



Ephesians 2:11-22
Inclusive Love

Last week we saw the encouraging news of the gospel – that we were once dead in our sins, but God came to us and gave us life – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is at work in us. And we saw that God has a purpose for the life of the Christian. We looked at that important and powerful statement in

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And my hope is that God is using that to agitate us, to stir us up to love and good works. My hope is that the Holy Spirit has speaking to you this week, confirming things, expanding things, unsettling you. I hope you've been thinking about all these things and asking yourself and asking God – am I walking in the good works God has for me? Am I on the right track? Even if it involves a blessed ordinariness? Or do you need to step back, step out, or step up? Is God calling you to correct your path, modify your direction, or blaze a new trail?

He has a plan for your life. You are His workmanship. But, do you look like it?

And remember, I said last week that if you want some equipping for the life and ministry that God has called you to, anything from some mentoring, some discipling in the basics of the Christian faith, or some training for ministry, let us know. That's what God has put us together for. Christ is the head, and we are the body. And the pastors especially have been put here to equip the saints, that's you, for the work of the ministry. So if God is burdening you, saying now is the time, let us know. Let's figure out what to do about it, together.

So Paul is telling the Ephesians, and us by extension, who we are in Christ and where we're headed. But he also wants us to remember where we've come from and how absolutely unimaginable it is that we're here.

Eph 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh

“Gentile” was the term the Jews used for anyone who was not an ethnic Jew. Similar to the way the Greeks called everyone else Barbarians. The Jews, also had another name for outsiders

—who are called **Uncircumcision** by what is called the **Circumcision made in the flesh by hands**—

Remember, a defining characteristic of the Jews was circumcision, which they viewed as a sign of the covenant God had made with them, so Gentiles were also “Uncircumcised” and

these were most often used in derogatory ways – this is name calling, and very impolite name calling.

12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Paul is reminding these non-Jewish Christians of the fact that they once had no connection to Israel, they had no idea that God has promised to send a Messiah, they didn't know what was going on.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

There is a lot for us to dig into here, but the first thing we need to note this morning are the first two words of verse 11, "Therefore remember."

Paul wants the non-Jewish Christians in Ephesus to remember their past and not lose sight of this amazing thing God has done in saving them. When the Bible tells us to remember things, it's probably for a reason – it's probably because we're so prone to forget. And I have to confess that's true for me personally. I forget how weird it is that I am a Christian, which is exactly what Paul wanted the Christians in Ephesus to remember.

Two weeks ago though, God opened my eyes and helped me to see the mystery of my salvation in a fresh way.

Several times a year I get together with some of the other pastors of Calvary Chapel churches in our area – from Baltimore down to Richmond and Lynchburg and everywhere in between. Well, two weeks ago we got together for lunch down at Calvary Chapel Lynchburg, and they had invited some guests to come in and share with us – a ministry from Israel that reaches out to high school students and soldiers in churches in Israel. So, they're doing youth and college/career age ministry for Jews and Arabs who have become believers in Christ.

And the man who telling us about their ministry said, "You know, when people find out that I am Jewish and also a believer in Christ, they think it's amazing. And they want to know how I came to faith in Christ. As if that's shocking or weird. And I tell them, 'No, it's not. I'm a Jew. Jesus was a Jew. What's really amazing is that you, who are not Jews have come to worship a Jewish Messiah. That's what's really mind-blowing."

Can you let that sink in for a minute? Here's a man who is Jewish by birth, by ethnicity, born to Jewish parents. And we think it's a novelty that he would be saved. And he says no, what's really crazy is that any of us, non-Jews, non-Israelis, would be saved.

Paul is saying the same thing, telling the Ephesians to remember that they were once separated from God, with no knowledge of Him, completely ignorant of His promise to send

a Savior for the world. They weren't going to synagogue, they didn't grow up hearing stories about Noah and Moses and King David. They didn't know about the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. They didn't know God had promised to send a Messiah to save people from their sin. That promise had been given to the people of Israel, and it wasn't widely known outside of Israel at the time.

