

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 2:11-22 Making the Two into One - Part 1

This morning we unpacking a section that probably doesn't seem really weighty for most of us devotionally. Some of the other sections in Ephesians may seem to be more significant. But I truly believe this section is more substantial than most of us realize.

Let me put it a different way: a lot of times when we come to the Bible as Christians we read some of the OT and it's these stories of God doing stuff through Israel and making various promises. Maybe there's some moral things we can do or not do.

Then we flip over to the NT and it seems so different. We've got these gospels that give us the life of Jesus, the epistles that explain theology to us and how to live. We see that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in the death and resurrection of Jesus - but it feels so different than the OT.

So how do we understand the OT? How do we understand what God was doing with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, the prophets? And how does that connect with us as Christian 2,000 years after Jesus?

Well, what Paul is telling us here is that we've been brought into that storyline through faith in Jesus. **Read 2:8-9**

So we know this and that this is how sins are forgiven. This is how we are saved from the wrath of God. Notice the connection in **Vs. 11**: "therefore" - because we've been saved by grace alone through faith alone - we are now part of the historic people of God.

Abraham's story is my story - because I'm his child.

David's Kingdom is my Kingdom - because I'm his child.

The promises of Israel are my promises because I've been brought in.

Interestingly, in storytelling this is one of the most powerful types of stories. This is part of the reason Harry Potter and Star Wars and The Matrix and Dune and other movies and books are so popular. They have a main character who discovers this amazing truth about reality and they become part of grand storyline that they never even knew existed. It's called the Chosen One narrative, or the hidden identity narrative.

It's when someone becomes part of a bigger narrative than they realized.

When you came to faith in Jesus you were probably looking for forgiveness of your sins. You felt the weight of oppression and guilt and knew that judgment was coming. You believed in your heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead and were saved.

But what the Bible tells us is that while our sins are forgiven, something else was happening too. We become part of this grand story that God designed all the way back in Genesis.

The storyline of the OT is the story of God and his chosen people - usually Israel. God blesses Israel, protects them, gives them laws and grace and blessing. And everyone outside of Israel is cursed.

Beyond the border of Israel there is chaos and godlessness and cursing. And only Israel was blessed. In fact, the Gentiles were so cursed they didn't even know they were cursed. Many didn't even know there was only one true and living God. You remember when Pharaoh asks Moses "What god told you to take Jews away?" Moses says "Yahweh." Pharaoh responds by saying "I've never heard of him."

The Gentiles were so blind and darkened that they didn't even know the one true and living God existed. And what Paul is talking about here is that when we were saved, it's not just that our sins were forgiven and now we go to church and live moral lives - all that is true. He's saying we've been brought into an amazing storyline of God's grace. **Read 13**

That's the hinge verse in this whole section. It's really the whole point.

Big Picture: Jesus died to bring us into the people of God. This section unfolds in 4 parts - we'll just look at 2 of them this morning

1) Gentiles were excluded **Read 11-12**

Paul starts off here by recounting the sad state of Gentiles before Jesus. What's a Gentile? A Gentile is anyone who is not a Jew. In the Bible there are Jews - the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And then there's everyone else on the planet who is a Gentile. A goyim in Hebrew. Ew.

Goyim - Gentiles - were the pagans. They were dogs, pigs, filthy unclean idolatrous pagans. The word goyim is used of the nations afar that didn't know God. They were disgusting uncircumcised. These were the pagans that offered their children on the altars.

Joshua said to the Israelites when they got into the land "do not mix with the goyim - the gentiles - remaining among you." **Josh 23:7**

In the OT the Jews were God's people, the Gentiles we're not God's people. And chief distinction to show the difference was circumcision. God's people - the Jews - were circumcised. The Gentiles were uncircumcised.

David says about Goliath "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine who dares defy the armies of the living God?" **1 Sam 17:23**

Being a gentile wasn't just simple designation. It was racial slur - just like any racial slur today. The Jews hated the Gentiles, many still do.

Paul says remember that was the distinction before Jesus. In fact, he says "remember" twice. **Read 11-12a**

Now this is a cool theological passage. He says you Gentiles in the flesh - most of us are gentiles genetically. We're gentiles in the flesh. We're not Jewish.

He says remember that the Jews - the physically circumcised - called you uncircumcised. We were out. Why is he saying it that way?

Let me take just a little rabbit trail here because I think this is important.

Paul is taking a shot at circumcision. Jews built their whole identity around circumcision. But they thought physical circumcision was the most important thing. It's not. Circumcision of the foreskin was always a picture that our hearts needed to be circumcised. It was never the end goal.

