

LSB Ephesians 4:11-13

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,

In a way, last weeks study was kind of a side bar. I really wanted to develop the idea of us as prisoners in this condemned world, and Jesus as the one who comes and kicks in the prison doors and breaks us out of our prison of sin.

He took captivity captive. We were captives in a condemned world. He came into that world and captured us out of that captivity and into His. Recaptured captives. We once were captives who belonged to Satan because of sin. Now we are captives of Jesus and we belong to Him. Blessed captivity!

And that was legit, that idea is there for sure in the passage, but we sort of sidestepped Pauls original intent for having that there. Paul didn't want to have the prison break and freedom as an end in itself, here. Paul wants to talk about what happens next.

Yes, Jesus kicked in the prison doors and recaptured his elect, and removed them from their old captivity, the sin that held them captives in this world, He took captivity captive, but we're still here. He didn't take us to heaven. Yet. He left us in this fallen condemned world.

Our status is we are no longer captured in Satan's condemned world. We are citizens of heaven, the property of Jesus, members of a new world, the kingdom of God.

That presents a strange predicament. I'll let the apostle John sum it up for

us. 1 John 5:19 *We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

That plain language defines a dichotomy of authority. The whole world lies under the direct authority of Satan. Almost everybody. Who are the exceptions. Us. Christians. We are of God. We belong to God. By a very costly purchase I might add. The blood of His own son.

But we are citizens of heaven and therefore no longer under the power and authority of Satan. I got interested for the purposes of a metaphor and read a little bit about diplomatic and consular immunity.

You don't hear about it much, but every once in a while we hear about the nuisance of diplomats parking their cars in no parking zones, and they're immune to consequences that we as citizens would face.

The same principal is in play for us. We don't get immunity here, but we, like foreign diplomats, are citizens of another country, left in this country for the purposes of conducting our new King's business. Our new country is heaven, but we're here doing the Master's business. The king here in the old world has no authority over us.

But, our business is not diplomacy, although you might get that idea if you watch the luke warm church cow towing to the world. Actually our mission is hostile to the king of this world.

Our mission is to tell others here, there's a get out of jail free opportunity available, free for the taking. And not only that, but this world is condemned, and judgement is imminent, so take advantage of the offer quickly, before the door of opportunity closes.

I watched a Netflix mini series while Pam was away last weekend about a woman, our age, who had a beautiful home, a lovely family, a loving and faithful husband, and she's basically in a panic. She has a near perfect life and she wakes up one morning as a 65 year old woman in a panic. **This**

can't be all there is! So she tells her husband she will seek a divorce and her plan is to try to somehow fill the empty void that is causing panic as she sees here life winding down. This can't be all there is!

Interesting timing. The post WWII baby boomers are right there. The Viet Nam vets are leaving the room. Many boomers have had privileged lives. Never a hungry moment. A hot shower every night of my life. A silver bullet parked in the lot next to the house so that when I go camping, I can still have my hot shower and sleep in clean sheets.

And yet, how many privileged baby boomers are in a panic like the woman in the program. I have everything, need nothing, but there's still a void. I'm empty and there isn't much time left.

The world is on empty. And Jesus has left us here with a message. You don't have to be empty. Sin is the barrier that keeps you from the God who replaces emptiness with a cup running over. The blood of Jesus was shed to remove your sins. Joy and completeness is available. God fills that empty void when the barrier of sin and hostility is removed and His peace fills you up.

So then. Two kings. One world. This current planet has experienced a hostile takeover by Satan. Our King Jesus is the rightful owner. He came and broke us out of jail. Paid the debt of the sin that held us in Satan's world. He re-captured us and took us out of Satan's kingdom and placed us in His kingdom. But he left us here as enemy combatants, doing His business in this world. For now.

What provisions do we have then. First, our King is all powerful. He does as He pleases. Utter Sovereign control of this world according to His plan and His timing. Second, He gave us a book. We have information beyond finding out by any other source but His graciously revealing His truth to us.

Third, we gather together and worship Him regularly as His church. And Fourth, He has gifted His church with gifts that aid her in her mission in

this world.

