

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Ephesians
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A Blended Family
Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Harris Creek, how are we doing? Let's go. Let's go. (When the lights come up, JP is wearing a moss green leisure suit [it's St. Patrick's Day], and the audience begins to laugh.) I'm not getting pinched. Not getting pinched. So, I asked my mother-in-law if I should wear this. She said, “Yeah, that would be funny.” She was right! I don't know how I feel about that.

Hey, I want you guys to help me think of a movie. This like the perfect opener for today. It's a movie where there's a team, and the team is trying to accomplish something. And there's people not on the team, and they're like the opposition, the enemy. Then at some point in the plot, they get added to the team, and at first there's adversity; but when they figure out how to work together, they go on to do great things. What movie is that? (Audience begins to call out movie titles.) What'd you say? *Remember the Titans*. What is it? *Mighty Ducks*. *Mighty Ducks*. Is that what you said? That was your contribution? It is in *Mighty Ducks*. What? *The Sandlot*. You guys are good at this game! Any others? *Miracle*. *Coast Guard*. Is that what it's called? *Coast Guard*? That's the name of a movie? Any others? *Air Bud*? (JP chuckles along with the audience.) *The Kingdom*. Is that a movie? Sure. There's always somebody that ruins the illustration for everybody. It's been played out in a lot of movies. A lot of movies.

That is the scene. I mean, *Remember the Titans* is a really clear one because there's this racial tension. They're on the outside, they get blended in. At first, they don't know how to work

together, then they figure out how to go on to do it. Anything, from the movie *Armageddon* to *Ocean's Eleven*. It's a plot where you're building this team to accomplish a goal, and at first there's adversity: "Hey, we don't know how to work together. I don't even know if I *like* you. But, once we figure out how to work together through our differences, we go on to do great things." And my friend in the front row is absolutely right. That is the plot that we're living in more ways than one. And that's where we're going to be in the Scripture today in Ephesians Chapter 2, verses 11 through 22.

So as a reminder, we're studying the book of Ephesians. We're kind of moving through verse-by-verse, section-by-section, chunk-by-chunk, to understand what is Paul saying to the church in Ephesus and surrounding churches about 62 AD? He's penning this letter. He's in prison in Rome, probably chained to a Roman soldier. He's writing this, maybe through a scribe. He actually wrote lots of books at this time: Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians. And so here we are, we're studying it, and we're saying, "All right, what is the eternal truth for us? Why did the Holy Spirit preserve this for thousands of years so that we would read it in church today, and look at it like a mirror and say, 'Okay, what changes do I need to make about my life after observing this text?'" The subject is brought in, blended, and built up. Those are the three words. The text hands me the alliteration today. A preacher's dream; brought in, blended, and built up.

Let me ask you a question. If I choose to show a particular ethnic group a lot of favor at the expense of other ethnic groups around them, what am I? You might say, "Racist." To which I might say, "Well then, is God racist?" Because that's the story of the Old Testament. And you've got to reconcile that. You say, "Well, why would you say that?" Because I don't do a really good job at tiptoeing around questions that I have in the text. I don't want to play that game. If we're looking at something that doesn't make sense. It's confusing. We should talk about it. Right? And it seems like this whole Old Testament is this story of God choosing a particular ethnic group of people and blessing them at the expense of others around them. That's a big part of more than half the Bible that you have, that you read and that your affections are stirred. And if we have this question, we should seek out an answer.

God is blessing them to be a blessing to others. And at some point, and this is so important for us to understand, they took their faith, and they made it about rules and rituals. Their heart drifted from God, and He says, "Okay, if you're not going to get the job done, then the message is going to go beyond you. And I'm going to begin to bless the nations myself." And that's where we come into play. If you're here and you're not of Jewish descent, you're not ethnically a Jew, then this message is extremely important to you because I've heard it said, we must learn history or we risk repeating it. And what's the story of the Old Testament? God choosing a people, blessing them abundantly, setting them free from slavery. Setting them free and then them saying, "Wait, I want to go back to slavery. I don't want to follow You. I'm rebelling against You." And even toward the New Testament, growing prideful and arrogant in their holy huddles saying, "Hey, we're just going to circle up. We're better than them. We know God and we're going this way." And they dumbed their faith down to rules and rituals. And we better know that. We've got to understand, what does that mean for us? The reality is we've been blended in because God is trying to accomplish something, and you don't want to drop the baton. You want to understand what is it that he wants to do? Where do I fit into this greater narrative of what God is accomplishing? And so, a preview today is we've been brought into God's kingdom, we've been blended with the Jews, and we are being built up into God's temple. That's where we'll go, how we'll break up the text.

