

Ephesians 4B

- Valentines day is right around the corner (heads up men!)
 - That day reminds us that when we care about someone and we want to show it, we often bring them gifts
 - A gift is a sign of our affection
 - It can't begin to equal our feelings for the person, but a nicely chosen gift can be a wonderful representation of how we feel
 - And almost everyone loves to receive a nice gift...like the teacher in the small town who received gifts from her class on Valentines Day

All the children brought presents for their teacher.

The florist's son handed the teacher a gift. She held up the box and said, "I bet it's some flowers!"

"That's right!" shouted the little boy.

Then the candy store owner's daughter handed the teacher a gift. She held up the box and said, "I bet it's some chocolates!"

"That's right!" shouted the little girl.

The next gift was from the liquor store owner's son. The teacher held up the box and saw that it was leaking. She touched a drop with her finger and tasted it.

"Is it wine?" she asked.

"No," the boy answered. The teacher touched another drop to her tongue.

"Is it champagne?" she asked.

"No," the boy answered.

"What is it?" she said.

"A puppy!"

- Gifts are a good thing, but only if we understand them properly
 - And this is true for both kindergarten teachers and for those of us in the body of Christ
 - For we all receive gifts from Christ
- Last week in Ephesians, Paul implored the church to see itself as one body rather than as individuals or even as two groups of Jew and Gentile
 - He reminded the church that they were united by the same Spirit Who brought them into a common baptism of faith

- They entered that faith by the same calling from the same Father
- And therefore, they had no spiritual reasons to consider themselves separate
- As we've discussed before, it's likely the church was dealing with false teachers
 - They were Judiazers, who were trying to drive a wedge between Jew and Gentile in the church
 - While there used to be such a separation, it was removed in the New Covenant
 - Now the Jewish follower and Gentile follower of Christ were on equal footing
- So this morning Paul moves his argument forward one more step, to explaining that everyone in the body was equally empowered by Christ for service

Eph. 4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

- As further proof the church body has been united by our common faith, Paul adds that each of us has received a measure of God's grace in the form of a gift
 - The gift Paul's talking about is the spiritual gift that Christ's Spirit assigns to every believer
 - Spiritual gifts are specific assigned abilities to serve in the body of Christ
 - You may remember our study on spiritual gifts a few years ago in our study of 1 Corinthians
 - We learned then that spiritual gifts are assigned to us at the moment of faith by the Spirit according to the will of God
 - He determines what gift we each get
 - And our ability to serve in that gift remains under the control of the Holy Spirit so that as we serve, the Lord gains the glory
 - That's the very purpose of a spiritual gift: to glorify Christ through service to His body
 - Paul raises the topic of spiritual gifts in this chapter as further proof of the spiritual unity of the church body

- All believers receive a gift from Christ, not just Jews or Gentiles
- This experience is common to all believers
- But Paul's argument goes deeper than simply common experience
 - Paul's making a reference to marriage
 - When a man and a woman entered into a marriage covenant (called the betrothal), the bride received gifts to seal the covenant
 - Typically she received a ring or other symbol as a gift
 - You may remember how Isaac and Rebecca were betrothed

Gen. 24:22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold,

- The societal rules of engagement and marriage have changed over the years
 - But men still give women an engagement ring today
 - Paul's referring to this practice, because Christ is our Groom and we are His Bride
 - So because we have entered in a covenant with Him through our faith, we have received a betrothal gift
- Notice in v.7 the word "gift" is singular, which I believe indicates that we are given a single spiritual gift, not multiple gifts
 - We may use our gift in a variety of ways, but our supernatural gift is singular
 - For example, a person may have a gift of service, but they put that gift to work in teaching or counseling or praying for others
 - Or someone may have a gift of teaching, but they use that gift while serving as a pastor or evangelist
 - In the end, we all have a supernatural gift given to us by Christ to empower us in service
 - Paul says this was God's grace
 - Every gift is by definition an act of grace

- When I give you a gift, I'm bestowing something upon you that you didn't earn and had no right to demand
- It comes to you only as a matter of grace, undeserved favor
- Furthermore, it was a measure of his grace
 - The word measure in Greek suggests some gifts represent a greater share of grace because they are more important to the body
 - For example, the gift of apostleship or prophet is a greater measure of God's grace than lesser gifts
 - So some got "more" grace than others did, but everyone got exactly what the Lord desired for them
- It's this common experience of receiving spiritual gifts that argues for our equality before God
 - If all believers are gifted by the same Spirit, then it must be that God intended for all members of the body to be equal participants in the life of the body
 - That's Paul's argument
 - The Lord has made His desire for unity clear by gifting all believers in the body
 - He expects all to work together arm-in-arm without prejudice or haughtiness
 - And therefore, any teaching to the contrary – any teaching that seeks to erect new barriers between believers – must be rejected
 - Furthermore, if everyone in the body has been given a gift, then it must be that all of us are called to put our gift to work for the sake of unity
 - Have you ever considered that your spiritual gift plays a role in ensuring the proper unity of this body?
 - That if you withhold your spiritual gift from the body of Christ you may be contributing to our instability and even disunity?
 - Paul will elaborate more later in this chapter on how spiritual gifts work to unite the body

- But first, Paul is going to insert a brief sidebar from the Old Testament
- In his sidebar Paul wants us to understand what the Messiah had to do in order to grant us these gifts
- Gifts that some of us may be taking for granted or leaving dormant
- Paul explains in vs.8-10

Eph. 4:8 Therefore it says,
 “When He ascended on high,
 He led captive a host of captives,
 And He gave gifts to men.”

Eph. 4:9 (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

Eph. 4:10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- In v.8 Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, though he paraphrases the verse to reveal its prophetic meaning more clearly
 - Back in Psalm 68, v.18 reads like this:

Psa. 68:18 You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives;
 You have received gifts among men,
 Even among the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell there.

- In the English translation I use (NASB), the translators phrased line two of the verse to say Christ received gifts from men
- But Paul rephrases the verse in Ephesians to read that Christ gave gifts to men
 - We can see that Paul’s view is correct when we look at the Septuagint, the Jewish translation of their scriptures into Greek

Psa. 67(8):18 You have gone up on high, You have led captivity captive, You have received gifts for man, yea, for they were rebellious, that You might dwell among them.

- From this translation we see Paul’s interpretation is correct
- The psalmist wrote that Christ received gifts *for* men

- Which is to say the Father gave His Son gifts to be given to men
 - These are the spiritual gifts that Paul is talking about, which the Father bestows on His children in faith by means of Christ's Spirit
 - So the Father is the One determining our gifts, and His Son has received all glory and power from the Father, which He gives to men
- The rest of Psalm 68:18 explains the occasion when these gifts will be made available to men
 - The psalmist says the Messiah gives gifts to men when He ascends on high
 - This is a reference to Christ's ascension into the throne room of God following His resurrection
 - The book of Acts records that after Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, He spent 40 days on earth making appearances to His disciples
 - Those appearances proved Jesus' claims to live again
 - Then in Acts 1 we reach the moment when Jesus departed the earth and returned to the right hand of the Father

Acts 1:9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Acts 1:10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

- We call this moment the ascension because Jesus ascended, He was raised up, into Heaven
 - But Paul seizes on this word in the Psalm to explain its full meaning
 - In v.9 Paul says that Jesus' ascent was from a place in the lower parts of the earth
 - The lower place Paul is talking about is a place that the Old Testament scriptures call Sheol

- To understand what Paul is saying and how it relates to the giving of gifts, we need to learn about Sheol
- The Bible teaches that no one can approach the holiness of God because of our sin
 - God is holy and perfect and just in all ways
 - So if sin enters into His presence, His perfect nature will lead Him to bring proper judgment against sin
 - Perfect justice requires that sin be judged
 - He cannot do otherwise, because if God were to permit sin to abide in His presence, He would be imperfect and unjust
 - Under the Law of Moses, the Lord gave Israel a sacrificial system to demonstrate these principles
 - God's glory dwelled with Israel in the tabernacle but only behind walls and curtains out of view
 - God's glory occupied the Holy of Holies above the mercy seat
 - His glory was hidden away from sinful men behind tents and curtains
 - For sinful men can't survive an encounter with the Living God, as God Himself declared to Moses

Ex. 33:19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Ex. 33:20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

- In the Law, the Lord did make a way for the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies one time each year to make atonement for the people
 - At the feast of Yom Kippur, the high priest would make sacrifices of animals as atonement for his own sin
 - And then he would fill the Holy of Holies with smoke to obscure the glory of God
 - And then he could enter to perform his priestly duties without risk of death

- Hebrews tells us that the tabernacle was merely a picture of heavenly things
 - The tabernacle taught Israel that a blood sacrifice was necessary before sinful men could enter into the presence of the Lord
 - First, it taught that sin had to be judged
 - And the only judgment God accepts for sin is death
 - But it also taught that the death of an animal is not a sufficient payment for the sin of men
 - Every year the high priest had to repeat the sacrifice of animals before he could re-enter the Holy of Holies
 - That sent a message to Israel that the problem of our sin cannot be solved by the blood of animals
 - Something better would be needed to satisfy the wrath of God
 - And that something better was the sacrificial death of God Himself on our behalf
 - So the Messiah was God's provision to sinful man
 - When Jesus died on the cross, He shed His blood to make the one and only payment for the sin of mankind
 - Anyone covered by His sacrifice need never make any other sacrifice for their sin
 - The Father accepts the sacrifice of His Son as full payment for all sin, whether past, present or future
 - So because of Christ's sacrifice and our faith in that sacrifice, when we die our spirit can enter into the presence of the Father without fear of judgment
 - The judgment we had coming for our sin was already poured out on Christ on the cross
 - Leaving us without condemnation
- But what about those saints who died prior to Christ's sacrifice on the cross?
 - For example, what happened to Abraham when he died?
 - The Bible says he was a man of faith in God's promises

- And because of his faith, God credited Abraham with righteousness

Gen. 15:5 And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Gen. 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

- The Bible declares Abraham was a righteous man by faith
 - Which means Abraham was assured by God that he would be protected from God’s wrath for his sin
 - When God declares a person to be righteous by faith, it means they will be acquitted of their sin on judgment day
 - God’s wrath for Abraham’s sin was poured out on Christ instead
- But hold on...Abraham lived long *before* Christ died on the cross
 - When Abraham died, Christ’s sacrifice for sins had not yet happened
 - His soul couldn’t have entered into the presence of God when he died because his sin debt was unpaid
 - So when Abraham breathed his last, and his body was buried in the tomb, where did his soul go?
 - For that matter, what did God do for the souls of all Old Testament saints?
 - Even John the Baptist faced the same dilemma, since he died while Jesus was still alive on earth
- Scripture says God provided a place of comfort for these people until the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection
 - The Bible calls this place Sheol
 - You’ll see occasional references to Sheol in the Old Testament
 - For example, when Jacob learns that his favorite son, Joseph, has been killed by wild animals, Jacob says this in his distress

Gen. 37:33 Then he examined it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!”

[Gen. 37:34](#) So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.

[Gen. 37:35](#) Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him.

- Jacob declares his sorrow will cause him to "go down to Sheol"
- Jacob was an Old Testament saint like his father and grandfather
 - He was righteous by faith, so like Abraham knew he would be saved from the penalty of his sin at his death
 - As we would say today, Jacob was a saved man, and yet here he declares he expects to go "down to Sheol" after he died
 - Why isn't Jacob talking about going "up" to Heaven as we would say today?
 - Because Old Testament saints understood that they would go to Sheol at death
- So what is Sheol exactly?
 - It's a place where God held the souls of all those who died prior to Christ's sacrifice on the cross
 - And Sheol is two places, actually
 - One part of Sheol held the souls of the Old Testament saints like Abraham or Jacob
 - They were held in Sheol in a place of comfort awaiting the sacrifice of Messiah as payment for their sins
 - As we just explained, until Jesus paid the price for sin, no one could enter into God's presence so this temporary home was necessary
 - Since the place of comfort was Abraham's home for a time, it came to be called "Abraham's Bosom," meaning the place of Abraham's comfort
 - But Sheol was more than just Abraham's Bosom
 - Sheol had a second part that held the souls of all those who died without faith

