

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 2:11-22 Making the Two into One - Part 2

This part 2 of last week's sermon on what happens when we come to faith in Jesus. As reminder, what I mentioned last week is that usually we come to faith in Jesus because of the weight of our guilt and sin and we are seeking forgiveness for our sin. We come to Jesus to beg him to forgive our sins based on his death on the cross and resurrection 3 days later. His death atones for our sins and his resurrection gives us new life. The basic gospel message - the glorious gospel message - is that we are saved by believing the Lord Jesus died for our sins and imputes to us his righteousness. If we believe, we have eternal life.

But that's not all that happens when we come to faith in Jesus. God's design for us is so much bigger than that. When we come to faith in Jesus we are grafted into the historic people of God - the story of the OT becomes part of our story and our heritage.

And what Paul is reminding us here is that us Gentiles - non-Jews - before we had faith in Jesus were completely without any hope. We had no promises from God, we were foreigners to Israel, we were without God, without Christ. We were completely cut off from the people of God.

But through the blood of Jesus our sins were forgiven and we were brought into the people of God. We were brought into God's gracious covenant people that includes Abraham and David and Joshua and Boaz and Jonathan. In fact, because of Jesus there is no more Jew/Gentile distinction based on genetics. Now the distinction that someone is part of God's people is based on someone's faith in Jesus.

Those who believe in Jesus the Bible calls true Jews, true Israel. And all those who don't believe in Jesus - Jew or Gentile - are now the gentiles, the pagans. So after Jesus came the definition of the people of God changed to those who have faith in Jesus versus those who don't.

Now, that sounds pretty straight forward. Just a simple reading here makes it clear that there is no more division at all or in any way between Jew and Gentile. We are all one in Christ Jesus. That doesn't seem all that controversial.

But here's the deal - and this may ruffle some feathers - there are a lot of people who believe that ethnic Jews are still the really special people of God. Gentiles are in, we're saved. We get promises. But the really special people of God are ethnic Jews.

And they get that because in the OT God clearly chose Israel and blessed her.

Deut 7:6: For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth.

And the idea is that although we're in the New Covenant and have salvation through faith in Jesus, not through genetics, the Jews must still have some special place in God's heart. More so than the Gentiles.

And this has a lot of implications. It has implications for how we view our place in God's redemptive plan of God as gentiles. Are we just red-headed step children who get the crumbs of the Kingdom and Jewish people are the really the Father's favorite? But it also has a lot of political implications especially here in America. It can have implications for your view of eschatology.

I want to show you from recent events just how much of an implication it has. But I want to say 2 things first.

1) Just because someone doesn't believe that modern Israel is God's chosen people doesn't make them antisemitic. A lot of times when anyone pushes back on the idea that unbelieving, pagan Israel somehow doesn't have God's favor they're labeled an antisemite - a Jew hater. But that's not true.

Even Jesus said that many are called but few are what? Chosen. Not all Jews are chosen of God.

Paul says in **Rom 9:6:** not all Israel is truly Israel. Only those who believe in Jesus are.

2) I don't really have a strong opinion about the current conflict unfolding right now. This is not a polemic either way for war or our involvement in the current situation.

But let me show you how the theology that somehow unbelieving Jews are God's chosen people - Zionism - can impact how we think through modern conflicts.

When Israel attacked Iran a few days Glenn Beck - who is a conservative-ish Mormon political commentator - posted this on Facebook: "Heavenly Father, please protect Israel and her people...your chosen people."

Now, should we pray for Israel and other nations who are on the brink of war? Sure. We should want peace and we shouldn't want unnecessary death anywhere in the world. Also, there are many Christians in Iran.

But Beck made a very clear theological statement: Israel is your chosen people. He's Mormon, he's not a Christian at all. But that post was liked by 43,000 people, many of whom are Christians. And they liked it because they believe what Glenn Beck believes: that the modern day Jews - including the state of Israel - are the chosen people of God. They believe that there is still a covenant between Jews and God.

Permit me to give one more example. Theology matters. And theology comes out in politics more than you'd think.