By way of review, we started just talking about the Church in Ephesus where people are turning from black magic. They're burning their sorcerer scrolls. They're following Jesus, and the Church, one of the most powerful churches of antiquities is being built up, the Church in Ephesus. Paul writes this to them and the surrounding areas. In Week One, we talked about this reality that you and I have been chosen by God to know Him, to be a part of His family, to be His children. And then we looked at a prayer for the Ephesian church that we can learn from. What is Paul praying for them that the Holy Spirit preserved for us to read and understand? And then last week is the Gospel straightforward. **“⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** Or prepared in advance for us to walk in, that God has something that He wants to accomplish. And then, BOOM, here we are right there.

We're His masterpiece. So what? **“¹¹ Therefore,”** Therefore, because God prepared you for these works in advance, the things He wants to do. **“¹¹ Therefore, remember ...”** And that word *remember* is going to be repeated, so don't repeat history. **“... remember that formerly you who are Gentiles ...”** Now, I think for a long time I'd read the Bible. The Gentiles? Oh yeah. I'm the Gentile. Who are the Gentiles? What is that? The Gentiles. That word just means the nation. So, if you're here, your Chinese background, Persian background, Indian background, English background, German background, Czechoslovakia, Polish, if you are any other ethnicity than Jewish, that *Gentiles*, that's you. That's you. This is for you and me. **“... that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” ...”** And then parenthetically, he says something important here. He's trying to let you know, he says, **“... (which is done in the body by human hands)—”** He's saying, “Hey, that thing, that covenant, that was the mark of God's people, something changed. It's just physical now. Do that if you want to for the sake of cleanliness or don't, it has no implications for faith whatsoever. He says in **Matthew 3:9**, **“Don't say to me that you are from Abraham, for God can raise up from these stones sons of Abraham.”** Saying, “Hey, that distinction doesn't mean anything anymore.” And then Verse 12 starts with that word again. **“... ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”**

Let me just start by saying. He's repeating the admonishment or the exhortation, for us to remember, I don't think we have. Okay, I don't, this isn't everybody's favorite memory verse. Ephesians 2:8-10, you've probably got that on a coffee cup. This one, you're like, “Oh, there's a lot of words. What does that mean?” And he says, “Remember, remember. Hey, don't forget this.” And I think we have. I think we've forgotten. He says, “This is who you were. You're here, not of Jewish descent. You were separate from Jesus. You were excluded from citizenship, foreigners to the covenants, without hope and without God, without Jesus and destined for hell. That's who you were.” And this is what you need to know: the Bible, the culture that Paul's writing this to, is riddled with extreme ethnic prejudice. Today, you would call it racism. The Jews of this time, they wouldn't want to go anywhere near you, eat with you, and in fact, if they went into your house, when they would leave, they would dust off their shoes so as not to carry out the pagan dust. That was commonplace here. If they were going to a place and there were Samaritans there, they would take a two-day detour to

avoid them. Now, if you feel I'm being anti-Semitic, no, it goes both ways. This is what Paul is addressing right here, but certainly, the prejudice goes both ways.

And so, this is the tension that this is being written into right here. The net result for the Jews was a sense of entitlement and elitism, all while being oppressed by the Roman government. But a real sense of, "Hey, we're better than them." And you kind of see this sometimes in camps of a really high view of God's sovereignty, which don't get me wrong – I have a high view of God's sovereignty – but in those camps, you will sometimes see this kind of *look down on, make fun of*, you might say *bully*, speak in a way that is inconsistent with the Scriptures. You'll see preachers do it, Christians do it. It's different than what the Scripture calls us to.

So, we were outsiders, watching the Jews enjoy the promises of God and now we've been invited in. Paul is saying, "Don't you ever forget that." My first point is you have been brought in.

1. *You Have Been Brought In*

A couple of observations here. One, I want you to know, I'm going to give you the answer to a test question. It's really important because I hear it all the time. "Hey, how did you become a Christian?" "Oh, I've always been a Christian." "How did you become a Christian?" "Man, really ever since I was born." I hear that all the time. Waco, Texas. Churchgoers. You understand, I want you to know, plain and simple, that is not true of anyone. No one was born a Christian. At some point in your journey, you became a Christian. You don't have to know the day or the time. I hear that all the time, too. "Oh, I don't know the time," It's okay! You don't need to know when. It's great if you do. You don't have to, though, to get into Heaven. At some point, you were, what Scripture says, justified. That just means declared righteous. Now, the confusing part of what we've been learning, is that in the very beginning, you were predestined and you were called, chosen by God, and then at some point, justified. And so that's kind of the difficulty we have of explaining things in chronological order, when God sits outside of time, and He knows the end from the beginning. So, there are some challenges for us getting our heart around that. But my point is, no one was born a Christian.

