

Sermon Notes on Eph. 4:7-13, Ascension

1. Vss. 1-6 speak about the oneness of all Christians in Christ. In vs. 7 Paul turns to the individual. Each Christian has been given a gift for the unity and furtherance of the Christian Church. One translation reads: "But each of us has been given the gift measured out by Christ who gave it." That was one of the reasons for the Ascension.
2. In vs. 8 Paul quotes Ps. 68:18: "You have ascended on high, You have lead captivity captive." In the next line the Ps. reads: "You have received gifts among men." Under the Holy Spirit the fulfillment reads: "You have given gifts to people." This is one of a number of instances in the NT in which, in application, the Spirit changed the words. God is His own interpreter. By the way the word "gifts" here does not mean salvation. That had already been given. Here it means gifts of unity, service and edification. We all have some.
3. In vs. 9 along with the Ascension Paul introduces also Christ's descent into hell. The great passage on this is I Pet. 3:19,20. When Christ became alive in the grave He descended into hell to declare Himself Victor over Satan and all evil forces. See also Col. 2:15 and Jn. 12:31. First Christ went down to the lower parts of the earth. Satan, once and for all, has totally been conquered.
4. Vs. 10 plainly says that the descended One also ascended above all the heavens to fill all things. A very unusual expression. It means that Christ's human nature now fully enjoys all the attributes of His divine nature. He said "I am with you always." The "I" is the God-man. Hebr. 4:14 says: "Our great Highpriest has PASSED THROUGH the heavens. He is not limited to a space called "heaven." The right hand of God is everywhere. Hebr. 7:26 says: "He was made HIGHER THAN the heavens." He can be in the Lord's Supper for He is omnipresent. And our text say that He ascended TO FILL all things.
5. Vss. 11-13 speak of Christ's particular teaching gifts to the church. Other than salvation itself, the greatest gifts of Christ to the Church are people. Vs. 11 reads literally: "He (Christ) gave us some to be apostles, some to be teachers of the Word, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds who are teachers." The original Greek, for several grammatical reasons, combines "shepherds" and "teachers" as mutually explanatory. Only the Lord Himself can supply the church with those who use God's Word to edify the church. He is the Lord of the harvest. Mt. 9:38. Only He builds the Church. Mt. 16:18.
6. Vs. 12 speaks of what these human gifts, under God, attain in this life and vs. 13 very likely speaks of the ultimate perfect goal in heaven. One translation reads vs. 12 this way: "in order to get His holy people ready to serve as workers and build the body of Christ." The heaven-sent teachers and pastors equip the saints. Here is one of those places where Christians are called "saints," Holy people. As noted above, many Lutheran scholars think that vs. 13 speaks of the perfection and goal of heaven. Vs. 12 gives us the purpose of Christ's gifts in time. Vs. 13 tells us when Christ's gifts will no longer be necessary. These scholars give three reasons for considering vs. 13 the goal of heaven: 1) The word "until" shows that not even the apostles thought they had reached this goal; 2) Paul says "all." That surely means "all the elect." At the present time many of these chosen children of God are still without the knowledge of their Savior. 3) The phrase "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" surely means something more than can be attained in this life. We must confess with Paul: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on". (Php. 3:12). And I Jn. 3:2 comforts us: "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him."
7. Think of how exact OT prophecy is about Christ: His person, birth-place, work, names, sacrifice, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and everlasting kingdom were prophesied.

Sermon Outline on Eph. 4:7-13, Ascension

Theme: WHY CHRIST ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

Introduction: In the Apostles' Creed we confess: "He ascended into heaven." Now He sits at God's right hand and only one more thing must be fulfilled: His second coming to judge living and dead. Our text gives us the reasons for His ascension. It is a very comforting passage. It makes us joyful just as were the disciples. Acts 1:12-14.

I-He led Captivity Captive. This is the fulfillment of an OT Messianic prophecy. There it is not explained. But here in our text it is explained in vs. 9 of our text. The One Who ascended first descended to the lower parts of the earth. In this way He led captivity captive. The grand passage on this truth is found at I Peter 3:19-20. There we are told that Christ went to preach to the spirits in prison. He preached victory over Satan and all his angels. The same truth is found at Col. 2:15: He stripped the evil powers of their authority. He openly triumphed over the devil on the cross. It is a fulfillment of Gen. 3:15: He crushed Satan's head. And of Jn. 12:31: "Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out." SATAN HAS BEEN CONQUERED. All we need is the shield of faith to ward off his arrows. Eph. 6:16.

II-He Filled All Things. The angel said to Mary: "The holy thing which is being conceived will be called the Son of God." From conception Jesus was the God-man and will be so into all eternity. He was true God in the womb and when Mary nursed Him. He was true man when He walked on the water. He was true God when He died. The two natures in one person cannot be separated. But while He was on earth He did not always and fully show that He was true God. His Word proved it. His miracles proved it. His transfiguration proved it. His disciples confessed His divinity. But when He became alive in the grave he began constantly showing and using His divine qualities. As a human being He descended into hell to announce victory over Satan. As a human being He arose from the dead. Only the God-man could do that. Many times in those forty days He appeared and disappeared to his own. On Ascension day the God-man went up into the clouds. He did not leave the disciples. He had said: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He had said: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Our text says that He ascended to fill all things. His human nature too, plus His divine nature, is everywhere, also with you right at this moment. He assures you of that by giving you His very body and blood to eat and drink in the Lord's Supper. He ascended high above the heavens to fill all things. Vs. 10.

III-To Give Gifts To Men. Vs. 7. Our text begins with "But each of us has been given the gift measured out by Christ who gave it." Each of us can do something in the church because Christ gave each the gift. But vs. 11 speaks specifically of the people whom Christ has given as gifts to the church: apostles, teachers of the Word, evangelists, pastors who are equipped to teach. He gave these persons for two reasons: 1) In vs. 12 Paul speaks about what these people do in the church on earth: "to get His holy people ready to serve as workers and build the body of Christ." Some plant. Some water. But God gives the increase. Vs. 12 plainly shows us why Christians ought come together frequently to hear the Word of God. 2) Vs. 13 gives us the final objective of the church in heaven. In heaven all the elect of God will come into the oneness of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ. This vs. is incomprehensible to us now because we are not yet perfect. We are justified, forgiven, holy but we still carry the flesh with us.

Conclusion: Like the disciples let us be joyful that Christ has ascended into heaven. He has not left us. He has fulfilled all. He now sends us teachers and preachers of His Word. He keeps our eyes on everlasting life.