

Ephesians 4:11-12
Ministry
080622
Jason Henderson
Market Street Fellowship

Ministry

Last week we had a the people that went on the Arkansas trip share some things they were seeing at the conference in Leslie. Today I'm going to pick up in Ephesians where I left off the week before last in chapter 4.

If you'll recall, we spent the Sunday before last talking about what it means that Christ fill all things. More specifically, we talked about what it means for Christ to fill us. We often speak about being filled with Christ, or Christ formed in us. But quite often I think we don't really know what that entails or how that really works.

Just to review for a few minutes...the experience of Christ filling your soul is not a process of getting more and more of Jesus. That truly doesn't make any sense. You never get more of Jesus once you are born again. The experience of Christ filling your soul is the experience of Christ occupying and reigning in your soul according to Truth. It is the increase of His conquered territory, the territory where He has conformed you to His death and where He reigns in resurrection life.

Christ fills your soul as the nature of the first man is obedient to the death that Christ has died and the nature of the New Man fills and occupies and dwells in your heart through faith. Faith is the literal mind of the Lord, God's vision, God's light, the Spirit's understanding, operating in your soul. Paul prays for this very thing in Ephesians chapter 3.

***Eph 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;*

Christ is in you by new birth. But Christ dwells in your heart by the increase of faith. Faith is how King David increased the borders of Israel in the Old Covenant. Faith is how King Jesus increases the borders of Israel in your soul in the New Covenant.

Here's a quick side-note that is very relevant. What is Israel? Somebody says "it's a bunch of Jewish people". Wrong answer. It's a land in the Middle East. Wrong answer. It's the church. Nope...that's not right either. Israel is the Son of God glorified in a people. Israel has always been the Son of God glorified in and through a people. God Himself said, in Exodus 4:22 "Israel is my Son, even my Firstborn".

What does that mean? That means that, from God's point of view, Israel was never primarily a people or a land. Israel was primarily a Son who was glorified through a people and in a land. Israel was the Son of God that was glorified through that covenant, through that relationship, through that priesthood and kingdom and

through those laws. The descendents of Abraham were the chosen vessel to bear in themselves His increase and his glory. But if you take the Son of God out from the center of the descendents of Abraham then you no longer have Israel. Because Israel is my Son, even my Firstborn.

That was always what the prophets warned the Jews about. That was Jesus' contention with the Jews of His day. Sure they were sons of Abraham, but they had long ceased to operate as Israel. Because Israel is a people in whom the Son of God is glorified. Before that Son was given as the literal life of His body, that glory was known and seen through the multitude of types and shadows that operated in the Old Covenant. That glory was seen in the parting of the Red Sea, and water coming out of a rock, and fire hovering above the tabernacle, and mountains shaking and burning. That glory was in natural pictures that spoke of Spiritual realities. The Jews were the corporate body that bore glory of the Son. They were the corporate vessel in the midst of whom God dwelt.

Israel is no different in the New Covenant in terms of definition. Israel is still the Son of God glorified in a people. The difference is entirely in how everything of Old Testament glory (in natural types and shadows and events and places and things) has become New Covenant glory where the life of God actually resides in and conquers and overtakes and conforms the very soul of man. The reason I took this rabbit trail about Israel is because Israel is the Son of God being glorified in your very soul. And all of the pictures of that glory in the old have become the literal EXPERIENCE of that glory in the New as Christ expands the boundaries of Israel in your soul.

In the type and shadow, the Land of Israel was given to Abraham in its fullness long before it was fully possessed. In order to be fully possessed it had to be taken by faith. Only when the land was possessed by the king could there ever really be a king that was glorified in that land. As long as Goliath and his uncircumcised Philistine buddies were reigning and ruling in that Land, though it belonged to Israel, God was not glorified in Israel. But when that Land was taken and conquered by faith, then Israel bore the glory of the Son of God.

