

Text: Eph. 4:1-16

Title: "Appraising the gift of Christ"

Time: 4/30/2023 pm

Place: Heritage Baptist Church, Windham NH

Introduction: In 2014 an elderly Red Sox fan, named Gail, appeared on the Antiques Road Show with a baseball card collection. The collection had been passed down to her from her great-grandfather, whose mother ran a boarding house in Boston.

That boarding house was home to the 1871 Boston Red Stockings, the first baseball team to be paid professionally. The Red Stockings had given the young boy of the house a free pass to their game, where he purchased the cards of the whole team, including the famous Wright brothers and one of Al Spaulding, the first to field with a leather glove, and the eventual founder of the sports equipment that empire bears his name today.

Appraised at \$1 million, the collection ranks today as #9 in the top ten most valuable items ever appraised at the Antiques Road Show. The appraiser, Leila Dunbar, became emotional and started to cry as she estimated the collection's worth. What the baseball world gave away in 1871 for nothing, from our perspective today, is very valuable indeed.

Our passage speaks of some gifts that are amount to nothing in the world's eyes, but which are very valuable from God's eternal perspective (v. 11). These gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. I think we are correct to learn from Eph. 2:20, that the apostles and prophets were foundational gifts who then gave us our New Testaments, and then the evangelists and pastor-teachers are

gifts our churches still receive in an ongoing way to preach and teach our completed Bible in an ongoing way.

So, my charge for your local church this evening, on this happy occasion of the ordination of Brother Craig Brunson, is that we appraise this gift correctly from heaven's perspective. I want us to think about the true value of the gift of this brother and his family as God sees it, and as His Word appraises it.

I. Greatly value this gift because the Giver as been generous (vv. 7-10).

Illustration: One of the things that made the collection of 1871 baseball cards so valuable is that it included a letter of appreciation that the Boston Red Stockings wrote to Gail's great-great-grandmother. The team was visiting a team in Washington for a series, but they were rained out, so they all wrote a line to their boarder back home in Boston and signed their name.

Those signatures validate the collection and enhance its value. The boarder probably received many such letters from others, but this letter is part of a valuable collection because of who it was that gave it.

Application: Our text tells us that we are reading here about a gift of Christ (v. 7). Christ is the Giver. This alone gives the gift great value. As the Giver He is the fulfillment of a prophecy found in Psalm 68:18, which says that the Lord God of that Psalm would ascend on high and give gifts to men.

Paul explains how we know the Psalm spoke of Christ in His resurrection and ascension. He explains that, for the

Lord to ascend, He would first have to descend to the place lower than “on high,” namely the earth. This descending was the humiliation of the eternal Son of God.

While on earth Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life with the purpose of seeking and saving those who are lost. He died on the cross for the sin of sinners like you and me. He was buried, and He arose again victorious over sin and death. And He ascended to the right hand of the Father where He reigns now as the one who fills all things (v. 10). Whatever in our universe exists without Him is void, meaningless, and empty.

This is the Giver who gives us the servants of the Lord, evangelists and pastor-teachers. He had to die and rise to do so. He had to ascend to the Father to do so. He had to first become the filling of all things to do so. The gifts our passage speaks of were not easily obtained by the Giver. For this reason, we must greatly value them as He does. Greatly value this gift because the Giver has been extremely generous.

II. Greatly value this gift because the recipients are needy (vv. 12-16).

Illustration: Gail’s great-grandfather probably did not need baseball cards to live a healthy life. Evidently, Gail has no need for \$1 million, because she is determined to keep the collection rather than sell it. Her memorabilia are valuable, but not because it is necessary.

Application: The opposite is true for the gifts of our passage. They are valuable because they are essential. Jesus gives us these gifts because we have a great need for them.

Look at this list of needs these gifts are designed by the Giver to meet:

- The perfecting of the saints for their work of ministry.
- The edifying of the body of Christ.
- The unity of the faith.
- The knowledge of the Son of God.
- Growth into Christlikeness as His body.
- Protection from winds of false doctrine and the influence of lies.
- Our ability to love one another.

Jesus has given us what we have come this evening to receive because we are a desperately needy people and we have desperately needy people all around us. He told us to pray for gifts like this: "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:36-38).

We have a Savior who sees the harvest of multitudes in Central Asia, and He is moved with compassion for them. If we have failed to pray earnestly for these laborers, perhaps it is because we have not been moved with compassion about lost sheep the way our Savior was moved.

The servant of the Lord is His answer to the prayer of a church moved with compassion for needy sinners everywhere. Greatly value this gift as an answer to prayer, recognizing our churches' great need for it.

III. Greatly value this gift because it is a gift of grace (v. 7).

Illustration: In actuality, that \$1 million dollar set of baseball cards is little more than a dozen or so old pieces of pa-

per. What makes them valuable is not what those pieces of paper are in themselves, but rather the imprimatur they bear of the baseball players.

Application: Every true evangelist and pastor-teacher would confess readily that in our flesh dwells no good thing, nothing of great value. What makes us valuable ultimately is the imprimatur of God's grace in our lives. God has saved a sinner, sanctified a sinner, equipped a sinner, and called a sinner, and He has done it all by His grace. He has done it to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:6).

Sometimes it is easier for us to see the glory of baseball cards than it is to see the glory of the grace of God at work in the life of the Lord's servant. Many who would pay \$1 million for that card collection would never lift a finger to advance the ministry of the Lord's servant. They have no ability to correctly appraise a gift of grace. We must be different from that. Greatly value this gift because it is a gift of God's glorious grace.

Conclusion: Let this be what moves you to tears; let this be what your home treasures; let this be what you desire to pass down to your children; let this be what you would not take \$1 million for. Craig and Abby are gifts given by a generous Giver, given to us and those around us who are desperately needy, and given to the glory of God's grace.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching