

LSB Ephesians 4:7-10

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."

9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

Our culture is obsessed with two things that are elusively unachievable. Always just out of reach it seems. We obsessively talk about them non stop but they slip through our hands and we never quite grasp onto them.

Or we think we have achieved one of these goals and later we find out that what we thought we had achieved wasn't there at all.

I'm talking about the human goals of freedom and justice. And the ideological left keeps pushing pushing pushing incrementally towards what they consider the pinnacle achievement of those two goals and when they get what they thought they wanted, it inevitably is neither justice or freedom.

Why is it that way. To be truly free, would require absolute human autonomy, according to the ideologues. Every human must be free to decide for themselves their sexual preferences and activities and even their gender.

To not have those freedoms is seen by the ideologues as oppression. That's where justice enters their pictures. Justice demands every human have an equal piece of the pie of absolute autonomy over all that you are and all that you do. Any limits, what so ever, are oppressive.

Now stop for a moment and think about these lofty desires. Absolute autonomy over who you think you are and what you do with those freedoms is actually a declaration that you are, in fact, god. That's the goal. I may not be god over my neighbor or my brother, but in the ideological world of absolute human autonomy, I am god of me. I decide . . . everything.

I declare what gender I am, and I engage sexually with any partner of any gender (and soon, any age) I choose, whenever I want, and if a pregnancy occurs, even though I declared that I am a male person, I eliminate the baby inside me so that my mad hedonism can be un-interrupted.

This is the brand new wild west of our current culture. And anyone who imposes any limits whatsoever loses elections. We're just on the cusp of that phenomenon. Limit hedonism, regardless of your other affiliations, and die on that hill. Godless republicans are asking, why do I have to lose elections over this morality stuff.

Meanwhile, in the same time frame from about 2015 when our government declared marriage of same sex partners is the law of the land, until now, we dropped from 15th happiest nation in the world status to 23rd according to a Gallup poll. Why? Why did increased ideological freedoms result in a drastic drop in overall happiness of our nation?

Our passage this morning is obscure. No one would choose to preach this passage of scripture if they were doing topical studies zooming freely about from place to place. It's obscure to the point of weirdness. It may have actually been a line from a first century church hymn. Parts of it are taken directly from Psalm 68 and we'll look at the old testament basis for what this little obscure portion teaches.

In fact, let's turn to Isaiah 61 and read words that Jesus read in a synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of His ministry, handed the scroll back to the synagogue attendant, and claimed the words spoke directly of Him. They were written 700 plus years before His birth but they were specifically

spoken of Him. Isa. 61:

*1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And freedom to prisoners;*

2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD,

Whoa! Did I not just hear every possible catch word that the culture is worked up into a frothy lather over. Afflicted people. Brokenhearted people. Captured people. Prisoners. This is a catalog of the oppressed that our culture has set its goals on to set free.

Jesus said he was the cure for those ailments. He said he was going to do all those things in Luke 4. He said those words described His mission. So where is the disconnect? Why is it that our culture warriors who are claiming to stand for all of those same trigger words distance themselves as far away from the biblical Jesus as they can get?

They both use the same terms. They both have the same ultimate goal of human thriving. Free the slaves. Break the bonds of affliction by the oppressors. Heal the broken hearted. And yet they run, not walk, as fast and as far away from the Jesus of the Bible as they can get. Why??

Some of the memory verses that we could quote as children have the answer.

Proverbs 3:5,6 *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and **lean not unto thine own understanding**. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.* memorized in the king's 1640 english.

Or how about Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way **which seemeth right unto a***

man, But the end thereof is destruction.

Both texts warn against doing what your brain says will work. seemeth right unto a man . . . lean not unto thine own understanding. In everyday parlance we'd say, you can't trust your own conclusions. Your thinking machine is broken. It comes up with solutions that cause the opposite of what you were wanting in the first place.

The theological terms for this phenomenon; this is called the noetic effect of the fall. I'll say that twice. The noetic effect of the fall. And it means just what I said before. Your thinking machine is broke. Sin broke it. It's universal. All who have sinned are not only captured and oppressed by Satan, to make matters worse, your thinker is broken, and what your brain tells you will make things better, actually has the opposite effect.

I thought it a very telling truth that someone is using some abstract way to measure global happiness and we fell 9 points in the 9 years since the SCOTUS made same sex marriages legal. Sheesh! Is it possible the Bible's right?

