

Series: Ephesians
Title: Gifts for the Rebellious
Text: Ephesians 4: 8, 10; Psalm 68: 18
Date: April 13, 2014
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Ephesians 4:8: Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

This is taken from Psalm 68: 18. Let's read it because it includes some things not included in our text.

Psalm 68: 18: Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.

Divisions: 1) Christ's ascension 2) His victories 3) The gifts he received for men 4) The great end for which he bestows them

Proposition: The assurance that Christ's church is prospering exactly as it should, and shall continue to do so, is because Christ is risen and taking care of the growth and unity of his church continually.

By church, I am not speaking of what most men in this world recognize as the church. I am speaking of Christ's true body, his true redeemed, made up of the elect given to him of God before the foundation of the world—Christ's very body!

Christ's church is prospering exactly as it should, and shall continue to do so, because Christ is raised to take care of his body, along with each member in particular.

I. FIRST, CHRIST HAS ASCENDED—Ephesians 4: When he ascended up on high,...Psalm 68: 18: Thou hast ascended on high,,,

Way back in David's day, 2000 years before Christ came, the Holy Spirit spoke of Christ ascending in the present tense—Psalm 68: 18: Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men;

Our eternal God sees the end from the beginning so that the past and the future is one eternal present with God. God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will;" so with God the future is as certain as the past.

Where did Christ ascend to?—up on high. Psalm 68 points to an occasion that pictures Christ's ascension. After David obtained victory over all his enemies, after David settled his kingdom in peace, then David ascended with the ark to place it in its fixed dwelling place in Mt. Zion. That whole occasion pictured Christ.

The Lord Jesus is the true Ark. The book of the law—the one book of the whole law—was in Christ's heart as the book of the law was in the ark to establish it for God and his people. The dimensions of the mercy seat or propitiation were exactly equal to the dimensions of the ark so that the propitiation, the mercy seat, exactly covered the broken law for all Israel. Likewise, Christ's obedience unto death was the exact dimensions to meet the demands of the whole law of God for all his elect Israel. Like David, after Christ defeated all his enemies, after he settled his kingdom in peace, Christ our Ark ascended to his fixed position in heavens Mt. Zion.

Psalm 24: 7: Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8: Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle....10: Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

Psalm 48:2: Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

Christ entered into the holy place not made with hands there to appear in the presence of God for us. Proof to the universe, that God has reconciled the world of his elect unto himself, that there is forgiveness with him for sinners who cast themselves upon his mercy; is that one in our nature has taken possession of the kingdom. “He that descended is the same also that ascended up.”

Believer, this is the foundation of our hope, the source of our greatest joy. This is the answer to satan’s accusations, to our guilt, and fear and unbelief which would destroy our peace.

1 John 2: 1...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2: And he is the propitiation for our sins:

Hebrews 8: 1:...We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2: A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

Romans 8:34: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

In his ascension glory, Christ is highly exalted upon the throne of glory, he possesses all power in heaven and in earth. (Eph 1: 21-22) “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.”

II. SECONDLY, LET’ SEE CHRIST’S VICTORIES—Ephesians 4:8:...he led captivity captive,

All men by nature is a captive—held in bondage by chains no man can break by any effort of his own. Sinner are captive to sin’s dominion over our mind and will. We were so bound in ignorance we boasted of our free will and our liberty while as yet we were totally captive. But while under the dominion of sin, a sinner’s will is confined to the ability of his depraved nature. He is only free to do what his sin nature will allow him to do. So having no ability to discern spiritual things, we were too blind to even see our need to be set free by Christ. (1 Cor 2: 14) We were captives to the devil and to death. He kept us in bondage by a fear of death all our days of rebellion. (Heb 2: 14-15) All the while we were willing captives. We did not want to be set free—especially if it meant giving Christ the glory for setting us free.

Yet, the promise was given that the seed of the woman, would bruise the serpent's head. He defeated satan’s power and delivered his people from the fear of death and from the devil’s cruel bondage Christ fulfilled this promise as the second Adam, the head and representative of his people. On the cross he purged his people of our sins. He obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb 1: 3; 9: 12) When Christ ascended on high, he let his captive people free and opened the kingdom of heaven to all those he ransomed from the fall. He literally took us captive by redeeming us. We are his purchased possession. (Eph 1: 14) Christ is calling us out of bondage now making us his willing bond-servants (Ps 110: 3) Christ is the Way as we leave Babylon and make our way across this world’s hot desert sand to heaven’s Jerusalem. (Is 35: 8)

Application: Sinner, does that include you? Do you see yourself as you are in your flesh?—dead in trespasses and in sins? Do you see you have no hope except Christ Jesus save you by his mercy and grace?

The only thing keeping you from his abundant mercy is you. Heaven is opened for ungodly, desperate, helpless sinners! That is the only kind Christ came to save.

III. THIRDLY, THE GIFTS FROM CHRIST—Psalm 68: 18:...thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also,...Ephesians 4:8:...and gave gifts unto men

When Joseph ascended from the lowest parts of Egypt to the chief seat of honor and government of Egypt, the ones he saved by ascension were the one who least deserved it—his rebellious brethren who hated him. They had conspired to kill Joseph; they sold him into slavery; all the servitude, imprisonment and sufferings Joseph endured was due to his brethren who hated him.

Yet, God overruled all their evil for the good of those very rebels who hated Joseph and treated him with such cruelty. Afterward, God raised Joseph to his ascension glory over Egypt. Then God drove his rebellious brethren to Joseph by a famine of bread in the land. Joseph saved their lives by receiving them freely and opening the storehouses to them so that their salvation was all owing to very one they rejected but who had now ascended up on high. What a picture of Christ!

The Lord Jesus was despised, rejected, and slain by the very brethren he came to save—you and me who now believe. Our sins made him descend into the lower parts of the earth; our sins made it so he must be lifted up on the cursed tree; the sins of his elect people made it so his body must go to the grave; it was because God must be Just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. (Rom 3: 26)

God overruled all for the good of his people—us rebels who nailed Christ to the cross. But when Christ arose, he ascended up on high with the key to the storehouse of all grace. The man of sorrows took possession of the throne of glory; not for himself only: but his very honor is joined with the salvation and edification of his brethren—you and I—who put him on the cross. Christ descended and died; for our sakes he ascended and lives. Now, he is giving us a famine of bread, driving us to Christ that we might receive freely, eternal life in him.

As the representative of his people, he purchased and received gifts from the Father to bestow upon his people. So from Christ alone comes all the gifts of grace, which give us the ability to believe him and rest all our hope in him. These are gifts that Christ alone has been given the glory to communicate to his people; these are gifts by which Christ alone can recreate us in his image, the image of God; these are gifts whereby Christ makes us righteous and holy so that we can return to God and be received freely and accepted in the Beloved.

Now, notice Christ received gifts for men, yea for the rebellious also, and he gave gifts unto men. What else but pure, free, sovereign grace receives and bestows gifts upon rebels? Let's try to contrast the freeness and greatness of these gifts with the character of us to whom these gifts are given. Then we will see the exceeding riches of his grace.

Christ gives the gifts of free grace to the ungodly. You and I who have been given these gifts, were so alienated from God that in our depraved minds we considered Christ our enemy, so much so that we did not want any grace from him at all. We despised the gospel for declaring salvation is only by the unmerited favor of God's grace. Yet, Christ magnified his grace by freely giving us these gifts though we not only did not merit his favor but were full of demerit.

Furthermore, we despised the truth that God is pleased to save through the preaching of the gospel. We accounted Christ's ambassadors our enemies as much as the Christ they spoke for; charging them with disrupting our peace; speaking reproach against them, reviling and opposing them. Yet, Christ freely gave us

these gifts of his grace anyway—Ephesians 4: 11: And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

In addition, when our dearest friends, and nearest loved ones submitted to the gospel of God, we treated them as apostates from popular worldly opinion. We considered our own fathers and mothers defectors from our side to the side of Christ our enemy. Though in the same household, we considered those who loved us to be our foes and made sure they knew they were ours. Yet, Christ gave some of us the gifts of faithful fathers and faithful mothers, faithful sisters and brothers, who continued to tell us Christ is the one thing needful.

On top of all this, there we were holding the law and authority of God in contempt. Sometimes, we would admit we were sinners—“after all, nobody is perfect.” But we were not the kind of sinners that have no ability to save ourselves. We imagined we could still gain God’s favor by our doing. We did not know that incapable, unable sinners are the only kind of sinners there are. So we compared ourselves with others. And our foolish hope was that God would recognize we are not as bad as others. But we did not know that before the Lord we, as well as all other sinners, were already justly condemned by his holy law because we believed not on his Son. Yet, that Son we rejected, who authority we despised, kept using that very Authority and power to provide us with the gifts of his providence: of his protecting hand, of his daily benefits.

When the gospel declared that God would receive nothing less than the infinite wisdom of his Son, the perfect righteousness of his Son, the perfect holiness of his Son, the precious blood of his Son, in the pride of our sinful nature we rose up in our hearts in defiance. We declared Christ’s wisdom utter foolishness to us. In our vain heart, our filthy rags were as good as his righteousness. Our wicked hearts holy as his perfection; the very thought of God everlastingly loving his own provoked the enmity and scorn of our nature. Yet, we did not know we were one who God everlastingly loved. Therefore that very love we despised, for the sake of Christ, was the only reason God refused to consume us in his wrath. He would give us the gift of his love.

Despite all this, our rebellion, Christ gave us the gift of a new nature, the gift of new eyes to see and new ears to hear, the gift of a new will—he made us willing in the day of his power to submit all to him. He gave us the gift of faith and repentance; he gave us the gift of a tongue to cry out for mercy to him; he gave us the free gifts of his perfect righteousness and free justification; the gift of reconciliation to God and peace in our hearts, gift of eternal life.

Brethren, this was the rebellion of the rebellious—our rebellion. We insulted Christ in his authority and government, defying his power, resisting his will—all by trampling underfoot the blood of Christ by our unbelief. This is the heart of every dead sinner towards God and his Christ and this was our rebellion. It is true that enmity of the carnal mind may not rage with equal fury in every sinner. But every carnal mind, nonetheless, is enmity against God for he is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. He that is born after the flesh always persecutes him that is born of God. And this was our rebellion.

Every time we heard God declare in the preaching of the gospel, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him” In our hearts we cried, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” Yet, we did not know that Christ would not take no for an answer. Christ received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, and gave gifts unto men. Christ with his great love wherewith he loved us, gave us the unspeakable gift—he gave us himself, in our hearts, and saved us from us!

IV. LASTLY, THE GREAT END FOR WHICH CHRIST BESTOWS THESE GIFTS—next time we will see the end for which Christ gave us his ministers—this time I want you to see the great end for which Christ gave us these gifts—**Psalm 68: 18:… that the LORD God might dwell among them.**

By this work Christ our God has made us one with him and with God our Father. Now we are his habitation.

Ephesians 2: 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

In John 17, notice the “gifts” Christ has given and the result being oneness with God.

John 17: 7: Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8: For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9: I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10: And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them....20: Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21: That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. [by this shall all men know that you are my disciples if ye love one another] 22: And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world [the world of his elect] may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Amen!