And that's what Paul wants to speak to in this passage. I'm going to re-read last week's passage that I sidetracked us into taking a thorough look at our jail break event. Paul's purpose was to talk about gifts to the ones that are broke out of jail. Gifts to the church. That's Paul's theme, and I now return us to that concern. I wanted to talk about verse 8. Paul wants to talk about vs. 7

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

The captives broken out of jail, captured by Jesus and removed from this condemned world to safety, although left in this hostile world, that's the church.

And each person in the church has received a special grace gift or giftings plural to be used for the benefit of each other person in the church. It's universal. That's why it says *But to **each one of us**, grace was given, according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Gifts are universal. If you are included in the pronoun, **us**, you have been given a gift to be used for the benefit of all the other us's. The measure is different for each of us.

Notice the word grace. Neither the individual or the church deserves these gifts. Christ pours out his gifts upon the church, undeserved. It is pure grace, unmerited love, that gives the gifts. Also note, that the word grace indicates these gifts have nothing to do with out natural talents, they are a grace independent of the strengths or weaknesses of our old selves.

And then, vs. 8 completes the thought about the gifts; *8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."*

What are the gifts, and what are they for? That's our passage for this

morning. It tells us why we have received these gracious gifts.

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,

Immediately, we have to lay more foundation, more background for this discussion so we can understand it fully. We want to rightly divide this important truth so we can enjoy it's full benefits without distractions.

Paul wrote these words in the formative years of the church. The old testament inspired canon of God's Word was in place. Finished. But the new testament was not. The new testament was in the process of being written.

So those who strive to rightly divide the word of truth, have a division right here in verse 11. Apostles and prophets who were writing down new inspired direct revelation from God were a one time gift, until the full canon of scripture was completed.

The apostle John, was the final prophet and apostle of that formative time. We believe the book of Revelation was written perhaps in the AD 90's. John died on the Isle of Patmos in 96AD according to church tradition.

That closed the era of apostles and prophets receiving new unique revelation from God. In 2024 we reject anyone who claims they're receiving new revelation from God. In fact we're a little bit touchy about it.

The hair on my back starts to stand up as soon as I hear someone say, God told me to go do such and such. Or Jesus told me this or that. It's a universal problem in the church. But ladies, you seem to be more exposed to this nonsense by authors who make claims that Jesus tells them stuff. Beware.

The last person Jesus told anything to was the apostle John. And in fact He

made Himself pretty clear on the issue. Rev. 22:18 *I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19 And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

We don't add to or remove from this book. There are zero apostles on earth, including Pope Francis who is dangerously tampering with clear truths that Jesus placed in His book by actual apostles.

Likewise there are zero prophets getting new revelation from God for the church in 2024. No apostles, no prophets, no new revelation, the canon of scripture is closed. It is complete. It is sufficient.

And those aren't the only gifts that ceased to exist after the church was formed and the one time canon of new revelation was closed. There were sign gifts, miracles that were a sign to that generation that God was in fact doing something new, something distinctly new and different from judaism.

Miracles and speaking in other tongues, unknown to the speaker, and always with an interpretation of what had been said. Miracles of healings and even a resurrection from the dead.

Those gifts were a sign. God is doing a new thing. And we have church history to tell us, they vanished after the first century of the church. God finished His revelation. The church was established and growing. Sign gifts vanished when that initial foundational work was complete. The formative period of the church with new revelation from God accompanied by signs and wonders came to an end when scripture was complete.

We have the famous tale of Thomas Aquinas who was speaking to Pope Pius who was counting out a large amount of money. And Pius said, you see Thomas, the church no longer can say, silver and gold have I none, to which Aquinas answered, yes holy father, but neither can she say, rise up

and walk.

So, we are carefully doing our best to rightly divide the word of truth here, and we wonder and marvel at the first century gifts during the formative church and the writing of the New Testament, and we reject anyone who believes those unique gifts did not cease.

Sign gifts only make sense for their original purpose as evidence that God was doing a new thing. When the canon is in place, the need for special evidential signs and wonders / miracle gifts is over, and those gifts vanished.

