

Theme 2012: Equipping Leaders to Equip the Saints

Ephesians 4:1-12

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on January 8, 2012

Introduction

- ❖ This morning I have the privilege of introducing our Ministry Theme for this coming year. Last week we focused on our church's Mission to make God-loving, compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations. That never changes. As a community, we are on mission to make disciples among all those that God puts in our lives – family, friends, neighbors, classmates, co-workers, etc. All for the glory of God and the work of the Gospel.
 - *But how do we carry out that mission? What's our plan?* That's what our Ministry Theme is trying to answer, and it can change depending on the life stage of our church. So as your pastors, we've been evaluating where we are at, and we believe we're at a place in the life of this church where we need to focus on raising leaders. And not just any kind. We need leaders who are equipped to equip. Trained to train. Leaders who have been discipled so they in turn can disciple others.

- ❖ Our Ministry Theme for 2012 is "***Equipping Leaders to Equip the Saints***". This year we want to make an intentional effort to train up leaders in the church in such a way that they are capable of training others to carry out their own unique ministries.
 - Now by leaders, we're talking about elders, deacons, fellowship leaders, coaches, small group leaders, and worship leaders. This is an effort to equip present leaders and train new ones and will take place across all language groups in the church.

- ❖ *Now why have a year-long ministry focus on equipping leaders?* Why not have a year-long focus on blessing our community? What about a year-long theme on reaching the lost? Or planting churches throughout our city? 'Equipping leaders' sounds so inward focused. Why aren't we dreaming bigger and looking outwards?
 - Trust me, we want to dream big, pray big, and trust our Big God wherever he leads us and however he uses us. **But before we can pursue a grand vision for this church, we need to make sure the right people are behind the wheel.**

- ❖ In his book ***Good to Great***, Jim Collins drew conclusions from his research of elite companies that made the leap from good to great, and what he found in the data was surprising. In a chapter called "**First Who ... Then What**", he initially thought the first step to greatness would be to set a new direction, a new vision, for the company, and then to find competent people who could commit and drive that vision. But instead he discovered that 'great' companies did the very opposite.
 - Instead of deciding first where to drive the bus and then finding drivers who could bring them to that destination, top companies first got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off) and then figured out where to drive. First who, then what.

- ❖ There's a lot of wisdom there. It would be a shame to brush it aside as simply secular wisdom. All truth is God's truth, and we believe this principle is true. If we, as a church, want to do something great and be part of something big for the glory of God, then before we figure out where we're going, let's make sure the right people are driving the bus and that these leaders are fully equipped and prepared.

- ❖ This morning I want to look at a passage that shows us the importance of leaders and what they are called to do. Look with me at Ephesians 4:1-12. If you're following the outline, I have three points. **1) What unifies us as a church. 2) What diversifies us as a church. 3) What leaders do in a church.**

What Unifies Us as a Church

- ❖ I want to begin by emphasizing our unity as a church since I realize the dangers of focusing on leaders. There is a tendency to see church leaders as a special class of Christians. As if they're holier, more spiritually mature, just by virtue of their position. Sadly, we have in our minds two levels or classes of Christianity. The leaders and the regular Christians.
 - Now granted there is a distinction between leaders and non-leaders, but it might not be what you think. In fact, I think this might be a new insight for many of you. But before we talk about our differences, I want to stress our unity.
- ❖ In the first three chapters of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul laid out a robust theology of salvation in Christ. We're told that every Christian once walked in sin. We were dead in our trespasses, but God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love, made us alive together with Christ (2:1-5). We were saved by grace through faith. This is not something we accomplished. This salvation is a gift from God, not a result of works so that no one may boast (2:8-9).
 - And since no one did anything to merit so great a salvation, then there should be no dividing walls of hostility between us. Since we have nothing to boast in, then we have no reason (no boast) that justifies excluding someone or belittling others or creating different classes of Christians. As Paul says in chapter **3:8**, "*Through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*"
- ❖ Every Christian has been adopted by the same Father into the same family through the same Savior (1:5), so we are all equal. We all have equal access to our heavenly Father. So we don't need a church leader to act as a priest to intercede before God on our behalf. No, every child of God can come into his presence through the blood of Christ in one Spirit.
 - This is the salvation to which we have been called. And now in chapter **4:1** Paul charges us to live in light of it. Read with me, "*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*" Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. **What Scripture is saying is that, if you are a Christian, you have a calling.**
- ❖ Think about that. **We typically associate "a calling" with a call to full-time church work or to the mission field.** Pastors and missionaries have callings from God. The rest of us just have careers. Nothing can be further from the truth. Every Christian has a calling.
 - Now this can be understood in two ways. **In one sense, our calling from God is none other than our vocation in life.** Vocation comes from the Latin for 'calling'. In this sense, our callings are different because we have different vocations.

