

# How Did Christ Give Gifts to His Church

by Tim Conway

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*This sermon delves into Ephesians 4, emphasizing the significance of Christ's victory and ascension, highlighting the diversity of spiritual gifts given to believers for the unity and edification of the church. It explores the unique logic behind Christ's ascension after descending into the lower parts of the earth, showcasing the unparalleled glory and authority bestowed upon Him. The sermon calls for a deep appreciation of the gifts Christ has won for His church and a fervent desire for their manifestation and utilization in building up the body of Christ.*

**Duration:** 1:03:08

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:1, Psalms 68:18, Hebrews 1:3, Acts 2:33, Hebrews 2:9, Philippians 2:9

**Topics:** "Christ's Ascension", "Spiritual Gifts for Unity"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Okay, Ephesians 4. So, just read with me beginning in v. 1. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. All these criteria that build up to this eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And then we see that in the very fabric of our unity, we have these doctrinal realities.

One body, v. 4, one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all. But in that unity, there's also diversity. Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

So Christ measures out differently to each of us. What I want to deal with today are the next three verses. Therefore, it says, when He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.

In saying He ascended, what does it mean but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. Now let's just keep reading even though that's the end of the parentheses there and that's the end of what I really want to focus on today. But notice this, "...And He gave the apostles..." That's what it was talking about back in verses 7 and 8. He gave.

Grace was given to each one of us. He gave gifts to men. Verse 11, He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

Now notice this. Notice this. Christ is given a diversity of gifts to His people precisely to foster unity.

His diversity of gift fosters unity in the church. Watch. All these various gifts, verse 12, are to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Each one of us is being equipped by this plurality of giftedness for one unified purpose to build up the body of Christ. And we see that in verse 13. "...Until we all attain to the unity..." See that? The diversity fosters the unity.

All of these are for bringing about this equipping "...Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge..." which means the unity of the knowledge. The unity of the faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God for a unified purpose of bringing us all to mature manhood. The assumption is we're not mature.

Just talking to a sister between services about maturity levels. This is assuming we're not mature. And yet, we're equipping each other for the sake of this ministry.

There's unity in what all the diverse gifts are bringing about. Mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Now, the question of the hour is this.

Why does Paul stick verses 8, 9, and 10 where he does? Why do they get thrust upon us? Because look, the reality is this seems to be a departure. And it is. It doesn't just seem like it is.

It is. That's why most of your Bibles have parentheses at least around verses 9 and 10. Why? Because it's seen as an aside.

It's seen as kind of getting out of the flow of things. And in fact, look, the truth is if we extract verses 8, 9, and 10 altogether, we just pull them right out, this thing would flow so nicely. It really would.

I mean, think about it. What we need to ask is how in the world did the ascension of Christ get thrown in here? I mean, think about this. Look, we can admit that yeah, we see how verse 8 fits in.

I mean, look at it. Verse 8, it seems to make sense in light of verse 7. Verse 7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. So to then go on to refer to an Old Testament passage, it says, therefore, it says, Scripture says, the Old Testament says, specifically, Psalm 68 says, it says.

Not so concerned to tell us where it says it. He just wants us to know that it does say it. It says it.

It. Therefore, it says, when He ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and here it is, and He gave gifts to men. I mean, that makes sense, right? I mean, you say Jesus gave a diversity of gifts according to His grace.

He gave gifts according to His measure of His gift. And then you go on to say, see, this is just like the Old Testament says. He gave gifts to men.

Okay, okay, we can handle verse 8 being in there. But then it would have been so natural and smooth to go right to verse 11. And He gave.

I mean, think about it. If you had verse 7, verse 8, and then verse 11, without this interruption, the theme of Christ giving is unbroken. You see that? I mean, verse 7, you see the giving.

Grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. You go to verse 8, He gave gifts to men. You go to verse 11, and He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists.

It would have been an unbroken... But you know what? You know what's obvious to me? Paul doesn't care if he breaks the flow. I don't know how you guys are. You like to have this grammatical flow.

