

EPHESIANS 4:8-10
Reading 4:1-16
5/9/2013

INTRO: Today we commemorate the ascension of Christ into heaven. Let me give you the order of events in light of the seven feasts of Israel which are given to us in Leviticus 23. The first three feasts occurred at much the same time. On the 14th of Nisan, in the evening, the Passover was commemorated. This, as we know, pictured Christ's death and was fulfilled when He died. Then came the feast of Unleavened bread, and it began on the 15th of Nisan and was a seven day feast. It was fulfilled at the same time as well. But during the feast of Unleavened Bread, the feast of First-fruits took place. It took place on the day after the Sabbath which followed the Passover. This feast was fulfilled when Christ rose from the dead.

Then, fifty days after the day of First-fruits, the feast of Pentecost took place. First fruits, the day Christ rose from the dead, was the first fruits of the barley harvest, and Pentecost spoke of the first fruits of the wheat harvest. Now Pentecost was fulfilled in Acts 2, when the Spirit was poured out on believers, marking the birth of the Church. It occurred 50 days after the feast of First Fruits.

Christ's ascension took place 40 days after the feast of First fruits and 10 days before Pentecost. So, 10 days from now, we will commemorate Pentecost. Jesus ascended to heaven 40 days after First Fruits and the number 40 is the number of testing, and it was the testing and proof of Christ's resurrection, the biggest miracle of all man's history. The resurrection is an incredible event and God made sure there was ample proof of it. Luke writes in Acts 1:3 that Jesus presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs and then He ascended. So, today we commemorate Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven.

This morning, as we look at Christ's ascension, we have before us a most interesting passage so let us read once more Ephesians 4:8-10 (read). Since this is a ascension message I want to center our attention on verses 8-10, but I want to cover briefly the preceding context of verses 1-7 and then the following context of verses 11-16. So our concentration will be on verses 8-10.

I. THE PRECEEDING CONTEXT TO VERSES (4:1-7)

To briefly cover the context which goes before our ascension passage, let us begin by reading verses 1-3 (read). Paul calls believers to walk worthy of the calling with which they are called. He describes this walk in general. It is to be with all lowliness. This is simply humility. For the original language of the NT, this word is a long one. It is tapainophrosune. It comes from 2 words meaning, lowness and phreen. It is humble thinking. Lowliness of mind. Then the believer's walk is to be with longsuffering and bearing with one another in love. There is to be an effort to keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This all needs a lot of time but we are only briefly giving the context.

So we come to verses 4-6. Unity among believers is important because there is only one body. This speaks, no doubt of the universal Church, which is pictured in Scripture as the body of Christ. There is only one Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit. Of course if this one Spirit keeps the body going, there should be unity in the body. And Paul adds, "...just as you were called in one hope of your calling." Then there is only one Lord. Then there is only one faith, that is the true Christian faith. And there is only one baptism. I have told you before that I understand this to being baptized by the Spirit into the one body at salvation and has nothing to do with water baptism.

Then there is one God and Father of all. And I believe this reference to God being the Father of all refers to believers. In this sense only believers can pray, "Our Father which art in heaven..." And this Father of all believers is above all. He is through all and He is in all believers. So we note that in verses 1-6, unity and oneness is emphasized. But this idea of oneness must be handled with care as we will see later. There is but one body, which speaks of the Church. That is the unity. There is but one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

And so, though this is not my subject, let me briefly note verse 6 for you, and the words, 'in YOU all'. We have had Warren Smith with us several times and he has alerted us to the fact that the modern translation called the Message has New Age thinking expressed in it. This verse is an example of that. Let me read for you verses 5-6 in the Message, "You have one Master one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness."

May I say to you as kindly as I can, this is not a version, this translation in this verse alone is a supreme perversion. I feel like Paul said in Philippians 3:18, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." The man who wrote the Message, I cannot see otherwise than that he is an enemy of the God and of the Bible! I cannot see how he could be a Christian and love the Lord and translate like he has done.

So, notice first how he translates verse 6 where our version says, God is 'in you all.' He translates this as saying that God is 'in all'. By the way, probably all new versions leave out the all important word 'you' here. That is because of their preference for the oldest manuscripts. But in translating the verse in this way, what you have is the heresy of pantheism or panentheism. But Peterson goes beyond that to add eleven words to verse 6 that have no manuscript evidence at all and note what it teaches as I read these added words, "Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness." Of these eleven words, there is not one in the original text of any manuscript I can find. Then, to go beyond that, when he says, "Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness", he has capitalized the word 'Oneness.' Is everything we are and think and do permeated with divinity? That is sheer blasphemy!

Well, that is a warning, so we go now to verse 7 (read). In spite of the fact that we, as believers are one body, still, He, that is the Lord, gave 'to each one of us' grace. So, though we are all one body, yet we are all distinct individuals. That seems

so clear as to not need explanation. But in our day it needs explanation because of such teachings as pantheism, or panentheism creeping into the Church. Pantheism means everything is god, and panentheism says that God is in everything but it goes beyond pantheism and says God transcends creation as well.

