

Ephesians 14-05-18a

This is Sunday, the 18th of May, 2014, we're in the book of Ephesians, which is the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church actually at Laodicea, and he also had in mind the believers at Colossae, and he said, you guys in Colossians, be sure and send your letter over to Laodicea, you guys in Laodicea, be sure and send yours over to Colossae, and they are very complementary, we've seen their similar structure and shared themes, they sort of illuminate one another, they both traveled in the same mail bag with the same messenger, and we find ourselves this morning in chapter 4, and we are looking at this section that begins in verse 7, where grace is given to us according to the measure of Christ's gift, and then Paul quotes this Old Testament passage, when He ascended on high He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. I always thought that was the most cryptic, mysterious thing, captivity captive, sounded like He was maybe carrying a bird cage as He went to glory, and I thought, well that can't be right, and of course it isn't, so we're making sure we understand what this actually means. Let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to help focus our concentration and make sure that we're prepared for God the Holy Spirit to be our teacher and to help us understand and remember these things, and then we'll begin.

Father, thank You for another opportunity to spend time being blessed in the presence of people who love You and who appreciate the truth of Your Word, who understand its practical value and its daily effect on the way we think and the way we live. We thank You for Your many blessings, You preserve us, You protect us, You provide for us, You challenge us, You present us with story problems in our lives that give us the opportunity to reflect back on the things that we've learned from Your Word and try to put them into practice so that we can grow in grace, we can be more effective as Your servants, and we most of all prepare ourselves for life in Your presence and in the ages and the kingdoms that are to come. We thank You for this portion of Your Word that is before us and the concepts that it communicates.

We ask Your blessing on us as we seek to gain a better understanding of them, as we reflect on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and its meaning for us. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is, as I said, kind of a cryptic and mysterious reference. If I was an apostle and I'm not, and if you drive by any of these rural churches and it says on the sign that the apostle so-and-so is the pastor of the church, just pretend like it doesn't say apostle. There aren't any more apostles.

We had the apostles. There were criteria for the apostles. Jesus had to personally interview and call them.

He took 12 guys and designated them to be apostles. There was a swap of one guy. Judas was a disciple but not an apostle.

Judas cratered out. You'll see him again. He's going to be an interesting fellow to visit with.

He's not going to hell. He was Jesus' disciple. He had the gift of the Spirit.

He performed healings. He listened to all the Bible classes. But he pancaked.

He face-planted when it came to understanding and applying. He wanted to do things a different way. He got tired of hearing Jesus preach about the kingdom.

I think he wanted the kingdom to come in and he said, you know, if I can sort of force the issue and force the confrontation, Jesus will have to go ahead and wipe out the Romans and set up his kingdom. So I'll deliver him into the hands of the Romans. I'll make a little money on the side.

That'll be a nice benefit. And of course it backfired. When Jesus was actually crucified and did not deliver himself, did not come down from the cross, Judas was horrified and went and hung himself.

This is what happens and the application for us in looking at Judas is not, oh, be sure you don't betray the Lord. Be sure you don't superimpose your ideas of how God's plan should work or what his truth should say on what Scripture says. Humility is the key.

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble and it's incumbent on us to go to the Bible, not go to church tradition, not go to, you know, shiny words that people present. Just go to the Scriptures. This is why we're a Bible church and we try to figure out from Scripture what God has for us.

And the key to getting a right understanding is humility, not developing a wonderful little system or grid. Or in the recent days, I've had the chance, I've got a relative who is really beginning to investigate Christian truth. And so he's on YouTube.

And he's, if you've been on YouTube and looked at pastors and guys talking, every stripe flavor under the sun is up there. And this individual, and I'm not talking about him, and I completely understand, is saying, how do you know which of these guys is right? I mean for crying out loud. There's always been a lot of denominations and different understandings, but you haven't seen the distillation of disagreement until you go on YouTube and you listen to one guy and then another guy and another guy.

They go to the very same Bible and come out with wildly different interpretations. And you think, and this has been an argument even for religion in general. How do you know Christianity instead of being a Hindu or a Buddhist or a new age person or whatever? You can jump up and down on the couch with Tom Cruise.

