

We Need to Be Captives of Christ

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, as we turn now to your word to open our hearts to it, and to ask that by your Holy Spirit the content of this passage may be opened to our hearts, and that our hearts may be given to praise you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The passage that we're looking at is the passage from Ephesians chapter 4, and last week Dr. Packer, if you were here, told you that this is a matter of getting steam in the boiler to make the engine go.

And so you have the great engine of the church, and it needs steam in the boiler, and Ephesians chapter 4 and following is an attempt to provide that steam.

Now I want you to look at the passage that we're studying today very carefully, beginning in verse 7 of chapter 4 on page 182 in the New Testament section of your pew Bible.

And in case you didn't get that, it was verse 7, chapter 4, page 182 in your pew Bible. Now, what happens, you see, in our world is that in the course of the week, our little world becomes smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller until it virtually disappears.

[1 : 39] It becomes so small and so utterly insignificant. So that by the end of the week, we need an opportunity to examine what has happened to our world, how it could be that it got to be so small, and what we can do to correct it.

Well, what we do to correct it is that which was just done for us in the singing of the Tidium, which is on page 7 following in the prayer book.

It says, you know, it begins, We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.

And that what we have is a tremendous picture of the glory and purpose and triumph of God in the whole of history.

And only in the last verse of the Tidium does it come down to saying, quietly, O Lord, in thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded.

[2 : 53] It doesn't talk about me till the very last line. And that's the way our lives need to be, full of the glory of God and not totally concerned with ourselves.

Finding that kind of perspective. And that's what this passage helps us to do. So that if you were going back to the last verse of last week's sermon, which is verse 6 of chapter 4, it says, Talks about one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

The totality of who God is. The one in whom we are all united. The one in whom we find our oneness one with another.

All this united reality comes in our worship of God. And that's why the summation of the whole of history is that all people of all nations and all tongues should gather together to praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the thing that will ultimately unite all of us. But the passage for this week talks first about the glory of God, that it unites all of us.

[4 : 18] And then in verse 7 it talks about the grace of God that recognizes each of us. So that God unites all of us in worship and gives all of us individually for ministry.

So we need to come together in order to worship. But in that, God deals with each of us individually in gifting us for the ministry that we have.

See, that's what it says. Grace, verse 7 of chapter 4. Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Each of us is recognized and each of us is gifted. Then in the next verses, it talks about the downward mobility of God that captures us.

Now look at those verses, if you will, beginning with verse 8. It is said, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

[5 : 30] In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he also who ascended far above the heavens, that we might fill all things.

Now I admit to you that those words sound confusing, and if you take them to the scholars, they become confusing. And the more scholars you take them to, the more confusing they become. And so I would like to simplify them for you as I have tried to live with them this week, and to say that this gives expression the downward mobility of God.

God was able to descend to the lowest parts of the earth. God was able to descend to where we are. Now we live in a culture and society that seeks to ascend to the highest level of possible human attainment.

And our culture teaches that, and our competitiveness drives us towards it. That's what motivates us. That's what keeps us going.

[6 : 43] We're all looking to get to the top, and having some regret that we haven't, and a considerable amount of bitterness about those that have. And that's the way our society works, that we're all looking in that direction.

But that's not the direction God is looking in. God is able to descend in Christ to the lowest parts of the earth. So that that's the direction that he indicates for us.

And I think that he suggests to us that that is what we should be doing. That's how we as Christians should be orientated.

I feel the terrible competition between our culture that is so progressively, upwardly motivated all the time.

And the damage we do relentlessly following that course to ourselves and to our children and to our children's children is horrifying.

[7 : 51] Because of that, when God clearly says that because in order to demonstrate his glory, to demonstrate that he is God, to demonstrate that he is king, he went down and down and down.

And that's the direction we have to go in. We have to become downwardly mobile to be able to deal with people that heaven got all the advantages that we have.

That heaven got all the education that we have. That heaven got all the material goods that we have. We need to work hard at going down. Our whole culture is driving us to go upward and upward and upward.

And we spend all our energies and most of our time and all our life trying to do that. But it says that the glory of God was revealed by his coming down.

And when he came down, he took captives. That's the next point I want you to see. That he came down in order to capture us.

[9 : 07] So that we would become his captives. That we would be trained to him by love. That we would no longer have a life of our own.