Second thing I want to bring your attention to, is that at one point in history, you couldn't have become one. It wasn't available to you. So, before you can become a Christian, it had to be made available to people like you. Again, assuming, speaking to those non-Jews. Jewish is confusing because it's both a faith and an ethnicity now. That's not true of Muslims. That's not true of Hindus. That's not true of Buddhists. That's not true of Christians. But when I use the word *Jewish*, that word can mean my ethnicity, or it can mean my faith. I can be Jewish and a Christian. I can be ethnically Jewish and believe that Jesus is the Messiah. And I can be Jewish faith and not of Jewish ethnicity. So that can be a little bit confusing. And so, the Gospel has been made available to us. And again, it's not an anti-Jewish message. The Gospel is available to Jewish people also, as I just said.

I've actually shared the gospel with a Jewish leader once. I was in a conversation with two Jewish leaders, high up, a part of that faith, devout leading others in Judaism. And I said, "You guys are still looking for the Messiah, right?" And they said, "Yeah, absolutely. This is what we believe." They kind of were sharing that with me. And I said, "Hey, what about

Jesus? Why wasn't He the Messiah?" This is what they said, and it's going to surprise you. The first guy says, I'm telling you verbatim, these are his words. He says, "Huh? I don't know. I've never considered it." And the other one chimes in and says, "Yeah. I've never thought about that." Now, I think, having had that conversation a few times with Christians, I think that really surprises us, which is a little bit of our arrogance. Of course, everybody knows what we believe. But they said, "Oh, wait. Hold on. So, what is it that you believe about Jesus?" These aren't fresh Jewish converts. These are the leaders in Judaism. So, there's a great Gospel starting point for you. It's like, "Hey, what about Jesus?" Pretty much with any world religion, by the way, or atheist or agnostic. Any faith. "Hey, what about Jesus?"

So, this mystery has been made known to you. This is incredible news for us. It's that the Creator of the heavens and the earth has adopted us now as His children. "That's my daddy! He owns the whole world. That's awesome!" What Paul's trying to say is, "I want you to remember where it started." And the imagery that I get is the movie, *The Sandlot*. Somebody said it here. (JP points to the right side of the room.) What's his name? Scotty Smalls. He's new to town, and everything revolves around the sport of baseball. And he's just there, with his fingers in the chain link fence, being left out because, "Hey, he's the new guy. He's not going to play. He's not one of us. He's not allowed." All he can do is just peer through the chain link, got his fingers in, and he's just looking and thinking, "They get to have the fun. They get to play the game. I'm on the outside." And then at some point, as the plot progresses, "You're one of us! You're invited, and you can play! You're on the team! We got your back!" And that's what happened. We were outside looking in, "Look at those weird, funny hats. They gather on Saturdays. What is it?" And then at some point this message of salvation is available to you. Let's go.

14 For he himself is our peace, ... Underline it **"... who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."** There's actually a dividing wall, at this time, in the temple in Jerusalem. There's some disagreement on what this means. There's the Gentile courts and the Jewish courts, and there's a wall in between. And so, some scholars think that Paul is referring to that. I think he's speaking spiritually. He's using that wall as an illustration or a metaphor to say, "Hey, there's a wall between us and that wall is being torn down, because it didn't literally come down as he wrote this. **"By setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations, his purpose was to create in himself,"** that's Jesus, **"one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,"** underline it, **"and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace,"** underline it, **"to you who were far away and peace"** underline it, **"to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the father by one spirit."** A really clear message here. Hey, remember, remember, remember there was a dividing wall of hostility. Hostility is mentioned twice, but he came to bring peace, to make the two groups one group, that they would work together to accomplish one end goal. There's something for us to do, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do. What is it? Go to church. No! No, no, no, no. Tithing? No, that's not it. No, you don't just gather up and pray. No, all those things are important. They should be a part of who we are. But he's talking about building a team and accomplishing something. This is the angst I feel. I always feel it right about now. It's like at some point, when did this fall out of our faith? When did we start reading this book and think, "Oh, but it's different now. It's different. Now, He just wants us for an hour and a half on Sundays. That's really what He's looking for."