This week Tucker Carlson interviewed Ted Cruz. Maybe you saw clips of this. But in this whole interview he brings up the Iran Israel conflict and he says the same thing Glenn Beck did:

Cruz: "Growing up in Sunday School I was taught from the Bible those who bless Israel will be blessed. And those who curse Israel will be cursed. And from my perspective I want to be on the blessing side." ...

Tucker: "Where is that?"

Cruz: "I don't have the Scripture for you."

Tucker: "You're quoting a Bible verse and you don't know where it is or have context for it but it's your theology?"

Cruz: "Where does my support for Israel come from? Number 1) we're commanded biblically to support Israel..."

And what ensues is this back and forth about whether or not the blessing that God gave to Abraham back in Genesis 12:3 means that we have to give unconditional support the secular state Israel 4,200 years after God said those things.

Both Cruz and Beck have political views and vote to go to war based on how they understand who Israel is and what our relationship to Jews should be.

And interestingly most Christians know that unbelieving Jews aren't going to heaven. Anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus is condemned in their sins. But yet somehow they also believe that God has chosen them.

To which I usually ask: chosen them for what? How can someone be chosen of God and yet reject Jesus their entire life and go to hell? They don't have much of an answer for that.

Turn to Gen 12:1-3 for a minute. We'll get to Ephesians, but this is important for you to see. Even when we're not on the brink of war people quote passages like these all the time. This is the first go-round of the Abrahamic covenant. It's the promise of God to give Abraham children. **Read 1-3**

Now this is important. Does God say we need to bless Israel? No. God says the people should bless Abraham. And that God will make Abraham a great nation.

"But that's Israel!" Is it? Abraham had several sons. Are all of them blessed in the same manner? Is Ishmael blessed like Isaac? No, of course not. Is Esau blessed like Jacob? Of course not. There's selectivity. Even within the family of Abraham. **Turn to 15:1-6**

This is years later, Abraham still has no kids. God reiterates the promise again. **Read 1-6**

Here God repeats the promise but in different terms. The nation and children are called the offspring. It's the same promise. And Abraham believes it.

This is Abraham's conversion. How was he converted? He was justified by faith Christ. Abraham believed in Jesus. You say, well, Jesus isn't in this passage - how could he believe in Jesus? Children are in the passage. Wasn't Abraham saved by having faith in God giving him children? No, he was saved by believing in Jesus. He just didn't quite know it. **Turn to Galatians 3:15-29**

I know this is a long intro, but stick with me. I'm trying to show you that even in the OT it doesn't say "if you bless Israel you'll be blessed." It says if you bless Abraham and his offspring you'll be blessed. Who are his offspring? **Read 15-16**

Who was God talking about in **Genesis 15**? He was talking about Jesus. The offspring that would come long after Isaac and Jacob and Judah. God wasn't primarily promising physical children, although he was, he was primarily promising Christ. Now watch this: Paul is going to show us that the Law that came after Abraham was designed to lead us to Christ. **Read 23-29**

That's why I made the case last week from here and Romans and 1 Peter and Galatians that true Israel - the true Jews, the true circumcision - is the church who believes in Jesus.

We the Church are the chosen race, the holy what? Nation. The royal priesthood and the people of God's own possession. Why? Because we have the same faith as Abraham.

Where do Cruz and Beck and many others get this idea that we have to unconditionally support the modern pagan state of Israel unconditionally at every turn? The theological root of this idea is a movement called dispensationalism. This movement started in England and in America in the mid 1800s influenced by leaders like John Darby and CI Scofield and Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological seminary. Even John MacArthur - who you know I love dearly - is very much a dispensationalist.

And dispensationalism has changed over time. It used to be a very complex system with charts and graphs and ways to divide up the Bible into different epochs. But today really the 2 biggest remnants of dispensational theology are 1) pre tribulational rapture view of the end times. The idea that Jesus will come secretly and rapture the church and leave the rest of the world to endure a 7 year tribulation. After which Jesus will return and start the 1,000 millennial reign on earth.