Here's what the book says about the noetic effect of the fall into sin.
Romans chapter 1:

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, **but they became futile in their thoughts**, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,*

We read vs. 12 of Proverbs 14, but listen to what vs. 16 says in the same

chapter; *A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: But the fool rageth, and is confident.*

Fools rage against God, and beloved, they're so confident that they're right and God is wrong, that they're quite literally at the end of their patience with anyone else who believe's God's book is right.

The arrogance of the confidence of ideology. They've been patient with people like me who uphold the authority of this book, just about long enough, and perhaps before my life is over; Lebensunwertes leben will again be the cry of those who simply need to get people like me, out of the way, for the benefit of the masses of course. Lebensunwertes leben was the Nazi term for life unworthy of life.

Unwanted babies in wombs are already just Lebensunwertes leben. It's not that far from there to . . . me. First babies. Then old and infirm. Then of course people who think this book is God's breathed out words of authority, well, obviously we're infirm.

Nirvana will always be just out of reach, as long as people like me are in the way blocking the path. We've been patient long enough.

Well, if you're a student of preachers and preaching, and even more so of expositional preachers who are stricter about sticking to an unfolding text, you may be smiling to yourself and thinking, I wonder how Mr. Galli is going to get this train back onto the tracks. Just watch me.

We've laid the foundation for the effects of sin which are universal to all peoples since Adam. The noetic effects of the fall. We are trapped in our sins. And our thinkers are broken so not only are we trapped, we devise ways out that only get us deeper in the quicksand.

You want to know what the shortest list in the world is? Happy transgender people. Very short list. And most of them are contemplating suicide, regularly. That's just one example. We are captured by sin and our

thinkers are broken. That's the plight of men. Universally.

How telling it is that if you look at the globe at a color coded zones map of the happiest nations on the globe, all of them share something in common. All of the ones that are trying to hang onto whatever residual happiness is still there, have in common in their pasts that they came out of reformed protestant western cultures.

It turns out that the cultures that thrived to the fullest possible thriving that can be had in this fallen world where Satan is ruler, limited themselves according to the precepts of this book. Those are the ones that thrived to the highest extent. Even the catholic nations south of us thrived less than the once upon a time protestant cultures.

Then you abandon God, get a divorce from God and His comomandments, and you rely on your own imaginations and into the quicksand you go. You're like brer fox and brer bear fighting that tarbaby. It's quicksand. The more you fight with God, the deeper into the tar you go.

But if a culture limits itself according to God's spoken revealed precepts in this book, and whaddya know. Thiving comes like magic. God built that into His creation. You don't even have to acknowledge God or give Him the glory He is due, just follow His precepts, and thriving comes. It's automatic.

So, listen again to the song that Paul sings here in Ephesians;

*7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says,
"When He ascended on high,
He led captive a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men."*

9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might

fill all things.)

Jesus descended from heaven, born as a baby, in the lower parts of the earth, so that He could die for our sins and free us from the bondage *that* sin held over us. We *are* the captives, as long as sin has the power of death over us.

Jesus died, He removed sins and the penalty of death, for all who believe, and then He took captivity captive.

It's a picture of Jesus descending, paying the purchase price, and then taking captives captive. Once I was a captive of Satan, held by sin. Now I am a captive of Jesus, and he is leading me captive to His heavenly home.

Some day soon, He will come for all of His captives, the living and the dead, and He will shout Come Up Here (Rev. 4) and all of the captives that He took captive of will see His face and rise with Him, in new resurrection bodies, right up to heaven.

*“When He ascended on high,
He led captive a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men.”*

The quote is from Psalm 68. And the reason David wrote the Psalm was because Israel was celebrating capturing Jerusalem from the Jebusites. And to celebrate, they took the ark of the covenant, which was the representation of God on earth, they took it to the pinnacle of the city which is mount Zion.

Psalm 68 is a triumphal victory hymn from that historic event. God is King of the mountain. God conquers all peoples. God reigns from His mountain.

And Revelation tells us that Jesus will reign for a thousand years, at Jerusalem, just like that ark of the covenant represented to David 3000

years ago.

We are the captives that Jesus purchased with His blood and set free from the bondage of sin. He captured the captives. That's what it means when it says, He took captivity captive in some of your translations. He re-captured the prisoners who had been held captive by an evil king.

All of those things that Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah are true for those of us who are His captives out of captivity. Sin and death had captured us and Jesus paid for the sin and eliminated death for all who He recaptures and leads to ultimate life and freedom in His kingdom.

*I The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And freedom to prisoners;*

Those are the ideals that the captive world ascribes to but can't have. Those are the gifts freely given to me who is a captive slave of Jesus.