- ❖ For some, your vocation right now is to be a student, others are called to be doctors, nurses, engineers, plumbers, electricians, mothers, fathers, pastors, missionaries, etc. The point is that every vocation is of God. No one vocation is inherently holier than another. My calling is not higher than yours. We'll develop this idea further next week.
 - In that sense, we have different callings, but in another sense, every Christian shares a common calling that is fundamental to the various vocations we've been given. **This common calling is our call to Christ to be his saints.**

- ❖ In **Romans 1:7** and **1 Corinthians 1:2**, Paul writes to churches and addresses the believers are those who are "*called to be saints*". Don't get confused with the way the Catholic Church uses the term 'saints'. **Biblically, to be a saint simply means to be someone set apart for service to God.** You've been sanctified or consecrated for holy service.
 - Just as the temple priests would pour oil over various items and instruments in order to consecrate them for holy service to the Lord, in the same way, Christ has poured out his Spirit like oil over his people, consecrating us for holy service.
 - That's what it means to be a saint. We are holy instruments in the hands of the holy God for the purpose of serving in his name.

- ❖ Now look at chapter **4:11-12** with me. "*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*"
 - We'll look at verse 11 in more detail, but I just want you to notice that the saints are supposed to be equipped "*for the work of ministry (of service)*". It doesn't say church leaders do the work while the saints reap the benefits. **Rather it says the saints are to do the work of ministry.**

- ❖ But what is the '*work of ministry*'? Well the context of Ephesians 4 would suggest that the work is any kind of responsibility aimed at building up the body of Christ, that is, helping people come to know Jesus and to grow up in spiritual maturity to look like Jesus.
 - That could involve evangelizing the lost, discipling the young, teaching the hungry, counseling the confused, correcting the unrepentant, visiting the lonely, comforting the mourner, shepherding the sheep. These are the works of ministry to be carried out by the ministers of Christ for the building up of the Church.

- ❖ And the point is: **If you're in Christ, you are one of his ministers.** To be honest, my job title is misleading. It says in the bulletin 'Minister Tarn', as if I have been specially called to do the work of ministry distinct from regular Christians. Regular Christians are called 'Brother/Sister so-and-so', but since I'm in full-time church work I get the special title of Minister. Frankly, that's unbiblical.
 - I realize much of this is unintentional. Most churches are not intentionally trying to create two classes of Christians. But unfortunately, that's what gets communicated. "*The full-time church worker is the minister. I show up to get ministered to.*"

- Friends, that's not biblical. According to Scripture, every believer among us is a minister. **If you're a Christian, you have every right to call yourself 'Minister'**, to call the brother or sister in Christ next to you a "Minister".
- ❖ Paul taught earlier in Ephesians 2 that we were saved by grace. His point is that we're not saved *by* good works, but in chapter **2:10** he emphasizes that we are saved *for* good works, "*which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*"
 - **We have been saved to serve, to do the good works of service, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**
- ❖ Let me ask: *Christians, are you walking in a manner worthy of your calling as a minister of Christ?* Does your life reflect the attitude and priorities of a **Christian minister**, active in service in the name of our Lord? Or does it reflect that of a **Christian spectator**, passively watching others do the work that you've been called to join in?
 - There is a distinction between church leaders and church members, but the difference is not in who does the work of ministry. Every believer is responsible for that.

What Diversifies Us as a Church

- ❖ So if this common calling to minister is what unifies us as a church, now let's see what diversifies us. Look at chapter **4:7**: "*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*" Verses 1-6 were focused on the theme of unity in the one church, but now in v7, we read the word '*but*', which begins a shift of focus to the diversity found within the one body.
 - Far from being monotonous, the one body of Christ is full of exciting diversity, and we're not just talking about ethnicity or language. **The Apostle is describing a diversity among the members of the body in the varying measures of grace that Christ has gifted to each.** We're talking about a diversity in his gifts of grace.
- ❖ **Verse 7 is saying that Christ has sovereignly distributed gifts to his people in varying measure, without taking into account our works, otherwise they could not be known as gifts of grace.**
 - Now that word for 'grace' usually refers to saving grace like in Ephesians 2:8. But here in v7, we know it can't be referring to saving grace because it says that Jesus gives this grace in varying measure. But Scripture is clear that saving grace is poured out equally among all believers (Mt. 20:1-16).
 - The grace in v7 must be another kind of grace. I like to call it a *servicing grace* because, as we'll see, this grace is what enables us to serve the body of Christ.
- ❖ So what **unifies** us as a church is Jesus' *saving grace* poured out in equal measure on all his saints. BUT what **diversifies** us is Jesus' *servicing grace* distributed to his saints in varying measure.