That's not Christianity! It never, ever has been Christianity! He's blended us. I come from a blended family. Dad was married, had my sister and brother. Mom was married, had my sister. Mom and Dad get married. Dad gets custody of the two of them. Mom gets custody of my sister. They get married, they have us. I heard my whole life, "It's his, hers, and ours. It's his, hers, and ours." I'm the ours. And so, you can imagine, right? Four siblings, one bathroom. Like we all grew up under the same roof, kind of Brady bunch, if you will. And we've got to figure out how to get along. There is a, "Hey, how are you?" moment, where my brothers and sisters are meeting for the first time. "Oh, so you're my new sibling, or we're going to be siblings." We become siblings, and we've got to figure out how to get along.

And that's the picture that Paul is writing to us. The Holy Spirit is writing to us here. Why do we have to figure out how to get along? Because 2 Corinthians 5:18 says we have been given a ministry of reconciliation. We've been given a ministry of reconciliation. We're putting the pieces back together. And so, my second point is you have been blended.

2. *You Have Been Blended*

You have been blended. Christians are not divisive. The word that you see here is peace. The Gospel is divisive. You can present the Gospel to somebody, and they can respond to it a number of ways. We, you and I, are agents of peace. What does this mean? Let me show you. I have the "gift" of sarcasm. So, in college, with my friends, it was like survival of the fittest. And whoever could put the other one down or say the cruelest, crudest thing about the other one's mom, (I wasn't a believer, wasn't a Christian) that's who raised to the top. That was the king of the hill, if you will. And so, for a long time, that was there. Holy Spirit comes in my life and I'm like, "All right, what do I do with this "gift"?" And what you can do with it, and a lot of people do, is you just sit there with the Bible open and you say, "This is what I believe." And then you make fun of people who don't believe it. You say, "Well, they're stupid!" You want a fast-track way to grow a platform? That's how you do it. And that mindset suits me, if you will. That comes naturally. I know how to do that. The problem with that is the Gospel. That we are now agents of peace and ministers of reconciliation, putting things back together. Here's what I've learned: people who are really good at *that*, they're not really good at putting things back together. They're really good at creating division and a holy huddle around them, saying, "This is my team. Who's your team? Let's go to battle!" That's not the Gospel.

But you can take this too far. I want you to know, it is okay for you to have a Biblical conviction on things, and it's okay for you to express that Biblical conviction. Like, you can say, "A man should not sleep with a man." Should not be. "A woman should not become, a man." Should not be. "We should not terminate life in the womb." It should not be.

Now, as I say that, there's some of you so uncomfortable right now. "Wait, can he say that?" Of course I can. The Scripture does. But *how* I say that really matters, and *who* I'm saying that to, if at the end of saying it, I'm not willing to have them sit down at my table, something's gone really wrong. If I can't be with them and love them and care for them, and my message is not attractive; not just that message, but the totality of it, where they're not looking at your life and saying, "Listen, I disagree with you on the baby thing, but man, I got it. I got it. You're clearly onto something. Your life is so marked by peace. I mean, there's just something about you that I want for myself and I hate, I *really* disagree with what you said, but man, the way you said it, it just kind of moved my heart that way." So, if you and I are

followers of Jesus, and we don't know how to handle the trans person handing us our coffee, then at some point, some area of our life, we've stopped following Jesus. Because when you can think about it, well, what should it look like? This is where the whole WWJD thing is actually helpful. What *would* Jesus do? Would it be the finger in the chest, "Hey, let me teach you something." Or would it be like, "Hey, tell me about your background, your story, your upbringing. Man, where'd this come from? Like there's, I want to get to know you. Hey, let me get another cup of coffee. What time are you off?" And you say, "Who does that?" Good question. Followers of Jesus do that. Followers of Jesus do that.

That's the normal, natural way that the Gospel has progressed. And as it turns out, the "Hey, let me give you a piece of my mind," and come with a really well-crafted video and argument that's airtight and call you stupid.' Turns out that doesn't work very well. That doesn't cause anyone to win.

These are lessons I had to learn the hard way. There's no room for treating anyone with less than dignity in the gospel. The gospel is a story of you being given more than you could ever deserve. And so, what you do when you have a right understanding of the gospel is, you give to others more than they could ever deserve. It's called grace. And this is what we're called to. We weren't saved for nothing. We weren't saved for nothing. We were saved for a purpose.

