Ephesians 4:7-12

The Gifts of Our Victorious King

Ephesians 4:7-12

You've probably heard some of the legends of King Arthur and his knights of the round table. King Arthur is depicted as a very good King whose kingdom spread as it liberated kingdoms from wicked rulers. Arthur called to service men throughout his kingdom who were of different backgrounds, but each ***particularly gifted*** in the art of battle. They had proven themselves to be men of valor, honor, sacrifice, and loyalty to the crown.

They had been liberated under the good king and were willing to lay down their lives in their service to him.

Every boy growing up wants to be a Knight at the round table. These are make believe stories we learn and act out from a very young age, but they tell us something bigger about ourselves and the REAL story that we are all living. We know that we live in an evil world and we learn early on that in life we will need at times to fight, and be courageous, ***and to serve the cause of others.***

Then we learn from the Bible the story of all stories - that in the fullness of time, God put forth a plan to overthrow the wicked King, Satan, through a very good King, Jesus, the Son of God, who overcomes the wicked king's greatest weapons – sin and death and judgment. He does this by dying in the place of sinners on a cross to pay for their treasonous sins, and is buried in the grave – the place of the curse (to dust you shall return). Jesus became a curse your curse on the cross, and was buried in your curse in the grave – but 3 days later He rose from the grave conquering the curse of death. He then ascends to His throne, ***and calls those He has saved one by one into His service (like the knights of the round table)***. We are given a new name - "saints" or "set apart ones" or "holy ones" – and we are "equipped" to "serve" and to help build His "kingdom" – the church.

Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1:

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13)

What a glorious rescue plan and what a humbling calling – "saints" who are now placed into a new kingdom, and given the privilege of serving the King who died in their place.

In Matt. 25 Jesus told a parable of a master who went on a long journey and entrusted talents to his servants (a talent was a very large sum of money). He charged them to use the

talents he entrusted to them while he was gone and multiply the talents. Two of the servants used the talents and multiplied them. But the wicked servant of the story didn't use the talent, but buried the talent in the ground and did nothing with it.

Church, if you are a child of God, Your King has given you a gift to use in His service. Don't bury the gift given to you in the ground. Don't neglect the gift that you have graciously been given.

Paul told Timothy:

> **do not neglect the gift you have which was given you…practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. (1 Tim. 4:14-15)**

Here is the charge to you and me this morning: ***Your victorious king has conquered your greatest enemy, and has now enlisted you into His service.***

Two things I want for us to consider in this passage: ***First***, we are going to see yet another vision of the Victorious King who once again pours out into His church. We saw this vision of Jesus ascended to His throne and pouring into the church first in 1:20-23. Now we get to see WHAT IT IS that He pours out, namely, gifts. ***Second***, we are going to consider 5 different gifted leaders who are called to service by the Victorious King to equip the church for growth. I pray that God will perhaps inspire, or call even this morning several of you that God has perhaps gifted in this way as we talk about them.

1. The victorious King who gifts His church (4:7-10)

Look at verse 7 – "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift***." God has called you to His service.*** Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, has "measured" or "allotted" to each one of us spiritual gifts for the purpose of building His church. Each one of you is unique, and uniquely gifted. We can't try to be someone else, we only need to be who we are and who God created us to be. No one else can live your story – you must live the story God has written or else it won't be told. God doesn't need you to be someone else, He needs you to be YOU. He has allotted to you gifts as He sees fit – He knows you perfectly and the gifting He gives you is suitable to your story. Our task is that of discovery – how does God want to use me in the service of His Kingdom in this season of my life? There are several lists of gifts in Scripture, and I think every list is unique, but none of them exhaustive – to try to exhaust them is to miss the point. Here in THIS text we have what we'll call "leadership giftings".

Notice Paul describes the gifts given as "grace given". It's by His grace that God not only saves us but then calls us into His service. We don't deserve salvation, and we don't deserve to be called to His service – it's GRACE.

Now I want you to see how Paul envisions this "gift giving" IN EPHESIANS. It's very unique and different that the other passages that speak about spiritual gifts (1 cor 12; Rom. 12; 1 Pet 4). In Ephesians, Paul is writing a cosmic manifesto of massive, heavenly apocalyptic realities that have huge practical implications. In 1:20-23 Paul shared a heavenly vision of Jesus ascending to His throne after first conquering every enemy – "far above every rule, authority, power, and dominion" (1:21). He is now seated over them in victory, and then in 1:23 you might remember that Paul first introduces the word "church" as Christ's body that He fills for the benefit of the church filling all things in all places. ***Remember the picture I gave of the bucket*** at the kids waterpark…it gets filled and filled until it spills over onto everyone underneath it. The church is described as "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (1:23). The church is filled to be sent on the King's mission.

Here in 4:8-10 Paul once again shares a heavenly apocalyptic vision of Jesus as a divine warrior king who ***ascends*** and who ***fills*** in fulfillment of David's divine warrior in Psalm 68.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 which is a very important Psalm of David about a divine warrior who conquers all of his enemies and then "ascends on high" to his throne as the Victor and King and "gives gifts to men". The King has "led a host of captives" – if you carefully read Psalm 68 this is most likely referring to the spiritual forces of evil the King has conquered.

Paul takes Psalm 68 and shows that the greater fulfillment of David's divine warrior is none other than the Messiah, Jesus, who has conquered the enemy and has ascended in victory over all and now He gives gifts to men. You have been gifted by your conquering King who laid down His life to deliver you from the power of darkness…now He calls you into His service.

In v.9 Paul now gives some commentary on Psalm 68. He says that before He ascended Jesus, **"first descended into the lower regions of the earth"** - there are many different interpretations of "lower regions of the earth" that Jesus descended into – some say that after Jesus died He descended into hell to free people from purgatory. That's a MASSIVE stretch of the text, and nowhere does the Bible teach there's such a place as purgatory (Roman Catholic interpretation). Some say this is simply speaking of His incarnation…he descended to earth as a man (interpretation of the Reformers). But I think this is probably referring to Jesus' burial in the grave – the place of the curse. To the Ephesians, the Greek words Paul uses for "lower regions of the earth" would have caused them to think of the grave and Hades which is the location of all spiritual evil.

This is a glorious apocalyptic image of our Victorious King who has not only conquered death for us, but has now gifted us to serve in His Kingdom. And He has now, v.10, "ascended far above all the heavens, ***that He might fill all things***" – sound familiar? The church is the

fullness of Him who fills all things in all places (1:23). Jesus is the divine warrior King who has ascended on high "that He might fill all things" (4:10). ***What does He fill the church with? "he gives gifts to men" so that we might be used in His service.***

The glory of the revelation given by Paul of Jesus as the fulfillment of David's divine warrior in Psalm 68 is intended to cause us to be in awe and feel the full weight of the privilege and responsibility before us.

Your King who has redeemed you wants to use you in His service. So here's the question, "are you the good servant who will the talents given to him by the master? Or are you the servant who buried his gifts in the ground?"

Paul now gives a list of gifts in vv.11-12. Paul's lists of spiritual gifts are always unique, and here they are unique as well. Context is always key! Remember, Paul is writing about unity in the body. Vv.1-3 Paul told us to be "eager to maintain unity" and then in vv.4-6 He gave 7 affirmations we are to be united under. Later in v.13-16 Paul talks once again about the unity and maturity of the body of Christ. Vv.7-12 are meant to be the MEANS by which God ensures that unity, stability, and maturity will be cultivated in the church….this bring us to point number two this morning…

2. Gifted leaders who equip the church (4:11-12)

Paul gives a list of leadership gifts because it is gifted leaders who are to ensure unity, stability, and maturity within the body of Christ. The leadership gifts are not intended to do all the work, they are intended to – v.12 - "***equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ***." This is very similar language that Paul already used in 2:19-22 Paul talked about the unity of the church, that we are "fellow citizens" and "joined together" and "being built together" into a dwelling place of God. Then in 3:6 Paul talked about Jews and Gentiles as "co-heirs" and "co-members" and "co-partakers". Paul is very concerned with UNITY! The unity of the church is essential because the church is the representation of God who is ONE…Father, Son, and Spirit. Now Paul gives us 5 leadership gifts that equip believers to walk in unity, maturity, and stability.

