

Ephesians 2:11-22

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[0:00] Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you. And may the words of man become the words of God for the people of God.

I pray in Christ's name. Amen. It's so good to be with you this evening. I'm particularly glad to be here because I've been babysitting for the last three or four days.

My lovely grandchildren, they are really lovely. About the minute I come in the door, the little boy says, let's go play with Thomas the Train. And I've done nothing but Lego and Thomas the Train and building airplanes for the last three or four days while my daughter and her husband are off in Italy having a lovely holiday.

So this is a great change to be here tonight. I am so blessed to be able to share God's word from Ephesians 2, 11 to 22.

We're going through this book of Ephesians that Paul wrote to a group of Christians in Ephesus. And the theme of the series is that Ephesians is about the church as the new humanity.

[1:07] The particular message of today's passage is that the church is an international community, once far from God and neighbor, but now reconciled and domiciled that is made at home in Christ to become a reconciling community in the world.

I love this section because it teaches us that the community of the church has not only been made holy, that's chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, but it's been made to be at home in God.

And it invites others home as well. In a recent courageous speech, pop singer Ed Sheeran appealed for unity, not division in the world, for humanity, not politics.

It was a well thought through speech. And it's great in its own right, but I think it lacks some grounding. It is only in Christ that this is possible.

And though it can't happen fully until the kingdom fully comes, it is the church in the in-between time that is meant to be a sign and instrument of that unity.

[2:17] Our passage today moves towards, I think, one of the climax pieces in the epistle to the Ephesians, the reality that the church is the dwelling place of God.

God had expressed in the Old Testament his desire to be among his people, that I may dwell among you. But it takes the fullness of divine revelation in Christ for God to make his home in an international community, the new humanity where people of all nations are welcome, Jews and Gentiles and even a few Scots as well.

A quick recap to show how Paul gets there. It's a little recap of the series so far. Chapter 1 depicts the church and its remarkable origin in the life of the Trinity.

In chapter 1, 3 to 14, it is the community of praise because it is birthed in the election of the Father, in the redemption of the Son, and in the sealing of the Spirit.

That section, I think, is like a symphony that reverberates throughout the epistle. And then chapter 1, 15 to 23 is not so much praise as it is prayer. It's described, the church is described as a community of prayer in the life of the Trinity entered into subjectively, giving us an experiential knowledge of God and especially of his incomparably great power.

[3:40] That was last week. Paul defines that power as that which was expressed in the raising of Jesus from the dead and in his session and exaltation to the Father's right hand.

These historical realities concerning Christ are what then shapes the community in chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. What was true in the history of Jesus in chapter 1, 15 to 23, that is, death, resurrection, and exaltation, becomes true of his people in chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, that is, death, resurrection, and exaltation.

You may wonder, how does that mapping of the history of Christ onto us actually occur? First, I think it is because Christ actually came into union with us humans by taking on our humanity at the

incarnation.

And I think this is the underlying reality of this epistle. You can't form a new humanity without first becoming human. And the Son of God became human to act on our behalf.

And as the human for humanity, everything that Jesus did represented us or was vicarious for us. His vicarious life, His vicarious death, and His vicarious resurrection.

[4:57] In summary, the gospel is this, that Christ has become one with us so that we might become one with Him. Each human who has believed in Jesus has been joined by the Spirit into Christ, that is, into His church.

He participated in our humanity so that we, by faith and regeneration, might participate in His life.

We, as the people of God, in union with Christ, were once dead but are now risen with Christ.

But in our passage today, that's not the emphasis. The emphasis is not so much that we were dead and now risen, but that as a community, we were alienated, a community of Gentile people.

We were alienated and distant from God. But we are now gloriously included through Christ in His church, the new humanity made up of all nations. But how did the church get there?

Chapter 2 actually depicts our spiritual biography as God's community in two ways. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, Paul acknowledges that it only is what it is because of sheer grace.

[6:06] People who were spiritually dead, that is, unresponsive to God, didn't get to be in the community of life through any merit of their own. They were awakened by God.

They were the subject of a great adversative. Excuse the big word. Adversative just means but. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. So we are the community only because, it only exists because of grace and our participation in Christ.

But now in our passage today, 2, verses 11 to 22, in a second description of our pilgrimage to becoming the church, Paul moves from the individual dead, now made alive, to the community once estranged but now included in Christ's community.

We are a community, we were a community of estrangement and alienation, being Gentile separated from the covenantal community of Israel. And in case you're wondering, as you look at this passage, there's some difficulty to it because he keeps using the words you and we.

[7:25] But really it's quite simple. When he says you, he's referring to the Christians of Gentile origin. And when he says we, he's referring to Christians of Jewish origin, which included himself.

