

Remember What You Are

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[0:00] That this war would come to a conclusion, to an end, and that fighting would stop. We also pray, Father, for peace in the Middle East. And we pray that peace would come to that part of the world again.

So, we also pray for our country. Father, we know our country has departed from the Bible in so many ways. And we pray for our leaders. We pray that, Father, you would cause our leaders and our country to come back to you and to the standards that are found in the Bible.

We want to intercede for our country this time, Father. So, now we just commit this time to you, and we pray for our speaker, that you would give him liberty and freedom to proclaim the oracles of God.

We pray that through him, you would bless each one of us here this morning. We pray in the mighty, powerful name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Friends, see if you can have a Bible to hand, whether that's in phone form or book form.

Turn to Ephesians 2. That's where we're going to be looking. Maybe just take a moment. Draw a breath. Stand up. Do a little dance.

[1:25] Whatever you need to do to get in the right frame of mind. Say hello to a friend. Share a smile. Before we begin. Before we begin.

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may may If there are any left and you haven't got a Lego brick yet, then this is a good time to grab one of those, find a pen, write your name on it, all will become clear if you're mystified as to why we're playing with children's toys at church.

But, you know, if you're allergic to Lego for some reason, then don't feel you have to. It's not a command. Okay. Absolutely nothing. Debs, don't worry.

Shall we just pray before we come to God's word once more? Yes, Lord, these are your words, the oracles of God.

We pray that they would come through, Lord, with your love, with your truth, as we hear them this morning. We pray that you would give us open hearts.

[3:03] We pray that our hearts would be soft ground for the good things that you want to plant there. We pray for feeling hot and tired, that you would give us grace to concentrate.

We pray for feeling frustrated and a bit fed up, that your light would break through. We pray, Lord, that if we are in darkness, that your hand would reach in and draw us out, as you minister to us by your spirit this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. I wonder if you've ever felt like an outsider, like you don't belong. It's quite easy in school, isn't it, to feel like that sometimes.

Maybe you had a form, a class, and you just realized that there's no one like me here. Or maybe at work, or even in your neighborhood, you're aware that everybody else has good relationships, but

they just don't seem interested in connecting with you, and don't want to talk. Maybe even here in church, just feel a little detached from what's going on. I think we probably all have that feeling in different contexts, that feeling of, am I the only one who...

[4:18] Even if families feel like that sometimes, don't we? Especially if we're a teenager. This is the place where I'm supposed to belong.

I don't feel like I belong. Do you remember feeling that as a teenager? It's really rubbish, isn't it? It's in fact worse than being actually alone.

Being in a group of people, feeling alone. Feeling like you're separated. And that feeling is real, and it drives a wedge between us and other people, and it's discouraging.

Here's what that looked like for Paul and his readers. This is the sign, the actual picture of the actual sign that was on the wall of the court of the Gentiles in the temple in Jerusalem.

And it made it very clear, clear message to people who were not Jewish, you do not belong in here. You are separated.

[5:28] Do you know what? Inside the temple, those who were inside the temple, knew that there was an even more serious barrier than that one. Separating them, it's this one here. See, at the end of that long golden room, an enormous curtain, which was a hand's breadth thick, dividing the place where God was from the rest of the world, and saying, you can't come in here.

The Lord has something to say to us in this, just as he had something to say to the Ephesians through Paul. If you have been here the last few weeks, you'll be remembering now that Paul has reminded the Ephesians, Jesus is reminding us of everything that we have in him.

The amazing way that we are blessed if we are in Jesus. And today, he's encouraging us to remember that. To remember what that means.

To remember what we were. To remember what we are. The cure to feeling like we don't belong is to remember who we are in Jesus.

And remember who we were before. And to carry that round with us consciously. I don't know if you've seen those videos.

[6:51] Been on the internet for a while. Of a baby or maybe a young toddler brought by their mother to the opticians. And they get their first pair of glasses. And they put their glasses on.