- ❖ Keep reading in **v8**. “*Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”*” Here Paul is quoting **Psalm 68:18**. In that Psalm, Yahweh is described as a Victorious King, who in vv17-18 enters the sanctuary in the temple in Jerusalem, which is located on top of Mt. Zion. So in order to enter, the LORD must *ascend*.
 - Now in ancient times, after a military victory the king would return with a triumphant procession. He would parade through the city with a train behind him, including dancers, musicians, soldiers, spoils of war, and lastly the captives.
 - And at the height of the celebration, the king would receive a tribute from the conquered captives to signify their submission, and then he would distribute the gift to his own people. He would *receive* tribute and in turn *give* gifts.

- ❖ That is the imagery we find in Psalm 68, and now Paul is applying it to Jesus and his Ascension to the Father’s right hand. **His point is that Jesus is the Victorious King of Psalm 68 who has conquered his enemies and given gifts to his people.**
 - To prove this, Paul includes a parenthetical statement in **vv9-10**. “*(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)*”
 - His point is that for ‘*he*’ to ascend to heaven, ‘*he*’ had to have first descended to earth. And who is the only person in history to have both descended from heaven and then ascended back (cf. Jn. 3:13)? Only Jesus!

- ❖ Vv7-10 is Paul’s way of proving, exegetically, that Jesus is the Messiah, Israel’s long-awaited King. A King who died but who rose again victoriously and ascended to the Father’s right hand. And in doing so, he led a train of captives.
 - But his captives are not the devil and his demons. **His host of captives are actually forgiven sinners, who were once enemies but now reconciled by his blood, captured by his grace.** And to each, he has given a gift out of his serving grace.

- ❖ *Friends, are you in this train of captives? Are you captive to Jesus and his grace?* If not, will you surrender to him today? If you are still searching for peace with God, then I urge you to lay down your resistance and receive His peace, His forgiveness, and be captured by His grace. It takes an act of faith, asking him to include you in his train of captives.

- ❖ And to those of you in his train, to you believers, *what kind of gift has Jesus given you?* Verse 7 says ‘*grace was given to each one of us*’, so clearly you have a gift. *What is it?* Now you might be used to the term ‘*spiritual gifts*’, but I prefer to call them ‘*service gifts*’ because that’s what they are for. ***What is your service gift?***
 - *Want to know the best way to identify that?* Forget the survey. Just start serving. Try out various ministries, and look to see if your service is bearing any fruit in the lives of others. And listen for the affirmation of others, as they begin to recognize that truly, Christ has given you a gift for *this or that* work of ministry. Then you’ll have a better sense of the serving gift(s) that Christ has won for you.

What Leaders Do in a Church

- ❖ So our common calling to minister in the name of Christ is what unifies us as a church, and the multiplicity of gifts distributed among the body for the work of ministry is what diversifies us as a church. We were saved to serve and then gifted to serve in differing ways.
- ❖ Now let's look back at v11 and find out the big difference between church leaders and members. Read vv11-12 again. *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*
 - **Notice that, in this verse, the gifts Jesus gave are not described as particular abilities but as particular people – certain people who exercise certain Word-based gifts.** Paul lists out four.
- ❖ **First, the church is given the apostles and second, the prophets.** The **apostles** were those men who were eyewitnesses of the Risen Lord and personally commissioned by Him to witness to his death and resurrection. They included the twelve disciples (minus Judas), James the brother of Jesus, and Paul. Now the **prophets** could be referring to OT or NT prophets. I think Paul had the OT ones in mind because he already paired them with the apostles in chapter **2:20** saying they played a foundational role in the church.
 - He's referring to their role as divinely inspired authors of Scripture. The church is built on the foundation of the Bible with Christ as the cornerstone of that foundation. **So because the NT apostles and OT prophets have fulfilled their function, that is why Jesus no longer gives them to the church in the present day.** But their ministry still reaches us through the pages of Scripture. That's how these ancient ministers still serve us today.
- ❖ **Third, the church is given the evangelists.** This word is rare in Greek literature, so some think it was actually coined by Christians. It refers to people specifically engaged in the preaching of the *evangel*, the good news, to the lost. Now the only person in the Bible called an evangelist was Philip (Acts 21:8), and we see him exercising this gift in his famous encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). The modern day equivalent would be those individuals gifted in sharing the gospel in a real winsome, persuasive manner.
- ❖ **Fourth, the church is given the shepherds and teachers.** Notice there is no *'the'* before *'teachers'*, like you find before the other roles, meaning these two nouns are more closely related. Most commentators think Paul is referring to the same person, a **shepherd-teacher**.
 - These individuals are given to the church to shepherd the congregation like a flock – leading them, guarding them, feeding them, particularly through their teaching ministry. Shepherds are primarily responsible to feed their sheep the Word of God.
- ❖ Now the word 'shepherd' could also be translated as 'pastor', which is a term we're more used to. In ordinary speech in this church, the word 'pastor' usually refers to the full-time church worker, the shepherd employed by the church. A professional church leader.