- This part of Sheol goes by a different name: Hades
 - Hades is the Greek word for the place we call Hell
 - And as the name suggests, this side of Sheol is not a place of comfort
- Jesus describes the difference between Abraham's Bosom and Hades in a short account about two men who descend to Sheol after death in Luke 16

Luke 16:22 "Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

Luke 16:23 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

Luke 16:24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

Luke 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

Luke 16:26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'

- By the time of Jesus' first coming, both sides of Sheol were packed
 - Abraham's Bosom held the souls of every Old Testament saint since Adam and Abel
 - While Hades held the souls of every unbeliever since Cain
 - We can safely assume that the population of Hades was much larger than that of Abraham's Bosom
 - As Jesus said

Matt. 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Matt. 7:14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- We know from scripture that Jesus's body lay in the tomb for three days

- During that time, Jesus' spirit descended into Sheol to spend three days in Abraham's Bosom
 - While He was there, Jesus must have preached to the Old Testament saints
 - Remember the Lord only revealed bits and pieces of His plan of redemption to the Old Testament saints
 - They all had faith in a promised provision for sin, but they didn't necessarily know exactly how or when God would provide it
- Now they were learning the full the story...from the Messiah Himself
 - Best of all they learned that Jesus had just paid the price for their sins by dying on a cross
 - And so now they would accompany Him into God's presence without fear
 - What a joyous celebration must have followed that news!
- But Jesus also preached to another crowd in Sheol

[1Pet. 3:18](#) For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; [1Pet. 3:19](#) in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, [1Pet. 3:20](#) who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

- Peter says Jesus also preached to the souls of the condemned suffering in Hades, which Peter calls a "prison"
 - At first, we wonder why would Jesus preach to these souls?
 - Was He giving them a second chance to believe?
 - The answer is no, because Hebrews 9:27 teaches there is no second chance following death
 - We are appointed to die once and then comes judgment
- Instead, Jesus witnessed to their just condemnation
 - Remember, sometimes the Lord uses our witness to bring others to faith and salvation

- But other times He uses our witness to bring just condemnation against their hard hearts
- The Bible teaches that eventually every tongue will confess and every knee will bow at the name of Christ...eventually
 - Confessing Christ only yields salvation if we make that confession on faith, before we die
 - I'm sure the spirits in prison confessed Christ as Lord when they saw Him arrived in Sheol
 - But their confession was not a confession of faith, since they could see Jesus was the Messiah
 - Therefore, their confession could not save them
 - What terrible mourning must have followed that news!
- Now that brings us back to Paul's explanation in Ephesians 4
 - Paul says Christ's soul descended into the lower parts of the earth
 - Paul came to that conclusion because Psalm 68 said the Messiah would take with Him a host of captives when He ascended
 - The captives Jesus took were the souls of all the Old Testament saints who were waiting patiently for Him in Abraham's Bosom
 - So Jesus' ascent started from below the earth in Sheol
 - Remember, Jacob said he would go into the earth when he died, so too did Jesus
- Then after three days, Jesus ascended with the souls of the Old Testament saints
 - And at that time, the Messiah gave gifts to men, that is those followers He left behind on Earth...to the church saints
 - The spiritual gifts He gave to the church at Pentecost following His ascension ten days earlier were our proof that we are His bride
 - While the Old Testament saints are already enjoying the full presence of Christ, the saints on earth receive a measure of His grace

- This measure of grace unifies all of us, confirming that we are His even as we wait to join the rest
- That's why Paul says in v.10 that the same Christ Who descended into the earth for our sins is the same Christ Who ascended into Heaven
 - He is Lord of both those of the Old Testament (Jews) and those of the New Testament (Gentiles)
 - Christ did this to fill (or it should read *fulfill*) all things
 - Jesus accomplished all this to fulfill scripture and to fill us with His spirit