When we got up and what we did and how we lived our lives was because we have been captured by Jesus Christ. He came down to capture us and to claim us for his own.

That we belong to him. And it doesn't matter what anybody else says. It doesn't matter what anybody else may make claims on us about.

None of those things matter because we have been made captive by Jesus Christ. Our only business is to serve him who has captured us.

And that's what it says. I mean, it gives a picture of a mighty monarch coming down and capturing people and taking them home in triumph. And so, God in Christ has come down and seeks to capture us that we might belong to him as the prisoners of his love with no desire except to please him and to be obedient to him.

[10 : 30] That's what I long for us as a church is that we could grasp that reality. That's what we really prayed for these innocent children that we baptized this morning.

That they would be the captives of Jesus Christ. That they would be totally owned by him. And we're not to sacrifice our children to something to which we wouldn't commit ourselves.

So that in presenting our children for that, we must present ourselves to be the captives of Jesus Christ. To serve him.

Now, what that... You can read it there in the text. In the text, just make sure that you know where I'm talking about. When it says, He ascended on high, He led a host of captives. Well, the next thing that I want you to look at in the passage is that those captives He gives to us as gifts.

[11 : 45] His gifts were, you see, He's caught these people and now He gives them to us as gifts. That some should be apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and some teachers.

He captured them in order to give them to us. I mean, you can read the amazing story of how Jesus set out to capture Saul of Tarsus in order to give him to us as an apostle.

You can read how God set out to capture John the Baptist from before he was even conceived in his mother's womb. He was captive to God and had no right but, had no desire but to serve the God who had captivated him entirely.

You know, in our own day, when God has done this to people and he's done it to you too. At least if he hasn't done it, that's what his intention is.

And you are in some danger, I hope. I wish it was awful danger of being captured by Jesus Christ so that you had no other Lord and no other Master and no other purpose for your life but to serve him who has made you the prisoner of his love.

[13 : 11] That's what he purposes to do. And see, what he did was he captured these people and then he gave them to his church in order to do, to fulfill certain functions.

And you'll see what the functions are again if you look at the text where it says his gifts were that some should be apostles so he captured Paul, he captured as a prophet John the Baptist, he captured Philip to be an evangelist and then he captures people to be pastors like Titus and Timothy and teachers in order to to be his gift to the church.

That's what he gives to the church. Now we live in a generation in which God has captured some very wonderful people and given them as gifts to his church.

And you can even see the sense of their rebellion and their unwillingness if you want. But imagine how our God went out and captured Charles Coulson through the Watergate thing.

Imagine how he took hold of that fuddy-duddy little English professor in England called C.S. Lewis to be a teacher to the church. Look how he went and took the editor of Punch magazine and captured him that he would spend the rest of his life bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

[14 : 51] Look how he took a farm boy from Carolina and made him into an evangelist to bring the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to every country in the world in many, many languages.

Look how he went and took a young German pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and made him to be the pastor of his people in a most critical time in their history.

Christian. You see, this is how Christ has captured these people so that they knew that there was no other purpose or reason for their life than to be the prisoners of Jesus Christ, to be his servants. You see, God has always worked that way. Most of the great Christians learned most of what they learned in prison as captives of Jesus Christ.

And that's what he did. And so he did that and then he provides them as gifts to his church so that his church should be built up by apostles that bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, prophets who tell you what God is doing down through the centuries and generations of history, evangelists who tell you what the good news about God is in Jesus Christ that you might come to a place of repentance and faith and belief, pastors to care for you as the flock of Christ, and teachers to instruct you in the way of Christ.

[16 : 41] that's what he's given to the church, those people to do that for all of us. And so we as Christians are fully what God intends us to do, what God has accommodated for us when we have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

And their function is to equip us for the work of the ministry. so that we're all involved, each one of you.

Remember, we're talking about not all of us together, but each of us being gifted for the work of the ministry. We are equipped to do it.

And that's how we've been equipped by these people whom God has gifted us with as a church, to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, in order to equip us for the work of the ministry.

It's right there. Look at it again, just so you'll see where I am. In verse 12, to equip the saints, that's you. Now, you may say that you're not a saint, and I will agree with you.

[18 : 03] but even though you are not, perhaps in your awareness of yourself, you still belong to the saints, and saints, as I've told you before, is always a plural in the New Testament.