I forget what he is. He's a Scientology, I think. L. Ron Hubbard.

I mean there's this spectrum of stuff. And you say, well, how can you figure out what's right? Well, we've been down that road in our fundamental study. First of all, you figure out that there is a God.

You figure out what form of communication he has chosen to use. And through a process of elimination and verification, we figure out God is the God of Israel. He is the God of the Bible.

And this book is his word. And once you come to that, now it is just a matter of comparing Scripture with Scripture, appealing to God to, as it says in Proverbs chapter 2, my son, if you will lift up your voice, if you will cry out for understanding. Jesus said, parents, if your child comes to you and asks you for food, you don't let them eat a rock or a snake or a scorpion.

In the same way, if you genuinely want to know the truth and you ask God, God will not let you end up with a YouTube rock or a denominational scorpion or some false religion. Christianity is a relationship between us and God. When we go to God and ask him for truth, he will make sure we get it.

And we will find ourselves dissatisfied. If you wind up intermediate steps, you get some Twinkies and you get some 12-year-old Hostess cupcakes and they taste just like they did the day they were made, and you're not satisfied. You say, I just, I don't.

It's just like a suckling infant. Suckling infants know what good food is. And you try to give them strained peas and they'll spit it out because strained peas is nothing you should feed to an infant child, in my opinion.

I tried them when I was an infant. I didn't like them. But we have an instinct for the milk of the Word.

And when we find it, we recognize it. And we grow thereby. So when Paul writes this letter to the Laodiceans, they are not theological giants.

They have not been in churchianity for a long period of time. And so he is giving them truth. And what does he say in these first three chapters? You're in Christ.

Everything you have is in Christ. And any good teaching is going to focus on Jesus Christ. You're going to find yourself returning to the Lord Jesus.

He is, that's why it's called Christianity. It is about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not about theology.

It isn't about a bunch of works or rituals or mumbo-jumbo. When you are looking at the Lord Jesus and learning about Him and understanding what He has done and what He has given to us, and that's what this passage talks about. To each one of us, grace was given.

To each one of us. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a general package that

has been given to us in terms of salvation. And you've got the three R's that sort of summarize everything in salvation.

Redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. The R is the second letter in propitiation. But I still think of it as, it's like reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Well, you've got redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. And they've got three directions. Reconciliation is toward God.

There was a division. We were enemies of God. We were separated from Him by sin, by corruption, by all the things that make us fleshly and fallen and earthly.

And so in Christ, we are reconciled to God. Now He is our Heavenly Father. Now we have the basis to go to Him and to make requests and to ask for things and to receive His provision.

We are reconciled. We are redeemed. The problem of sin, with its penalty, with all of its effects, the corrupting, degenerating, separating effects of sin, we're redeemed.

We have been purchased away. Sin used to own us. We were slaves to sin.

Not anymore. We've been redeemed. It's like these guys, they've even made movies depicting sort of generalities of the past where a guy would be going past a slave market and here's somebody that is up in slavery and he, for whatever reason, has sympathy on them.

Even back in the Roman days, there were these, you know, a guy would go by and he'll see some strapping guy that's actually a Viking or something and he's in chains and he says, you know, there's something about him and he'll purchase him out and change his ownership, change his possession. And we've been purchased out from the slave market of sin. That's what redemption is.

So we're reconciled to God. We're redeemed. Sin is no longer our master.

We can run back to it and serve it voluntarily, but it's kind of dumb to do that when we've been redeemed. And then finally, we have been, propitiation means, and this is in the direction, reconciliation is in the direction of God. Redemption is in the direction of sin.

And propitiation is in our direction in the sense that we are qualified to stand before God. It's not just a matter of not having a sin problem. It's not a matter of not having an enemyship problem, but we actually have a relationship basis to stand before God.

This is what Christ has done. So in these first three chapters, Paul has talked about, in Christ, these are the things you have. We didn't accomplish any of them.