Let me take you back to First Baptist Quero, Texas. There was a little three-on-three tournament this year in Quero High School. I think the year was 1998. And this particular year we had what was called the Dream Team in basketball. There were three guys whose chemistry was just incredible: David Maldonado from the outside. I just remember he would shoot the ball anywhere in the court. He would yell the word "Stroke!" and it would just swish any time. It's like, "How do you do that?" He shoots the ball, ball's going in the basket every time. Guarded, unguarded, fade away from the threes, from half court, wherever it is, he shoots the ball, it's going in. It was unbelievable. But then there are the Twin Towers, Michael Williams and Bobby Mays, and they're both like 6'5" or something. It wasn't like obnoxiously tall, like me, but tall, and they were athletic, which is a good pairing, turns out. They would throw the ball off the back wall, and catch it in air. and with David, their chemistry. David would throw the ball up, alley-oop, backwards, forwards, 360. It was a show. It was a spectacle. And First Baptist Church is hosting a three-on-three tournament and the three of them are a team, but it's teams of four. And they say, "Jonathan, you're on our team." And I say, "Why?" And they're like, "Hey, we need a fourth. Come on." And so, I'm thinking, "Uh oh!" Because I'm not good by the way, if you're new here. You're thinking, "Oh, he's tall. He must be good." No, that doesn't have to be true. I'm not even on the team. I quit athletics by this point. They say, "Hey, you're our fourth." And so, they're playing and it's a spectacle. I mean, they're throwing it off the back wall, dunking it, even though it doesn't count. Because it was out, just to show you, just to intimidate the other team. Just dominating. Other teams haven't even scored. Complete shutout.

But I remember David coming up to me, saying, "Hey, you're in." I said, "No, no. I'm good, man. I'm watching. That's amazing! Y'all keep doing your thing, man!" He goes, "No, no, no. You're gonna play!" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you're on the team, because you're on the team." And I think, like some of us have to hear that this morning. It's like, "Oh man, I love these seats. They're comfortable. Man, it's good. It's a good message. Yeah, man, it's good. I love the worship today. That new song. That's great. Yeah, I even lift my hands up, move. I love watching the professionals. Like some people are called to foster. That's great.

Fill their empty bedrooms, man, that's awesome. That whole trans coffee thing. I'm gonna think about that. You know, that's for somebody. Somebody's gonna do that. And he's up there teaching. That's good. He's got that gift. You know, the teaching gift. That's not really my thing. People in the parking lot, you know, it's awesome. Hey, thank you. Good to see you, Mr. Parker.”

And I think you just got it here right now. You're going to play because you're on the team. If you're not on the team, you don't know Jesus, you're here, man, hang out as long as you want. Hope you see the fragrant aroma of Christ and are moved *to* Him. If you're here and you know Jesus, get in the game! It's time. If you're like, “Oh, but I will if God tells me to, you know. I'll need a sign.” (JP jumps and waves his arms) There's your sign.

“¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.” We're His children. What is this? This is like a recap. You've been brought in and blended. And then he says the word **“²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”** Our foundation of faith is Jesus Christ. **“²¹In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”** So, where it says, **“²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,”** it's saying the apostles' and the prophets' foundation, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ or Jesus Christ Himself. **“²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

God is making His home among us. Who? Who's the us? Us. Who? People who are very different, who don't get along, who don't like each other. Different backgrounds, different socioeconomic statuses, different ethnicities, different belief systems about investments and buying homes and buying cars and Bitcoin. All kinds of things that we can disagree on. But when we agree that Jesus Christ is Lord, we better learn how to get along, because if you can't, you've got to go back to, “Do I actually have the Holy Spirit?” There are people in the flock and controversy follows you. Division follows you. Explosive bouts of anger follow you. Go back to it. “Man, do I really? Am I sure? The spirit of peace. Does he dwell in me?” Like sometimes you should stay in a dysfunctional relationship so that you can learn, but I don't mean dating relationship. I mean like friendships, so that you can learn how to grow. My single friends, they say, “How do I prepare for marriage?” I say, “Get a dysfunctional roommate. It's the best training.”

The soil in Woodway is awful. It's clay and it expands and contracts. So you have to have a good foundation, because if not, your house will crumble on it. And if you build your faith on anything other than Jesus, it's going to crumble. There are entire Instagram and TikTok accounts right now of people whose faith has crumbled because they built it on rules and rituals and people and regulations and other ideologies under the banner of Christianity, but it wasn't built on Jesus. He's the only foundation that's going to hold you up. And so, my third and final point is you are being built up.