In fact he says it was made in the flesh by hands. Made by hands - you what was made by hands all throughout the OT? Idols. He's saying how Jews understand physical circumcision is idolatry.

Circumcision was always a picture that our hearts needed to be dedicated to God. So in the NT the true circumcision are those who believe in Jesus. Our hearts - not our flesh - have been circumcised.

Look at Phil 3:2-3. Paul makes this argument throughout the NT that Christians are now true Jews, and truly circumcised. We are the people of God. And unbelievers - Jews and gentiles - are now pagans. With Jesus, everything has changed. **Read 3:2-3**

Who are the dogs, the evildoers and the mutilators? The unbelieving Jews. They are now unclean dogs, mutilators like the prophets of Baal from Elijah's day cutting themselves up. They think chopping stuff will make them holy. It won't.

Because of Jesus, the flow of history is now not based on genetics or circumcision, but based on our faith in Jesus. We are the true circumcision. We are those who worship God.

Turn to Rom. 2:25-29. Paul makes the same kind of argument. I remember first being a Christian and wondering why Paul kept talking about circumcision. What a weird thing to keep talking about. Not if you were a Jew though. If you were a Jew and thought this was the defining mark of the people of God it was everything. It was like baptism for us now. Physical circumcision doesn't matter. **Read 2:25**

Circumcision is great as long as you keep the whole law. Who does that? No one. **Read 25-29**

This is wild you guys. Paul flat says, you're a Jew only if you are circumcised in the heart. What does that make Christians? Jews. What does that make unbelieving Jewish people? Gentiles.

The Script has been fully changed. **Look at 1 Pet. 2:9-10.** Peter is talking to Gentiles here who believe in Jesus. And what Peter does is describe them the way Israel was described. We know that they're Gentiles because he says you were once not a people. That can only mean gentiles. **Read 9-10**

All of these descriptions were given to Israel in the OT and Peter is now describing the church - filled with Gentiles - with terms that applied to Israel.

This isn't talking about Jews - it can't be because he says you were once not a people. Jews were a people of God. And Jews had received God's mercy. Peter says that believing Gentiles are now the true Jews. And watch this, unbelievers are now the Gentiles. **Read 11-12**

Christian's, watch out how you live your life in front of the gentiles. NIV says how you live among the pagans. But the word is actually ethne, gentiles. Christians are now the covenant people of God and the unbelieving Jews and gentiles are now the pagan Gentiles. And we need to live honorably among unbelievers who Peter says are now the Gentiles.

What has happened in Christ is that our identity has been transformed. All Christians - whether ethnically Jew or Gentile - are now true Jews, the true people of God. We are now identified with the historic covenant people.

Gal. 6:13 says we are the Israel of God. We are the children of Abraham.

That's why I often say Nehemiah is our Grandpa. Or David is our Grandpa. Or Joshua is our Grandpa. Why? Because through faith in Jesus we've been grafted in to this amazing story that we never even know existed.

Now, that's backdrop for where Paul is heading in Ephesians 2. The big picture here is that Jesus died to bring us - gentiles - into the people of God. Take a look **back in Eph. 2.**

So the people of God used to be physical Jews versus physical gentiles. Now the people of God are the true Jews who are Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. **Read 11-12**

Paul tells us twice to remember who we were before faith in Jesus. This is important because sometimes we can forget where we came from. We can forget just how much grace God has shown us. If you look down on unbelievers, don't have compassion on unbelievers a lot of time it stems from this right here: you've forgotten how much God saved you from.

Paul lists 5 ways we were saved.

A. We were separated from Christ. In the OT there was a constant theme of the Messiah, the Christ. Messiah is the OT Hebrew word meaning an anointed one. Someone anointed with oil to show they were chosen by God to lead his people. The word Christ is just the NT Greek word for Messiah. So Messiah and Christ mean the same thing.

When we say Jesus Christ - that's not his last name. It's his role. He's Jesus Messiah. Jesus the anointed one, chosen by God to lead his people.

The prophecies of Messiah started vague in Genesis 3 - just someone who would come and crush the head of the serpent. Make right what went wrong in the Garden of Eden.

But the Messianic prophecies got more specific over time. The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah because Judah was destined to rule. Messiah would come from the line of David through Solomon. Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Born of a virgin. To some extent the whole OT is this anticipation of Messiah.

Jospeh is in charge of the whole world...is he the guy? No
Moses is a great leader...is he the one? No.
Saul, he's a big guy, looks the part..is he Messiah? No.
All these guys fail.

And it's mostly a Jewish concern. Most Gentiles had no idea about Messiah. It's not even on their radar.

That's why when the Jewish leaders drag Jesus to Pilate to crucify him they have to explain to Pilate the significance of Jesus saying he's the Christ. They have to explain that Jesus is claiming to be King over all kings.