You see, Paul is writing to people who lived in Ephesus who had no prior connection to Judaism, the patriarchs, the prophets, or the Temple - at least not the Temple in Jerusalem. They had a different temple, a very famous temple in fact. Ephesus was home to the great temple of Diana, or Artemis as she was known to the Romans. Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

So how did people living in this city who were not Jews come to worship a Jewish Messiah? How did they go from "[being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world](#)" to become Christians? That's not a logical sequence of events.

But God was calling them to Himself. They were [brought near by the blood of Christ](#). And Paul is encouraging them - don't lose sight of how unlikely all of this is.

Many of us have grown up in America, which has had strong Christian traditions. After all, many of our country's original settlers came here looking for a place where they could practice their Christian faith freely and openly according to their convictions. So, certain aspects of Christianity feel like they're a part of our broader culture and it doesn't seem so strange that we would come to worship this way.

We've forgotten what Paul said to remember: that it's still remarkable that we worship Jesus and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs of the Jews.

Every now and then we need to be shocked by a conversation like the one I had two weeks ago that shakes up our daily perspective and assumptions and reminds us not to take our Christian faith for granted.

It reminds me of another time when God really got my attention over the way the gospel can change our lives in the most unexpected and unprecedented ways.

I served for several years on the staff of a missions sending organization, it's how I met Matt and Peg - we put together a trip to Kenya in 2004 with Matt and Peg leading people from their church and me serving as the missions representative. And one of the ministries we went to help out with was a church that had been planted by one of our missionaries, Robbie Gordon. Robbie is Samoan, a large man. And he caught a lot of attention in Nairobi where you don't see many, or really, any, other Samoans.

Robbie loved Jesus. In the most amazing ways, he just bubbled over with the love and joy of Christ. At the time he was single. But he eventually met and married a Kenyan woman who was tall and beautiful and also deeply in love with Jesus. Her name was Elizabeth and

she was from the Luo tribe. Not long after they married it hit me: in all probability, it is very likely, in fact, almost certain, that no Samoan/Luo couple has ever existed before this moment in human history.



How are a man from the Pacific Islands and a woman from Western Kenya ever going to meet? Well, this couple met because they were both following Jesus, who was born in Israel and traveled to Egypt once as a child, but spent the rest of his life in Israel. Yet, knowing Him led a Samoan to travel to Kenya, and meet and marry a local woman and have a daughter, creating a unique mixture of the most beautiful DNA, that has never existed before in human history.

Friends, do not forget the amazing reality of what has happened to us in Christ. Today the body of Christ includes Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexican, Native American, Argentinian, Indian, Pakistani, Egyptian, and many, many, more tribes, languages, and nationalities.

How did we wind up worshipping the God of the Jews? They've never been more than a tiny fraction of the world's population. They don't have much land. They've only had one significant kingdom and that was around 3000 years ago. So why have they had such an incredible impact on the world – on the people in Ephesus and on us in Fairfax? It's not logical or sequential in strictly human terms.

And Paul wants the Ephesians, and us today, to remember that. To remember that we who were once far off have been brought near. And that's a miracle. That's supernatural. That's evidence that there is a God who loves us and who has taken enormous steps to reach us.

There were two points in human history when everyone alive had direct access to personal knowledge of God.

Adam and Even knew God directly and personally and had the opportunity to tell their children everything about Him. But things went wrong quickly. Mom and dad sinned personally and were evicted from the Garden of Paradise God had established for them, and you know what happens when sinners have kids? It turns out the kids are sinners too. And so, their first offspring, Cain and Able became the first murderer in human history and his victim.

Things never really improved from there. In fact, although Adam and Even knew God personally before they sinned and could have, and perhaps did, pass on everything they knew about God to their kids, the trajectory of human history was still drifting farther and farther from God as time went by.

Things eventually got so bad that God decided to pour out His judgment through a flood that wiped out the world. Everyone died, except Noah and his sons and their wives. So you had eight people who survived the flood and then got off the boat and eventually spread

out to repopulate the whole world again. But at that point in history, everyone alive had access to direct, personal, knowledge of God. They knew who He was. They knew what He had done, they knew of His judgment of sin, they knew He had provided a means for them to escape that judgment. All they had to do was keep passing that information along to their kids.