- Growing up in this church, I always thought the pastors represented one office of church leadership and the elders represented a completely different office. The pastors were the paid professionals with degrees. They had the most clout. And the elders were just laymen who assisted the pastors in shepherding the flock.
- ❖ **But I've come to realize that, biblically, you can't find a distinction between pastors and elders in the early church.** In fact Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the NT where the noun 'pastor/shepherd' is ever used in reference to a church leader. Usually the Bible calls them 'elders' or 'overseers', and the word 'pastor' usually shows up as a verb describing what this particular leader does. He pastors/shepherds the church.
 - **I'm convinced that the Bible uses the terms elder, overseer, and pastor interchangeably.** They're all referring to the same church leader (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). But in the modern church, we've created unhelpful distinctions, particularly in separating the paid leaders from the lay leaders. I'll have more to say about this in a few weeks when we begin a series on the book of Titus.
- ❖ The point I want to make today is that church leaders, shepherd-teachers in particular, have been given to the church for a particular reason. **Contrary to popular belief, it's not to do the work of ministry on behalf of the congregation. It's to train the congregation so they can do the work of ministry. To equip the saints to become ministers in their own right.**
 - That's the main difference between a church leader and a church member. Both are responsible for the work of ministry, but the church leader has the added responsibility of making sure the members are properly trained and equipped to carry out whatever unique ministry Christ has called them to.

Conclusion

- ❖ Let me conclude by addressing two groups of people and drawing out a specific application.
 - 1) **The first group I have in mind are the saints** – those of you who profess faith in the Lord Jesus, who have been set apart for holy service and given with serving gifts.
 - I wouldn't be surprised if some of you have been going to church for years, **always looking to be fed but never realizing that the goal is for you to mature in your faith to a point where you're the one doing the feeding.**
- ❖ Too many church members are under the impression that they're simply here to receive the ministry of the leaders or at most to just support their ministry. To give financially to keep the ministries going. To help with more administrative tasks.
 - But let's leave the spiritual work – the discipling, the counseling, the teaching and shepherding – to church leaders, especially the paid staff.
- ❖ This is unbiblical thinking, and more often than not, we church leaders are responsible for perpetuating this myth. That's why we want to make a concerted effort this year to change that mindset. **If you are a Christian, realize that Jesus has personally gifted you and given you a calling to minister to others in his name.**

- **That means every believer should be actively involved in the spiritual work of our church** – sharing the gospel to non-believers, discipling a new believer or younger believer, reading the Bible with others, teaching the Bible to others, praying with others, calling or visiting newcomers, visiting a sick members in the hospital or homebound senior members where they live.
- ❖ But you might be thinking, “*That sounds great and all but I have no idea how to do that. I don’t know where to start.*” **Well that’s why Christ has given you leaders. Leaders who are here to equip you and train you to carry out this kind of ministry.**
 - Make it a resolution this year to seek God’s direction in where and how he wants you to minister, and then seek the leaders of this church to equip you in using your service gifts effectively for the kingdom of God and the work of the gospel.
- ❖ **2) Lastly, I want to address church leaders** – those of you called to serve in a leadership capacity in this church. That includes elders, deacons, fellowship leaders, coaches, small group leaders, and worship leaders.
 - What all of this means for you is that one primary way of measuring the effectiveness of your leadership is not simply to ask if you’re being faithful to your own calling BUT to also ask, “*Are the people you’re leading finding their callings, and are they being equipped to use their gifts to minister with you in the name of Christ?*”
- ❖ I’m sure you’re familiar with the old adage: Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish for himself, feed him for a lifetime.
 - But church leaders have to take it a step further. **Teach a man to fish for himself AND then teach him to catch enough to feed his family and neighbors and friends and co-workers.** Teach him how to minister to others within his calling as a fisherman.
 - **Better yet, teach a man to fish for himself AND then teach him how to become a teacher of fishermen.** That is what it looks like to equip the saints. That is the unique task that the leaders of the church have been given.
- ❖ *Leaders, how are you doing in this?* Perhaps you’re faithful in your own ministry, but have you equipped others to find and to fulfill their own unique ministries? Have you been investing your time, as a leader, to help someone else develop as a leader in their own right so they can partner with you in ministry?
 - Make it a resolution this year to seek training on how you can effectively lead others by equipping them to do the work of ministry with you.