

“Because He Lives: Serve!”
Ephesians 4:7-13

What sets Christianity apart from the world’s religions is that the religions of the world are all about mankind’s attempts to get to God, to please God, to satisfy God in order to be blessed by Him. Religion is about what I do, my works, my accomplishments that I offer up to God. Christianity is not a religion, it’s not about what we do for God, but what God has done for us. The Bible certainly contains many commands and requirements, many standards to be met and obligations to be fulfilled. But important as those things are, they are not the heart of Christianity. They are simply what God calls and enables us to do in response to what He has done for us through His Son.

On Easter Sunday we celebrated what God has done in Jesus Christ in raising Him from the dead; it’s about His glorious victory over sin and Satan, death and hell. But more than that, we saw that the resurrection can make a difference in our lives today. Because of His death and resurrection, you can know and experience the freedom that is forgiveness. You can be released from the power and penalty of sin and all the baggage that comes with it; guilt and regret and condemnation. You can also know and experience the presence of Jesus Christ, the purpose of Jesus Christ and the power of Jesus Christ in your life right now, and you can have rock-solid certainty about your future. As Jesus is victorious over death, so too will you be victorious over death, so too will you live forever in the glory that is eternal life.

What is your response to these truths? If they mean nothing to you, anything Jesus commands of you will be offensive and even insulting. But if these facts are true to your life and experience, certainly nothing Jesus commands of you is too much, given all He’s already done for you. We say last week that one command Jesus puts before us is to be His witnesses. To be a witness for Jesus Christ is to simply tell others what you know, what you’ve seen, what you’ve experienced in your relationship with your Savior and Lord. And we know He gives us the power, great power, supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to back our witness up, because this is the singular method, the only way that the gospel is going to be shared with all people, to the ends of the earth. This week we come to another commitment He commands of us, which again, is directly tied to the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead on Easter Sunday. That command is alluded to in verse 12, which speaks of God’s people being prepared for “works of service.” I want to speak to the command to serve, Jesus’ provision for serving, and the purpose of our serving today.

First, the command is “to prepare God’s people for works of service,” (verse 12). That is, active involvement in ministry for Jesus Christ in His church. From Ephesians 2:10 we know we have been “created to do good works, which He prepared in advance for us to do.” The work He has for us is to serve, to minister to others, for others in Jesus’ name. When we’re actively involved in serving Him, we’re doing those good works, and we’re faithfully following Jesus’ example. As He said in Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.” I have a good friend named Tom who went on a short term mission trip this spring. In the journal he sent me of his experience he wrote, “The most meaningful part of the trip was the fact that I served or helped a fellow man and group of people. Serving brings great inner joy and peace. The most satisfaction you will ever get out of life is when you help others. You don’t have to go on a mission trip to learn this. I encourage you to find ways to give yourself to others.” Serving is a command, but it’s also a great opportunity.

Second is Jesus’ provision for serving. This takes us to verse 8, which at first glance doesn’t make much sense: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” This is a direct quote from Psalm 68, a Psalm that pictures God as a triumphant king who has won a great victory over His enemies. He’s bringing home the spoils of His triumph and is ascending His throne to receive the praise of His people, and to give them gifts. By citing this Psalm the Apostle Paul puts Jesus into this role. On the cross He met and defeated His enemies, and He has now ascended triumphantly to the right hand of the Father to receive the praise and glory and to distribute His gifts to His people. When the resurrected Christ ascended into heaven, He sent His Spirit, as He promised in last’s week’s passage, Acts 1:8, and with the coming of the Spirit came the power to witness and the giving of His gifts to His people, the church. Those gifts are supernatural abilities accompanied by a supernatural motivation to use them. Our passage notes Jesus’ gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. Other gift lists are found in I Corinthians 12:8-10; 28-30; Romans 12:6-8; I Peter 4:11. Look at what verse 7 says, “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” When you received saving grace when you

became a Christian, you also received grace that suited His good purpose for you, your life, and your ministry in His church! You are not an accident in Jesus Christ. You are uniquely graced with Christ's gift in your life. A major element of knowing God's will, His purpose for your life is to identify and use the grace Jesus has given you, the supernatural gift (or gifts) He's blessed you with.

The purpose of Spirit-empowered service is found in verses 12 and 13: "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." The goal of serving Jesus is that we would become a body of Christ that is unified in faith and unified in knowledge, and that grows and matures more and more into the kind of unified and glorious person that Jesus is. I know the idea of devoting our lives to something beyond ourselves, to building together, a body of Christ that looks more and more Christ-like as time goes on is foreign to us, difficult to grasp. We live in a culture that says personal fulfillment, personal satisfaction is the focus of your devotion. And yet it's the vision Jesus has for us, and by His death and resurrection He provides us the gifts and the power to make it reality. That who we are takes on more and more the fullness of Jesus Christ; His personality, His strength, His joy, His love, His spirit! Taking what I've said this week and last week, what jumps out at me is that the church, Christ's body, is dynamic; it's reaching out, it's expanding, it's growing, it's building. There's a dynamic of life and energy and vitality in the church. I want to sum that dynamic up in the word "movement." The gospel is about moving – God moving into His world in His Son to bring salvation. And it's about His people moving too.

On the screen behind me and in your outline are descriptions of that movement Jesus has commanded will happen in His church. First, there's that movement of men and women, boys and girls who are not believers, who are outside of salvation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they move, they're drawn into salvation (represented by the circle), that is, saving belief and faith in Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. How does that happen? Jesus said the only way it happens is through witness to Him. The only way it happens is if we are witnesses to Him.

The next screen shows what's to happen once someone is saved. According to God's Word, that person is now a part of Christ's body, the church. It's the same circle, just described differently. Let me call your attention to the fact that our saved person is waving and has a suitcase in his hand because he's ready to travel. In being saved, he's certainly moved from death to life, from being lost to being found. But he's still on the move. The movement now is toward the goal that is Jesus Christ, specifically "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." He moves toward that goal by serving, by ministering in Jesus' name in His church.

But then the last slide rightly notes that this isn't an individual pursuit, it's what we - all of us - are engaged in together – witnessing Christ to those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior and Lord. As we're part of His church, we're also serving, actively ministering, especially in those areas where we've been supernaturally gifted and motivated to serve. As we do that together, together we're moving more and more toward what verse 13 calls, "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." I'm under a conviction of our Lord that the issues I addressed in this week's and last week's message are critical to our future as a church. First, that we will be witnesses for Jesus Christ, that as faithful and obedient followers of Jesus, we will be fishers of men, women, boys and girls, and not members of a "Fisherman's Fellowship." Second, that we will recognize and use our gifts to serve one another, to serve others, to serve our Savior and Lord. That's a work we're all called to. As a believer in Jesus Christ, as a part of Christ's body the church, there's no place for "sitting it out," watching others do the work we're all called to do. This, I believe, is Jesus' vision for His church, His people, for you and me. The question is, are we working for that vision or against it? If I can personalize it: Are you working for that vision, or against it?

When, in the power of the Holy Spirit, given to us by the resurrected Christ, Jesus' people are witnessing the salvation that is found only in Him, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, given to us by the resurrected Christ, we are actively engaged in serving Him, Jesus' body, His church is built up and grows "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature." Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness in Christ. That, my friends, is the vision. It couldn't be stated any more clearly. Will we pursue that vision or head off in another direction. That I think is the challenge, the decision, the opportunity before us in the weeks and months and years ahead