But once again, something went wrong. They didn't pass the message or the message wasn't received. So God made another attempt to reach out to men and reveal Himself.

This time He chose one man, Abraham, who lived in modern Iraq, and said, "Abraham, I am God. And I'm going to use you to be a blessing to all mankind. I'm going to give you children, I'll make you into a nation, and I'll give you a land that will be your home" (Gen 12:1-3). That nation and that land eventually became known as Israel.

Now, God could have chosen anyone at that time. He could have chosen someone from the Indus River Valley or China or Spain where other cultures were flourishing at the time. But He reached down into modern Iraq and chose Abraham and created the Jews because He wanted to. We don't really get much information about why Abraham, and why the Jews. It's just the way God choose to do it.

But He did choose them, and make a covenant with them, that they would be His special people, the ones He would use to reveal Himself to the rest of humanity, and the ones through whom He would bring a Savior who would deliver us from the penalty of sin.

As part of that whole process God gave the Jews a sign of the covenant He was making with them – circumcision, a removal of a section of the man's flesh that would mark them and remind of them, daily, of their collective identity and purpose.

He also gave them specific instructions, through Moses, regarding how to live and how to worship.

He gave them boundaries when it came to religion and worship. Only certain people could be priests, only certain things could be sacrificed, you could only worship God in certain ways. And He established a center for worship – first the tabernacle, a movable tent, and then later, once they were settled in the land of Israel, the Temple. He also gave them a king and established their kingdom.

So you had this nation of people who were set apart by God for His purposes. They did things differently than the other nations around them; they had different traditions and worship and daily life. God was trying to do something unique through them that would impact the rest of the world. Unfortunately, just like Adam and Eve's descendants, and just like Noah's descendants, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Moses and David, didn't hold on tightly to what God was saying and they tended to drift away from Him too.

So God sent them prophets to call them back, and to remind them of who God was. These men did miracles and delivered fiery sermons or spoke words of comfort, all in an effort led by God to keep the Jews close to Himself.

During all of this time, provision was made for non-Jews to have a place in what God was doing¹. If non-Jews were seeking the God of the Jews, they could be accepted into the community of faith. Some elements of Jewish Law kept Jews distinct from foreigners, but the intent was always purity not absolute exclusion. The important thing was: which direction was influence flowing? If the Jews were leading the non-Jews in increasing knowledge of and dedication to God, then things were fine. But if the non-Jews were leading the Jews away from God, then there was a need for separation.

Unfortunately, over time, the Jews began to think of themselves as superior to other people. After all, they were God's chosen people. And they began to isolate themselves further and further from the people they were supposed to affect. By the time Jesus came along, some of them were praying things like "O God, I give you thanks that I am a Jew, not a Gentile or a dog" as part of their daily prayers.

During the time when Jesus walked the earth, there were actually signs posted around the Jewish Temple warning non-Jews not to come any further.

Archeologists have found one such sign, carved in stone, that reads:

"No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death, which will ensue."²



Does that sound like an invitation to the religion that welcomes people from around the entire world or would compel a Samoan to move to Kenya and marry a Luo? Do you understand why it's shocking to an Israeli youth ministry leader that so many non-Israelis would worship His God?

Do you see why God, through Paul, is telling us to remember how miraculous it is that we who were far off from God would be brought near? How did it all happen? How did we Gentiles wind up getting pulled into this supernatural story that began with God calling Abraham?

Simple. We were brought in by Jesus.

¹ Is 56:1-8;

² To learn more: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Warning_inscription

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Eph 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

Jesus knocks down the wall of segregation between Jews and non-Jews and brings us all together at the foot of the cross.

And here's a little bit of extra information for those of you who know your Bible well. Paul is writing this letter to the Ephesians from a Roman jail. Why was he there? Because he was arrested after a riot broke out when some of the Jews accused him of bringing a non-Jew into the Temple area, past those signs warning of death. (Acts 21:28-31).