3. *You are Being Built Up*

You are being built up, built into something. God is building His home among us. Listen, Monica and I, my wife and I, had the opportunity to build a house. One of the exciting days

in building a house, the foundation is laid. Get the post-tension slab, you got rebar, and cable. Cables going through it, holding it tight. All kinds of stuff, holding that slab together, and then it's time to go up. What happens next is a truck shows up, and it drops off the building supplies, bricks, and sticks. Two-by-fours and boards, and sheet rock, and plywood and then, bricks on pallets and pallets of bricks. And really, you're looking at your house on the ground. And it's Lego time, Lincoln log time, right? We're going to make sense of all this and begin to put it together. A good builder is going to inspect that.

And when you build, there's a giant trash bin there. Sometimes it's made out of fence, and sometimes it's an actual trash bin. If a brick is broken, it's thrown in the trash bin. If a board's not straight, it's thrown away. If there's a knot in it that makes it not usable, it's thrown away. We want to build this out of good supplies. I love this idea that God then takes that trash bin of broken people and says, "I'm going to build something out of *this*." People with stories of abuse. People with stories of hurts. People with stories of habits. People with stories of, "Hey, I grew up in church and I didn't do any of that. And I've always wondered, is life over there?" Or, I'm bent towards self-righteousness. I'm tempted to judge those. And God says, "Hey, if you will humble yourself, if you will realize your need for a builder, and not just a desire to be alone, a piece of broken brick by yourself." But if you'll say, "No, I want to play nice with others. I want to play well in the sandbox. I want to learn to get along." Then God says, "I'll build my Home out of you." And the Church, that word, the first time it shows up in Scripture, it's the word *assembly*. That God is assembling something. He's putting something together out of those who will humble themselves. His building supplies are broken people and the foundation is a person who was broken for us, Jesus Christ. That's a picture of the Church. We have a job to do. He's building us together for a purpose.

And so, in summary, we have been brought into the Kingdom of God by the blood of Jesus. We have been blended in with the Jews who trusted in Jesus as the Messiah. We're being built up into God's temple, an army of God's people, making a home for God to live in forever.

Last night I watched a movie about a man who lived 1600 years ago. He was kidnapped at the age of 16 and taken to another country where he was forced to work as a slave. He endured physical abuse at the hands of these people, and he worked there and lived there as a slave for six years. When he was a Jesus follower, God showed up to him in a dream and said, "I'm going to give you a way out by way of a boat, a ship, that's tied to a dock. I want you to go find it." He wakes up, he travels 200 miles, indeed finds the ship that's going back to his home country, which is today northwest England. You guys know who I'm talking about? St. Patrick. Patrick wasn't Irish. He was British, captured by the Irish, which was the worst nation in the known world. Incest, bestiality, abuse were all commonplace there. Slavery. So, he goes back to the comforts of his land. Having escaped, he's been set free. When God speaks to him again, and stirs his heart around the people who had left him with scars and trauma. And he says, "I've got to go back." And everybody said, "You are out of your mind." He takes a boat back to Ireland, and when he gets there, they have tied him to this Druid prophecy that a crazy man is going to come from the seas. So immediately they capture him, they chain him up, they beat him, and they rob him. And he stays.

And he begins to share the Gospel with those people. To tell them about the love of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. When he got there, Ireland was among the worst nations in the

known world. When he died there in Ireland, it was the most Christian nation of the known world. Why? Because of the faithfulness, humility, love, and obedience of one single person.

If you want to change the world, it's not going to be your sarcasm. It's not going to be your quick-witted put down. It's not going to be your well-crafted reel. It is going to be your steadfast faithfulness to declare the truth and love hand-in-hand. And all of you, every person listening, if you are a Christian, have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do. Right now, you need to ask yourself, and I'm talking to you, not "*you*" (indicating the room as a whole), but *you* (pointing to an individual). If you're in the commons, I'm talking to *you*. What did God create me to do? What is the reconciliation that needs to take place? What parts of my calloused heart need to die? And if all of us did that, just us in the room, but just you, if just you did that, the world as we know it would never be the same. No one is too old. No one is too young. Everyone has a faithful next step. You need to determine right now what that is. I'm going to pray that you would.

Father, would you help us know what that is? Would you raise up out of this group some Saint Patricks? Would you raise up out of these saints some Patricks and Patricias? Some faithful servants of Jesus that would declare to those that we are tempted to hate, Your goodness. Would you soften our hard hearts? Give us a vision of hope and help us to live as you've called us to. In the name of Christ. Amen.