

Ephesians 2:11-22

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today comes from the book of Ephesians chapter 2, verses 11 to 22. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning.

[2 : 00] Welcome to Christ Church Chicago, and my name is Bing. I'm one of the members of the pastoral team, and if you're visiting for the first time, welcome.

Thank you for choosing to spend your morning with us. Routinely we turn to the Bible, and so I encourage you to keep your Bible opened, whether digitally or on paper, to follow along as this time unfolds.

But let's just pause and pray and ask for God's help. Father, the task before us is a divine task, meaning that you illuminate your word to inform your people, that we hear the words of Moses, take to heart all the words that are written, that we may be obedient and careful to do and follow them. And so help us to that end. What we know not, would you teach us? What we have not in need, would you give us? And what we are not, would you make us?

For Jesus' sake. Amen. As we continue in the book of Ephesians, we have arrived at one of the pinnacles of not only the letter, but certainly the New Testament, and arguably the entirety of the Bible.

[3 : 36] The Bible, you can imagine, is this vast mountain range. There are certainly summits that stand higher than others, just by the sheer weight of what's contained in these texts.

These particular verses, which we come to this morning, have been called the key and high point of the whole epistle. It is perhaps the most significant ecclesiological text in the New Testament, meaning it's the most significant text about the church, the people of God.

In it contains the nature of the church, the gathering of the people of God, its establishment, purpose, and function in the world. This morning, the material is substantial, and admittedly, it will not, what I will undertake, will not be comprehensive or exhaustive in any manner.

Rather, my aim this morning is to give you the contour of these verses. To give you a sense of the substance of these verses, there was a late English preacher by the name of Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the most prolific English-speaking pastors of the last century.

He methodically went through books of the Bible similar to us, actually in far more detail. It took him 20 sermons to make his way through these verses.

[5 : 02] It will take me one. But here we are, verses 11 through 22, and they're certainly conjoined to the first 10 verses.

The entire chapter of Ephesians 2 is a demonstration of God's power doing the impossible. That which was impossible for human achievement or attainment, God would intervene and accomplish with his immeasurable greatness of his power.

How does God use his power? Well, last week, it was primarily answered in this way. God uses his power to make the dead live. And this week, what you'll find is God uses his power to bring the divided together.

In other words, God raises the dead, and God reconciles the divided.

This morning, our text reveals God's plan for his people. God's plan for his people. And to help navigate through this text, I've broken it up into three parts, and I want to map it out, the text, with these signposts.

[6 : 20] And I trust that they will be helpful. They are time markers. They indicate temporal settings. You'll see it there in verse 11, that at one time, at one time.

Then you'll see it again in verse 13, but now, but now, at one time, but now. And then finally, verse 19, you'll see it.

So then, you. So you see it. The movement is past, present, and plans for the future. And there are three things I want to show you from this text this morning.

We will see our desperate plight. Our desperate plight. Followed by God's way of peace. God's way of peace.

Concluding with a dwelling place for God. A desperate plight. God's way of peace. And a dwelling place for God.

[7 : 23] Verse 11 continues in the letter with a direct address to Gentiles. All who could not claim Jewish descent. The call to action for them is to remember.

To remember. They are to recall life prior to Christ. Here, they are referred to as the uncircumcision. Those who did not bear the physical mark of Judaism.

That mark for Jews distinguished them as belonging to God. They were, in the eyes of their Jewish counterparts, the Gentiles, inferior, deficient, even despised.

The uncircumcision, you see it there in your quotes, is actually a derogatory term used to demean the Gentile. There was actually incredible animosity between the Jew directed at the Gentile.

So much so that one commentator writes, the Jew had immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentile, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.

[8 : 27] God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need.

For that would simply mean to bring another Gentile into the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews.

The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of the Jewish boy or girl was carried out.

Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death. The animosity was great. And with this in mind, Paul exhorts them to remember how things used to be.

To pause and reflect upon life before Christ. And he points out for them five ways they were deficient or deprived. You see it there beginning in verse 12.

[9 : 38] Remember that you were at one time separated from Christ. Meaning that you had none of the promises that we had unpacked in the first chapter. The chasm of separation would have excluded you from all the blessings found in Jesus.

You would be orphans, condemned, rejected, lacking any inheritance, separated from Christ. You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.

Prevented from many citizenships of Israel. You would never belong to the divinely favored nation. They would never be part of God's treasured possession.