I like to have outline. I mean, maybe that's the engineering. You like things to be ordered.

You like them to make sense. You know, it's like, Paul, that should be another point down lower. That should be something that you get to later if you want to really develop that.

But, here's the thing. I would think that if Paul said, look, Christ gave grace. And then he comes along and he quotes Psalm 68 and he says He gave gifts to men.

I would expect that's what he wants us to see. Oh yeah, He gave gifts to men. But you know what happens in verse 9? It's not even like he wants to focus in on Psalm 68 and the fact that He gave gifts to men.

It's like he immediately, you know what he picks up on in verse 68? He picks up on the ascension. Paul, I understand you're talking about gifts. And you quoted a verse from the Old Testament that has to do with gifts.

I would think that the thing you're really wanting us to see there is the fact that He gave gifts to men. But it's like Paul doesn't even stay there. It's like he says, bang! The first part.

No! No, what I really want you to see is how He ascended. You see what's happening in Paul's mind? He isn't so concerned that we look at Psalm 68 to see that He gave us gifts. He's wanting to see how He gave us gifts.

How is it even possible that Christ is in a position to give gifts to His church? So yes, you can say, well, there's a literary glitch here. But you know what? That's no issue. You'll see this in Paul.

There's some places where he definitely gets distracted and he chases rabbits. But I'll tell you why. Because his mind is not just focused in on gifts.

His mind is focused in on Christ. And what happens is when he sees gifts being given, his mind is on Christ. And he's running.

He wants to take us and sweep us up into the glory of how it is that Christ came to the place to be able to freely bestow these gifts upon His church because something happened. How did He get there? This is the question being answered by Ephesians 4, 8, 9, and 10. So, what I want to do is follow Paul's thinking

here.

He points out that what he has just said in v. 7 should not surprise us. Why? Because it was foretold in Psalm 68. Now let me warn you.

I have this great big volume. I like it. It's a valuable book.

It is actually the work of Carson and others. They have gone entirely through the New Testament and they have found every place where Old Testament verses are referenced. They have created this massive commentary.

Do you know when you open that up and you look at these verses in Ephesians, here's what they say. Psalm 68 is notoriously difficult to outline and place historically. Scholars rank it among the most difficult of the Psalms to interpret.

So you ready? You ready to go to it? Look at what scholars think is the most difficult? Let's go. Let's see what's going on in Paul's mind that he should be talking to these Ephesians and go back to something David said in Psalm 68 so long before, hundreds of years before. What is happening? What's he feeling? Let's get a sense of Psalm 68.

Psalm 68 was in Paul's mind. Yes, he's being carried along by the Spirit. But he's being carried along as Scripture is coming to his mind from the Old Testament.

Psalm 68, you want a glimpse of just some of the difficulties? Look at v. 11. The Lord gives the word. The women who announce the news are a great host.

You've got these female proclaimers here. What's that? The kings of the armies. They flee.

They flee. The women at home divide the spoil. Though you men lie down among the sheepfolds, the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with shimmering gold.

When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalman. All good? I read through this several times. And it helped that actually I've been going through the psalms and studying each one specifically.

I've been working through it over a year now. And I'm actually just the last psalm I went through was Psalm 68. Psalm 68.

So it perfectly jived with being in Ephesians 4 at this time. But, the quote of Paul comes from v. 18. Look at it.

Psalm 68, 18. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men. The King James Version says, receiving gifts for men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Now, it's apparent right off. He doesn't quote the whole verse. But it ought to jump out at you that Paul does not even quote the part that he quotes exactly.

I mean, in fact, Psalm 68 says, notice what it says. Look at it. Psalm 68 says, receiving gifts, he's receiving gifts among men or for men.

Whereas, Ephesians 4.8 says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. One says he received. One says he gave.

Now, look, I would just say this. I'm not going to focus a lot on that. Certainly, there is a reality in which Christ receives that which He gives.

Now you would say, yeah, but He's God. That doesn't make sense to me. But listen, there is something about the victory that Christ won whereby He is given what He then gives.