We don't talk about individual saints, we only talk about the saints collectively, and so you are a saint. I can't get out of that one, can I?

I, you are in the company of the saints. All right. That's what he's saying, that this is done, again, if you go back to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and then it says what the work of ministry is, is building up the body of Christ.

Now, the body of Christ is a uniquely different community. This day will go down in the history of the world, because, to quote an old joke, this is the day on which one billion people who badly need exercise, will spend their time watching 24 men who badly need a rest.

The church is like that. I mean, it's exactly the opposite to that.

[19 : 47] It's that all of us are involved in the work of the ministry ministry, for building up the body of Christ. You are an integral part of that.

And I can describe to you my own despair, because I was brought up in an Anglican church. When I had my tonsils out, along with my three brothers, the minister came to call, and he brought us some vanilla ice cream, which was more welcome than you could ever imagine.

we had our tonsils out on the dining room table, which was before medical plans came in. But always it was, the minister does the ministering.

And we behave as badly as we can, as long as he doesn't find out. And that's about the role of an Anglican minister, as seen by most congregations. But he is not the minister.

the whole congregation share in the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ. And there are many, many people on our parish list who are dying on the vine for lack of ministry.

[21 : 06] And my heart breaks because of the need that I can see, but I can't fulfill. And I'm told in this passage that I can't fulfill it because it's not my job primarily.

It's that you all are equipped for the ministry to build up the body of Christ.

And it needs building up. And we have to exercise the ministry for which God has gifted each one of you.

Look at the passage again. And I want you to see where it goes on from building up the body of Christ to saying, until, and this is the last verse, we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood isn't the right word.

I mean, it's to the fullness of the humanity which was revealed to us in Christ. You see, that's what happens when children are brought to be baptized, is that they are to grow up into Christ.

[22 : 33] Their maturity is to become like Christ. Christ, what we actually prayed for them in the service, and to which you said amen, is the next verse.

Look at it. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That was what you prayed for those children, that they should come to that.

Now trace it back. Watch it. Let me just go through it once again. even though you may find it difficult. Here it is.

That God has gifted pastors, sorry, apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers to equip you, the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up of the body of Christ, until we all, that is all of us together, attain to the unity of the faith, to the knowledge of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the mature manhood, which is in Jesus Christ, to maturity in Christ. Remember I told you about that woman from India who said, my status I find in Jesus Christ, and no place else.

[24 : 00] my status as a woman. It's that kind of status that we need, and in that we come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

So you have this concern for the glory of God, right down to who you are and who I am. We come to that.

God, so that when your life becomes very small and very fiddling and very totally insignificant, may God grant you the grace that your eyes may be wide open to the reality of his purpose in the whole of history for which he has gifted you to share in the accomplishment of his purpose, equipping you for the work of the ministry to build people up in the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, to the knowledge of the Son of God, to the maturity which is ours in Christ, to the fullness

of the stature of the measure of Christ, then, my friend, your life has dimension, great dimension. It's God's dimensions for you. May God take this word and help you to grasp who you are, and may God grant to us as a congregation to grasp who we are as we see what God's purpose is revealed in this word.

Amen. Let us turn now to prayer.

[26 : 05] Please sit or kneel to pray, and Mildred will lead us in our prayers. sorry, I've made a mistake.

Just before we pray, we actually have a hymn, so that's been a good bit of exercise for you. And one of the members of the body of Christ has told me what to do.

That's great. That's true ministry. We stand and sing hymn 514. 514. o O Jesus, my promise
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Let us pray. Be still and know that I am God.

I am exalted among the nations. I am exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. Accept, Lord, our praise and thanksgiving for your ways of working in the NATO meetings this week.

[32 : 50] Father, press in on our minds and hearts the responsibility of praying for our world leaders.

Grant wisdom and courage of conviction to all in authority in the world, in our national concerns, and in our local government.

May they all keep the promises they have made to the people that they serve before God.

Now, Father, we commend to your loving care all of us who are sick in body, ill in mind, or down in spirit.

May your grace and mercy comfort, protect, and strengthen each one of us who needs a touch from you.

[34 : 14] May we all know the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

This morning we want to remember especially several families. We want to remember the Tolling family who have just had the birth of a wee baby girl and she is having some problems.

So we would want to pray for the staff, the medical staff, and for the parents to keep them steady.