And their little face just lights up, doesn't it? Amazing reaction. What's life like if you don't have the glasses you need?

Or you forget to put them on. They've become so ordinary. They're just another thing. You can't see clearly, can you? You hurt yourself. You bump into other people.

You hurt them. It's hard. Paul's saying, remember to put on the good news glasses so that you can see clearly.

Right? Okay, let's put on the glasses. What are we supposed to remember? Verses 11 and 12. We are supposed to remember what we were. 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.

[7:56] 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.

We're to remember that we were once separated from God and therefore from each other. Once we didn't belong. That alienation is a real thing.

If you were to go back up to verse 3 in this chapter, we have a reminder from Paul that we are, by nature, objects of wrath. In other words, our very natures, our DNA, means that we are not belongers.

That we're not part of the family. Paul's saying, remember that that was you, once upon a time. You were separated from God and you were separated from each other.

And that separation, verse 12 says, means we have no hope because we're separated from Jesus and he is the author of hope. It doesn't mean that we weren't religious or that we didn't have beliefs or principles.

[9:04] It means we didn't know Jesus personally. And therefore, we were following something that can't save. Mostly, I think we're just following ourselves.

What happens when you follow yourself? You go in circles. And if God is the source of life and we are separated from him, well then you're not really living, are you?

Sure, you're physically alive. But you don't have real life. And of course, if we're separated from Christ, we're separated from each other.

That's what all that Gentile business, circumcision business, excluded from citizenship, foreigners to the country. That's what that means. We're separated from each other.

It's a bit like this if you look at the screen. If God is in the middle and we're close to God, then by definition, we're close to each other. The further we move from God, we don't have to try.

[10:14] We just naturally move further away from each other as well. Because we don't have a touchstone. We don't have a north star to guide us.

We don't have a point of reference. We don't have a God. So we just hold on to our own opinions because there's nothing and no one to check them against. That's what we were. Separated from God.

Separated from each other. And that not belonging we feel is a real thing and it's not the way things are meant to be. And so that feeling ultimately points us back to God.

Because the root of that is separation from him. Remember what we were. Why do we need to remember? Because we forget.

Why are we so quick to forget? This is interesting, isn't it? Why are we so quick to forget this? We are quick to forget because it hurts our pride to remember who we were.

[11:18] If I forget that Jesus had to die for me, it makes it much easier to judge my neighbour. Have you noticed that? If I forget what I was, then I can begin to convince myself that really, I'm here on merit.

Because I'm a pretty good guy. Sure, Jesus bought my ticket, but by now I've pretty much earned my spot. If I forget what I was. Don't forget.

Only if I remember how bad things were for me before God's love found me, will I remember the greatness of God's grace in saving me and changing me. And when I remember my sin and God's grace, that grounds me.

So remember what we were. But don't stop there. Secondly, we want to remember what we are. Reconciled in Christ.

Let's just read verse 14 together. For he himself is our peace. He himself is our peace. Who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

[12:34] He himself is our peace. I want to tell you a story that comes from Indonesia where some of my friends live and share the gospel. It's about a tribe called the Sawi.

The Sawi were cannibalistic headhunters from South Papua. And there were a couple called Don and Carol Richardson who went to live with them to show them how to live with Jesus, to share the good news with them.

And when they arrived, the Sawi were just constantly at war with all of the neighbouring villages. And they had a tradition. Here's what the tradition was. One man from the Sawi tribe would make friends with a man from another tribe.

And the goal of that friendship was to betray that man, kill him and eat him. And the more elaborate the betrayal, the more the betrayer was honoured as a hero.

Awful. Now this tradition was so strong that when Don and Carol Richardson shared the gospels with them, the Sawi thought that Judas Iscariot was the hero. And not Jesus.

[13:55] As you can imagine, that was fairly discouraging. You know. Does the gospel really change anything? And then they witnessed a ceremony that happened when one of the Sawi villagers needed peace with an enemy village.

