

“Captivity Captive”
Ephesians 4:8
(Preached at Trinity, January 25, 2015)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I've pointed out, one of the chief themes of the Book of Ephesians is the unity of the Church. Paul stresses how the former division between Jews and Gentiles has been removed in Christ. In fact, we are one. We enjoy the sweetness of unity.
2. The second half of the Book of Ephesians makes practical application of this truth. Paul begins **Chapter 4** by reminding us that this glorious unity must be protected.
Ephesians 4:3 NAU - "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
3. In **Verses 4-6** Paul set before us some of the foundational elements that hold us together. There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all.
4. But in **Verse 7** we find a striking turn in Paul's argument. He moves from the greatness of the unity of the church to the diversity of individuals within the church. He moves from the things we share in common to those things that are distinct about us.
Ephesians 4:7 NAS - "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."
5. Christ, by His Spirit, has gifted each of us differently – in different ways and in different proportions. We are united but we are not the same. He sovereignly determines the particular place of each one in His church. In **Verses 8-9** we find the authority behind our Lord's determination of our gifts. He has been raised in power and glory. He has ascended on high.
6. This morning I want us to consider the truth behind these verses. Theologically they speak of our Lord's humiliation and exaltation. Although Paul presents the exaltation first: "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."
We'll look first at our Lord's humiliation: "what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?"
 - I. The humiliation of Christ is cloaked in great mystery
 - A. Paul speaks of Christ descending to the lower parts of the earth
 1. There is disagreement as to what this means
 - a. Some say that it's referring to our Lord's death – His being buried, descending to the grave.

- b. Some say it refers to Jesus descending into hell after His death. This follows the text of the Apostles Creed
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
 - c. Some who hold to this understanding see the OT saints as being held in the captivity of Hades and Jesus descended to bring them out of their captivity.
 - d. Others see it as Jesus descending into hell to defeat Satan. nowhere do we find in the Scriptures that Jesus saved us by going to hell.
 - 2. It would seem that the best way to understand this is to apply it to His incarnation. Having ascended implies that Jesus had to first descend. This is referring not to Jesus descending into hell but Jesus descending to the earth. We refer to this as His humiliation.
 - B. One of the greatest passages on both the humiliation and exaltation of Christ is in **Philippians 2:5-8 NAS** - " Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
KJV - "made himself of no reputation"
 - 1. The nature of His humiliation is encapsulated in the Divine Kenosis
Verse 7 - " but emptied Himself " κενόω – to empty or to make void or make as nothing.
 - 2. Theologians have long debated the kenosis of Christ. Of what did He empty Himself? Most explanations fail because they tend to attack His deity.
 - a. Some say He emptied Himself of His glory – but this can never be He never ceased to be God!
John 1:14 NAU - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
 - b. Some say He emptied Himself of His independent exercise of authority – but the godhead has always operated in harmony – no part has ever operated independently of the other.
 - 3. The only way to thoroughly understand this is in terms of the incarnation. God took upon Himself flesh and blood – God became man.
John 1:14 - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,
 - C. He was never emptied of any aspect of His deity – This never ceased, never changed This He plainly declared before all. Jesus Christ plainly claimed to be God.

1. The Pharisees sought to stone Him because He declared Himself to be the Great I AM
John 8:58-59 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." ⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."
 2. His deity was recognized by all who had discernment
The Magi from the east
Matthew 2:11 NAU - "After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."
His disciples in the boat
Matthew 14:33 NAU - "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"
The women at the tomb
Matthew 28:8-9 NAU - "And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him."
Thomas
John 20:27-28 NAU - "Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." ²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"
 3. In every case Jesus received their worship. Compare that with Peter
Acts 10:25-26 NAU - "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped *him*. ²⁶ But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am *just* a man."
- D. Nevertheless, the Divine Christ became a man – the ultimate act of humility. God left His transcendent throne of glory and clothed Himself in the clay of this fallen world. The Kenosis verse explains itself. but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.
1. As a man He acquired all of the weakness of humanity. He became weary, hungry, thirsty, He felt genuine pain
 2. As a servant He came to serve in humility
 3. In His humanity He became a King without a throne.
 4. In His humanity He was a man void of the beauty of one clothed with majesty. A man despised and rejected. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He was one to be wounded, beaten, bruised, slaughtered.
- E. In His Humiliation, Jesus came to earth as the Servant of both God and man.
Philippians 2:7-8 NAS - "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