Mt. 11:28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

What a sweet slavery is ours! How good it is to be a captive of Jesus. In this slavery is ultimate liberty, real freedom. I'm set free from guilt. My sins are removed. My soul is quickened to life from the dead. War with God is over! I am God's, and He is mine. That, beloved, is the good news. What we call, the gospel.

Jesus had a lot to say about this topic of slavery because of sin, and freedom. Let's take the time to look at John chapter 8.

Jn. 8:30 As He was speaking these things, many believed in Him. 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly My disciples; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's seed and have never yet been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Did you get the gist there. Sin equals slavery. Jesus has freedom and He offers it to others. Simple as that.

But of course, the jews are smart folks. Smart people with broken thinkers. And they retort; What are you talking about. We're not slaves now nor have we ever been.

Excuse me. Maybe you need to march right on up to the Roman headquarters building right there on the temple grounds and explain that to Rome. See how that works out for you.

Jesus patiently explains that He's not speaking of a political freedom or slavery in this world. He tells them, anyone who sins is a slave of sin.

How many sins did it take to trap me in a slavery that I cannot extricate myself from. How much sin does it take? The answer is one. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. People running around with their impaired thinking machines telling themselves, I'm not a slave. I'm free and getting freer.

I killed God and now I can be the true inner me and do whatever this culture will tolerate. That's what impaired brains are telling each other. But somehow we slipped away from even the wellness that we had before. We've got all this freedom but we're still not satisfied. We're less satisfied,

less well than ever!

When Jesus talked about a status that He called; free indeed. Truly free. He is talking about the peace that comes immediately into a person's heart when they have been freed from the guilt of the sin that alienated them in rebellion away from God.

Real freedom, free indeed as Jesus stated it, is freedom from the judgement of God. Peace with God. Inner joy because you're at peace with God. Your sins are forgiven.

It's counterintuitive to our broken minds. But those of us who have been taken captive by Jesus and who have experienced the joy of relief, my sin won't be held against me, my sin is paid for in full, will tell you, this inner peace thing trumps all the pleasures of sin. Peace with God, and the resulting joy, is the treasure that's more valuable than anything else this world can offer.

Mt. 13:44 *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”*

Being taken captive by Jesus and released from the prison of sin, is the treasure that when found, when we understand the value of that, we walk away from all else, to have that.

I want to spend a little more time developing this idea of captivity and slavery that sin has caused before we move on to the theme here that Paul is actually developing which is spiritual giftings from God to believers.

Paul develops this idea of freedom from the captivity of sin for an entire chapter in his full doctrinal statement of salvation written to the Romans. Chapter 6 of Romans.

vs. 16 Do you not know that when you go on presenting yourselves to

someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were given over, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Sin enslaves. We are born into a captivity. And since our reasoning machines are broken, we think the way out of slavery is actually what bogs us down further and deeper in sin. We double down in our sins and it's simply built into God's creation, instead of freedom you've doubled down on your bondage.

The Old Testament is rife with this idea. It isn't something new with Paul. Rejecting God and His laws doesn't release you from chains, it binds you more than before.

Psalms 107: 10,11

*10 There were those who inhabited darkness and the shadow of death,
Prisoners in affliction and irons,
11 Because they had rebelled against the words of God
And spurned the counsel of the Most High.*

Rejecting God doesn't free you from prison, it locks you down in affliction.

I love the idea of Jesus being pictured as Coming down out of heaven on a mission to recapture captured people, and then having captured the captives, He takes them to safety.

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

Like a special forces mission to recapture hostages and transport them to safety. Like the Israeli's at Entebbe in Uganda in 1976 where the Israeli Air

Force took control of the hostage takers and gathered up the Israeli citizens who had been hijacked and brought them back to safety.

We are hostages in this world. Sin has bound and captured us, and we are enslaved to an evil and harsh ruler.

Col 2:13 And you being dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him, having graciously forgiven us all our transgressions. 14 Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us, He also has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them in Him.

Jesus kicks in the door, announces that the sin that once held me captive is paid for, it no longer has a legal claim on me, and then He transports me out of this world and into His kingdom. There, the Father has declared me an adopted son. We serve Him with delight.

And we are a public display of the glory of the victor. We are the spoils of war, captured away from Satan who had captured us in sin. Now we gladly serve and honor our new King who has delivered us to our new home in heaven. We are the glory of King Jesus.

*“When He ascended on high,
He led captive a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men.”*