I don't believe modern glossolalia that occurs among many non christian groups is the same thing as the first century sign gift of speaking in other tongues. I think it's a satanic confusion and deterrant. I don't believe in faith healers, but I do believe God sovereignly heals. Miraculous healings that are simply graces, but not necessarily signs.

OK, we needed that background and foundation for these verses because this is a big area of confusion these days. I'm happy to speak further on these topics with anyone, one on one, if someone would like that.

So then if we return to vs. 11 and 12, that leaves us with a very short list.

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,

Evangelists and pastor / teachers. But if we look at the lists in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 there is an expanded list of spiritual giftings for the church that help us get the full idea.

Rom. 12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another, 6 but having gifts

that differ according to the grace given to us: whether prophecy, in agreement with the faith; 7 or service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with generosity; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Prophecy, speaking forth in agreement with written scripture. Not new revelation. Prophecy means to speak forth. Strong, bold, preaching as opposed to simply teaching, is a form of the gift of prophecy. No new revelations from God. You're expounding with power, the doctrines and tenets of "the faith". It's the gift of preaching, with power.

I love to listen to men who are God's current generations gifts to the church who can preach with great power. Special conferences of speakers who are the best of the best with this gift, who preach to other pastors, like me.

You'll note in verse 7 of our Ephesians 4 passage, *7 But to each one of us grace was given **according to the measure** of Christ's gift.* Each of us gets a gift from Christ, for the benefit of other christians, according to a measure.

No one is asking me to come preach at a Shepherds conference. That's OK. Christ gives His giftings according to His measure. I am surprised that He gifted me to do this . . . AT ALL. In ANY measure. It is with delight and amazement that He gifted me to speak to 8 people! Never saw that coming. And honestly, the measure of my gift is so small, I have to hide here behind this pulpit desk and read my sermons. That's the measure of my gift. I'm thrilled that He counted me worthy to do even this much. Privileged!

I have a tiny portion of the gift of prophecy. I recognize a gift of teaching. But frankly, I'm not much of a pastor. Not much interest there. Sorry. It is what it is, and you got what you got. OK, moving on to other gifts in the lists.

Service. Teaching. Exhortation. Giving. Leadership. Mercy. We can

add those to our short list in Ephesians.

Then in 1 Corinthians 12 we have more gifts listed for us;

*1 Cor. 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of workings, but the same God who works everything in everyone. 7 But to **each one** is given the manifestation of the Spirit for what is profitable. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to someone else faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the workings of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to someone else various kinds of tongues, and to another the translation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

Wisdom. Knowledge. Faith. Healing. Miracles. Prophecy. Distinguishing of spirits. Tongues. Translation of tongues.

Now then we have to do some trimming accordingly, don't we. The original signs and wonders gifts ceased when the scriptures were complete. So healings, miracles, direct new revelation prophecies, tongues, translation of tongues, those gifts vanished after the church foundation was laid and the canon of scripture was finished. But we can add Wisdom. Knowledge. Faith. to our list above from Romans 12.

Let's combine all three lists then with the gifts that are still very much viable and necessary for us 2000 years later. Evangelists. Pastor / teachers. Prophecy, speaking forth in agreement with written scripture. Not new revelation. Service. Teaching. Exhortation. Giving. Leadership. Mercy. Wisdom. Knowledge. Faith.

What I see in my 53 years of viewing the church in action is that what happens is the Spirit gives a unique mix of these gifts to every christian. I

think my gift mix is teaching, knowledge, mercy, helps (another name for service) and encouragement (another name for exhortation).

People come to me often and confuse the gift of knowledge with wisdom. I may know where to point you in the book, but wisdom for your problem isn't my strong suit. So people will ask me, what should I do, and I'll say, I don't have a clue.

I remember as a teenager at Grace Church where these gifts were more than plentifully displayed, if I was looking for scriptural knowledge, how do I rightly divide and understand this scripture, I'd go find Phil Taylor. But if my problem was wisdom in applying the knowledge, I wouldn't go to Phil, he was rather useless, I'd go find another guy whose name has slipped away from me after 50 years.

God gives each christian in a local assembly unique giftings to be used for the benefit and thriving of the other members. Like a human body where each part has a function that is necessary to the whole. A fingernail seems not very important most of the time, but hit it with a hammer and it'll let you know how important it is.

