

EPHESIANS 2:11-12
The Wonderful Work of Salvation
Message 11
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INTRO: Before we begin this message, I want to show you where we are in Ephesians as I outline the book. Let me liken this book to a most beautiful hike, a very scenic trail in beautiful mountains. (Pictures ?? Dean Funk.) Let us say your hike is a total of 70 miles. And on this hike are lakes and beautiful scenes of snow capped peaks. There are flowers and birds and animals and fish. There are lakes and streams rushing downhill, and springs and pools. There is sight after sight. Just the flora and fauna alone is enough to keep you occupied, never mind all the rest.

The first 45 miles take you from Ephesians 1:3 to 3:21, I have called this section the wonderful work of salvation. There are two sections to this part of the trail. The first is the blessed source of our salvation. That is from 1:3-14. Then there are the prayers of the thankful messenger, Paul. That goes from 1:15-3:21.

But as we make our way along this trail in the second part, from 1:15 to 3:21, twice we come to a sign. These signs indicate two side trails and they loop back to the main trail. Both lead to a most beautiful peak from which you can view a vast tract of land of more mountains and lakes. And in 2:1, we come to the first side trail. I have called these trails 'digressions of thought' in Paul's letter. As he shares his prayers with us, all of a sudden he takes a turn and leads us to this beautiful high mountain. Paul's prayer is interrupted and there is the first digression. Paul, in sharing his prayers with the Ephesians, is side-tracked from 2:1-23. And this side trail shows us one of the most awesome truths we Gentiles will ever lay eyes on. It is the salvation of the Gentiles.

And this side trail has two sections to it. The first is the picture of what Gentiles are like before they are saved, and the second is what Gentiles must remember while they are saved. And we have come through the first part of this first side trail, and now we are going to make our way to the next peak.

Now I want to show you this in the text. First, 1:1-2 is introductory. Then, beginning at 1:3, we come to the first 45 miles of our hike. This part has two sections. The first is the blessed source of our salvation (read 1:3-14). The next section is the thankful messenger of this salvation (read 1:15-23).

So, as I see the letter, when Paul shares his prayers with the Ephesians he inserts two digressions. The first is from 2:1-22, and the second is from 3:2-13. Now if Paul had not taken these two digressions, he would have continued by sharing his prayers for them from 1:22 like this: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..." etc...

So, in chapter 2, we are in the first digression. This chapter could be a series all on its own. It is one unit of thought, and it is the salvation of the Gentiles, the 'even you' of 2:1. And this first digression leads up to one peak, that is 2:1-10, which we have just finished, and now we will make our way back to the main trail on a different route than the one we came. And it goes from 2:11-22. And 2:11-22 is further divided into two sections. First we have a picture of the Gentile before Christ came. That is 2:11-12. This is our subject tonight (read). Second, in this section we have a picture of the Gentiles after they are saved. So let us read 2:13-22. There is the incredible contrast of before and after Christ for the Gentile world. So let us begin with verses 11-12, the Gentile before Christ.

2) What the Gentiles must remember re: salvation (2:11-22)

a) Before Christ - BC

The section we are in now, is that in which Paul tells them, as Gentiles, to remember something very, very important (read verse 11). I agree with D. Martyn Lloyd Jones that in Ephesians 2 we get to see both the standing and state of the Gentile world before Christ. I have spoken to

you about the Christian's standing and state with regard to salvation. This chapter gives us the picture of the Gentiles standing and state before Christ and after Christ. In verses 1-10 he has shown the Ephesians what they were like before they were saved through Jesus Christ by grace through faith. That was their state. Look at it in 2:1-3 (read). That section shows them what they were like internally, in their hearts. They had a very wicked heart, as we all do by nature. And by nature of their very state, they were far removed from God.

But now, in 2:11-22 he will show them what they were like in relation to their standing before God. Unlike Israel, God's chosen nation through whom salvation came to these Gentiles; they, as Gentiles, were far away from God. And in our passage the Gentiles will now see what they were like externally, that is in comparison to God's people, the Jews. And before we go into this in detail, let me just simply spell out what they must remember that they were.

So Paul exhorts these Gentiles to always remember that before Christ came, they were separated from God by a great gulf. They were estranged from God physically, verse 11; and they were estranged spiritually, verse 12.

And the summation of their estrangement from God is given in verses 11-12 like this (read). They were Gentiles in the flesh; they were the un-circumcision; they were without Christ; they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; they were strangers from the covenants of

promise; they were without hope and without God in the world. Now that picture of them is about as dark externally, as the internal picture in the first section. And Paul is reminding them here to remember who they were in relation to God before Christ came.