And we see that reality. You know this. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

In other words, through His victory, He received, but then He also gives. And so, yes, Paul changes it, but I don't think you have to necessarily see it as a radical departure. And when he says, it says, he may actually only be quoting the first two clauses of Psalm 68.

I know when you look at Ephesians 4, you see it in quotes all the way out to a certain place. But those quotes weren't in the original. The translators stuck those in where they think they need to be.

Look, one of the reasons you write a huge commentary on the way that Old Testament passages are used in the New Testament is because that's a science in itself to study the way the New Testament authors used those. I mean, sometimes it's really apparent and sometimes it's like, wow, how did he use that verse and make it mean this? Have you ever been there? Do you ever really look and go back? It's amazing. But see, the thing that we come back to is that the apostle Paul is under inspiration.

He's being carried along by the Spirit. So what's important is that he is basically articulating what the Spirit of God would have articulated for us. But notice something.

Notice something about Psalm 68.18. You ascended on high. Now obviously in Ephesians 8, it says he ascended on high. He led a host of captives.

Psalm 68 says you. See, he is third person. You is second person.

I, that's first person. So he changes the person. But 68, you ascended on high leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Now, I want you to notice the pronoun you right at the beginning. Who is the you? Is this the same as the Lord God? That is Yah, Elohim, Yah. I like in the King James Version, verse 4 says, His name is Yah.

How does it say it exactly? Verse 4, by His name, Yah. And when you get to verse 18, it is Yah, Elohim. Yah is a shortened version of Yahweh or Jehovah.

Yah. That is actually in the original here too. It is not the fuller version.

It is Yah, Elohim. It is Lord God. Who is that? I mean, the question we would ask is is it the you at the beginning of that verse? And if it is the you at the beginning of the verse, then why doesn't David say, Oh God, or why doesn't he say at the end, you as well as at the beginning? Why does he move from that second person to the third person? Why make that shift? Why not say, you ascended on high, you led a host of captives, you received gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that you may dwell there?

Why not say it that way? It's an odd shift, is it not? Here's what I would say to you.

That kind of odd shift happens, and we're not going to study this whole psalm right now, but it happens various times here. I want you to see it. Look in verse 7 and 8. You'll see that the you and Yah, Elohim, or the Lord God, is one and the same person.

We shouldn't be perplexed by this second person to third person switch at various times throughout this psalm, because David does it in other places. And verses 7 and 8 are a perfect example. Oh God, that second person, he's speaking to God.

When you, second person, went out before your people, when you, second person, marched through the wilderness, Selah, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the one of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. You notice that shift? It happens there too. Quick shift to the third person.

So when David addresses someone as you throughout this psalm, you just need to recognize that's a reference to God Himself. You know that big commentary that I was telling you about? The scholars who did that, they translate this verse themselves. And they translate it this way.

Listen to how it reads. You ascended to the heights. You captured captives.

You received gifts among humanity. Even among the rebellious to dwell there as Yah, Elohim. There, it's much more obvious that the you is the Yah, Elohim.

You ascended to the heights to dwell there as Yah, Elohim. Just to quickly get a feel for this psalm, I want you to see what's being talked about here. This is David recounting the victories of Yah.

You see him guiding his people through the wilderness in v. 7. You see that? O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness, Sila. Through the wilderness. This is the wilderness wanderings after they came out of Egypt.

But notice this, v. 15. O mountain of God! Mountain of Bashan. Mountain.

Now, just follow this. O many-peaked mountain! Mountain of Bashan. Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain, at the mountain that God desired for His abode? You say, what's that? Okay, what mount does God desire for His abode? It's Mount Zion.

What's Mount Bashan? You know what it is? Who was the king of Bashan? Og. Remember how big his bed was? They figure it was about 14 feet long. He was one of the last of the Rephaim.

Do you know what that was? It was a giant. The picture is David recounting the victories of Yah as he came and guided his people through the wilderness. And through that wilderness, they came to Sihon and they came to Og.