The lost world around us only see's Jesus when we're all combined together as a single body that reveals a complete Jesus to them.

Listen again to Paul speaking to the church at Ephesus about God's method of the church becoming a living breathing representation of Jesus.

Eph. 4:11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,

There is a logical progression from beginnings to completion in these

verses. There is an end game, a purpose, and different points along the completion of the desired end.

The complete work is a healthy strong functioning body of believers who collectively are united and present to the world a singular portraiture of Christ. We are, corporately, the body of Christ.

The only Christ the world will see now, is us. What a frightening thought. So, then, how are we doing. Does the world see Christ when we are together as a church, and indeed, in our lives when we aren't with each other.

Don't forget that the world that Jesus walked in, mostly, ignored Him and went on about their business. He was healing and doing miracles and teaching with authority and operating at a level beyond what we can do and the world still ignored Him. Are we surprised that the world ignores us.

Jesus Himself used the metaphor for this phenomenon of Noah. Noah warned the people for 120 years while the ark was under construction. Then the animals went in and the doors were sealed. Nobody paid any attention. Then the flood came and killed them all.

In 50 years as a christian, what I've witnessed time and time again is that a group of christians will get discouraged because the world just ignores them, ignores God, ignores Christ. It must be the pastor's fault, right. We're doing it wrong. We aren't growing. We're frustrated.

That's pragmatism at work. And we're susceptible to that. We want results and if no results come we need to re-assess what we're **doing** and figure out what we need to do differently so we can see some success. Pragmatism.

And usually the pastor gets a ticket to move on. We'll try our luck with a new one, a different one, a younger one, a hipper one, a less prickly one, who has some fresh ideas.

I've completed 10 years of teaching in this pulpit. I'm actually in my 11th year, very soon to be completed, between my brothers birthday on May 3rd and my brides on May 15th. Cinco de mayo is pretty close.

In my defense, which isn't necessary because you folks aren't rumbling with discontent, but I'm my own biggest critic, and in my defense, if you go through all of the teaching that's posted on line for 11 years of continual exposition, I would contend that you have there, what Paul referred to as the full council of God. Paul told the Ephesian elders, I did not fail to declare unto you the full council of God.

I have preached the word, in season, and out of season. But we struggle along with a handful of senior and soon to be senior citizens. Are we doing it wrong?

I would encourage you, no, not necessarily. We don't rely on pragmatic theory and solutions. The book of Acts tells us, *And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.* Acts 2:47 God is sovereign over this and every other church's growth. He it is who makes new christians, not you or me.

The single thing that we can do is to take this passage in Ephesians very seriously. Every single christian that God has placed in the body of Christ, the church, has a combination of giftedness in spiritual areas that is to be used for the common benefit of the other local believers.

The one thing we can do is pray for God to make it very clear to each of us what our own individual gifts to the church are, and then, prioritize our existence so that working in unison with the rest of the church in our little community is our top priority. Christ's mission in Tonopah is job 1.

We are soldiers in an army. Tonopah isn't headquarters, it's just a tiny outpost. But we are connected to the rest of the army and we serve with all other christians, a single King.

So what's your position, in that army, way out here in a little remote outpost, working for the advancement of our King? Nobody in an army gets a pass. Everybody has something to do, pulling for a common purpose. Our King must win in this world.

Spend some prayerful time going over the passages we looked at together this morning and thinking prayerfully what it is that God has gifted you that you can supply for the building up and local impact in Satan's world that this little outpost in Tonopah is to accomplish.

Impact for Christ, begins with prayer, and then happens locally by the effectual power of the Holy Spirit of God working in the individual believers in the local church using their Christ given gifts.

That's already happening here. This church runs very smoothly. People behind the scenes work tirelessly to make the things that happen here keep going. Margie has our feast all ready for us next door. The children never worry about whether a teacher will be waiting for them on a Sunday morning. The gifts are present and working.

But, I can't imagine any one of us wouldn't thrill to see Christ's Spirit using us to bring other folks out of the condemned world and into the safety of belonging to Christ.

Consider your gifts and pray about what Jesus might further do with our little army outpost in Tonopah.