First, "apostles and prophets". Earlier in Ephesians Paul put apostles and prophets into a single grouping as the foundational individuals who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and who gave prophetic revelation into the mystery of the Jew Gentile church. Apostles and Prophets in this sense no longer exist today. But ***here*** Paul is talking about the ongoing building of the church. So while the ***office*** of Apostle and Prophet is gone, the apostolic, and prophetic giftings still remain. **"apostles"** - What do I mean by an "apostolic gifting"? I mean someone who has been "sent" (αποστολος) with a passion to see God do a new work in a new area. Missionaries have an apostolic spirit. They are willing to GO to a new area and to bring the gospel where Christ

has not been named. ***Church planters have an apostolic spirit, and those who plant with church planters*** have an apostolic spirit. Why on earth would you attend River Ridge Trevor when there is a healthy church right up the street with a bigger children's ministry, and more bible studies available, and a better building, with better coffee (some of these churches have their own lattee bar!). Hopefully, it's because you share a vision with me…you want to see God do a new work in a new area and you want to be part of it. All of those churches started somewhere…we are starting (for almost a year now) a new work. This is exciting work, it is hard, it takes a lot of plowing, it takes time, and vision, and commitment. It takes an apostolic spirit. I just want to say to you all, once again, thank you for dreaming with us and envisioning and plowing.

"prophecy" - Prophetic giftings still are at work also. Paul describes prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12 not just as predictive, but one who speaks forth God's word that brings conviction, encouragement, edification. This is much like modern day preaching. Someone who heralds truth from a pulpit, or even in conversation over coffee or a meal. This is that individual who seems to always "speak forth" truth that is fitting and almost electric, in the moment, and you walk away saying, "I think God just spoke through that person to me", or, "I think God just spoke through me to that person." Does God use you frequently in this way?

"evangelists" - Someone particularly gifted to herald or proclaim the gospel message to others. You just can't help but look for ways to steer the conversation to Jesus. Now…we are ALL called to share the gospel, and we can all cultivate this gift. I want to encourage you – "don't worry about having to share what you DON'T KNOW, just simply share what you DO KNOW." One of the greatest examples in Andrew the brother of Peter, "come and see". The elders of RR met yesterday, and do you know the best way that we can get people to "come and see"? If you become an Andrew and simply invite them. "Will you join me at church on Sunday?" Anyone of us can do that! The word for evangelist was used in ancient times to refer to messengers who would travel throughout the kingdom bringing good news. "The evil wicked King has been conquered, and King Jesus has ushered in His Kingdom!" This is the message of an evangelist. It is proclaiming to others EVERYWHERE the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice this is a leadership gifting, because evangelists lead the way when a church is being built…we need you to go out and share, invite, bring people in.

Last, "Shepherds and teachers" – where apostles, prophets, and evangelists were more itinerant roles that would found and establish churches from place to place, shepherds and teachers were given to establish each church to protect and help the church grow. We get the word **"Pastor"** from the word "Shepherd". Also, being a "shepherd" is used interchangeably with being an "elder". So "elder", "pastor", or "shepherd", or "overseer" are different ways to describe the same gifting. Someone who watches over, protects, guards the doctrine and the

safety of the sheep. A good shepherd knows His sheep and is willing to lay his life down for the sheep. Jesus is the greatest example of a Shepherd. Jesus is the greatest example of all of these gifts.

"Teachers" are simply those who teach in a formal or informal setting. One of the ways you know you have this gift is you have an insane ability to know Scripture, to study Scripture, and to share or even correct others regarding doctrine. Also you have an ability to articulate truth to people in a way that is clear and instructive. Paul groups these together – "shepherds and teachers" – because all shepherds must be teachers. However, not all teachers are necessarily shepherds. Teachers help the sheep to know the Scriptures and sound doctrine that unifies, stabilizes, and matures the church.