That's why Pilate asks Jesus: Are you a what? King. Jesus said: Who told you to ask me that? Pilate didn't know anything about it.

Listen, that was all of us before we were saved. We were separated from Christ. Not only did we not know him, many of us didn't even know about him. It's a Jewish thing - what does it matter to us lowly goyim?

But if someone doesn't have Christ then they have nothing at all.

B) Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. Read 12

In the OT, all of God's special blessings flowed to the nation of Israel. Other nations would be blessed only if they were a blessing to her. This is what made Israel so special.

As most of you know there's debate just about every day recently about citizenship and who should be allowed in and who shouldn't be. What should the process be. Citizenship in any country has always been a big deal.

Israel had sort of a staged system. You could become part of the covenant people of God but you had to be circumcised and abide by the Law. If you were a woman you had to shave off your hair and go through an isolation ritual before you were fully a citizen.

Even then, you and your offspring were not allowed to come to the tabernacle. That required full assimilation which did not happen for 10 generations. So if you were a gentile it wasn't until your great-great-great-times 10 grandson that he could come into the tabernacle to sacrifice. That's when your family became a full citizen.

Gentiles couldn't just have a little surgery and be in like Flynn. They were alienated from Israel. They didn't have her protections and blessings or even full inclusion.

C) Strangers to the covenants and promises. Read 12

This is a big one. Covenants are the backbone of the Bible. Everything in the Bible is oriented around the covenants God has made. A covenant is basically a promise that God has made to do something. Over and over the Bible refers to various promises.

We saw earlier in Ephesians that the Father made a covenant with the Son - we call this the covenant of redemption. The Father promised the Son a redeemed humanity who would worship him forever and ever, the Son had to purchase them by taking on flesh and dying in their place. We see this especially in **John 17**.

God makes a promise to bless Abraham and make his offspring more numerous than the stars in the sky. In Abraham all the nations - goyim/ethne - will be blessed. How is God going to bless the nations? Through Jesus.

God makes covenants to Noah, to David, Moses, and promises a New Covenant to Jeremiah.

Think about that: God is making promises to people. I don't know about you, but every once in a while I get an email about how I'm part of some class action lawsuit. Where if I sign up I'll get a little piece of the action on something. I think we once got a check for \$1.37 because of some electronic we had.

But imagine if you got an email that the God of the universe was handing out checks. He was handing out promises. You'd want in on that, wouldn't you? Oh, but it turns out you don't qualify. You don't have the right genetics. You're not part of his people so you don't get any covenant promises.

That was the gentiles before Jesus.

D) Gentiles had no hope **Read 12**

What does that mean? No hope? Well throughout the OT God is called the hope of Israel.

Jer. 17:13: Yahweh is the hope of Israel - he is her rescuer.

Acts 28:20 Paul says he is in chains because of the hope of Israel - God will rescue him despite hard circumstances.

Gentiles didn't have that hope. And really, those who have no hope are those who are damned. They are those who, once they die, there is no chance of salvation, no chance of being reconciled to God. They also have no chance of having a resurrection body.

You remember in **1 Thess 4:13** Paul is talking about believers who had died. And he says I want you to know what happens to believers who die so that you don't grieve as those who have no hope.

When a Christian dies, we have hope of seeing them again in glory. We have hope of being raised in the resurrection. There will be a reunion of joy and glory between all Christians.

Gentiles don't have that hope. They don't have the hope of a glorious resurrection. They'll be raised from the grave only to be cast into the Lake of Fire.

E) Without God. **Read 12**

This was the ultimate problem of every Gentile: they didn't have God. They had many idols - many gods - but not the true God.

And this was our problem too. We were utterly cut off and destitute. We had absolutely nothing because we were not part of the covenant people.

Here's the transition. **Read 13**

Praise the Lord. Through Jesus we've been brought near to God. Not just that our sins have been forgiven - they have been. But we've been brought into this amazing covenant community that we didn't even know existed.

I knew a professor in seminary who adopted a couple of boys from Russia. These two kids knew nothing about America. But when they were adopted their parents began telling them about the history of their new family. And their family had many war heroes from WWII and the revolutionary war. They learned about their history. Not the history of Russia, but the history of their new family. The history of those in their new identity.

That's us. We're now part of the grand scheme of God's plan of redemption. And we got here in Christ Jesus. It's through Jesus that we are part of this story. And specifically through his blood. **Read 13**

The blood of Christ is his death on the cross. His suffering death forgave our sins, and brought us near to God and to God's people.

We'll look next time more at these amazing truths of how Jesus brought us near.

Pray