. Zion and parade them before his people, and show off all the spoils taken by their soldiers. Even so was Christ’s procession to heaven to sit at God’s right hand. Christ’s victory is all His people’s victory too.

In Ephesians 2: 4-7 Paul says – “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” That is the meaning of Christ’s ascension to the right hand of the Father. It is to fulfill His Father’s great purpose to save us and to give us all things in Christ, because of the greatness of His victory over sin and death, Satan, and the world.

And 3rd – We have the blessing of Christ’s Ascension in His filling all things.

Verse 10 – “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” What a grand statement this is! It speaks to us of the immensity of Christ’s accomplishments as the God-Man; that He will fill heaven and earth, and all of His people in all generations, to the end of the world, and throughout all of eternity, with the blessings of what He has accomplished; with His dying on the cross and rising from the dead, and ascending to heaven to right hand of God. He now has been given all power in heaven and earth. He has been given all judgment by the Father, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He has also shown us the pattern for our sanctification; first humbling ourselves in obedience, even to the point of suffering if need be. And then comes exaltation in God’s time, and in His blessed way.

1st Peter 5: 6-11. “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all our care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” “Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” “To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” “Amen.” May each of us see, that because Christ has ascended, all the grace which we will ever need to see us through this life, and into the next, is ours.