They were strangers to the covenant of promise. Covenants of promise. They would not be beneficiaries of any of the great promises made to Abraham.

To David. They had no hope. Their plight was a dead end and deliverance would never be available. And they were without God in the world.

[10 : 41] Without the one true God. Certainly they were false gods. But the one true God they were without. And the summation of these five deficiencies resulted in what we saw last week.

They were by nature children of wrath. Dead in their trespasses and sins. Their faith was sealed and destruction would be their destiny. It was certainly a desperate plight.

It was not that their future was bleak. It was that they had no future. We would be mistaken if we only saw this directed toward the congregation in Ephesus.

We would fail to read this text correctly if we did not see this as our own desperate plight. This is the condition in which you and I found ourselves. Isn't it?

As far as I'm aware there is no Jewish lineage in my heritage. And the condition that Paul describes of the Gentile is my condition. It is my desperate plight.

[11 : 44] Which ought to plummet me into despair knowing my inevitable damn nation. Borrowing language from William Hendrickson I was Christless Stateless Friendless Hopeless Godless Christless Stateless Friendless Hopeless And godless And my temptation is to kind of skirt past this point and move past it but this text confronts us as we read it.

Because this is the condition of every Gentile reader. And we may think of it as applicable to others but the weight of this text reminds us that these are actually also our neighbors.

Our loved ones. Our friends. Our colleagues. I will admit I have great sympathy for those who may be jobless.

I feel for those who might be childless. I have sympathy for the spouseless the moneyless the homeless and I can name a whole host of worldly deficiencies but should not my heart ache the most for the one who is Christless stateless friendless hopeless godless this is a desperate plight this is our desperate plight and so it was until the great interjection of verse 13 because our misery is met by God's rich mercy you see it there in verse 13 but but

I can't get it out of my mind so I'll just say it someone once called this God's big but and here I circled it in my Bible in verse 13 and I drew a line to verse 4 because you see it there as well God's necessary interruption God's gracious interjection but now in but now but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ it all changed in verse 13 for those who were far off are somehow now brought near and they came by means according to verse 13 the blood of Christ it's certainly a reference to his atoning death on the cross his sacrificial death on the cross his blood stained death on the cross the blood of Jesus is the red carpet as some as one has said to the very presence of God it is that which leads us into the very promises of God it is in Christ blood filled death that we receive peace and we see

[15 : 05] God's way of peace and it's found in his son the death of his son and before proceeding it's helpful to understand that this peace is not merely serenity or absence of conflict it encompasses this wholeness this well-being this security good relations a sense that all is well and in order that we are not mistaken to think peace is secured by some mysterious channel or means Paul's emphasis is that it is in Christ that this peace is obtained that Christ is our peace verse 14 he is the one making peace in verse 15 he is the one speaking peace in verse 17 he is the one proclaiming peace peace the peace of Christ our peace and it comes quite interestingly it comes through both demolition and construction demolition and construction verses 14 and 15 highlight this demolition and destruction that must take place in Christ in his atoning death he is a wrecking ball of sorts because he goes through the wall of hostility and knocks it down it's not only symbolic emblematic of the hostility that I had mentioned between Jew and Gentile but it's also likely to refer to a physical dividing wall a literal dividing wall some of us might be familiar with the Jewish temple and it was there are barriers all around it and if you started in the middle of it there the Ark of the Covenant sat and that room in which it sat was the holiest of holies there the high priest could only enter once a year and outside those walls you have the most holy place where only the priest could serve where they would offer there would be candlelight and incense and bread and outside that court would be the inner courts where the sacrifices would take place and outside that court would be the court for the women and finally when you got all the way to the outside there stood a wall to keep out the Gentiles there the Gentiles could gather there the poor could beg there the infirmed could plead interestingly on this wall inscriptions have been found in both Greek and Latin in the mid late 19th century and in the mid in the mid 19th century in the early 20th century recorded by Josephus the Jewish historian that read something along these lines it's no one of any other nation to enter within the fence and enclosure around the temple whoever is caught will have himself to blame when his death ensues it is all the more ironic that Paul writes this because if you know the story of Paul his arrest his final arrest was this violation he was falsely accused according to Acts 21 of bringing Trophimus his colleague a Gentile into the temple courts Christ's death is this