So, though this passage does speak of unity, it also points out that we are distinct separate individuals. So note that verse 7 starts like this, "But to each one of us..." We are all individuals, though there is unity in the body of Christ. Now back to our main thought, what ties this preceding context with verses 8-10 is that to each believer grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. There is only one body, but this one body has many individual members and each of these members is gifted to do different things. So let us now read verse 7 (read).

II. THE CONTENT OF VERSES 8-10

A. The History of verse 8

That brings us now to verses 8-10. We are going to consider the content of these verses, since our emphasis this morning is on the ascension of Christ to heaven. We want to begin with looking at the background, or the history of Ephesians 4:8. To give evidence for what he has said that grace is given to every believer according to the measure of Christ's gift, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 (read). What connects verses 9-10, with verses 1-7 and then 9-16 is that of spiritual gifts. Notice the words 'given' and 'Christ's gift' in verse 7 (read) and the words 'He gave gifts to men' in verse 8 (read).

Now Psalm 68, many scholars feel, gives the story of the ark of God from when it was made in Israel's wilderness wanderings until finally David brought it from the house of Obed Edom to Mount Zion. If that is correct, verse 18, it seems, speaks of God ascending in this ark to its place in Jerusalem, which is on high.

B. The Prophecy of This Text

So if Psalm 68:18 is an historical account of the ascension of the ark, where God dwelt, to Jerusalem, one can rightly ask this question: "How could Paul use this verse as a prophecy of Christ's ascension to heaven?" Many scholars have been troubled with that, so Albert Barnes says, "Much perplexity has been felt in regard to the principle on which Paul quotes this Psalm, and applies it to the ascension of the Redeemer."

You will probably not remember, but when I introduced the minor prophets I mentioned to you a number of different kinds of prophecy. One of those I called historical prophecy. This is when an historical event pictures a similar event in the future. So, Hosea 11:1 says that God called His Son out of Egypt. That speaks of the historical event when Israel came out of Egypt when Pharaoh did not want to let them go. But look at Matthew 2 (read 13-15). Matthew says that historical event was fulfilled prophetically when Jesus, God's Son was called back out of Egypt. I call this kind of prophecy 'historical prophecy'.

That is what we have in Psalm 68:18. This historical verse becomes a prophetic type of Christ's ascension to heaven, another Mount Zion and another Jerusalem. When the ark ascended, captivity had first been led captive. When the ancient armies were victorious in battle, they led their captives captive and received gifts from the conquered people and then they distributed gifts to their own people. When the Lord Jesus was victorious over death and Satan, He, the victorious conqueror, ascended on high and led captivity captive and He distributed gifts to men.

Now the Apostle Paul draws a conclusion from the words in Psalm 68:18 in verse 9. He says, "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, that He might fill all things." Paul is here saying that Psalm 68:18 pictured a future event which is that Christ will ascend. So, he says that if Christ ascended, we can draw the conclusion that He must have first descended into the lower parts of the earth.

Now, those words, that He descended into the lower parts of the earth have generated several views regarding the intended meaning which we need to be aware of. Here is the question: What does it mean that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth? It will be worth listening carefully here because you will run into these views among numerous evangelicals.

C. The Interpretations of this Text

At least three interpretations are given of this verse that He descended into the lower parts of the earth. The question is, what is meant by these lower parts of the earth?

1. View # 1

The first view is very simple. This view says the phrase *the lower parts of the earth* speaks of the grave. That is simple enough, but it gets more complicated.

2. View # 2

A second view says that he descended into the lower regions of the earth, namely hell (how many have heard of this?) For evidence that He went to hell Acts 2:31 is given (read). To this text 1 Peter 3:18-20 is added (read). According to Gill's commentary, and I quote, "...some say, that Christ, upon his death, went in his human soul to hell; either, as some, to preach to the devils and damned spirits, that they might be saved, if they would; and, as others, to let them know that he was come, and to fill them with dread and terror..."

There is yet another view of these verses which says this: Before Christ paid for man's sins, the righteous went to a holding place in the heart of the earth. This holding place is called hades and it has two compartments. The one is hell, and the other is paradise, or the place called Abraham's bosom in Luke 15. The people in the paradise side were all the saved people before the death of Christ whose sins had never yet really been paid

for, since Christ had not yet died. Those on the hell side are the lost and between them a great gulf was fixed. And so when Christ died and paid for the sins of the saved, He went and preached to these spirits in prison, as 1 Peter 3:18-20 calls them. So, after Christ paid for their sins, Christ went down to hell and proclaimed deliverance to these captives, and He then ascended and took them to heaven. Thus He led captivity captive.

This view is very popular among many evangelicals but its origin lies in Catholicism where it is called 'limbo patrum'. Let me read to you from the Catholic Catechism, #632-634: "The frequent NT affirmations that Jesus was 'raised from the dead' presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection. This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ's descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good news to the spirits imprisoned there."

#633 "Scripture calls the abode of the dead to which the dead Christ went down, 'hell' -- *Sheol* in Hebrew or *Hades* in Greek -- because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God. Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous, while they await the redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into 'Abraham's bosom': It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell. Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before Him."