Also, Father, we remember Margaret Cool Smith this morning whose father passed away this week. the funeral is this afternoon in Ontario. Let's remember her. Many of you will remember the wonderful gift of music that Margaret has been given and she has ministered to us many times.

and she has been given the wonderful gift to her. Now, Father, also, we want to remember Mo and Maureen Lee.

[35 : 53] They lost their five-year-old son this week. Now, we pray very much that you would undergird these friends and family of ours.

Give to them all that they need in comfort and knowing that God is ever with them.

Help them to know the corporate body of Christ who stands with them today. Now, Father, we want to pray for camps, camps that are in session now and will be all the rest of the summer.

We remember Young Life Camp, camps and directors, staff, campers and leaders. We remember Pioneer Pacific Camp, Pioneer Chehalis Camp, and we also remember our church camps.

be to the staff, the counselors, and especially the campers that they may have a new grasp of your word and understanding for them.

[37 : 41] Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. I want to conclude with a family prayer and I feel it's appropriate for us to read together on page 372, especially as we've had the children's baptism this morning and we want to remember all families, even families that don't have children, maybe have pets instead.

So it's the family prayer on page 732. Together, merciful Savior, who didst love Martha and Mary and Lazarus, hallowing their home and thy sacred presence, bless, we beseech thee, our home, that thy love may rest upon us, and that thy presence may be with us.

May we all grow in grace and in the knowledge of thee, our Lord and Savior, teach us to love one another as thou has given commandment.

Help us to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill thy law, O blessed Jesus, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God forevermore.

Amen. Good morning, everybody.

[39 : 50] May I give a very special welcome this morning to the families and friends of the babies who were baptized this morning. It's lovely to have you all here. And also to anyone else who is visiting from another part of the country or the world, and to anyone who is a newcomer at St.

John's, if you've been coming for two or three times and you'd like to think about being a member of St. John's, there is a new card, an orange colored card in the pew, and if you would like to fill that out and turn it in, either in the parish mailbox at the back of the church or in the information desk at the coffee hour, we do invite you to do that.

For those of you who attended the anniversary celebrations, especially the anniversary tea, there is a wonderful photo album that has now been prepared, and you are invited to come and see yourselves and others in these photographs during the coffee hour at the information table, or if you weren't able to make it, come and see what went on.

It looks absolutely wonderful. I'd just like to mention three things that in the bulletin were mentioned briefly. Tomorrow there is a service, a memorial service, for Mrs.

Lamanda Elaine McLean at 2pm. On Wednesday evening, it is the first of the evenings this summer, a supper video evening, beginning at 6 o'clock with supper for \$2, followed by a video presentation at 7.15, and this Wednesday the topic will be on the Mormons, and so you are invited to come to that, and it is hoped that these evenings will help inform us what these cults believe, so that we, in response, we may be prepared in a loving way to bring them to Christianity when they knock on our door.

[42 : 03] So I do hope that you will mark that on your calendar for Wednesday evening. The bulletin also mentioned that we have a guest preacher next Sunday, the Reverend Dennis Maynard, who is Rector of Christ Church Greenville South Carolina.

Dennis Maynard will be with us for about a week, and on Thursday evening, he is going to give a talk here at St. John's at 7.30 in the downstairs gym.

Many of you may not know there is a gym downstairs. 7.30, and what he is going to do is talk to us informally about what it means to be a large church.

He has been in two parishes, one in Texas and the one in South Carolina, where the membership has grown dramatically, and in the process, the congregation has had to learn what it means to be a large church, where the expectations of a small parish church no longer prevail, and the congregation has to learn what it means to be a large church, and all the wonderful opportunities that presents to us as members, because St. John's is certainly a large church.

What opportunities there are to grow and to spread the word, so everybody is most welcome to come at 7.30 on Thursday evening to hear that.

[43 : 34] And now I'd just like to invite everyone to come for coffee, hope that you will come and share a cup of tea or coffee and have a chance to chat. Thank you. Closing hymn is in our blue hymn books with one voice.

144, you servants of God, your Master, proclaim. 144, we stand to sing. ■mn1, hope history.

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CHOIR SINGS As the cross is, God and Lord are you all.

[46 : 51] Now may you be equipped for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon each of you in every circumstance of your life this day and this week.

In Jesus' name, Amen.