Verses 11-12 give us what they were like before Christ and verses 13-22 tell us what they were like after Christ, that is after they were saved (read vs 12). They were brought near to God by the blood of Christ. They are now at peace with God; at one with the Jew; without division from the Jew; without enmity with God and man. They were one new man with the Jew and reconciled to God. They now had access to God by Christ through the Spirit, and they were no longer strangers and foreigners. They now belonged to the same family in Christ.

D. Maryn Lloyd Jones says that in verse 11 we do indeed come to a new section in this chapter. And he says that in 2:1-10 Paul has shown them as Gentiles their first obstacle in coming to God. It was their state and condition in sin. You see, it is the sinfulness of their inner condition that kept them from God.

But he says that in this new section, the second thing they must understand and remember is that their position or status in the economy of God as related to His law, kept them from having a relationship with God. In the first section Paul showed how they gained a relationship with God by having their sins dealt with. But now He will show how they gained a relationship as far as God's law is

concerned.

And let me tell you what our problem as Gentiles is to a great degree. First, though we have heard about the death of Christ on our behalf, we understand but very little of what God accomplished through that horrific price. We understand very little of the incredible price God paid to bring us, as Gentiles into His economy. We understand very little of the horribleness of sin. We know very little of the fear of God. That is with relation to Ephesians 2:1-10.

But, we also understand very little of what happens when we become Christians as far as our relationship to God is concerned. And that is what 2:11-22 is all about. Israel had that relationship, that is, the true Israel. But the Gentiles were as far removed from it as heaven is from earth. Such are the obstacles God overcome for the Gentile in Christ as portrayed in Ephesians 2.

And so we will now begin to look each of these separations in greater detail.

(1) Estranged from God
physically

So, the very first thing these Gentiles must remember is that before they were saved, they were just that, Gentiles in the flesh. They were extremely far removed from God. You see, when God originally created man, man increased and became larger families and eventually cities sprang up and different areas of the earth were settled. Then man

became very wicked and in Genesis 6-8 God destroyed all of mankind but for one family, the family of Noah. And once more the blood of mankind became various family groups. In Acts 17:22-28 Paul told the Gentile educated elite that God made of one blood all nations.

Well, this one blood divided up into various families as our DNA today shows. And in Genesis 12, some 2000 years after man's creation, God chose out one blood group of all those blood groups. We find this in Genesis 12. God called this man by name of Abram, out of the midst a wicked and perverse generation, to make of him descendents as the stars in the sky for number or as the sand of the sea shore; Abram, a man whose wife was barren.

And this man tried to help God out and brought about a people that have been the kind of people the flesh produces. I think Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar pictures the flesh and its unabating enmity with that which is spiritual. But eventually Abraham learned to trust God, and his wife bore him a son called, Yitzak, laughter. Well, Yitzak and Ishmael are still fighting today, both in the flesh and in the spirit.

But, the offspring of Yitzak became God's chosen people through whom God would reveal Himself to the world, first through the written Word of God, and later through the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ. And we know

this family of people as the Jews.

I had an e-mail a while ago that said, and I read, "I also wanted to thank you for your encouragement to finish reading my Bible. I am now in Joshua and am amazed at the journey that God's people had taken. Also, from what I've read I am now finding it hard to maintain a soft spot in my heart for the Jews because of their rebellion over and over towards God's commandments. I do feel sorry for them for what they have gone through but I wondered if you could possibly shed some light on helping me to understand a little better on why we should have compassion for the Jewish people. I know they are God's chosen people and I love them for that but with what I've read so far it's difficult."

Well, my answer is twofold. When God chose to save the world, He would do two things that would bring this salvation to mankind. First, He would have to communicate His mind to man. He chose to do that in written words. But He had to find a people group that would be faithful in both writing and preserving that Word for the rest of mankind. And the people God chose were those we today know as the Jews. You see, God had to choose a certain kind of people to whom He could entrust these words. This was a task too big for one person or for a short period of time. And he found Abram, and through him He was

able to bring about a people that He could entrust His divine Word to. It was also to the Jew that He entrusted His Living Word, Jesus Christ. And from these people, His chosen people, the Gentiles were far estranged. So Paul says here that the Gentiles must remember that before they were saved, they were Gentiles in the flesh and that had to span a huge gulf in order to bring them in. And let me say to us as Gentiles that we must remember that without the Jew we would be lost!