All we do is accept them. So now he says, to each one of us grace was given. That first part, that's the general grace.

All believers partake of those things. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is in Him. And it's like being an American.

Every American has got basic privileges that come with citizenship. But above and beyond that, we have particular individual graces that are given to us. And this is what he's talking about now.

Because as you look around at your fellow believers, there are people who have gifts for teaching. There are people that have gifts for encouragement. There are people that really have a gift for prayer.

They can take things before God and pray powerfully. And if you've ever been the beneficiary of that kind of prayer, if somebody has been praying for you and taking your life and your challenges before the throne of God, you know when those people are praying, because you suddenly just feel the whole vehicle shift into a higher gear. And suddenly the friction lessens and the sky clears and the light gets a little brighter.

And I know when certain people are praying for me, because I can feel the effect. God honors those prayers. There's people that just have a gift for prayer.

There are people that have a gift for coordinating and organizing and administering. There's people that have a gift for being sensitive to other people in the group and knowing that there's a need and figuring out really elegant and beautiful ways to fill those needs. They seem to always be there with just the right thing at just the right time.

It's a gift. It's a grace gift from God. To each one of us, grace was given.

And the great thing about these each one of us gifts is they are specifically for the body of Christ. This whole chapter has been about the body. There is one body and there's one spirit.

Jesus used to walk around in a physical body and He was empowered and enabled and guided by the Holy Spirit. That Lord Jesus' body has gone to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. Now we are His body and we can be in a lot more places doing a lot more things energized and guided by the very same Holy Spirit, generally in a less miraculous and newsworthy way.

We're not, you know, walking on water and multiplying food in the miraculous sense. But we are we do reflect the presence and the glory of God. And these individual gifts are given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

He knows each one of His sheep. He knows His sheep by name. And we know the voice of the shepherd.

And that is a unique privilege that we share. But it says in verse 8, when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. We went to the Old Testament place where this is

quoted and it actually says He received gifts from men.

And we say, well, Paul made a mistake. There's a mistake in my Bible. Because it's got an error, it can't be true.

I throw over the whole Bible. You know, there's people that just love to try to find a mistake and then say, oh my gosh. Well, it isn't a mistake.

It's a conscious change by Paul because that Old Testament passage is talking about the King. And the King both receives and gives. You think about any potentate who rises to power.

And He both receives and dispenses. He is a conduit through which things go. And Paul is emphasizing that because the Lord Jesus has received the privilege from His Father, all authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth, Jesus said, right? Because He has received that authority, the measure of His gift is to share it with His body.

Remember in Romans 8.28, it says, all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose, whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. And these privileges that Jesus has as the firstborn, He's sharing with His brethren. And that's us.

So what a wonderful thing, what a great, that's why it's called grace. So He gave gifts to men. Now this, He ascended, this is verse 9 now.

What does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? Well, this is where mysticity sets in again and people start saying, oh well, you know, Jesus died on the cross and then His body's in the grave for three days. And while His body lay a moldering in the grave, His spirit went and started traveling around and went and visited these spirits in prison and that this is the lower parts of the earth. Well, this is where people want to believe that Jesus went to hell.

I'll just tell you now, and it's probably on YouTube, I didn't look, but somebody probably is on YouTube saying Jesus went to hell. He, well, and it makes a kind of sense. I don't mean to mock people.

I think it's just a misunderstanding because, think about it, what is the whole salvation story? You either pay for your sins or you accept Jesus' payment on your behalf, right? Isn't that pretty much it? It's a substitutionary atonement and either you accept the work of Jesus on the cross or you're pretty much going to have to do whatever He did because if you don't accept His payment, you've got to pay it yourself. Well, where do we think all unbelievers who don't accept the work of Christ, where do they go? They go to the hot place, right? Well, so how can it be equivalent? Three hours of punishment, of judgment on the cross versus an eternity in the lake of fire? How does this balance? So a lot of people say, well, if unbelievers go to hell for lack of acceptance of the

work of Christ on their behalf, then Jesus must have gone to hell as a part of His work on the cross because it ought to be an equivalent payment. The payment, it's not like the cryptovirus.