wrecking ball that brings down demolishes this wall of hostility and there we also find an abolishment of the law the aspects of the law that gave Jews their sense of moral superiority their sense of ceremonial superiority were abolished in that Jesus would fulfill all of them in his life this is not to say that the law no longer had any use but the law no longer had the power to condemn accuse and divide and as the dividing wall of hostility and the law of commandments come down God in Christ also performs some constructive actions and the first constructive action is that in Christ we see it the individual is reconciled to God there's two constructive actions and I'll just point them out to you since your Bibles are open they're indicated by the word might according to verse 15 and 16 that he might namely Christ might create in himself one new man and in verse 16 that he might reconcile us both to God the individuals reconciled to God according to verse 16 through the death of the Lord Jesus and I won't spend more time unfolding this because last week we saw it unpacked a little bit but what's introduced in this section is the reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in Christ what we find is the hostility between Jew and Gentile the circumcised and the uncircumcised is done away with bringing peace two distinct two divided peoples are all of a sudden made into one one body one family you see it there in verse 18 that all of a sudden perhaps to some people's horror the Jew and the Gentile now share a single father a single dining table they possibly share bedrooms if you play out this household imagery if you've been with us since the beginning of the series you begin to see that God's purposes in the world are actually transpiring in chapter 1 verse 10 what is God up to to unite all things in Christ things in heaven and things on earth that God's vision and God's aim is to sum up to unify all things in Christ and Paul begins to show us how that takes place certainly the vertical axis is taken care of it brought together in Christ and now unveils to us how the horizontal axis is brought together and reconciled so that I'm not misunderstood what I'm saying is this I'm saying that on the cross Jesus died to bring me to God but also to bring us toward one another we are so king I'll put it this way I am so king to quote the the words of Jesus from the cross oh he on the cross father forgive them they don't know what they're doing and I imagine myself in the crowd staring at the cross I was the one who put them there father forgive me and I totally abandoned the words that Jesus also said from the cross John saying to Mary Mary behold your son John behold your mother and what does that mean that means on the cross Jesus did more than just reconcile me to God he told John this is your mom no no no that's your mom Jesus mom this is your son no no no you're my son and why does that why did he say that from the cross because no one would take care of Mary possibly no one would take care of John possibly my argument is this to show us that he's putting us in a brand new family and as much as he forgives us from the cross he fashions us into a family I'm getting too excited up here he is conjoining the sinner not only to himself but to one another into a single faith family this is the astonishment to the world we'll find out in future weeks it's a demonstration of the wisdom of God the unification of people in natural opposition this is the nature of the church this is the eternal vision that God has for his people this is the family portrait all of our complexions all of our hairstyles maybe some without hair that when all textures sizes and shapes [24 : 43] God's vision is for a people that is comprised of every tribe every tongue every nation and when you show your family picture to an unbelieving world they are astounded her words ring in my head so vividly it was our 20th anniversary at the time we were known as Holy Trinity Church Chicago and all four of our congregations some of you might have been there all four of our congregations assembled into Rockefeller Chapel we had a liaison from the university as we were using their facilities and I was working closely with her to ensure we were adhering to university policies Rockefeller has some interesting policies by the way but I was at the front door greeting the hundreds that were finding their way into Rockefeller and as people filed in young old quietly loudly single married families individuals various shades various sizes she turns and looks at me and she asked how does this happen how did this happen what is going on why are you you guys are so different and how do you find why is everyone piling in here well you know the answer let me tell you about a man

Jesus who spilled his blood to bring these people together this Christ is God's way of peace reconciling an individual to God reconciling individuals to one another because he is uniting all things in heaven and on earth under Christ the Bible knows of no other does not know of a scenario that reconciles an individual to God but not to their brother or sister there's no such thing it doesn't exist this in God's this is in God's foresight and may it be our ambitious vision for this congregation

our plight our desperate plight God's way of peace and finally a dwelling place for God verses 19 through 22 these verses elaborate on the transformation that's unfolded no longer no longer verse 19 not anymore it's no longer true no longer strangers and aliens but citizens within the same family ironically the Gentile who stood outside the courts of the temple was never permitted to enter is now found becoming the very temple that he was left out from to quote the prophet