And Og was the king of Bashan. And they marched through there and they went on, having defeated him. And the thing about this is this is the movement of God's people from Sinai all the way into the Promised Land, into Jerusalem, and up on Mount Zion.

And you see the transition here. It's as though these mountains of Bashan are looking with hatred. They've been defeated.

Their king, the king of Bashan, Og, the giant, the last of the Rephaim, laid down. Notice 17. Well, even at the end of 16.

This mountain that God desires for His abode, yes, where the Lord will dwell forever. The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands. The Lord is among them.

Notice this. Sinai is now in the sanctuary. What a strange saying that is.

But it's like God came down on Mount Sinai and with glory and thunder and lightning and trumpet. What he's saying is the glory of God followed our people all the way through the wilderness. We defeated giants.

And into the Promised Land, defeating all the enemies. Where God desires His abode, Mount Zion. And there in the sanctuary, there in the Holy of Holies, the glory of Sinai is now in the sanctuary.

Now notice, this is what brings us into you ascended on high. The idea is ascending probably like in the Ark of the Covenant. It's ascending up onto Mount Zion and God's presence that was there at Sinai, it goes up with it.

You ascended on high. The idea here is there's victory leading a host of captives in your train, receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there. Where? In the sanctuary.

In the place of His abode where He will dwell forever on Mount Zion. Seems to refer to that. I mean, what David sees is God triumphing and leading God's people through the wilderness into this promised land, up onto Mount Zion to dwell there.

And you know what Paul does? Paul steps in and he says, yes, David, but look beyond the shadows. Because there's a bigger picture here. This is indeed Yah Elohim ascending.

It is. But, you need to see this for what it is. This is an ascension into the true sanctuary that you want to see behind all this.

He ascribes all of this to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you know, I got to thinking, did the Ephesians? I mean, do you? We've had Christianity among the Gentiles for 2,000 years. And I would say, do you even know the significance of Psalm 68? One of the most difficult by scholars' estimations to even comprehend and understand.

And I'm thinking those Ephesians did not know. They're first century. They didn't even have the exposure to the Old Testament like we have had.

And yet, we're pretty much in the dark about Psalm 68. He quotes that to those Ephesians. Did they even say, oh yeah, we understand.

We've got it. I think they heard that and it's like, well, that must have come from the Old Testament somewhere. Because that's how we read it.

And we've got 2,000 year history of the Gentiles having the Old Testament. Paul is saying Psalm 68 is ultimately about Christ. Yah Elohim, of whom David writes, is Christ.

Now let's just come back to Ephesians 4. And v. 9. Because I want you to notice the logic of this. There's logic here. Look how he's arguing.

In saying, this is 4.9 of Ephesians, in saying He ascended, what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? I would just say, wow! What sort of rationale is that? I mean, think about this. If you and I go out to Colorado, I've been out there a number of times with the lighters. Just up from where we stay is Copper Mountain.

Josh and I have climbed to the top of that twice. Let's say you went out with us. And we go out there and we climbed that mountain.

But nobody argues this way. I mean, if we climb to the top, we ascend to the top, there's no guy up there standing at the top saying, well, because you ascended up here, what could that mean but that you descended from up here first? Nobody argues that way. Not at all.

That's exactly how he's arguing. Now look, if on the other hand, you know the deepest place in the ocean is supposedly the Mariana Trench. If I see you come up out of there in one of these deep water submarines, now I can assume, anybody coming up from out of there, what does that mean but that they had descended first? Why is that so much easier and comprehensible and logic? Well, because the reality is none of us start down there.

I know none of you were born down there. And the reason nobody argues the vice versa about this Copper Mountain is because we know nobody was born up there. We all started down below.

If we got up there, it's because we started down there and we ascended up, and now we're going to descend back down to go back to where we were. Same thing with the trench. We started up here.

If we went down there, and you see somebody coming up, well, you know if they're coming up, they went down first. But you see, his line of reasoning and logic here is this, if you see this great YAH Elohim, the Lord God, if you see Him ascending up to the true sanctuary, if you see Him ascending up to Mount Zion, there's only one explanation. Only one.