Have you seen the cryptovirus? I've been inoculating every machine I can get my hands on against the cryptovirus. It's ransomware. Now if you've heard how this works, you go, and please be careful, and my encouragement to you is talk to me later and I'll tell you how to prevent this, but you're going to a website and it says, hey, there's this cool video.

Maybe you went there because you wanted to see this particular, maybe it's an instructional video. Maybe it's showing you how to do something useful and you go there and it says, well, to watch this video, you need a video update or you get a piece of email and it says, read the attached PDF, and this has got some offer or a form you're going to fill out. It looks like a very innocuous thing, but the PDF, because Windows typically hides extensions, there's a .exe on there, or you're going to go do this video update, but it's not a video update.

It is this piece of malware. None of your antiviruses will stop this. They will not catch it.

AVG, McAfee, Symantec, Norton, none of these will catch it. It doesn't have a virus signature. It looks like an executable that you have asked for just like any other utility.

So it downloads and it gets on your machine and it goes out and looks through files based on a list of extensions that it has in its mind, .doc, .docx, Excel spreadsheets, any kind of a data file that you might have, and it uses a 2048-bit Kerberos encryption key to encrypt them. This is the kind of most encryption that we use is 1024. This is 2048 encryption.

It is unbreakable by brute force means. This is what the government uses for top secret stuff. If you don't have the key, you're done.

There is no firm you can send your hard drive to. There's no way to get these files back. So this thing sits in the background while you're innocuously, maybe you're now watching the video, maybe you're now reading the PDF, you're doing something else.

This thing behind the scenes encrypts every file of value, your Quicken data, whatever else may be on there, encrypts it all and uses a key. It sends the key to a mothership server somewhere outside the United States. And if you have any network drives, if you've got a shared storage or you're working at your office and you've got a mapping to a network server, it'll follow those and encrypt everything on the server.

When it is finished, it will politely pop up a little note and say, congratulations, all your files are encrypted. Send us \$500 in Bitcoin, which is untraceable, and we will send you the key to decrypt your files. If you do not send your \$500, and you've got to go figure out how to set up a Bitcoin account and how to pay and make sure you don't get scammed because there's a lot of Bitcoin scamming going on, but you finally get an account set up, and if you do not do this within four

days, you politely get a second message that says, if you do not pay within four days, the price doubles.

It is now \$1,000 to get your data back. There have been a number of firms that have been infected with this thing, and they went to an IT specialist firm to try to come back. All of the IT specialists will tell you, pay the ransom and pay it quick because unless you've got good backups and you want to reformat all your hard drives and restore everything you have from backup, there is no way to recover the files.

Ransomware, a little gift from the people who write malware, and they are making huge amounts of money. There are many firms that have been repeat infected, and they've paid \$500, they've paid \$500, they've paid \$500, they've paid \$500. It is extremely lucrative to these people because you have no choice but to pay, and they will send you the key.

They are intent upon delivering the key because they don't want people to give up all hope. They want people to pay, so they will send you the key, but it will cost you and cost you dearly. Well, the price does not double for sin.

It's the same price, and whatever the consequence, whatever the penalty for sin is, the Lord Jesus paid it on the cross, and He paid it for everyone. He is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Everyone's sins have been paid for.

What the Lord Jesus went through on the cross is unique. Hitler's sins, Mussolini's sins, Saddam Hussein's sins, Osama Bin Laden's sins, the guys that flew the airplanes on 9-11, their sins, everybody's sins were paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ. You think, wow, that's great.

Everybody's going to be in glory. Everybody's going to go and have eternal life. No, they're not.

The basis for condemnation now is not sin. Sin is no longer the issue. All sins have been paid for.

The issue now is, what is your decision about Christ? If you accept Him, he that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. And it's just that simple.

And the penalty that unbelievers will pay for rejecting God and rejecting Christ because they reject God is the lake of fire. So the question is, did Jesus go to hell? We saw this almost exactly three years ago in our 1 Peter study. We were in 1 Peter 3, and Peter says in that letter, Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.

