

Remember Who You Were.

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Date: 08 August 2021

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[0:00] Good morning. It's good to see all your lovely faces this morning. If you're new, we are going through the book of Ephesians.

! We've been preaching through this is our fifth week, I think, in it. We're in chapter two. So if you have a Bible there, you can open your Bible.

To Ephesians chapter two. If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the pews. Our text this morning is from page 1160. At least in the pew Bible. I don't know what page it is in yours.

Let us pray. Oh God, our Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning to feed at your feet, to listen to your word, which is life unto us.

We pray, Lord, that you will speak to us. I pray, Lord, that you will use my words, help me to get out of the way. Holy Spirit, speak through me despite myself.

[1:21] I pray for your people that they will have listening ears to hear truly and to obey. We pray all of this in the name of our Savior, Redeemer, Mediator, Jesus Christ. Amen.

By the way, if you are wondering what we've talked about in the earlier passages from Ephesians 1, we started Ephesians 1.

We have recordings on our church website of the sermons. So you can, if you want to and I encourage you to, you can go to the church website and listen to the previous sermons.

We'll be continuing this morning from verse 11 of chapter 2. By way of reminder, Paul, in the first 10 verses of this chapter, has shown how God's power, demonstrated in Christ, saves us and reconciles us to God.

We were given a viewpoint of where we were positionally in relation to God before we were saved. Paul says that before salvation, we were dead.

[2:37] We were children of wrath, sons of disobedience. And after salvation, he says that we are quickened. We were quickened to life. We're now adopted sons of God, raised up with our risen and ascended Lord.

This is who we are now, positionally, in relation to God. By Christ saving us. Now verse 11 to 22 runs parallel to verse 1 to 10.

In that, in that Paul starts, he starts verse 11 by going back again to our life without God. But in these verses, he wants to show how God's power and salvation affects believers' relationship with one another.

In verse 10, 1 to 10, he was shown how it affects our relationship to God. Now he wants to show us how this great salvation affects our relationship with one another.

Now, in other words, he has given us the vertical viewpoint of salvation. Now he's given us the horizontal point of view of our salvation.

[3:48] And he follows the same pattern as before. We see the progression, starting in verse 11. From life without God to God's divine intervention.

And then the positive implications of this new life that we have in Christ Jesus. As we relate to one another in the family of God, the church.

In verse 11, we see the first command or instruction so far in the book of Ephesians. That in itself is noteworthy.

This is the first instruction, the first imperative that's been given in this book of Ephesians. So far, Paul has been keen to show us who we are in Christ.

He's been keen to tell us, this is who you are. This is the blessings that are yours. And even here, in his first instruction, is him is to tell us to remember who we were.

[4:51] So we might better appreciate who we are now. And this is the note of the Gospels throughout all these scriptures, isn't it?

God's people are always instructed to remember. Remember you were slaves in Egypt. Remember you were disobedient and covenant breakers.

Yet God, who was long-suffering and abundant in mercy, whose mercies is new every morning, and because of his mercies, you were not destroyed. Remember that. Remember that you were dead in sin.

And he, God himself, in Christ, plumbed the depth of darkness and death to bring you to life.

Remember. Now, when we fail to remember, we start to think too highly of ourselves.

And we forget we were helpless to save ourselves. We start to trust, perhaps, in our own piety, our good works, rather than the righteousness of Jesus our Savior.

[5:55] Therefore, God, through his prophets and apostles, constantly calls us to remember. This godly remembrance allows us to fix our eyes to the object of our salvation, rather than on ourselves.

This is why it's important to remember. So Paul calls the Ephesians. He calls them to remember who and where they were before the gospel was proclaimed to them.

He says to them, You were Gentiles, meaning you were the uncircumcision, separated from the Messiah, aliens to the commonwealth of God's people.

You were a people outside the covenants of promise. You were without hope and without God. In other words, you, Ephesians, Gentiles, you were a people devoid of hope in the world.

Now, how is it that Paul could describe the Gentiles like this? It's really harsh, harsh words. Perhaps this is Saul. Remember Saul, the Pharisee?

[7:07] Maybe this is Saul talking. Maybe this is the self-righteous, zealous, prideful man. Well, it isn't. It isn't Saul. This is Paul writing.