Hosea which we studied in university ministry this past quarter the or in you the orphan finds mercy the separated one is now found to be among the saints there's a fusing of two metaphors here in these closing verses the household image the family image the believing Jew and the believing Gentile now have a single father and live within the same household the second metaphor is architectural and construction based the believing Jew and Gentile have a common foundation in Christ the apostles and prophets and are being built into a structure where God would reside we are being constructed into a temple to house the Lord the people of God the church is to be a dwelling place for God where his presence would rest and where he could be found when we are joined to Christ based on the first ten verses we are joined to one another and this is manifest in the assembling of God's people we are living stones as Peter would call us fashioned together into a holy temple it hasn't been finalized it's still ongoing but the weight of the image is found in the word together joined together built together it happens together together I don't think any architect or project manager would undertake a task if all the materials were scattered about I have some stuff in LA some in San Francisco some in Atlanta and I'm going to build this thing it wouldn't make any sense all the materials need to be on site at the location where the construction is unfolding and this is worth mentioning because there is a bizarre strand of Christians that somehow think that in and of themselves they are becoming the very temple of

God humorously I mean it's a funny image a freestanding temple apart from the rest of the church we're so good at this an individualized faith aren't we we apply our salvation so individualistically God rescued me God delivered me God will lead me God will prosper my ways but this is not a monastic faith that's a foreign faith to the Bible it's not to say we shouldn't have privatized facets of our spiritual lives certainly prayer fasting giving but the criticism falls on those who think that they can exist as Christians who are regularly not with Christians I'm a Christian but I don't I don't assemble I don't do that assembling thing and to that I would reply I'm not sure you understand what it means to be a Christian because one of the outcomes of authentic Christianity is the assembling together with the saints it is one of the few ways that you visibly demonstrate the authentic work of God in your lives because when the individual asks you

[31 : 32] Monday morning what did you do this weekend I could say I went to Bixler Park I threw the football around I watched my kids run in the playground I played my switch I ate dinner ordered a pizza but the moment I say I assembled with God's people they figure out wait you're a Christian now that I know there are people who fake it and attend church without any sincerity or sign of salvation I'm not aiming at those but my exhortation is toward those who say I'm a Christian and I'm not going to relinquish this gathering Jesus Christ rose from the dead not so you can stay in bed and if that is your mindset I pray that that experience would be great discontentment you would have great discontentment doing church on a screen you would have great dissatisfaction choosing not to participate you would have great unrest when you're not amongst the people of God regularly

I know that's mean certainly not all who go to church are Christian but I can say this all Christians go to church we are being built together when we worship together when we eat together we will eat together shortly when we serve together when we sing together when we suffer together when we stand together when we meet together and as we do all those things Christ Church Chicago is this tiny microcosm that demonstrates what God is doing in the world becoming a temple where he might dwell and may I make this bold assertion to close you will never oh man here we go you will never fulfill the plans of God for your life apart from the church you're like whoa whoa let me run that one back you will never know the fullness of God's extent of God's power apart from participating in this local congregation your life's purpose will never be fully realized apart from engagement here whether it be here elsewhere we do not only spiritually or mystically belong to some household no we literally and physically are part of the members of this household evidence of your salvation is demonstrated in your shared life with others and may we be a congregation that cherishes this well this is God's plan for his people unification under Christ and you might be a visitor who walked in this

Sunday morning and you're asking well what's what's so special about this social gather well I'll tell you there's a shared history in our desperate plight wait a shared history you and Milton grew up together no no no I grew up in Northern California he grew up all over you have the same interest no he could he could he could rhyme and he could rap and he could do all sorts I can't do any of that wait wait then I don't get this what brings this together well let me tell you him and I at one time I was separated he was separated from Christ I had no citizenship I was dead and continually dying I had no state I had no friends I had no hope and I had no God that's my shared history with him shared history a shared identity wait what you look nothing alike well let me tell you about our family we share a father we share an older brother who bled on our behalf we aspire let me tell you to be an assortment to be a variety pack we come in different shapes and colors because we are brought together by the ultimate peacemaker the Lord

Jesus Christ a shared history what are we about shared history a shared identity and lastly a shared duty we are becoming a dwelling place for God oh this is not an optional thing I don't think so I don't think so we are a people interdependent on one another committed to walking alongside one another in life and worship and we understand that we fulfill God's purposes together as a faith family and that is indispensable to our well being oh father our father father of many nations we come to you and we thank you we thank you that in your great mercy you flexed your power and you not only raised made alive the dead but you brought together the divided and as a congregation we ask for your help that we would fulfill your vision for this not only but for our congregation and for the whole church capital

C help us oh Lord help us we pray these things for Jesus sake amen