#634 "The gospel was preached even to the dead. The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus' messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real

significance: the spread of Christ's redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption."

So, this second view of what is meant when it says Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth says that Christ descended into hell, either to taunt the devil, or to give some people a second chance, or to deliver up those who were held captive there before their sins were paid for.

3. View # 3

There is a third view. This is the view I prefer. The words that Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth, I think means simply that He descended from heaven to earth. He descended from heaven to the lower parts and by these lower parts earth is meant. Let me give some evidence for my view. Daniel B. Wallace, in "Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics" says, "'Of the earth' is popularly taken to be a partitive genitive. However, it may well be a genitive of apposition, thus, 'he descended into the lower parts [of the universe], that is, the earth'" (99).

I personally do not subscribe to the view of the two compartment theory of hell and paradise in the heart of the earth until the death of Christ. Let me briefly explain the passages involved. In Acts 2:31, when it says in the KJV that Jesus went to hell, the word is as the Catholic Catechism correctly said, hades. And hades and hell are not the same.

I quote from my notes on the doctrine of the Church, "Let me give evidence that sheol and hades do not refer to hell. I am quoting from my own comments on the intermediate state, 'The term used in the OT which refers to the intermediate state is sheol. This word has been translated (in the KJV) as *hell* thirty one times, as *grave* thirty one times and as *pit* three times. It refers to the bodiless state. It is a state both good people enter at death (Gen. 37:35) as well

as bad people (Num. 16:30). In the NT the corresponding word is hades. The rich man entered hades at death (Luke 16:23), and Jesus too entered hades at death (Acts 2:27). In my understanding both the OT sheol and the NT hades refer to the bodiless state. Thus we see that both saved and unsaved alike enter the intermediate state at death'"(comments /scriptural/ topics/intermediate state).

Second, let me take you briefly to 1 Peter 3:18-20 (read). Ryrie's note is very helpful here and he gives the view I have come to as well. He writes, "Most likely this is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ preaching through Noah to those who because they rejected that message are now spirits in prison." I would take verse 19 like this, "...by whom (that is Jesus, by the Holy Spirit) also went and preached to those people who are spirits in prison", that is they are now spirits in prison. In other words, this preaching took place in the days of Noah, not when Jesus died.

III. THE FOLLOWING CONTEXT TO VERSES 8-10

So, we have looked at the context preceding our text in verses 1-7. Notice verse 7 once more (read). Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift to each one of us. Now this grace is not the grace extended in salvation, but the grace that bestows gifts on Christians for the good of the body. 1 Corinthians 12 deals at length with this subject and the grace gifts, or charismata. So the preceding context led up to the idea of spiritual gifting for believers and that these are given to each believer.

The content of our passage was built around the quote from Psalm 68:18 which we find in verse 8 (read). Then we have Christ's ascension mentioned in verse 8, in verse 9 and in verse 10. Christ's ascension is our subject for this day. Now the key idea of Psalm 68:18 for this context is the giving of gifts to men. And this leads us to the following context and which we find in verses 11-16 (read).

Now it is worthy of note that in Psalm 68:18 it says *He received gifts among men* or as the KJV says, *He received gifts for men*, but in Ephesians 4:8 it says *He gave gifts to men*. Which is true? Well, they are both true. Christ ascended to heaven in victory and received from God the Father gifts for believers. Christ in turn gave these gifts to believers. Turn briefly to Acts 2 (read 32-33)

Now go with me to 1 Corinthians 12. Notice in verse 1 that the subject is spiritual gifts (read). Now look at verses 4-11 (read). So, let me show you how I believe it works. The Lord Jesus ascended in victory. He received spiritual gifts from God for those who would believe in Him. He in turn sent the Holy Spirit to earth after He ascended and by or through this Holy Spirit He gives these gifts to believers. So each member in the Triune God is involved in the gifting of believers.

Now let me mention one more thing. When Jesus spoke of His ascension He said in John 16:7 these words, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." This helper, this comforter was the Holy Spirit. And this Holy Spirit is the One through whom Christ gives His gifts of the Spirit to us.

So, basically, to summarize this following context, the benefits of Jesus' ascension to heaven is that He gifted the Church to do His work here on earth. And there are three major areas in which this gifting benefits mankind. First, evangelism. The bringing of the Gospel to the world. Second, equipping the saints for the work of the ministry and this happens through the third thing from which believers benefit which is edification. Edification is the building up of believers. If I understand the Bible right, services like we have this morning are intended by God mainly for edification, not evangelism. Evangelism is what all the people of this church should be doing throughout the week. If I understand Scripture right, if Christ had not ascended this gifting would not have been possible.

CONCL: And so, to conclude this morning, Paul, in Ephesians 4 calls us to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. This is the calling to be a Christian, a Christ one. Christians should walk like Christ walked. And so he shows that the Church is one body but it is made up of many believers and each of these believers has been gifted according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Then he goes to Psalm 68:18 to show that Christ ascended after won the victory over the devil and He gave gifts to men. He received these gifts from God and gave them to the saved through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

These spiritual gifts He then uses in Christians to evangelize unbelievers and to equip and edify believers. Believers are to be equipped and edified in order that they might come to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.