

given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When He ascended on high, He took many captives and gave gifts to His people."

Paul loosely quotes Ps. 68:18 which says literally "He took captivity captive" – Christ took captive the captivity of Satan, for all who would turn to Him. Paul emphasises the goodness of God in not taking tribute but giving victory gifts to the church.

9-10 (What does "He ascended" mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

"He also descended" – the One who ascended is the One who had descended and become incarnate to relate to us, and then be put to death for us.

11-12 So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

Christ's gifts to the church are seen as five defined kinds of ministry working through spiritually mature leaders in the church. The point of this whole passage is encouraging the spiritual maturity which will maintain unity, through the equipping of these five strands in concert. A leader may be sent out to pioneer a new work; or may be gifted in knowing God's present purposes and praying them in; another is especially adept in

IN PRACTICE Turning to Jesus and receiving His gift of new life is a vital and life-changing decision. But we're not supposed to live that time over and over. We don't find a signpost and then camp there! As we know, the real formation of the church took place with the general bestowing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – an empowering time when the continuing presence of Jesus became very real and they grew in this new life of the Spirit. Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus, urging them to keep on growing true, humble and loving – and together. With an enemy whose tactic is to spoil and cause division in the body, unity is of paramount importance. Of course there will be tensions, but maturity demands that we resist dividing but have the character to absorb tensions and stay focused on Christ and together in Him.

QUESTION *When someone, perhaps a leader, says or does something that you find difficult, what are the two or three responses you can choose to make?*

PRAYER Father God, You are good all the time, gracious when like David we recognise our mistakes and giving beyond anything we could earn or deserve. Help me to love You by being trusting and open to simply receive from You. Amen.

communicating the Good News simply; and a different gifting is the shepherd who cares for the flock, most likely also one who has the gift of explaining the Bible's stories and message simply and clearly.

13 ...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.

"Fullness of Christ" – the full expression of what Christ is like, Eph. 1:23. People who are filled with Christ are by definition not filled with their own sense of importance, and will be builders of unity in the church and between churches.

14-15 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

"The mature body" – Christ's diverse people, working together, supporting each other and growing together in Him, v.16 below.

16 From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, August 5, 2018 with commentary notes

Church calendar readings for **Sunday, August 5**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - or read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: Lifegiving gifts of God, freely given

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a – A 'gift' violated in immaturity

John 6:24-35 – Jesus' gift to us of eternal lifegiving food

Ephesians 4:1-16 – Maturity grows through Christ's gifts to His church

To read additionally: Psalm 51:1-12

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a » A 'gift' violated in immaturity

David is convicted of his sin on hearing a story told by the court prophet, Nathan

26-27 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

"Displeased the Lord" – a dramatic understatement. David had misused his royal power, 2 Sam. 5:2, 2 Sam. 7:7, and broken the 6th, 7th and 10th commandments, Exodus 20:13,14,17.

12:1-3 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

"The Lord sent Nathan" – Nathan was acting as the Lord's emissary sent with the Lord's message. He had spoken before prophetically, 2 Sam. 7:2.

4 "Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking

one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

5-6 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

"As surely as..." – David's exclamation is in the form of an oath.

"Four times over" – the customary restitution. David later lost four of his sons, three dying violently.

7-8 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.

"Gave your master's house..." – meaning the

> continued

throne and its benefits being conferred on David.

9-10 'Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

"You struck down...you killed..." – figure of speech; David was responsible for Uriah falling in battle.

11-12 "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of

your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.' "
"In broad daylight" – foretelling Absalom rebelling and sleeping with the royal concubines on the palace rooftop, 2 Sam. 16:22.

13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

The story continues with David's wholehearted repentance, and being met by God's grace.

IN PRACTICE From a plain reading of the story, David is in denial of his wrongdoing until nine months or more after the affair with Bathsheba and the birth of his son, when Nathan the court prophet comes to him with a story. At this point the enormity of his sin impacts David – the adultery, deception of Uriah and his constructive murder – and blatant disregard for God's order. David immediately repents in a wholehearted way. However, sin sets in train consequences. To do what we know not to do, is costly for us as it was for David.

QUESTION *'Repent' is a word we shy away from, yet David turned to God and received grace. How ready are you to admit to God where you got it wrong?*

John 6:24-35 » Jesus' gift to us of eternal lifegiving food

The bread that never spoils is to believe in the One that God sent

24 Once the crowd realised that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

"Capernaum" – Jesus left the scene of the miracle of the feeding of the crowd alone, and the crowd went to search for him in the most likely place.

25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"

26-27 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of

Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval."

They saw the sign but perceived Jesus as a miracle worker. Like the disciples, Mark 6:53, they needed Jesus to teach them the fuller meaning.

"Food that endures to eternal life" – Jesus' miracle with ordinary bread is a sign of who He is, uniquely authorised by the Father as His giver of spiritual 'food' that gives life.

28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent."

"What must we do..." – The crowd followed the merit-based Jewish religion and misses the point that eternal life is not earned, but God's gift simply received, Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5. These two verses make a succinct statement of the gospel.

The one and indispensable 'work' is to exercise faith and believe in Jesus Christ. Romans 3:20-28.

30-31 So they asked him, "What sign then will You give that we may see it and believe you? What will You do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

"What sign will You give" – a popular expectation was the Messiah being known in the provision of manna again. The crowd was comparing one miracle and ordinary bread, with Moses who had fed a whole nation with heavenly bread for a generation.

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

"Bread from heaven" – significance emphasised by

seven-fold repetition, here and vv. 38,41,50-51,58.

33 For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Jesus gently corrects them. God gave the manna, but what is important now is the "true bread" of eternal life through the Son.

34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.

"Jesus declared, "I am..." – solemn and emphatic in Greek like God's words in Exod. 3:12-15.

For further study: *the seven key "I am" sayings in John's gospel, John 6:35, 8:12, 10:7,9; 10:11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5.*

IN PRACTICE The people who had received the miraculous provision of bread had met Jesus, the provider, but had not yet properly met with Jesus the Son of God – and so didn't understand the real gift of Jesus to them. It's the same today today. We are so indoctrinated with the idea of working for a reward, and of achieving preference on the basis of merit, that simply believing and receiving the eternally lifegiving food of Jesus Himself seems difficult. We create all kinds of substitutes: we prefer the 'entitlement' of church heritage and religious observance and good deeds. This is why we find it hard to turn to simply receive Jesus as Saviour and as Lord.

QUESTION *Everyone has struggled with this, everyone has a story... How would you explain to someone exploring Christian faith how you received Jesus' lifegiving gift?*

Ephesians 4:1-16 » Maturity grows through Christ's gifts to His church

Spiritual maturity and unity are a priority for the church to thrive

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

"Worthy of the calling" – the life that demonstrates Christ's call will have hallmarks apparent to others.

Further study: *1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 12:1; Col. 1:10.*

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Freedom from needing to prove oneself and free to absorb tensions showing grace to others, is part of growing in Christian maturity, vv. 13-16.

3-5 Make every effort to keep the unity of

the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

"Make every effort" – words of urgent priority, to maintain the unity that the Holy Spirit brings.

There's a unity in the life of the Spirit which must be defended from the enemy's tactic of division.

"One body and one Spirit" – seven foundational tenets of spiritual unity, in declaration form.

7-8 But to each one of us grace has been