The second pillar of dispensationalism that remains is 2) that there is a stark distinction between ethnic Israel and the church. That ethnic Israel - the Jews - still holds a place in God's heart. They are God's chosen people.

Now, I have nothing against the Jews or any other ethnicity. But I reject both of those 2 aspects of dispensational theology. I don't believe the Bible teaches a pre tribulational rapture view. I think Jesus comes back and that's it: the universe is dissolved in fire and he makes the New Heavens and New Earth where we dwell in joy in resurrected bodies forever. You can disagree with that, that's okay.

But - more to the point here - the Bible does not teach that the unbelieving Jewish who reject Jesus all their life are God's chosen people. That makes no sense. If they're chosen and they go to hell what were they chosen for?

So why the long introduction? Because I wanted you to see, if you haven't already on the news, theology matters. You have US Senators going to war and arming pagan countries because of Sunday school lessons and verses they can't find in the Bible. That's crazy you guys. You have conservative influencers and

conservative friends whose view of foreign policy is driven by bad theology. And that theology has real life and death consequences.

On this side of the New Covenant the Bible is clear that God's chosen people are Jews and Gentiles who believe Jesus is the risen Messiah. And frankly, even before Jesus the chosen people were not every Israelite - it was those who followed God in faith.

Jesus doesn't have 2 separate brides, or 2 separate people divided by ethnicity. No, he has one people that he made by his blood. And that's what this whole section is talking about. That's the amazing news of the gospel. We gentiles who believe in Jesus have the exact same status and benefits as Jews who believe in Jesus. And conversely, Jews who reject Jesus are just as pagan as gentiles who reject Jesus.

Big picture: The gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. This is why we gentiles rejoice in Jesus. We're not like second cousins twice removed getting scraps from Jesus in the Kingdom. We are full heirs.

So we saw that we were excluded from the Kingdom. We saw that Christ brought us near.

3) How Jesus brought us near. **Read 13-15**

There's a lot going on here but let's just break it down piece by piece. The big picture is he brought us near.

But don't miss the big point in **Verse 14**: he has made us both one. In God's kingdom there is no more distinction between Jew and Gentile. Jewish Christians are not super-Christians. And Gentile Christians are not just barely getting in. We're one.

That's what we saw in Galatians: we are sons of Abraham through faith in Jesus. Paul talks about this all over the NT. To be a son of Abraham - a Jew - is to have faith in Jesus.

What does it mean that we're both one? Or what does it mean that there's no more Jew or Greek? Slave or free? Male or female? Are we just woke now egalitarians now where gender means nothing? And we refuse to believe there are actually slaves anywhere? "I'm not identifying as a slave anymore?"

No. What this means is that when it comes to salvation, when it comes to entrance into the Kingdom your gender doesn't matter. Your status as a slave or master doesn't matter. Whether you are Jew or Gentile doesn't matter.

In Christ - through faith in Jesus we are all fully sons of God. Jesus levels the playing field forever.

Over and over there is no more distinction in God's salvation economy between Jew and Gentile. "But won't a lot of Jews come to faith in Jesus just before he returns?"

Some people believe that many Jews will be saved right before Jesus returns. My answer is: maybe. Romans 11 could be understood that way - I don't think that's Paul's point. But let's say it is. Let's say just before Jesus comes back God saves a bunch of ethnic Jewish people. He can do that, that's up to him.

But how are they saved? By their Jewishness? No. They're saved like anyone else: by abandoning any hope they might have in their ethnicity and trusting in Jesus alone for salvation, just like Gentiles.

This is the wonder of the gospel. Paul says he has made us one. **Read 14-15**

So what Jesus did when he died was destroy the distinction between Jew and Gentile. A lot of those distinctions were seen in the Law of God in the OT.

You ever wonder why there were these weird laws that the Jews had to abide by? They had to be circumcised, couldn't eat shellfish or owl or pork. They couldn't plant multiple crops in the same field. Their garments had to be made from just one fabric. Why? What's the point of all of that?