There could not be a more clear and helpful picture of how this works in your very soul. The fullness of Christ is given to you long before that fullness is actually glorified in you. The fullness of Christ is given to you upon new birth, and yet the glorification of Christ in you has to do with expanding the boundaries of Israel. It has to do with bearing in yourself the death of Goliath and the increase of David. It has to do with Christ having the liberty to dwell in you by faith. And the end that this heads towards is Zion – the perfection of beauty. Zion – the city of the great king. Zion – out from which glory shines forth forever.

Zion is not a place you are going. Hebrews tells us without question that Zion is what we have come to. "But you have come to Mt. Zion". And the purpose of Zion is to be a city, an environment, where God has unhindered, full liberty to glorify Himself. Zion is the souls of the redeemed that bear the glory of the Lord.

If you'll recall from last time I mentioned a verse in John chapter 16 that was really speaking to me. It's the verse where Jesus said "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now". I mentioned this verse because it has everything to do with Christ filling us. It has everything to do with the measure of His fullness that you and I will come to have operating in us.

The Lord is able to fill your soul and expand the boundaries of Israel to the degree that you and I are able to “bear” or to carry that which He says to us. I can’t tell you how important it is for us to really grasp this at a heart level. God is not communicating with us for any other reason than for us to bear in ourselves, to carry in our literal soul, the reality of what is communicated.

Now when I say “what He says”, or “what is communicated”, I’m not talking about words spoken to us. I’m talking about the Word revealed in us. I’m not talking about Jesus teaching us words and expecting us to do them. I’m talking about the word which is spirit and is life revealed in us with the expectation that we will bear in ourselves that image. We will be conformed to the reality that He teaches us in the Light.

God is seeking, not to teach you the right facts about His Son, but to make you into Israel, the glorification of His Son. He doesn’t want to teach you lessons about Christ. He wants you to bear in yourself the person of Christ. He wants to expand the boundaries of Israel in you so that you carry a greater measure of His fullness. And this leads me right into a couple verses that I want to look at today. I’ll pick up in verse 4:10 and read through verse 12.

***Eph 4:10** He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) **11** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*

Alright, what is an apostle? What is a prophet or evangelist or pastor and teacher? Somebody answers “well, it’s a guy or gal who...”. Stop there, you’re already off to a bad start. You see, our problem in the church today with understanding these words is that our view of them starts with a hopelessly man-centered foundation. We think it is primarily a person functioning with a specific gift, but it is primarily Christ functioning towards His specific end. And I’m not saying that people and giftings are not involved. But it is precisely because we approach this verse with a man-centered world-view that we come up with the embarrassment that we see today in the church with respect to these so-called offices.

I don’t know if there is any one thing more embarrassing in the church today than what we have done in the last 20 years with these five words. Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. I don’t really want to comment on all of the specifics of this. I mainly just want to point out that long ago in the Old Covenant, if you took the Son out from the midst of Israel as its substance and definition and reality, you had what God considered an abomination worthy of destruction. Similarly, if you take Christ out from the center of these functions in the New Covenant, if Christ is not their life, and source, and purpose, and substance, than you have something equally abominable and contrary to purpose.

These five words, which really only comprise four different titles in the Greek – the last is better translated pastor/teachers, or pastors who are teachers...these are not descriptions of natural human giftings that God desires to steer for His purposes. In other words, just because you are naturally a good communicator and enjoy reading doesn’t automatically make you a teacher once you are born again. Just because you love to travel and enjoy motivational speaking doesn’t make you an apostle.

Just because you worked 5 years for the psychic hotline doesn't mean that you're a shoe-in for a prophetic role in the body of Christ. That just isn't how this works.

These are not natural abilities being used for God. These words correspond to various expressions of Christ that are for the edifying of His body. I don't deny that natural giftings come into play. But the reality of the so-called office corresponds directly to the measure of Christ working in an individual for the sake of the Lord's body. Not the measure of enthusiasm, not the measure of charisma, not the measure of giftedness. It is the measure of Christ functioning in the soul, and towards the increase of the Seed in others.