It's because He obviously descended down there prior to that. That's it. For Paul to reason this way, he ascended.

What does that mean but that He had also descended in the lower parts of the earth? You know what He is called? He is called God above. Three times by Job. High and lifted up.

We read about Him that the highest heavens are not able to contain this God, the great I AM. YAH, that's what it means. I AM.

YAH Elohim, the eternally existent One, without beginning, without end, Who is higher than the highest heavens. There's only one way it can be said for Him to ascend or ascend up from somewhere. There's only one way to explain it.

He had to come down first. And you know what? This at first thought, I just got to thinking. You just kind of read Psalm 68 and maybe you and I, for one, Psalm 68, maybe we don't even comprehend so much that this is... You hear David and you probably hear, oh yeah, they're going through the wilderness and there's Sinai there and there's the sanctuary.

And you're kind of recognizing, well, all of this has Old Testament meaning, but then you hear Paul and it's like, wait a second. We need to see Christ in this. We need to see Him there.

And you can just go across this thing about Him ascending. Yah! 68, 4. The ESV says Lord. The King James holds that.

Although that shortened form, Yah, is found repeatedly in the Old Testament. It's interesting, the King James only translates it that way right there in verse 4. But it got me thinking. This is a marvelous thing in the sight of Paul.

And so I spent a good deal of yesterday scouring the Old Testament. Brethren, there is no place, no place in the Old Testament that says that Yah Elohim ascended except one time. You may search and find something.

I scoured. Obviously, I could not read from Genesis 1-1 all the way to the end of Malachi, but I searched and I searched by every kind of ascending, rising. Look, is there a time when God is called upon to arise? That doesn't mean He's ascending.

That means awake. Come! But you know, if you start looking for God being above, for God coming down, for God falling down, fire coming down, salvation coming down, it's everywhere. Listen, Paul picked up on something that is entirely unique and marvelous in Scripture.

And it has never occurred to me until doing this study and scouring the Old Testament and looking for it everywhere that God simply is not spoken about as ascending anywhere. Because you do not talk about the God who is God above and God over all with that kind of terminology unless some way God descended first. And I would challenge you, you can carefully survey, scan your Bibles through and through.

Think about this. You get there. Remember what happened at the Tower of Babel? God came down to see what was happening in Babel.

And at that tower. God came down upon Mount Sinai with thunders and lightnings and great... of course He comes down. Isaiah says He is the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, who is called holy.

He says, I dwell in the high and holy place. You remember when Isaiah came in there into the temple in Isaiah 6? There was the Lord on that throne. It says He was high and He was lifted up.

In Exodus, He came down. In Numbers, He came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent. In Psalm 18, very well known, David is crying out to God, God, He bowed the heavens and came down.

We love to quote this from Isaiah 64. **REND THE HEAVENS AND COME DOWN.** We never call upon God to come up.

It's come down. **REND THE HEAVENS. OPEN THE HEAVENS AND DESCEND.**

That's the idea. Isaiah 31.4 The Lord of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. Micah 1.3 You've got to love this.

Behold, the Lord is coming out of His place and will come down. If He comes out of His place, from where He is, Yah Elohim, it is always to come down. Down.

That is His place. And tread upon the high places of the earth. Notice, the highest places of the earth.

He must come down. He doesn't go up. He comes down.

The fire of God. You remember when Elijah, remember those guys came to take him? A commander came and he had 50 men, remember? And fire came down. And they sent another one.

Fire came down. They're on Mount Carmel. Fire came down.

That is the picture in Scripture. Upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the fire came down. You remember Solomon? He was dedicating the temple, and when he got done praying, Scripture says fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices.

We sang it out at Community Baptist Church. King James Version, Isaiah 45.8 Drop down, ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. It comes from above.

The Spirit. You find the Spirit is poured. You find in the book of Acts, the Spirit fell.

To fall is to go down. Three times I said to you before, God above. But on the other hand, you search your Bibles for God being down and moving up.