This is the apostle to the Gentiles. And these words that he's writing are inspired by the Holy Spirit himself. And they were given to Paul to speak to the church.

So they were said in love. And they were said in truth. And all that Paul said of the Gentiles was true about them. Let's examine the characterizations more closely.

Paul starts off by asking them to remember that they were called their own circumcision. Now, the word in Greek and in Hebrew, that very word, it's much, it's much cruder.

And it was used by Jews as a term of derision towards Gentiles. Look at the way Paul characterized it.

[8:08] You were called a circumcision according to the flesh. And then he says, the Jews who called you these, the Jews being those of the circumcision.

Now, in describing both groups, both the uncircumcised and the circumcised, Paul was careful to let us know that this is, they were both in these camps according to the flesh.

Paul shows that those descriptions, although real at one time, does not hold any longer. Paul elsewhere, elsewhere in Philippians, Paul wrote that those who place trust in the circumcision according to the flesh, the circumcision done by hand, are just mutilating the flesh.

For the true circumcision are those who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

This is what the true circumcision is. So Paul is, it's clear to make us see that although they were called this uncircumcision by those who were the circumcised according to that which is done by human ends, all of this has no import with God.

[9:35] True circumcision is done by the Spirit of God through faith, trust, and faith in Jesus Christ. but still, Paul called Ephesians to remember that the derisive term they were called by Jews was based on real differences that existed between a Jew and a Gentile.

He continued in verse 12 by reminding them that the very fact that they were the uncircumcised meant that they were without Christ, without the Messiah. here, Paul specifically means that they were without the Messiah.

And this is the greatest of all the disadvantages that stems from being outside the covenant of God. As we've seen so far in Ephesians, all the blessings that we have flows from being in Christ.

The Jews had the hope of the Messiah. It was on the promise of the Messiah that Abraham clung to and he was counted righteous. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, all the promises of God find their yes in this promised Messiah who is Jesus Christ.

He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. That is why it is through the Messiah that we can utter our amen.

[11:00] Our proclamation of assurance in the promises of God. It's through Jesus Christ that we can have that assurance. Well, the Gentiles had no such assurance because they were without the Messiah.

Secondly, they were separated from the life that God gives. Israel's way of life was given by God and the Gentiles were excluded from this.

They had no right of citizenship. citizenship. Not merely just citizenship under the country Israel, but the citizenship that means that they belong to God.

They are God's people. They're covenant people. They had no right of citizenship. They were also separated, according to Paul, from the covenant of promise. I think Paul had the Abrahamic covenant in view here.

The physical sign of this covenant being circumcision. And this is what the Jews wrongly placed their trust in. This was the great covenant of promise that mapped out for God's people God's saving purposes.

[12:14] It is the promise that through Abraham's offspring, God will bless the world. And implying that blessing to Abraham is the promise of redemption and restoration.

it is for the whole world. Even though the promise to Abraham has always had the whole world in view, the promise was not made to the whole world.

It was made to Abraham and his descendants. Later, Paul will say in chapter 3 that this was the mystery of the gospel all along. That salvation is for the whole world.

And that mystery is now revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But God's plan was revealed only to the descendants of Abraham. It was entrusted to them.

This was the covenant of promise that they had that the Gentiles were excluded from. So we see the real separation between Jew and Gentile. Such was the separation in fact between them that if a Jew were to marry a Gentile, his family will hold a funeral for him.

[13:26] Such was the animosity that Jews were between these two groups that Jews were even forbidden by law not to help a Gentile woman in childbirth.

For it meant bringing another Gentile into the world. So you can see that these were real differences. by the way these laws especially the last one I said that you will not find that in Holy Scripture.

That was not a law that was given by God to God's people governing people. That was something that they decided as an extra step out of bounds of God's will that they made to separate themselves from the Gentile.

It was never God's will or God's intention that that separation should be in that manner. they were to keep themselves holy. Now as Paul had said earlier and I'm trying to let us see these were real differences between Jews and Gentiles.

The Jews were indeed privileged above all other nations because they were God's chosen people. As Paul himself writes in Romans 9 this is Paul writing talking about these blessings that the Jews have enjoyed.

[14:50] He says to Israel belong the adoption. To Israel belongs the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises, the patriarchs and from them the Messiah of God.