More specifically, the function of any of these ministries corresponds directly to the measure that they have been obedient to the death of Christ. We don't think of it like this. We think of God sending people out to be all that they can be. We think of God harnessing our giftedness and then sending us to Africa to win the heathen. But that is not how it works. Not really. When God sends somebody to minister to His body, he sends them out to die. If there is going to be fruit in any particular area in the body of Christ, the Lord knows that what He really needs to send to that area is a dying seed. Only when a seed falls into the ground and dies, does it bear much fruit.

When God sent Paul out on His missionary journeys, He did not send Him in the strength and honor of what we now call the apostolic ministry. He didn't send him out with pomp and pageantry and confidence and gifting. No, that's how we do it today. If you have a big enough church, we'll send you an apostle to do a weekend conference for the right price. And we'll send him first class and we'll expect a back exit out of the conference center so that He doesn't have to get bogged down with all the questions and needs afterwards.

When God sent a man or woman He sent them to go somewhere in weakness and in the fear of the Lord. He sent them to go and bear in themselves the death of Christ so that the life of Christ would work in what is true ministry.

Listen to how Paul describes Himself:

***1Co 2:1** And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. **2** For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. **3** I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. **4** And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Why? What was Paul's expectation in ministry? Paul's expectation was quite simply that if the cross was able to get him out of the way, there might actually be fruit amongst these people. If He would bear in Himself the decrease, the death of the Lord, then there might actually be an expanding of the boundaries of Israel in those to whom He ministered. Here's how he puts it.

***2Co 4:11** For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. **12** So then death is working in us, but life in you.*

Death works in me, but life in you. That's Paul's understanding of the apostolic ministry. I am conformed to His death so that there is something of Christ that can be seen and shared and ministered. If you are going somewhere, whether its to a huge conference or just across the street to your neighbor's house, and you are expecting to minister according to one of these offices, then you can be sure of one thing. You can be sure that you're going to get plastic fruit unless you go there as a dying seed.

***Joh 12:23** But Jesus answered them, saying "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. **24** Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. **25** He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.*

Notice how right after mentioning the dying seed, Jesus shows them that he's not just talking about himself alone as that dying seed. Certainly He alone is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the life of all things or they have no life. But, unless we bear in ourselves His death, and come to abide in Him, we will bear nothing of His fruit. Unless we lose our life and follow Him, then there will be no fruit at all.

Do you know that losing your life and following Jesus are synonymous? There is no genuine following of Jesus that doesn't involve being conformed to His death. You don't follow Jesus around the earth, you follow Jesus out of the earth. You don't follow Jesus anywhere other than into His death, that you may attain to His resurrection. Look at what He says right here in John 12:26 – if you want to serve Him, you have to follow where He was going. Where was He going? What was He just about to do? "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies". That is how and where you follow the Lord.

Jesus is not trying to get you to follow Him around during your day. I mean, He's not really leading you to the post office and then to Sam's club, and then to help the old lady across the street. That's not really what following Jesus is. Following Jesus is following Him in the "Way". And the way is a term that is loaded with meaning. The way is shown to you in the exodus from Egypt. It starts with blood on a door. It is shown to you in the tabernacle. It is shown to you in the cross. The way is death, burial, and resurrection. And we're not really following Jesus, regardless of where we think He told us to go, or what we think He told us to do, if we're not following Him into death, through burial, and onto resurrection ground.

These four or five offices have to do with serving the Lord. But in order to serve the Lord you must follow Him to where He is. And there, having come by the way of the cross, the only thing left to offer a soul is the measure of Christ that is working in you.