Jesus Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. And He emptied Himself. And this is the picture in Scripture of God descending and then actually taking a posture of ascending.

And when Paul sees that in Psalm 68, it's nothing else but Christ leaving captivity captive and giving gifts to men. God ascending. It's such an exceptional, extraordinary, singular thing that this God rises.

And Paul says this is nothing less than Jesus Christ. And if He ascended, it can mean nothing else when it comes to this God, Yah. He had to have come down.

What imagery! God came down. And in that Psalm, He came down. You have Sinai there.

He came down. But see, this is the shadow. You think about Jesus Christ.

He came down. And we find Him on a mount giving His law as well. The Sermon on the Mount.

He gave the law of His kingdom. And have you ever noticed in the wilderness, this Yah of Psalm 68 leading His people? Wilderness. The Spirit led Christ out into the wilderness.

You see this movement. Do you know what 1 Corinthians 10 says? It says that rock that followed them out there in the wilderness was none other than Christ. Now, if you've got eyes to see it, that Psalm is about Christ.

But if you've got eyes to look beyond the shadow, was there manna? Yes. But Christ is the bread that came down. Did they observe the Passover? Yes.

But 1 Corinthians 5, Christ is our Passover Lamb. Did they go through the wilderness and on into the promised land defeating and fighting enemies? Yes. But what Paul wants us to see is this is Christ.

Christ, if we've got eyes to see, look beyond it. As He ascends, He's leading captivity. Captive.

Literally, leading captive captives. That which held captive is now captive to the captor. They were the captors before.

Before, they held others in captivity. Now captivity itself is being led captive. You see the picture? We were held captive by sin.

We were held captive by death. We were held captive under the wrath of God. Captive by the devil himself.

Captivity captive. And the picture that we have here is all those kings, those princes, those powers, those military chieftains, those forces that held us, He's now leading them. This is a parade as He's ascending.

This is the picture. He's making public display of them. And you know what the picture is? He's casting gifts to His people.

I'll tell you what happened. He came face to face with the devil. He went out there in the wilderness and He faced off.

He squared off with him. And what Scripture says, heel on his head. The viper's head was crushed.

And He said of the devil, he has nothing in Me. And He said of the devil, he's defeated. He says it in John 12.

He's cast out. And you know what Jesus said? You know how a strong man is going to give up his goods only if one stronger comes and binds the strong man? And that's what He did. And you know what it says? It says He condemned sin in the flesh.

He became sin. He came face to face with sin. And He never fell into it, but He became sin and having that load placed on Him, He came face to face with our hell and with the wrath of God.

And He's satisfied. And He faced it and He was victor. In all these things, everything that held us captive.

You read about that. He defeated these principalities and powers. Craig came through that in Colossians.

That's the reality there that we find that these enemies were disarmed. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in the cross. Through death, He destroyed the One who has the power of death.

That is the devil. What we need to see is this is a picture. I mean, in that Old Testament, when the city of Jerusalem was taken and when Mount Zion was taken and when the people of God ushered in and that sanctuary was taken up.

Of course, in the days of David, the temple itself was not yet built. Only the preparations made for the building of it under Solomon. But the sanctuary, the tent, that was brought in.

And the Ark of the Covenant was brought in. You remember it stayed at the house of Obed-Edom. But the idea is, it's an interesting concept.

Sinai has come to the sanctuary. All that glory and it went up on that mount. The mount where God seeks to dwell forever and ever.

But you remember what was said in Hebrews. You remember what was said as it was quoted to Moses. That He only saw in all of that a blueprint from the reality that was in heaven.

All that was shadow. And here we have the reality. Christ.

You know the other place in Scripture where it talks about ascending? See, this isn't directly tied to God, so I didn't mention it before. But in Psalm 24, it says, who will ascend the hill of the Lord? And do you know how that Psalm ends? I'll tell you this, it ends with glory. It ends with this picture of Jesus Christ coming, the Lord, the gates.

The gates are lift up and Christ comes in. That's the picture that we have. Who is able to ascend the hill of the Lord? That is indeed the picture.

You know, brethren, can you see it? This train of victory as He rises. It's like, brethren, when we come to the Scriptures, it exhausts all the available triumphant language that can be found in describing this ascension. Christ said this, I'll tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away.

In other words, ascend to My Father. For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.

And it's His sending of that Spirit that all of these gifts are poured out upon the church. And unless He goes, unless He ascends, this will never, never happen. In the Scriptures, no one has ascended.

Think of the exclusivity of this. No one. Jesus said these words.

No one has ascended into heaven. You see, that's why you don't find it in the Old Testament. Because nobody has done this but Him.

You only find it there where it is Christ. And where it's the picture, it's the shadow of this reality. Jesus says it.

No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And see, we can think, well, Son of God, that's glorious. The Son of Man seems to not be so glorious.

But that's only because you're not reading it as a Jew would read it with Old Testament eyes. Listen, that is a very glorious title and it's taken from Daniel. Listen to this.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came One. Where did He come from? Victorious from down there, from the lower parts of the earth to which He had descended into. He is now rising.

And it says with the clouds of heaven there came One like a Son of Man. And He came to the ancient of days. This is Christ coming to His Father and was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. Now listen, there is a form of eschatology out there that says that Christ does not have His kingdom yet. Don't fall into that.

Jesus Himself said, My kingdom is not of this world. Don't say, well, that just means His kingdom is not of this world yet. That's just adding what's not there.

His kingdom is not of this world. He rose up and He sat down. And He has been given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people's nations' languages should serve Him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. And His kingdom, one, that shall not be destroyed. Hebrews, so glorious.

We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens. Don't you love that? How it jumps at me. He passed through the heavens.

Jesus, the Son of God, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Now I'm quoting from Hebrews 4 and Hebrews 8 there. Listen to me.

In Acts 2, and you can read this another time, but when Peter begins to quote David concerning one who would sit on David's throne, do you know where David himself goes? He doesn't go to the second coming. Again, there's a theological system that says, well, he sits down on the throne of King David. Jesus sits on that throne.

He's going to come take that throne at His second coming. That's not what Scripture teaches. What Scripture teaches, David has in mind that this throne promise is fulfilled at the resurrection and the ascension.

It says David was a prophet knowing that God had sworn with an oath to Him that He would set one of His descendants on His throne. Listen to what he talks about. He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ.

This Jesus God raised up and exalted at the right hand of God. Now think about the second coming and this throne promise to take the throne of David. He's there.

He's reigning. His kingdom is in motion. We read some of the most amazing things.

God was manifest in the flesh. Vindicated by the Spirit. Seen by angels.

Proclaimed among the nations. Believed on in this world. And taken up to glory.

See the picture. Exalted above the heavens, Hebrews 7 says. Ephesians 4.10 Who descended is the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.

Hebrews 2.9 Jesus crowned with glory and honor. 1 Peter 3 says that angels and authorities and powers have been subjected to Him. We know there in Ephesians God seated Him at His right hand far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age, but in the age to come.

And He has put all things under His feet. This is the picture of Christ. Jesus Christ.

Acts 10 says He is Lord of all. We know that there is no Lord higher than Him. He is the Lord of lords.

There is no king that usurps Him. He is the King of kings. And at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess.

We know that. Those knees are bowing in heaven, on earth, beneath. At this name of Jesus, this is a name that is above every name for the glory of God.

Brethren, our Savior, that One called God with us. He is the Yah Elohim. He ascended.

What does that mean? That He had also descended down into these lower parts of this world to take on our bitterest enemies. And He confronted them face to face and defeated all of them. And He has risen.

And He has ascended. And He has gone to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Having purged sin, He sat down at the right hand.

He who blew through the air. He who ascended up. He who is exalted above the heavens.

He who has been taken up into glory. He who has passed through the heavens. He led this train of captivity captive.

And He gave gifts to men. And I would just say this as we end. Lord, give us these gifts for which You have wrought the victory.