But praise be to God. This second section of chapter 2 also has a wonderful adversative. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. And as a result of what Christ has done and our participation in his history, we are now no longer foreigners and aliens, he says in verse 19, but people who belong, people who are at home in the very life of God.

And Paul uses three metaphors, which I will come back to a little later in the sermon. In some detail, he talks about as fellow citizens, as members of God's family and as stones in the building.

Let me now focus on the passage before us. Our passage magnifies the grace of God, the wonder of the Christian gospel, in three ways related to the three paragraphs that are in our text.

[8:29] Number one, and each of these paragraphs begins with certain key words that signal something's going on. So he begins in verse 11, Therefore remember that formerly.

That's the first paragraph. It goes from 11 to 12. At verse 13, the adversative. But now in Christ Jesus, and that goes to verse 18, he talks about who Christ is and who Christ is for us.

And then finally, in verse 19, consequently, you are, and that signals who we are in Christ.

So who Christ is for us in the middle and who we are in Christ at the end. You know, as I think about this passage, I think really there are three great gospel verbs related to those three sections.

In verse 11 to 12, grace invites us to remember, to remember what we were before our conversion.

In verses 13 to 18, grace incorporates us into the community of God through Christ, who is our peace, who makes peace by shedding his blood to reconcile us, and then by preaching peace.

[9:42] Three things about peace that are to do with Jesus in this middle section in 13 to 18 that incorporate us into the community of God. How did we get there? Because Christ is our peace. How did we get there?

Because he made peace by shedding his blood for us on the cross. And how did we get there? By the preaching of peace. And I'll try to explain that in just a few moments. And so then in verses 19 to 22, we learn that grace does not just bring forgiveness.

So remember what you were. Remember who Christ is. And now in verses 19 to 22, rejoice in who you've become.

We learn that grace does not just bring forgiveness, justification, and sanctification. I love those words. They're an amazing part of the gospel. But it seems to me that Paul is saying something even more basic and more wonderful.

Those are all forensic categories. There's much more. Grace gives us a new being, an identity as citizens of the kingdom, as full-fledged members of God's family, as vital construction stones in his ever-growing temple, a dwelling in which the triune God lives by his spirit.

[10:59] That is, the heart of this passage, the heart of the passage to which we move is that we find our home in the life of God.

In other words, Paul begins by talking about remembrance, but grace refuses to let our past become our permanent identity. It causes us to rejoice in our belonging in a new community for all nations.

Another way to look at this passage is to say that verses 11 to 12 present the need for reconciliation. We were estranged from God. Verses 13 to 18 reveal the power for reconciliation in the incarnate and suffering Son of God, who is our peace, who makes our peace, and preaches peace.

And then verses 19 to 22 give us the goal of our reconciliation, which is to be the community in Christ, citizens, children, and construction stones and the ever-growing building of the triune God. These are the three verbs that will be our focus. Remember your past, ruminate on Christ, and rejoice in your new identity before God.

[12:11] Let's talk first of all about remembering. Paul starts with what the people of God in Ephesus were before God acted on them. The genre of verses 11 and 12 is very much a genre of recollection, remember, anamnesis is the fancy word.

We are called to remember not so much our individual past as in 2, 1 to 10, but our communal past. Remembrance that prior to encountering the grace of God, the Ephesians and us were alienated from God and alienated from our fellow humans.

I mean, that is a reality that exists today. Christ is the solution to it, and we as the church live it and preach it, but we recognize there's a day to come when the fullness of reconciliation will be worked out.

But in the meantime, all kinds of conflict exist in the world. You can't read the news today without recognizing all of that conflict. It happens in this war-torn world in which we live.

It happens also in social circles. Here's one microcosm of the conflicts that happen amongst people. One New Year's Eve, this happened in the early 20th century, one New Year's Eve at London's Garrick Club, British playwright Frederick Lonsdale was asked by actor Seymour Hicks to reconcile with a fellow member.

[13:32] The two had quarreled in the past and never restored their friendship. You must, Hicks said to Lonsdale, it is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy new year. So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to his enemy, I wish you a happy new year, but only one.

What the Ephesians specifically were to remember is what they were before they had, by amazing grace, been made into a unity in Christ's church. Paul's focus seems to be the Gentiles, who after all are the majority in this Ephesian church.

They are called upon to remember their alienated past. And Paul takes them down a memory lane that's not too pleasant. I love the way commentator William Henderson describes the Gentiles as Paul describes them here.

They were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and godless. But I've noticed something in this text. Every time Paul speaks about the lostness of the Gentiles, he actually implicates the lostness of the Jewish people as well.

And he puts them on a level ground. So, for example, the Gentiles were not in the Abrahamic covenant of promise as listed yet. The Jews forgot that that covenant had a very important phrase, all nations of the earth will be blessed.