Some people will try to say about the pork thing: well, you can get trichinosis from undercooked pork. That's not why God gave the law. That disease is ridiculously rare and there was no cooking revolution that happened when Jesus died on the cross. He didn't teach the disciples proper cooking temperatures for pork or shellfish.

The reason these laws existed was to create an obvious distinction between Jew and Gentile. It created a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile that was unnatural. How do you know the guy down the road is a Jew? Because he only plants wheat in his field. How do you know the other guy is a Gentile? Because he raises pigs and wears weird clothing with all these different fabrics.

Many of the OT laws were identification markers of the Jews. There was no moral aspect to them, they just made it easy to identify who was a Jew and who wasn't. And faithful Jews were required to keep these laws to keep themselves distinct from the Gentiles.

When Jesus died - the moment he died - something happened at the Temple. It was very significant. What was that? The curtain torn from top to bottom. What does that mean? It means that there's no longer a separation from God. There's no distinction between high priest and priest. No distinction between priest and laity. No distinction between male and female. No distinction between Jew and Gentile. All can come and access the Father directly through faith in Jesus.

Jesus broke the dividing wall in his flesh. This was radical. He's abolished those commandments. It just can't be any clearer. **Read 14-16**

Three times he says Jesus made us one. Made us both one, one new man, one body. All of this was accomplished through the cross. The cross made peace between us and God.

Rom 5:1: we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But that's not the only peace we have. We now have peace between Jew and Gentile. There's no more hostility. There's no more oneupmanship.

And just to be clear there's no more distinction between any ethnicity. In the reformed world there's sort of a weird revival of ethnic hatred going on. I think there are definitely differences between ethnicities and cultures. Some are better than others.

But do you know what happens when an Asian comes to faith in Jesus? They become a son of God.

What happens when an African comes to faith in Jesus? They become a son of God.

South American? Mexican? Scandanavian? Persian? Jew? Gentile? Their culture isn't completely lost, but they have access to the Father by the Spirit of God. **Read 17-18**

In Bible college I remember our OT professor talking about holy places in the Bible. And when Israel came into the promised Land the holiest place on the planet was a small room in a small building on the Temple Mount. It was the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could go there and only once a year.

The next room, was a little less holy. Priests offered twice daily incense there. But only priests.

Male Jews in good health and good standing could come into the Temple Courtyard. The women had to stay outside. Gentiles had to stay even further back.

Israel was the Promised Land, outside was the Goyim - the gentiles. So there were these concentric circles of holy land that went out from the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount.

What happened at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came? The Temple of God was no longer in a building of stone. The sacred space where God dwelled changed. What did it change to? It's still a building, just not the building we usually think of. **Read 19-22**

This is huge. It's not just that the Gentiles have been brought in. It's that we've been brought in, we've been filled with the Spirit and we are actually the place where God lives. God dwells in his people.

We have gone from being the forsaken people to being the holy Temple to the Lord. And notice, it's not just that each individual Christian is a Temple - though we are. It's that we're all together one big Temple in the Lord. **Read 21-22**

God's not filling some small decorated room in Jerusalem somewhere. He's filling all of his people all over the world, Jew and Gentile alike to be his dwelling place.

Remember all the problems we had as Gentiles in **Vs. 12? Read**
All those problems have been solved in Jesus.

- 1) We were separated, now we've been brought near. **Read 13**
- 2) We were alienated from the commonwealth, we're now citizens **Read 19**
- 3) We were strangers to the covenants and promises, now we're no longer strangers. **Read 19**
- 4) We had no hope, now we're reconciled. **Read 15-16**
- 5) We were without God and now we're God's temple in the world.

Paul couldn't be any clearer. The chosen people of God, the blessed ones of God are not pagan Jews. It's Christians, believing Jews and Gentiles who are not defined by our ethnicity, but we're defined by following Jesus and are filled with the Spirit.

Through faith in Jesus, we've been brought into the most amazing story that the world has ever seen and known. We've been brought into the Bible's story.

This affects everything. It affects how you view the news, how you view your place in God's Kingdom. It affects how you view the promises of God.

It's humbling to have been brought in by Jesus's blood. To God be the glory.

Pray