And here's what they did. Can I have a volunteer? Needs to be a kid. Oh, I've got a hand up. Okay. Oh, two. Even better. Okay.

Well, whichever one of you wants to come, come on up. And if you both want to come up, that's fine as well. Thank you. Great. In a minute, I'm going to need another one, by the way. So just prepare yourself mentally for that.

Fantastic. Well done. Can you come and sit in between Andy and Carolyn? Good. You're part of their family now. Can I have another volunteer? Oh, you too.

You need to be there as well because you're from the same family. Okay. Great. Thomas.

Excellent. Shall we let you choose your family? Ooh, dangerous question.

[14:59] I don't think we'll do that. Right. You can go and sit by Amy over there because you're part of her family now. So this is what they did.

A child from one village would be given to a family in another village and vice versa except it was permanent. Can you imagine what that felt like as a child?

Imagine what it felt like as a parent. Giving up your child? It's not something I'm recommending by the way.

As long as those children remained alive there was peace between the villagers. If a disagreement happens or there was a fight someone could point to the peace child and say, please stop and it would stop.

Are you feeling uncomfortable, guys? You can go back to your own family. It's fine. Now the Richardsons realised that this is their key.

[16:08] Why? Why is this their key? Because Jesus is God's peace child. Isn't he? God gave Jesus to the world to establish peace between us and humanity.

He gave up his son and sent him to live among the human family so that between us and him there would no longer be enmity but instead there would be peace.

So remember what you are. If you are in Jesus you are reconciled to God. Jesus has broken down the wall between us and God.

The wall that sin built because he is the peace child. And that sign on the temple wall that we were looking at earlier that's not just ancient. It's actually out of date.

And that curtain that separated God's presence from us it's ribbons. It's gone now. That's what Jesus did so that we could be reconciled with him and reconciled with each other.

[17:29] So remember that that's what you are. You are reconciled to him. How has that happened? I took a verse 13. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ Jesus.

And then look ahead to verse 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 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

This has happened in Jesus through something he did in his flesh by his blood on the cross.

When Jesus became human he perfectly kept the ceremonial law. The law is to do with being clean or unclean separated or included.

and he kept the sacrificial law the law that was to do with consequences and justice. He took the punishment that the law sentenced us to paying our debt with his blood setting those laws aside.

[18:58] That is how peace was achieved between me and God between you and God if you are in Jesus and how it can be achieved for anybody who places their trust in Jesus.

because he is the peace child. But there's more. If we become blood relatives with Jesus in that way do you know what that means?

It means we become blood relatives with each other. And if that's the case then even people we think are toxic damaging unclean in Christ Jesus may be our brothers and sisters.

Because of the peace child remember what you are. Who needs this? Let's look at verse 17. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near for through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

Who needs this? Everyone. People who have never heard of Jesus or who thought they were too far gone to ever be loved by God Jesus preaches peace to you and you need it.

[20:23] And people who were near I was born into the faith. I'm good enough. If there's a God he should love good people. I'm good.

people who were near Jesus came to preach peace to you and you need it. It's for everyone.

This is interesting though isn't it? Because if you've got your brain on you've realised this passage says Jesus preached peace to you Ephesians but of course Jesus wasn't there anymore.

He'd already been enthroned in heaven by the time this happened and the Ephesians heard the gospel. So who was preaching peace to the Ephesians? It was Jesus speaking through Paul.

Who is preaching peace to you today? Jesus speaking through this passage which means that the Lord Jesus Christ the peace child by his spirit is here now preaching peace to you.

[21:30] and what is our privilege as his body on earth? It is to preach peace to those who are far and those who are near.

Isn't it? So easy to forget. Two things we have to be very careful about when we're thinking about dividing walls I think. One we mustn't pretend that there isn't a wall when there is one.

No peace child no peace. If someone is not in Christ there is no peace. Now that doesn't mean we hate or destroy or demean those who aren't in Christ because we are brothers and sisters of the peace child but we also do not pretend that we're all one really that every faith is the same and that we all have different bits of the same truth.