That's pretty simple, isn't it? We were unjust. We were sinners. Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who formerly were disobedient, when once the divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.

Well, people want to link Ephesians 4, He descended into the lower parts of earth, with what Peter talks about. What is Peter talking about? Who are these mysterious spirits from the days of the flood? Well, by way of review, in the earliest days of creation, God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden. They go out there and they've got to make their living off the land.

Well, it's pretty tough to come up with all of the technology for agriculture, to master all of the skills. They've been in the garden. All they have to do to eat is pick fruit off the tree.

It's pretty simple. They don't have to know how to make textiles. They don't have to know how to manage livestock.

They don't have to know how to do agriculture. All of this stuff is new. Well, how did they learn it? God said, I'll help you.

He sent some of His angels down to ease them through the transition. He said, they're not going to be here forever, but I'm not just going to toss you outside the garden like Survivor Man. All you've got is your pocket knife and a piece of cotton and you've got to try to survive.

This is the end. Even in this fallen state where there had been disobedience and there was consequences for that disobedience, God didn't leave Adam and Eve orphaned. He sent angels down.

These are unfallen angels. These are good guy angels who are going to come down and help human civilization get off the ground. What happens once they start proliferating, once they start having children and children of children, human civilization begins? Well, there was a shortcut to getting civil engineering and community knowledge.

This is what the angels provided. They were a temporary form of government until humanity could take over for itself. Now, this is the Bible account.

Archeology notwithstanding, paleontology notwithstanding, cavemen, I can tell you where that stuff comes from, but we don't have time this morning. This is the biblical history that is given to us. It is very summarized.

It is very general. It doesn't give us a lot of detail, but in Genesis 6, these are the sons of God. The sons of God were here to judge.

The verb is din, D-I-N. It's where the name Dan comes from. Dan means judge.

It's from the verb din, which means to judge. These spirits of God, these angelic helpers, if you will, came down to get human civilization off the ground because they didn't know anything. Fire, the wheel, tension and compression, how to use stones, how to weave cables and things like this.

A lot of this, how to do forging, how to do primitive metal work and so on. You find other places in Genesis where it talks about guys who were workers in metal and guys who were musicians and artisans of various kinds. Well, this knowledge God showed through the angels, people, how to make use of the resources that were in the land.

These are the spirits. What happened? Well, like Judas, they were starting out as good guys with a good plan and they failed. They got distracted.

They went off mission. They went off the reservation. They went and started doing their own thing.

They took an exit and started doing wrong. How did this happen? They were given human flesh, as most angels that you look at in the Old Testament, they've got human flesh. This lets them talk and not scare people half to death.

If they came down with six wings and fiery glory and people would melt in their presence, nobody would listen. How can you listen to somebody that's reflecting the glory of heaven? You'd just be sitting staring at the prismatic rainbow of glory coming off of it. What did you say? I was bedazzled by the high def here.

I forgot to listen. So God gave them human form so that they could circulate among us. Scripture says elsewhere people have even entertained angels unawares because they look just like us in this form.

It's just the way it is. I didn't write the Bible. That's what it says.

So, in this human form and in this human flesh, they're operating and day by day they see the daughters of men that they are beautiful. This is all Genesis chapter 6. And they took wives of those whom they chose. They said, I'm really in an immersion experience here.

This human life thing is pretty cool. And they really get into it and they decide that there are benefits to having a marriage. And so they want, well, marriages in the ancient Near East, as you know, are an exchange.

There is, you let me marry your daughter. I'll make sure that you get this land deal, that this case that is being adjudicated is going to go in your favor. And there's barter.

There's exchange. There's dowry type of exchange involved. Well, this corrupts the whole plan.

And these angels, they are not demons. They are not followers of Satan. They are not rebels.

They are not sinners of the high hand. They goofed. They got distracted.

They sinned. They were disobedient. They went off mission.

Just like Judas. Just like Cain. Cain is a believer.

You'll see Cain in glory. He was offering a sacrifice to God, but he was disobedient in the sacrifice. He said, I want to offer my tossed salad.