So, just what does Paul mean when he says they were Gentiles in the flesh? Well, first, they were the un-circumcision. When God called the Jew, He chose a sign by which they would be known, and this sign is known as circumcision. Now the sign God chose for the Jews was a sign in the flesh. You see, a Jew is one who is a Jew by blood. When you are born to a Jewish couple you are Jewish. You can't get around it. And when Israel was disciplined by God and driven out among the nations, they had this sign in the flesh. They could never get away from it. People could always check to see if they were Jews or not and many died, simply because they had the sign. Yes, they were called 'the circumcision.'

But as far as the Lord was concerned, this sign of being a Jew was a sign of a very high honor. Such a one was one of God's chosen people. They were a race chosen by God. God revealed Himself to them and to them

alone. Anyone that wanted to get right with God had to come to them. They were, of all people, God's chosen people.

Now this matter of circumcision was all twisted out of joint by the Jews. They came to think that all they needed to be close to God was to be circumcised. And truly, it should have been so, because they had the Word of God which should have brought them all to salvation. But, as the e-mail complained, they rebelled again and again. And so they became religious and legalistic, and many are so to this very day. Take a moment to look at what they were like in Jesus' day in Matthew 23 (read 23:1-7).

So let me explain what happened to the Jew by a symbol we are very familiar with. Let us take the symbolism of circumcision into the context of the Church. When the Lord began the Church, He gave to the Church a sign that indicated that one belonged to the Church, I mean the true Church. That sign was baptism. And before long, the Church made the very same error the Jews made with circumcision. Many nominal Christians worldwide, and many, right in our own community feel they are now a little better off spiritually because they have been baptized. But they have never been saved. Like the Jew, to many it has become an external, legalistic thing. But the external symbol ought to point to an internal reality, and if one is not born again, baptism is empty, completely empty. And

if a Jew was not born again,
circumcision was an empty thing.

Could it be that in the Church
God set out that baptism was to
happen after conversion, because
circumcision became a legalistic
issue? Do you know how by far the
vast majority of groups who call
themselves Christian baptize
their babies? And did you know as
well that many of our early
Mennonite forefathers died for
rejecting their infant baptism.
Churches like the Catholic Church
and the Lutheran churches still,
today, baptize babies.

So I want you to notice in our
text a matter about circumcision
that must stand out to us. It
says circumcision is that which
is done with hands. It is a
manmade sign. It is done to the
flesh. But God meant this sign in
the flesh to speak of an inner
reality, that which is done by
the Spirit of God in the spirit
of man. It should speak of the
new birth. Jesus, speaking to
Nicodemus in John 3 said
something like this, "Are you a
ruler in Israel and don't know
about such things? Come on. You,
a Jew, yea more than a Jew, a
ruler of the Jews should
certainly understand the
importance of such spiritual
inner realities."

So, I want you to go to Romans 2
(read 23-29). Paul says that a
person who is a Jew by blood, and
thus circumcised is not
necessarily a true Jew. What he
means is that a true Jew is one
who has been born a Jew but one

who has learned to obey God from the heart. It is that, which circumcision speaks of. Then he says that the Jew who is one inwardly, that is he is born again and knows God, that is the true Jew. And it is this circumcision that the Gentile was devoid of. He was a Gentile. He did not bear the outward sign because he did not have that special relationship with God that a true Jew had.

Now the Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, was once one of those Jews who had been circumcised in the flesh but not in his heart. And when he boasted of himself as a Jew he could say, "If anyone thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; concerning righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:4-5). And later he will say that after he met Christ, all these things were rubbish, or dung to him (Phil. 3:8). And in Philippians 3:2, these Jews who have been circumcised in the flesh only, and are not true believers, he calls them the concision or mutilation in the flesh. That beautiful sign of having a special relationship with God, is only a mutilation if the heart is not right. I propose that it is just so with baptism if one is not born again.

And then in the Philippian

passage, including Gentile believers, Paul says, "We are the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

And even today, between the majority of Jews and Gentiles stands this huge rift of that which is only circumcision in the flesh but not in the heart. But a little later in this letter to the Ephesians we will learn how God made both Jew and Gentile one in the Gospel, in this age of the Church.

So, the Jew's highly exalted position by God became their Jewish pride and eventually they started calling Gentiles dogs, scum. And those who did that, lost their spiritual state with God and became nominal Jews, just like we have many nominal Christians today.

Lloyd Jones says that this division of peoples into Jews and Gentiles seems absolute, and I quote, "...any reconciliation seemed monstrous and impossible. Jew and Gentile! Jews and 'dogs'!" end quote. But in this letter to the Ephesians we will learn what an incredible thing God did in Christ when He began the Church.