1. He came to do the will of the Father
John 6:38 NAU - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."
John 4:34 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
Luke 22:42 KJV – "Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."
2. Jesus also came as a Servant to men
He spent His life serving others – healing, feeding, preaching
Ultimately, as the greatest expression of love He laid down His life.
John 15:13 NAU - "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

II. This passage also testifies to the glorious exaltation of Christ.

- A. Having accomplished His work as our Redeemer fulfilling all righteousness, God raised Him in glory. He has returned to His throne
Philippians 2:9 NAS - "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name"
 1. It is a throne of Majesty – of kingship
Psalm 93:1 – "The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, *wherewith* he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. Thy throne *is* established of old: thou *art* from everlasting."
 2. It is a throne of Judgment
John 5:22 NAU - "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son"
 3. It is a throne of Dominion
Philippians 2:10-11 NAU - "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
- B. Jesus fully accomplished our deliverance
 1. Paul quotes from **Psalm 68:18**
Psalms 68:18 NAU - "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*."
Ephesians 4:8 NAS - "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."
 2. **Psalm 68** is referring to the conquering power of Jehovah. Using what is known as Sensus Plenior Paul is using it to refer to Christ. Calling to mind the magnificent procession of a conquering king.
It's the picture of Christ delivering His people from their captivity and then captivating them as His own.
 3. We were in an absolute bondage – it was a multifaceted bondage
 - a. Satan held us bound and we had no way of escape. Jesus has delivered His people.
2 Timothy 2:26 NAU - "and they may come to their senses *and* escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

- b. Satan's kingdom is the kingdom of darkness into which all men since Adam were born. We have been delivered from this kingdom
Colossians 1:13 NAU - "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,"
4. We were also in absolute bondage to sin
- a. Luther referred to this as the bondage of the will. We had no desire to turn from our sin.
 Sin gripped us like iron fetters
- b. Sin held us fast as we were deceived into embracing its pleasures
- c. We have been freed from our bondage to sin and have been taken captive by Christ.
Romans 6:22 NAS - "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."
5. Jesus came in as a mighty conquering King and freed His people from their terrible bondage.
And Can it Be
 Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
- C. Christ's reign is a gracious reign
Ephesians 4:8 NAS - "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."
1. In His graciousness our King has endowed us with gifts—everyone of us
Ephesians 4:7 NAS - "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."
2. Paul gives an example in **Verse 11**
Ephesians 4:11 NAS - "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers"
3. Paul is telling us in this passage that Jesus has the authority to bestow gifts upon His people as He pleases. He rules over us. He is leading captivity captive. His reign is a glorious reign. We gladly follow Him.

Conclusion:

1. There are some implications we need to see in this passage:
2. First, we must recognize Christ's sovereign authority over us. He is the Head of the church. He is *our* head. We must not despise His gifts.
We despise His gifts when we don't use them to His glory.
3. Some people fear to use their gifts in church because they don't want to commit to being used by the church.
4. Some refuse to use their gifts because they don't understand the nature of Christianity. They are consumers in Christ's church. They want to sit back and allow others to do the work. Using our gifts often means sacrificial service. Our church is blessed by those who are willing to sit in the nursery even if it means giving up being in the worship service.
5. There are some who don't use their gifts because they don't see their usefulness. Because Christ has raised some up to visible places of honor people despise their own lesser gifts and envy those with more public gifts. EVERY person is essential in the church. All must be equipped for service.
6. This is a strong rebuke for any church member not involved in serving.
 - a. Each of us is important. Our differences are essential
 - b. None of us can say, "I'm not important"
 - c. None of us can say, "I don't have anything to contribute."
 - d. None of us can say, "If I can't lead or be recognized by many I won't serve at all."
MacArthur – "A Christian who does not have a ministry is a contradiction. He is disobedient and denies God the right to use him in the way He intends and for which He has gifted him."
7. None of us have a right to deny our King's right to use us in a manner pleasing to Him. To question the suitability of your own gift is to question the wisdom and sovereignty of Christ in giving His gifts to men.