[14:58] Yes, it is true that the Gentiles were not in the genealogy of the Messiah, but the Jews forgot that many Old Testament passages actually predicted a Messiah for the world, in the book of Ezekiel, as a case in point.

The Gentiles, it is true, were without hope and without God. That word without God is the word *atheoi*, which is atheists. Yet Paul in Romans 2 clearly indicated that even the Gentiles had been given the witness of creation.

The Jews had been called to reach the Gentiles. That's the point. But they had excluded instead of evangelizing them all through the Old Testament. Another way to say that is their election to be the people of God was intended for expansion to the world, but they hoarded it instead.

The Gentiles were the butt of Jewish name-calling in history past. The Jews engaged in the practice of calling Gentiles the uncircumcised, and that was a swear. They developed a superior and despicable attitude of the Gentiles, calling them dogs.

William Barclay notes that the Jews even considered Gentiles to have been created by God to be fueled for the fires of hell. And I notice here that Paul actually indicates the need for both Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled to God.

[16:21] And he says it quite clearly in verse 16. And in his one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

So in summary, all of us, apart from Christ, are alienated from God, broken and rebellious, and we have not experienced true community until we came to know Christ.

We couldn't enter into one's spiritual life and experience with other people. Barriers built on race, caste, class, creed, and education still exist.

But praise God, the reconciling person and work of Christ abolished all that. And our mission as his people today is to work that reconciling work out in our times. Why does Paul ask them to look back?

I think, just very briefly, some reasons. He wants them to remember that it was all of grace. He wants them to celebrate the wonder of where they had come from.

[17:26] I'll never forget leading a pastor's conference at Regent, and we had communion at the end of the conference, and a gentleman came to the front to receive bread, and tears were streaming down his face.

And his words as I gave him the bread was, he's, is it really true that Jesus died for a sinner like me? For me? For me? For me? Fourthly, it removes all pride and any sense of superiority that would prevent us from welcoming others into the saving life of Christ.

And fifthly, it would set off any friction between Jews and Gentiles, Gentile believers, something very necessary when you read the Galatian epistle in which it is evident that some Jewish believers were requiring Gentile believers to be circumcised and to become Jews in order to become Christians.

However, and this is absolutely crucial, this backward look is not where Paul stops. We are not to camp there permanently. We can all look back on our history before we knew Jesus and be ashamed of things and remember his grace.

That's wonderful. But as the 19th century Scottish minister, Robert Murray Machane, once said, for every look at yourself, including your past, take 10 looks at Christ.

[18:41] And that's what I want to do as we come to the second point. So remember, remember your past and thank God for his grace. But secondly, and this is maybe the heart of the passage, above all, let your present preoccupation be not with yourself, but with Christ.

Reflect on Christ who is our peace. What he has done representatively for us. The genre here is not remember. It's contrast.

In fact, it's revolution. You were this, but now you are this. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. We are called to contemplate Christ.

I want to contemplate Christ in three very brief ways. Number one, he's called peace. He is our peace. Secondly, he works our peace by his reconciling work on the cross.

He made peace, verse 15. And thirdly, he preaches peace. First of all, he is our peace. I think sometimes as evangelicals, we tend to separate the incarnation from the atonement of Jesus.

[19:53] And forgetting that Jesus had to become fully human in order that the atonement would be efficacious for us. He took our place. He stood in our place in life, death, and resurrection.

And so he is our peace. Paul says he is our peace before he says he makes our peace. He still is our peace today, I want to suggest. At the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for us, applying the finished work of the atonement to us.

And so that's the first thing, glorious thing about Jesus. He is our peace. He has become one with us that we might become one with him. But secondly, it says he has made peace, thus making peace.

And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God upon the cross. And this is such a rich vein of truth that God has in Christ reconciled us to himself.

Christ has put to death our hostility, the hostility by dying upon the cross, bearing our judgment, bearing our pain. And he died for the world. In his generic human body, he stands for both Jew and Gentile.

[21:04] As human, he dies for us. And Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, as he expands on reconciliation, says, Now all things are of God. I want to suggest to you folks that reconciliation is all of God.

We receive it, yes, by faith. But he works it. We simply receive it. Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul says something more detailed about the mechanism of reconciliation. In 2 Corinthians 5, 19, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

The three persons of the Trinity were present at the cross. And atonement was worked in the person of the Son, in his person. We must never separate his person from his work. And the writer of the Hebrews speaks about the fact that through the eternal spirit, Christ offered himself without spot to God.

You see all three persons of the Trinity there. This is no act of cosmic child abuse, a father punishing his son. It's the whole Trinity. It was present in the event of reconciling of the world.

[22:09] Though in particular, it was the person of the Son who suffered for us and endured our alienation. But third, he preaches peace. You may wonder, what in the world does that mean?