So, in our text, when it speaks of the people of the circumcision, and the uncircumcision, it is not talking about simply the external sign. It is talking about those whose heart is right with God. What he

is talking about is those who have a relationship with God and those who don't, and he is saying, "Remember that once you were Gentiles in the flesh and you had no relationship with the true God, like the circumcision did."

(2) Estranged from God
spiritually

So, the Gentiles must remember that they were estranged from God by the physical sign in the flesh. That brings Paul even a little further now, and so he says that they are to remember as well that at that time, when they were Gentiles in the flesh, and they were the un-circumcision, that they were also without Christ. They were spiritually separated from God. There was no anointed One, no Messiah, no Christos for the Gentile. They were without Christ before He came to earth and died for them.

And so, in verse 11, the fact that they were Gentiles in the flesh is further described by their being uncircumcised. And now, in verse 12, the fact that they were without Christ is further explained by their being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. That is what it means to be without Christ, outside of Christ.

So notice that our verse says, 'at that time'. The phrase, 'at that time' must refer to before

they were saved. But it would also refer to before the Church came into being. Before the Church came into being the Gentiles were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. So, at that time they were outside of Christ.

To be outside of Christ means no mediator between them and God. No mediator between the Gentiles and God means no communication with Him and immediate eternal damnation at the moment of death. There is no worse predicament than to be outside of Christ.

But, the words, 'at that time' refer also to the time before a person is saved. Before we were saved, at that time, we were without Christ. I remember most clearly when conviction first began deep movements on my heart. I remember the feeling of being 'without Christ.' I remember wondering each morning if this day I would die, and it would be too late. I also remember the day I was converted and the joy of the Lord flooded my soul and the grass looked greener and the sky looked bluer. But before that time I was outside of Christ.

(4) Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel

So, what does it mean to be outside of Christ? Well, the very first thing Paul mentions is that they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. The word 'aliens' as we have it is a noun, but it is preceded by a

participle and in the original it is a participle, which is a verbal noun. That is, this word has some verb qualities and I think it would be more accurate to say, "being alienated." Do you know what it is like to be alienated? I am sure you do. It is hard to go to this church without knowing what that feels like. You see, it says these Gentiles were 'without Christ', outside of Christ. They were alienated. An alien is an outsider. Someone who does not belong. Not in. Furthermore, they did not alienate themselves, they were alienated. They were kept out. They did not belong in Christ. And it was their sin and their state before God as Gentiles that pushed them out and kept them out. Before they were in Christ, 'at that time' they were aliens. And the tense of this participle is in the perfect. They were locked into this state and there was no help for them until they came to Christ. As long as one is outside of Christ, one is an alien.

So, consider the word 'commonwealth'. The original word is *politees*. We get our word 'politics' from it. It originally spoke of a member of a city or state. When you have that membership, it means you belong. When you are not a member you do not belong. So, before Christ, these Ephesian Gentiles were aliens from the commonwealth, the citizenship of Israel.

Now I want you to notice something very important here. It

says that at that time they were aliens. Now there is a very strong implication here, though not stated. It is this: Now that they are inside Christ, they are no longer aliens from the commonwealth of Israel! We will see what this means in the next message.

So, what I propose Paul is saying is that after Christ, we Gentiles are no longer aliens. We have joined forces with the commonwealth of Israel! Israel and the Church are not the same thing. In the age in which we live, the Jew, just like the Gentile, becomes part of the Church. But in the age that lies before us, Israel will yet be brought into its own. So, what I believe Paul is saying here is that we are no longer aliens to the commonwealth of Israel. And when you meet a Jew who has surrendered himself to Jeshuah Hamasheach, you will notice that very quickly.

(5) Strangers from the covenants of promise

There is another matter that divided Gentiles from Jews. The Gentiles were strangers from the covenants of promise. Have you noticed all this separation that was there before Christ? Outside, without, aliens, strangers? You see, we, as Gentiles were strangers from God's covenants of promise. These covenants of promise were not made with us. He made them with the Jews, both the Old and New covenant were made with the Jews. We, as Gentiles,

had no agreements with God. A covenant is an agreement. So these Ephesians, and we must include ourselves, were strangers to God's agreements and thus the promises. God was not obligated to the Gentiles for anything. They were outsiders altogether.

But now, in Christ, the Gentiles too had entered into covenant with God. This covenant is the New Covenant, or the new agreement if you like. Under the old economy they could not enter any agreement with God and if they did, by becoming a Jew, then they could no longer be Gentiles. They would have to convert and go through a baptism experience, put off their Gentile-ness and put on Jewish-ness by becoming a Jew.