Notice that all 5 of these leadership giftings are to "equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ". Leaders are not called to do the work, leaders are called to do the work of equipping others to do the work. My primary role (as well as the elders of this church) is to teach, preach, shepherd, and pray…and in doing so, to equip you for service.

CLOSING

Now…in closing…what does all of this look like for RR Trevor? This is a big vision of Jesus and of His church. But we're small, and we're starting out. We don't have a lot of ministries for people to serve in…yet. But we do need all hands on deck.

Acknowledge your King has enlisted you

We believe from v.12 in what is known as the "Ministry of Believers". We are a body of believers that support one another through the gifts that God has given each of us.

Three things I want you to go home with and prayerfully consider. Which of these three "words" are for you? Here they are: 1) plug in. 2) Discover. 3) Cultivate.

Plug in – One of the best ways to discover how God has gifted you is to jump in and start somewhere. Start by doing something! We have several teams that need your help. Set up and tear down (its great to do this after service…but get onto the team that relieves others). Hospitality. Production. Worship. Childrens Ministry. Greeters and Ushers and connection table. Security. Any one of you can plug into these ministries. Our goal is to build a big enough volunteer team that people can rotate. Right now, we have pretty much the same people doing the work. So plug in if you aren't already.

Discover – Because we're starting out we don't have big, developed ministries…but Lord willing they are coming! This is a perfect time, in our infancy stage, for you to discover what your gifts

are. We have a spiritual gifts survey that I'm asking for all of you to take. We have cards in the back that have a QR code that take you to our website. I'd love to hear what you discover. Another way you can discover is by plugging in. God sharpened and specified my giftings by simply plugging in to different ministries. Here is what you will discover…you will experience the joy and power of the Holy Spirit flowing in your life like never before when you begin to say, "God use me!" So discover how God wants to use you in our church.

Cultivate – remember Paul's charge to Timothy: practice, immerse, and progress. Many of the gifts we talked about even this morning are cultivated and developed IN COMMUNITY. We have a few small groups, and God willing we'll have more, that you can join now. Small groups are a great place to cultivate the gifts. When you go…look for opportunities to encourage one another, to build one another up, to teach one another, to show gifts of mercy – I heard an amazing report from one of our ladies the other day that the women's small group has become more than just a bible study…it's become a "support groups"! Amen! That's what family should be! So join a group and get plugged in…we have all our group information at the connections table.

Finally cultivate relationships with others around you. You may not feel like you have the gift of evangelism, but all of our are called to welcome, invite, and share our faith in some way. Not all of you can be a Peter, but any one of you can be an Andrew who invited Peter – "Come and See!" Here is a simple question you can ask someone this week, "will you join me at church this Sunday?"

So…which of the three is for you to hear (maybe it's more than one): Do you need to plug in? Do you need to discover? Do you need to cultivate?

<u>Communion</u>

We're going to now receive communion together. Communion is our time to celebrate and remember what our king has done for us. Jesus on the night He was going to be betrayed took bread with His disciples, and He broke it and said, "take, eat, this is my body" and He took a cup, and when He had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, **28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt. 26:27-28) When we receive communion we remember and we celebrate the life and death of Jesus given for us. At River Ridge we believe that anyone who has put their faith in Jesus is welcome to take communion with us, if you haven't yet put your faith in Jesus we ask for you to refrain from taking communion, but instead, you can reflect on what we've said. The Bible says that all of us are born in bondage to sin, and we see that play out in our lives as we've all sinned and stand guilty before God. But God provided a rescue plan for you! He sent His Son Jesus, who died on

a cross for our sins. He gave His own body and His own blood for us to pay the penalty so that we can be forgiven. This morning you can experience the miracle of being called by the King into His Kingdom. Simply surrender to Him this morning.

For those of us who have already done that…God calls us to His service. Is He worthy of your service?

- ur gifts by using them within those relationships. Cultivate relationships with others outside of the church and ask them to join you one Sunday (be like Andrew – “come and see”).