Do you remember Jesus after his resurrection preaching? I don't. I don't think that's what it means. I think Paul is compressing things.

It's cryptic. When Jesus died and rose again and ascended to heaven, what did he do? He sent the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit preached Christ and Christ was preaching through the Holy Spirit.

The two persons of the Trinity are deeply intertwined. They're co-inherent, each in the other. And as the Spirit empowered the apostles, Christ is preaching. And today, every preacher who takes the word of God seriously and the apostles' doctrine seriously, when they stand up to preach, Christ is preaching through them.

It's a very high view of preaching, but it's one that the Reformation stood for and that we stand for as well. And so, this is the great reality. Christ has come and he is our peace.

[23:21] He died to become our peace, to make peace. And he is now at the right hand of the Father where he continues to be peace. And he sent his Spirit in order that the word of God, the word of Christ, might be preached.

But now, finally, we've talked about remembering our past, but not staying there. Reflecting on Christ. But thirdly, this is the wonderful reality for us as believers in Jesus.

We have become something. Our being has been changed. And it's reflected in these three beautiful metaphors with which I'll end the sermon. We have been made citizens of the kingdom of God.

Fellow citizens with God's people. You know, bear in mind that Paul wrote these things when the Roman Empire was at the height of its powers. And no doubt, Paul even uses his Roman citizenship.

So, we do have earthly citizenships here. But the point is that there is a higher citizenship, a higher calling. The kingdom of God and the church and the kingdom of God are one in some senses.

[24:31] And we have a responsibility. The special reign of Christ over his church involves us in a citizenship of far higher value and privilege. And even more urgent responsibility.

This is what you've become. This is what you are. I love the comment of the famous Welsh preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones who stated, We no longer live on a passport. But we really have our birth certificates.

We really do belong. Can you imagine how this reality must be received by people like the Dalit peoples of India who have no political rights?

The church is what's meant to make the difference and then welcome the Leet peoples and all peoples of the world. In God's eyes, they are precious and they are kings and priests. Secondly, we are children in the family of God. That's more familiar. It's a warmer term. It's a lovely term. We've been made children of the living God. Children of the Father. That theme actually reverberates also throughout this epistle.

[25 : 31] And this is wonderful because it's a belonging. It's a belonging. And, you know, the image of God as our Father is a place to find healing from our Father wounds in life through communion with the Father of the fatherless.

And thirdly, we are stones in God's temple. Paul shifts the metaphor in one phrase from the household to the house built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The cornerstone is either at the top of the building giving its shape or at the bottom of the building. We're not quite sure, but it gives shape. Christ gives shape to his community. But here's what I want to end with.

This is what I notice very, very tellingly with regard to this particular image. We are construction stones in that building.

And what I notice about this, first of all, it's Trinitarian because Paul says we are becoming a holy temple in the Lord Jesus, a dwelling in which God the Father lives by his spirit.

[26 : 43] Can you believe it? We are brought into a place of nearness with the whole triune Godhead. But secondly, there's something very powerful about the imagery here.

The image is dynamic, not static. God doesn't just form the little building. And the church is not just meant to be a little building of people. It's meant to be a growing.

It's being built together to rise to become a holy temple in the Lord. Yes, God provides reconciliation. But 2 Corinthians 5 says, yet we are his agents.

And he's given us the ministry of reconciliation. The true church is constantly preaching to its friends and neighbors. Be reconciled to God. The church is never permitted to be a community in which people are just complacently happy and happy with their little comfortable church, proud of being their church.

And I would sometimes call it a community of huddle and cuddle. The church is a missional church, deep in its communion, but wide in its message and impact.

[27 : 53] We as the church coming together are, as the church, missional. It's wonderful how many races and people of different ethnic backgrounds are in this church.

That's a sign of God's reconciling work, and we're so thankful for that. But I can't just stop there with being the church in a static way. We are called to draw people into faith, into repentance, into discipleship.

We are meant to be a reconciling force in society, amongst First Nations and European and Asian people. I was so glad to hear a few years ago about the role of a group of people called African Enterprise.

They had a role in preventing war in South Africa between the Zulus and the Kozos. That's the bright spot. But I grew up in two countries that were deeply racist and had churches that were deeply racist.

And it's so grievous to me to think back on those days. So apartheid in South Africa and informal apartheid in Rhodesia, where I grew up. And churches bought into this.

[29 : 02] Rather, they should have modeled for society a new humanity where all are equal and all are loved and all can contribute to the building of the temple.

This reconciliation extends, of course, all the way to the healing of creation, but that's for another night. In sum, remember your past and thank God for his grace.

Ruminant on Christ. Meditate on him. And rejoice in who you are as the reconciled and reconciling people of God. Amen.

Amen.