So let me give us that New Covenant. Turn to Matthew 26. When Jesus had what we know as 'the last supper' with His disciples in that upper room He said some very significant things (read 26-29). Now I want you to go to 1 Corinthians 11 (read 23-26). Now here we see clearly that the Gentiles, which is what most of these Corinthians were, have entered this new covenant.

(5) Strangers from the covenant of promise

But Paul says that furthermore, the Ephesians, as Gentiles, were strangers from the covenants of promise. Oh, God had great promises for Israel. But the Gentile was outside those promises. But when God began the Church, He brought the Gentiles

into many of those promises. We as Gentiles have now entered by salvation, such promises as the promise of the millennium and the new heavens and the new earth and the new Jerusalem. It is simply beautiful to study the New Jerusalem and to see that the names of the founders of the Church are written on the foundations of this city. Look at Revelation 21 (read 12-14). Here is the New Jerusalem. That is pretty Jewish is it not? And the gates have 12 names that are pretty Jewish too! And on the foundations are 12 more Jewish names, but these are the founders of the Church and you can read in the book of Acts how they set the foundations of the Church.

But before Christ, all of this was not possible. The Gentile, Paul says, must remember this. I know why he tells the Gentiles to remember this. It is because if he does not, like the Jew in his highly exalted position, the Gentile would become proud and thus be a destroyer of the Church.

(6) Without hope in the world

But, the apostle is not done showing us what we are to remember that will keep us from getting proud. So we go on in verse 12. Here the Gentiles are further reminded to remember that before Christ came they were without hope in the world. Now words fail me to tell you what life is like without hope. When people have no hope they commit suicide. But, let me tell you an

interesting thing: when man lives without hope from God, he generates hope for himself. So when you hear of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and so on, they have all generated their own hope. But these are all false hopes. But they learn to trust in such false hopes so that they can exist in comfort with regard to the eternity that is in their hearts.

Hope is absolutely essential to life and hope always has to do with the future. Those who do not have hope in something after this life have their hope in something in this life and it keeps them going. But Paul says here that they were without hope in the world. He means the real hope. They had no promises to hope in.

But let me tell you something about this biblical hope. Turn to Romans 8 (read 24). Now this verse has been used to miss-lead people to believe that we are saved by hoping. We can never know, they say, if we are saved. We can only hope we are. But this verse does not say we are saved by hoping. We are saved by or in hope. The NKJV says, "We are saved in this hope." I think that is the correct translation of the case of the word *hope* here. And when it says, "this" hope, which hope is it talking about? Well, according to verse 23, it is the hope of the redemption of the body. We have this hope because Christ was raised from the dead. But the Gentiles, Paul says, are to remember that before Christ they did not have any hope, that

is, they had no real hope. They had no covenants, no agreements, no promises from God to hope in. When Paul spoke to the intelligencia of the world in Athens, Greece, they were amazed to hear about a resurrection. They always waited to hear some new thing. But when Paul spoke of the resurrection, some mocked and others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." This was strange news to their ears. But we Gentiles, now as believers, have the hope of the resurrection of the just.

(7) Without God in the world

And last, in verse 12, these Gentile believers are instructed to remember that they were without God in the world. Paul says, "Remember this, that you were without God in the world." Well, at this when Paul is writing to them they are Christians and they know what it means that they were without God in the world. That had not been very long ago for them. They knew full well what it was like to live without the true God. It is almost the most horrible thing of all, to be without God in the world. The most horrible is when you think you are with God in the world, but the god you have is the wrong one.

CONCL: And to conclude, I want to remind us of something. Paul challenged the Ephesians to remember something. They were to remember that at one time they were Gentiles in the flesh. They had no covenant sign with God. They were without Christ. They were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. They were strangers from the covenants of promise. They were without hope in the world, that is real hope. And

they were without God in the world. They were to remember this. Now I want to remind us of something. Some 30-40 years later the apostle John wrote to these Ephesians. I want you to see it in Revelation 2 (read 2:1-7).

I wonder if you have noticed something about those who are so gloriously saved. Some of them it seems it does not take long, and they are back dabbling in the same things they came out of. May I remind us to remember what has happened to so many, like these Ephesians, that they lasted a mere 30-40 years and sometimes much less?

So, to conclude, let us read 2:11, to see what Paul says they are to remember of their physical estrangement from God (read). Now consider what they are to remember of their spiritual estrangement in verse 12 (read). And just to show us what is coming, look at verse 13 (read).