I think this will make a great sacrifice. God says, no, without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. It has to be a blood sacrifice because it foreshadows and reflects the work of the Lord Jesus.

Cain thought he had a better idea and he disobeyed. And for that he was judged. He was disciplined.

He was expelled. Adam and Eve were disobedient. They weren't rebellious.

They disobeyed. God didn't destroy them. God used them as the progenitors for the human race.

So this is a consistent pattern. Anyway, to cut to the chase here, in Ephesians 4, we do not have descending into the lower parts of the earth as a reference to what Peter is talking about when he says that Jesus preached. By the way, does Jesus preach the victory of the cross and the work of deliverance and salvation for humankind? Does He go tell Satan, hey, guess what I just did on the cross? Is He going to go round up the demons and have a big demon assembly, sort of a conclave? Hello you demons.

I've just finished my work on the cross. I just want you to know it's done. Your history, it's over.

There's a time coming when you're all going to be rounded up and thrown into the big lake of fire and this was the turning point. Does He need to tell Satan and the demons? They know this. They were on the earth.

They were trying their best. In fact, they thought they succeeded when they got Him killed. And it turned out, which is so typical of God, that the ironic twist is just when they thought they had succeeded, that was their doom, because that was the means by which they didn't really see the resurrection coming.

And even though it was in the scripture, they just couldn't see it. Well, this is not that. When Peter says he went and preached to the spirits in prison, these are the ones who were disobedient in the days of the flood.

They are recoverable. They are going to learn. They have been sequestered.

They've been quarantined. That's what it means in prison. They're in a place of separation.

They were disobedient. And so this is like the penalty box in hockey. You're not off the team.

You're not out on the street with your suitcase and your tie hanging out of it. Well, what do I do

now? You're in the penalty box. You can't play.

You're sidelined. They are sidelined. They can't see what's going on.

Part of their penalty is the TV monitors are turned off. You don't get to see what happens in the rest of history. You've got bigger issues.

You've got to reflect on what you did wrong. Jesus goes to them after the resurrection and gives them a Bible class on what just happened, catches them up. That's what Peter's talking about.

So here in chapter four and in Peter, we do not have any warrant for Jesus going to hell. Now the reason this is important is something we're going to talk about when we come back from the break. There is a teaching that is circulating now and it is becoming increasingly popular about hell and what hell is.

It is a real place and it is the consequence of disbelief and rejection. It's not so much disbelief as rejection. Everybody actually has a knowledge of God.

God has put the knowledge of Himself in the heart of every man and it is suppressing that truth and rejecting that truth and trying to run from that truth that gets people in the category of condemnation. There is nobody that doesn't know that there is a God in our heart of hearts. We know this.

God has put eternity in our hearts it says in Ecclesiastes. It tells us in Romans that God has made Himself manifest in creation in our hearts and in His word. We've got a three-fold witness.

God the Holy Spirit comes and convicts of His presence of sin, righteousness and judgment. Everyone knows this. Everyone on the planet knows this.

It is what we do with that knowledge that determines our faith. So if you decide to reject, it's the lake of fire. What is the lake of fire? This is one of the most misunderstood topics in the world.

So we're going to pause and take our break and when we come back, because of our passage here, when He ascended on high and led captivity captive and gave gifts to men, this ascending, what does it mean? That He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth. What's the difference in the lower parts of the earth and the actual lake of fire? There is a significant difference and we'll look at it when we come back from the break. But the main point here is the grace of God.

It is not the end of everything when we disobey. It is not the end of the world. It wasn't the end for Cain.

It wasn't the end for Judas. It wasn't the end for these angels who kept not their first estate, got distracted. The grace of God is there for anyone willing to accept it.

To each one of us, grace was given. He spent the first three chapters talking about the overall grace that makes us body of Christ. Now He's talking about individual grace, but there is always grace.

Grace greater than our sin. He giveth more grace. That's why He says God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

And it is simply a matter of acceptance. We're going to see what is on the line for this acceptance when we come back from the break.