Now, he didn't really do it, but that's what he was accused of one day in the Temple and that's what started the riot that led to his arrest. And now he's sitting in a Roman jail writing about the fact that Jesus has "**broken down the middle wall of separation.**" Consider how important this notion is to him and those who know why he is in jail.

He goes on to tell us even more about what Jesus has done to bring Jews and non-Jews together in a salvation that is for the entire world:

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

The message to the Ephesians is the shocking and unexpected fact that God has brought Ephesians and Jews together to worship the same God. And they're not doing it in the Temple in Jerusalem or the Temple for Diana in Ephesus, they're doing it by coming together in Christ to create a new, spiritual Temple made of human lives instead of stones.

The same God has made salvation possible for them both.

The gospel is the great equalizer, the great leveler, because it tells us God has reconciled us all the same way. Through Him we all have access by one Spirit to the Father. Whether you are a Jew, Chinese, Korean, Brazilian, Eritrean, Canadian, German, or some crazy Samoan-Luo mix. It doesn't matter how much money you make or don't make, or where you got your degree or if you got a degree. We're all saved by grace, through faith, in Christ who reconciles us all to God and brings peace to our relationships with one another in the process.

Our world is a mess today and if there's one thing we could really use, it's reconciliation.

We could use it on a global scale between nations. We could use it on a national scale between political parties and social groups. And we could use it on a personal level in our

closest relationships. How many of you need reconciliation with your parents or siblings, friends or neighbors?

But what are we going to do to find reconciliation and mediation? Hold a summit? Have a town hall meeting? A family meeting? Are any of those things guaranteed to work? Of course not. And even if they do, how long do they last, and how durable are they?

The Scriptures tell us that true reconciliation begins with God. When we are brought into a relationship of peace with Him, we find forgiveness for our own failings and the strength and the desire to forgive others for theirs and to ask for forgiveness from them for our own. Nations will stop fighting when they come together in Christ. Races will stop fighting when they come together in Christ. Social and demographic groups will stop fighting when they come together in Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ and its gospel has done more to promote peace than the United Nations or any other regional or strategic alliance could ever hope to because the Church is not motivated by treaties and alliances, but by the grace of God who loves us and sacrifices for us, and invites us into a relationship with Himself and the other people who love and serve Him.

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

You and I, together with the saints through the ages are being built together into a dwelling place of God.

If you go to Ephesus today, and you can do that, it's a tourist destination in Turkey, if you go there, you can see the sad remains of the once magnificent temple of Diana. They'll show you a couple columns sticking up out of a swamp. If you go to Jerusalem today you can visit the Western or the Wailing wall – it's all that's left of the Temple after it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. It's not even the actual wall of the Temple, it's just a part of the original retaining wall, but you can see Jews there praying and tucking their prayers into cracks in the bricks.

But in both Ephesus and Jerusalem, another temple exists. It's not obvious to the human eye because it's not made out of marble or limestone, it's made of human souls, linked together with other souls through time and around the world from North to South and East to West – a global temple made up of the lives of men and women, boys and girls whose lives have been changed by God through Christ. He is the cornerstone of the Temple, the first block that was put in place, the one everything else is based on and guided by.

He came to earth to save Jews and Gentiles alike, to gather us all together into one relationship with Himself.

The Bible says:

Rom 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*

This is gospel we have believed. This is the God who has called us and saved us. This is the God who is forming and shaping us and who has prepared good works for us to walk in. Do you know that? Do you remember that? Does it have any impact on how you see your life? Do you ever marvel at the incredible fact that you who grew up in Fairfax, or Nebraska, or Taiwan, or Germany have been drawn into a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, an Jacob, through the life, death, burial and resurrection of a Jewish carpenter?

My friends, there is more to this life than the things we are so caught up in each day. May God shake us up, wake us up, and help us to remember what’s really going on. And may we respond by surrendering our lives to Him, entirely, completely, today.

Let’s pray.