Give our church these gifts that You've so lavished upon Your sons and daughters. Give them to us in this age. May it be as it could be said of the church at Corinth.

Do you remember how it said right there at the beginning? It's the King James rendering. You come behind in no gift. May that be said of our church.

We come behind in no gift. Lord, You fought for. You were victorious.

You defeated Your enemies. You won this victory. I'll tell you this, for there to be diversity in the church came at great expense to God to have diversity of spiritual gifts.

Paul, he doesn't care about being grammatically correct. It's like if I can take those Christians up into glory and show them glorious views of Christ as a victor, I'm going to do it. So we better do it.

The Spirit is leading him. And so if the Spirit wants him to go there, the Spirit wants us to go there. And so we should go there.

Do you know that there are no three consecutive verses anywhere else in our Bible that speaks about the ascension? This is one of the richest passages on the ascension in our Bibles. So you don't want to despise that. This all has to do with our unity.

This has to do with these gifts that are given. Don't despise what grace Christ has measured out to you because it was fought for and won at a high price. And in His victory, I mean, one of the great realities is gifts.

The Holy Spirit for the church. It's for our advantage. Lord, please, please, You won these diverse gifts for us.

Lord, we ask You, please, may it be said of us as it was said of the Corinthians of old, may we come behind in no gift. Lord, not only in our day, but in all the days of the church and all the lampstands that You've ever lit. Lord, we don't ask for great wealth.

We don't ask to be situated in a great part of the city. We don't ask to have all the perks that the current mega church and church growth mindset is possessed with. Lord, we don't desire to have great names and great fame, but we would ask You, Lord, to bestow upon us great gifts because Your victory was

great.

We have to believe that these are not insignificant gifts and they're not trivial. They're not to be despised or looked down upon. Even what might be seen as the kind of gift that Paul describes as maybe being the most uncomely parts that we cover.

Lord, it's all essential to the body and so not to be despised. All to be cherished. All to be nurtured.

Lord, please, give. Especially as we think here at the beginning of a brand new year, and I'm thinking of all the things, Lord, we desire to see our church flourish in all the ways that we see churches in the Bible flourish. We desire to see the church flourishing right here in the body being equipped and the members growing and us reaching a maturity, this full stature of the measure of Christ.

Lord, Christlikeness. Lord, we want the diversity and depth of gift that we might be like You, like Christ Himself, bearing those traits in all the humility and the lowliness and the gentleness and the patience, bearing with one another in love that we might have faith that's quickened and larger and deeper, that we might see the brethren serving one another and even as You Yourself when here, when descended into the lower parts of the earth, You have robed Yourself with humility and washed the feet. Lord, we pray, give us that we might use these gifts for the ever building up of this body so that we might have evangelistic gifts and we might have missionary gifts and we might have pastoral gifts and teaching gifts, that there might be a prophetic element, Lord, for gifts of preaching and administration and mercy and faith and giving, that we might have gifts of discernment and wisdom and knowledge.

Lord, if there are gifts that are miraculous that You have bought for the church, we want them. We don't want to despise them. We want them.

If You bought them for us, please, Lord, never mind any unbelief we have. We pray, Lord, that You would overcome that, rise above that, scatter our unbelief to the wind. Please give us everything that You've purchased for us in having us to be well saved and to grow and to be a light in the midst of this darkness that surrounds us in this generation.

Give us men and women who know the Gospel and can speak it powerfully. Give us those who are pastoral and can recognize needs in one another to minister to them, to comfort where it's necessary and admonish and encourage and seek to strengthen this body. I pray, Lord, that such gifts would be given of giving that indeed our needs would be met.

I pray that such gifts would be given of faith that we'd have people that are prayer warriors in this church. Lord, I pray that You give us what we need. Give us a diversity.

Give us gifts. Lord, we pray that men and women of different colors and nations and ethnicities and ages and educational levels and social strata variances. Lord, we pray, Lord, that these gifts would freely flow all across the board.

We pray this, plead this in the name of the One who wrought this victory and led captivity captive. Amen.

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