And if someone claims to follow Jesus but ignores the teaching of the apostles and prophets on which the house is built and we'll come to that then we're not one house are we? Because they're not building on the foundation that God says he is building on.

That also means that if we are really serious about peace we will be really serious about sharing the gospel even if that means opposition. But secondly we also must not build a barrier when Jesus has died to destroy one.

[23 : 10] we can't divide in God's family over culture or accent or background or skin colour or worship style or where we sit in the building or any of the other traditions that we hold dear if Jesus has died to make us one.

that moves us doesn't it from an attitude which says we can accept you if you become like us and it moves us instead to a place where we say we will love you because the Lord Jesus died so that we can be reconciled to the Father together.

Remember what you are. thirdly we need to remember what God is making us a family built on the word and the spirit.

Verses 19 to 22 consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

[24 : 41] Remember what God is making you. Start to understand what the different coloured Lego bricks are about? Put your name on that label.

Put that brick on the house. It's the house that Jesus is building us into. The house that he dwells in. It's a picture of what God is making us. What is he making us?

Verse 19. We are now fellow citizens. We are in the kingdom. And what that means of course is that we have the protection of the king and his angel armies.

That's what citizenship being inside the borders of his kingdom means, doesn't it? you are within the borders of safety and they are patrolled by the armies of the Lord. Paul talked about adoption in chapter one.

Here we see what adoption develops into. We're members of his household. See, God is gathering his adopted children and he is building a forever home for them.

[25 : 50] that's us. And what is it built on? Verse 20. The foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In other words, it's built on the word. It's built on Jesus who John says is the word made flesh. And it's built on the apostles and prophets on God's word given through his messengers!

In the Bible. That's what Bethel is built on. We want to hold on to that, don't we? That's our foundation. Jesus.

His message. His messengers. If we walk away from that, we're just taking the foundations out from under us. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

who lives here. God by his spirit lives here. Can you see again how great God thinks the church is? That he makes it the place of his presence on earth.

[27 : 03] Isn't that amazing? And it's one that he's not ashamed to live in even though the building work is still happening. Some of you know what that's like, don't you? Building work going on around your ears.

Not ideal. God says, he looks at us and he says, it's a massive building site, guys. It's a big old building project. I want to live here.

Paul is saying, remember that you belong now. That's what it comes down to, isn't it? You belong now. because of what Jesus did.

Not because I think if I make an effort I could probably fit in and pass for a Christian. Or because I think these are my kind of people.

Walking to church on Sunday morning and think, these are my kind of people. I hope so. But actually you're here because you belong. because Jesus reconciled you to himself.

[28 : 15] And because therefore you're one. You're not alone. You belong.

Jesus is building you into a home that he intends to live in forever. Isn't that amazing?

Remembering that will help you with that feeling of isolation and being on your own and not fitting in and being detached.

When it comes. Because that's the world we live in, isn't it? The good news found in Jesus is our protection against that.

Remembering what we were is our protection against forgetting it. Here's two practical ways to remember. As you go out, there'll be another bowl. It's a two bowl Sunday, guys.

There'll be another bowl, a little pair of glasses. Take one of those. Stick it somewhere in your house where you will see it every day. On the mirror, on the hairbrush, on the child's forehead, something like that.

[29 : 19] And when you see it, think, I need to put on the good news, glasses. I need to remember who I was and who I am and what God is making me into with the rest of my brothers and sisters.

glasses. Okay? Put on the glasses. One other way, there's some labels still, I hope, at either exit that you might have used to put on your Lego bricks.

There's loads of them. Just take a sheet, get home, and write on those labels all of the labels you have ever given yourself or anybody else has ever thrown at you. and stick them on a Bible or a phone or a pen or whatever, it doesn't matter, and then stick over them one big label that says reconciled child of God.

Okay? Because that is the only label that will never come off, that you will never lose, because that is who you are. Right? Remember who you are.

Let's pray.