God incarnate himself, the second person of the Trinity came into flesh through this race of the Jews.

These are great privileges that were given to Israel. But these great privileges were not given so Israel can despise the nations around them. They were given so there will be a light to the nations. As God's people they were to reflect God's character. a God who is merciful, kind and loving. Those are the traits that were to reflect to the nations around them.

By their faithfulness to God, they were to bring the nations around them to the worship of their God. But that's not what happened in Israel's history, is it?

[16:01] Instead, they became prideful. They placed their hope in their bloodlines and physical mark of circumcision. They forgot that it was God who chose their forefather Abraham while he was still an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees.

It was God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to the land he promised to their forefathers. It was God who defeated their enemy on every side as they entered into the land that God promised them.

It was God who remained faithful even though they were covenant breakers. And he brought them out of exile back to Jerusalem. They had forgotten all of these things.

And so you might say to the Jews, Paul's words in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9, it might be directed to Israel here. Your privileged status is not your own doing.

You have no room for boasting. But before you think that the Jews of Paul's days were so prideful, I want us to see in this text that this instruction to remember was actually written to Ephesian Christians.

[17 : 22] It was written to the Gentiles. Why will they need to remember you might ask? You know, perhaps they themselves, having just been grafted into the family of God, perhaps they themselves start to see the privileges that they enjoy by being in Christ and they start to boast in their new status as well.

So the call there to remember, remember from whence you came. Paul here is only repeating the same warning to these Gentile believers that the prophets in the Old Testament asked the people of God to do.

It's the same reminder throughout the Old Testament. God sends his prophets to his people to remember. Moses said these words to Israel as they were preparing to enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 4 and also in the Deuteronomy 8 chapter we read today in our Old Testament reading.

He says to them in Deuteronomy 4, take care to remember, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen unless they depart from your heart all the days of your life.

The whole of Deuteronomy was a sermon given by Moses to the people and constantly the refrain throughout of that, throughout that book was to call the people to remembrance.

[18 : 48] And when they stopped remembering, what happened? they went away from God. They went away from nearness to Him and they went back into the far country of idolatry.

So you see the forgetfulness, the forgetfulness that leads to pride and boasting in ourselves, it's a human condition. It's not just limited to the Jewish people alone.

It is always the human tendency to put stock in the flesh, to boast in that which is a gift from God as if it's by our own doing. And the problem with boasting in oneself for our privileged status as God's people, the problem with that is that it leads us to thinking that we are deserving of it, that we've earned it, that we've merited it, that God owed it to us, that we have come near to God by our own effort and merit.

unlike those godless people who are still far away. We forget the truths that Paul has been saying to us throughout.

All our privilege is in and through Christ and it is not of our own doing. In remembering, we can consider the grace of God to us and be reminded that if God is able to save a wretch like me, surely there is no person who is beyond this redeeming love.

[20 : 25] Some of you might be here, you know God, you've heard of the redeeming love of God since you were a little child, yet the lure of the far country has pulled you away.

you know, I can't help but think of the prodigal son that left his father's house, the comfort and the security and the safety and the love of his father's house for the far country.

And then he was suffering, dejected and in pain. It was in remembering his father, it was in remembering his father's house, his father's character, his father's generosity, his father's love, that he was able to look around his condition and rise up and return.

If you, if that is you, today, I bid you in Christ's name, come back to the father's house. Remember he is a merciful and loving God, ready and willing to save all who turn to him.

Some of you have forgotten the father's love and have come to think you merit your privileged status. Perhaps that has produced in us a callousness, perhaps, an inhospitable self-righteousness.

[22 : 04] intolerance for those who are in sin or suffering. Remember that you were once far away without hope in the world and God in his mercy has brought you near.

Remember and do not build walls for others who need to come in. verse 13 talks about what God has done in bringing these two radically opposed enemies of one another, Gentiles and Jews. What God has done in bringing them together. He's brought those who are from far away, the Gentiles, and he brought those who are near, and he's brought them to himself. And now in himself he's made them a new people.

This is the privilege that we have as Christians in Christ Jesus, that in Christ all the walls of hostility, all the walls of division have been broken down.

Now, we'll pick up in verse 13, we'll continue in verse 13 next week. And see what God has made for one people. And now God has brought these two people together.

[23 : 35] Let us pray. Thank you.