These four titles – apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor/teacher – have to do with ministry. But what is ministry? If only we would stop and ask the Lord that question before we headed out and started to minister. Ministry is not what we do, what we say, or where we go for the Lord. Ministry is the measure of Christ working in what we do, what we say, and where we go. True ministry is entirely bound up with the measure of Christ that works in us. The measure of ministry is the measure of Christ. It is NOT the measure of attendance at a meeting, not the measure of salvations claimed at a service, not the measure of bodies healed, not the measure

of excitement, not the measure of books sold, or money raised, or faces with smiles. The measure of ministry is the measure of Christ and frankly, the only one that can truly see that measure is the Father who is looking for His Son.

Oh we hate that. We hate not being able to measure. We first of all hate that it is not **us** being measured. But worse even than that, is that there is no way to pull out our yard stick and measure how well we're doing. The adamic man lives for report cards. We live to assess ourselves. And the reason we do that is because we live and breath and work and serve almost exclusively for the praise of men, for the glory that comes from man. We live for what we are seen to be by men. Reputation. Approval. Acceptance. Appreciation. Success. These are the words that make the world go around. These are the words that get us out of bed in the morning, and that we labor for all day long. Reputation, approval, acceptance, appreciation, success. And these are the words that we have brought into the church and associated with the titles apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, evangelist.

And that's not true across the board. There are people who operate in these ministries according to the measure of Christ. But so much of what we see today in the church is the same title envy and ladder climbing and self-promotion that we see in the unbelieving business world. But before man ever used these offices to glorify ourselves, they were given of God to glorify Himself. They were quite simply the various ways in which the measure of Christ worked in and through people for the building up of His body. They worked in and for the body that Christ might fill all things. They didn't work, as many do today, towards raising up bigger and better prophets and apostles. They didn't form the school of the prophets, or the apostolic training center. God established function by the measure of Christ, and each worked towards the edifying of the body.

The building up of the body of Christ is the same thing as Christ filling the soul with Himself. It is the same thing as bearing in ourselves a greater experience and operation of Christ by faith. You want to see an apostle? He'll be the one bearing in Himself the dying of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Christ is glorified in a people. You want to see a prophet? He'll be the one being conformed to the death of Christ so that He can speak out from the mind of the Lord.

Now, just for the sake of clear definitions – the word apostle simply means “sent one”. It is the noun form of the Greek word meaning “to send”. I know about all of the debates in the church about how to define an apostle, and who gets to be called by that name. The only reason we argue over things like that is because we're concerned with who should get the honor of wearing that title. But see, that proves we don't even know what ministry is. There is NO honor for a **man** wearing that title. On the contrary, there is outward contempt and inward death for the person wearing that title. We've got it all wrong. With a real apostle, there only honor is in and for Christ who is being formed in His body. That is the rewards – Christ formed in His Body. That was the reward that Christ labored for.

At any rate, an apostle is a “sent one”. It is one in whom the Lord works to establish churches that fellowship in the truth. I understand a prophet to be one through whom the Lord communicates His view. One who speaks out from the mind of the Lord by faith. Sometimes this has to do with things or events in the earth. More often, and more importantly, this has to do with spiritual reality as it is in the heavens. I understand an evangelist to be one in whom the Lord gathers together those who have a heart to know Him. One who proclaims the truth as it is in Christ

and feeds babes milk and brings them into a fellowship where they can grow up in Christ. A pastor/teacher is one that tends to and feeds a flock from infancy towards maturity in the Lord, bringing them from milk to solid food, that they might grow up in all things into the head, which is Christ. That they might present a people full grown in the truth in the full light of Christ's day.

And all of these offices or ministry title overlap one another and blend together. They are distinguishable by function, but its not like you can only be one or the other. Paul, for example, I believe had the Lord working in him mightily in each of these ways. But never once do I believe he cared to be known by a title. I know that once or twice He insisted upon being an apostle in his letters, but that was only because he wanted his churches to hear and receive the truth that he carried as from the Lord. It wasn't his position he was fighting for, it was the truth that he proclaimed. All other gospels are an anathema, and for them to reject the gospel of Paul was to reject the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen