



Sermon – May 29, 2022

Daniel Patterson

### **Verses Covered This Week**

*Ephesians 2:11 – 22*

Amen. Let me invite you to open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2. We'll be in verses 11 through 22 this morning. And if you're new here this morning, whether you're visiting, whether you're watching us online, let me say welcome. Every week, we open God's word together because we believe that these words, this book is the tool that God uses to open hearts and change lives. And we're going to be looking this morning at a passage in Ephesians 2 in part because tomorrow is Memorial Day. It's a day that we honor those who have fallen, who've given the ultimate sacrifice to help secure our freedom. And what do we do on Memorial Day? We do it through parades. We do it through flowers on graves. We do it through stopping our normal work rhythms. But the main thing we do on Memorial Day is we stop to remember. We honor that sacrifice by remembering. And we're not here to talk this morning about Memorial Day itself. But it remind me of this passage here in Ephesians because Paul is telling us here that the act of remembering is central to the Christian life. And if we're to live the life that Jesus wishes us to, if we're to live with the joy that Jesus wishes us to have in this life, then there's something that we need to remember. So, let's take a look at these first three verses here in Ephesians chapter 2. The Holy Spirit says to us,

<sup>11</sup>Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands - <sup>12</sup>Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, draw near to us this morning. Speak to us through the word of Your Son. Reorient our hearts through the work of Your Spirit. We ask You to draw near to us. But we ask You to draw near particularly to those grieving this morning. Many of us carry heavy hearts this morning for those in Uvalde after seeing the terror and the horror and the violence and death this week. And God, we pray that You would give comfort to those who are grieving the loss of a brother or a sister or a son or a daughter or a husband or a wife. We pray on behalf of those too

crushed to cry out, be true to Your promise God to be near the brokenhearted. Let us cling to Your promise to comfort, to sustain, and to make everything sad come untrue. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and until you do, be near us, fill us, and speak through what You've spoken. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

There's power in memory and sometimes you can learn that the hard way. I did. It started when I was serving on staff while in college. I was the college associate at the church just a mile down the street from where I went to school in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. And I was in charge of putting together the Monday night prayer service that our college ministry had. And before I ever was put in charge of it, the communications director of the church gave me a tutorial. Here's how you set up all the lights. Here's how you turn on the microphones. We went up to the sound panel and he showed me all these different things. But I was 18 years old, thought I knew absolutely everything which meant I basically listen to not a single word that he said. And so, the first night we have our college prayer service, it just so happens to be that our church was having, in the fellowship hall, the equivalent of what we have here, our steak out. We had 2,000 men from around the community, many of whom were visitors, many of whom were not Christians. We had an incredible speaker, red meat as far as the eye could see and we're all gathered together having a great time. And the speakers about halfway through his message and I slide out to go get the sanctuary ready for the prayer service that's going to start after that. I'm feeling so proud of myself, you know, I've got the lights, I've got the microphone set up. And you know, it's the college service, so I think we've gotta be a little bit cooler than everything else. I put some pillows out. I bring some candles in. I move the pulpit out. But there's one more thing that I want in there. I think it'd be great to have somebody play the piano and maybe even sing during our prayer service, during things. So, I get a microphone, I put it back there by the piano to where you can hear the keys being played. I put a microphone up so somebody can sing. But when you're setting audio, you have to test the audio. So, I sit down by the piano. There's only one problem. I don't know how to play the piano with the exception of one song, Let It Be, by The Beatles. So, I sit down and I kind of do that look around you do to make sure nobody's watching you and I start to play. And honestly, I start to have a little fun. So, I start playing a little bit louder and singing a little bit louder. It's kind of like singing in your car. If your car were a 3,000 -person auditorium. And everything's going fine until something doesn't go fine. You see, there was something that the communications director of the church was telling me. He, I remember him gesturing toward a button on the sound panel and he said, this is really important but I didn't remember the sentence that came after that. So, I just remember him kind of hovering over the button. So, I pressed the button. Well, the sentence that came after that is, "This is really important. Whatever you do, don't touch this button because it will broadcast the sound across the entire church." So, right as the speaker was going right at the heart of his message, right at the crux of it with 2,000 men, many of whom had never been to our church, many of whom are not Christians, what did they hear? But 18-year-old Daniel Patterson belting out at the top of his lungs, "when I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary, comforts me." And all I will say is if I were not a convinced Protestant, then, I was after that because I got a talking to from the pastor and Mother Mary was nowhere there to comfort me.

And you know, despite that, despite all of the ridiculousness of that, what we see here is that in order to do my job faithfully, it was critical to remember. And in the same way in these verses, we see Paul insisting that the church must remember. That's because in this passage, Paul is

saying that remembering is the key instruction that Jesus is giving us to fuel the Christian life. And this passage is us three things to remember. The first is we need to remember the past and look to our rescue. And we do that because first, our rescue reveals our desperation. So, think back to the Scripture that we just read. Right at the very beginning, it says, remember, remember. It talks, it starts talking about Gentiles and this sometimes it feels a little hard to understand. He's talking about circumcision and uncircumcision. But the point that he's trying to make to these Gentile listeners is, "Hey, you were not one of us." It's the same sort of message you might get if you're a kid and you're playing baseball. And you're picking teams and you've got two captains and they never pick you. And you're stranded at the very end. You're standing there alone. The message that you feel is, "You're not one of us. We don't want you. But then, not only does Paul say you weren't one of us, he just starts laying it on thick. Look at verse 12. Just feel the force of what he's saying. Just imagine yourself as the listener, as a Gentile, to your past desperation. He's saying, "Okay, you Gentiles in Ephesus, let's be really clear. You weren't one of us. But not only that, you're separated from Christ. You're alienated from the commonwealth of God. You have no hope. You have no God in all the world. You are strangers to the covenants of the promise." It feels like overkill. Like, what are you doing, Paul? You know, if we, if we go back to our baseball, you know, metaphor, it it's as if the team captains were saying, not just you're not one of us, we don't want you. But they're saying, you want to know why we don't want you? It's because you stink. Like an outhouse breeze. It's because you couldn't hit water if you fell out of a boat. It's because you couldn't catch a cold in the winter. It's because you're slower than my grandma and she's only got one leg. And just think to yourself, "My word, I get the message. What's the, why are you going on and on like this?" You can imagine the feeling if you're a Gentile outside of the promises of God, you can imagine the feeling of being almost stiff armed from the promises of God and this is part of what Paul is saying. They need to remember that desperation. Because the letter to the Ephesians was written to the church in Ephesus. But it was also written to be circulated around all the churches of the area in what is now modern day Turkey. It was designed to be passed around among people who were majority Gentile backgrounds. And that's relevant because in a place like here in the Brazos Valley, we are people, most of whom are not coming by biological descent from the tribe of Israel. And that means, we are the people who are biologically descendants of the bad guys in the Old Testament. The people who were warring against the people of God. And Paul is telling the Ephesians that they need to remember that desperation and that hopelessness. But by extension, he's also telling that to you because that story is part of our story. But it's only half the story and what we see next is that our rescue reveals not only our desperation but also our deliverance. Look in verse 13, it says,

<sup>13</sup>But now, but now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Paul has mentioned all of this hopelessness, all of this desperation, not to depress them but to astonish them, to energize them, to spur them on. And that's what Paul is doing with this language. He's reminding them of their formerly desperate state. He's reminding them of their former hopelessness. He's unrelenting in telling them how bad things were, how bad they were, how hopeless things were. That's because remembering our past helps us recognize our freedom. Remembering our slavery helps us enjoy our liberation. And some of us know that feeling, don't we? We know that feeling of a moment of desperation that God turned into deliverance. I know we do in our family and I was reminded of it just this week. You see, May

24th came and went this week but May 24th is a special day in the Patterson family. And that's because just a few years ago, my wife, Molly, was expecting and we went in for a just a regular ultrasound. And we have had multiple miscarriages in our family. After one of those miscarriages Molly almost died. And so every time we would go into one of these ultrasounds, it was fraught with a little bit more anxiety. Will we, will we clear this hurdle? Will this be just the same story that we've heard multiple times before? And we thought we were prepared. You guard your heart when you go into a moment like that. But we weren't prepared for what we heard from the doctor. She walked in after looking at the scan and I had my two daughters there with me sitting there with Molly. And she said, I need to talk to you alone. And I knew that couldn't be good news. So, I took them around the corner. And the doctor told Molly, the scan revealed some serious abnormalities. His femur is too short, means he may very well have Down's Syndrome. There's abnormalities on his brain. His spine's too short. There's spots on his heart. There's spots on his kidney. There's a very, very high likelihood he will never make it to term and if he is born he probably won't last very long. And if he does last, his life is going to be painful and very different from the normal life that one might live. And the doctor asked us to come back in for more testing. So we did. But it was Memorial Day weekend and so the lab was closed and they said that was going to mean it was going to take another week to get the results of those tests. To get a window into our future. And some of you know what it's like to get a scary diagnosis like that. You know the feeling of desperation that we felt like someone's just ripped out your soul and run it through a wood chipper. But we knew we had to wait. And that waiting time was sometimes even more terrible like you're just twisting in the wind in that time between the testing and the results. So we went in for the testing. And we went home. And we waited. And we prayed. And we cried like we never cried before. But life had to go on and I remember the next week, I had to go to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. It's where I was working for at the time. At the time we were fighting against some of the horrific things that we saw revealed in that report that came out this week that made national headlines. And I remember standing backstage and my wife's phone went off and it was a number we didn't recognize, and I thought this is probably going to be the doctor and I prayed, God, I don't know if I can handle one more ounce of stress, right now, it may break me. But Molly answered the phone and it was the doctor and they said, "We have no idea what happened but the spots on his brain are gone. The spots on his heart are gone. His spine looks fine. The spot on his kidney looks fine. And it was like the weight of the world fell off my shoulders. All the tension evaporated and tears of pain were replaced with tears of joy and absolutely stunned disbelief. And that baby went on to be born and his name is Seth. And he's right over there in the preschool perfectly happy and healthy with no idea that we're in here talking about him right now. But that's why May, amen, that's why May 24th is a special day for us. We remember all the pain and the fear. But what we remember more is the way that desperation gave way to celebration. What we remember is that that joy wouldn't be possible apart from the hopelessness. What we remember was a little boy that was near death. And is now alive. Death to life. Does that sound familiar? That's what this verse is talking about. That you were dead. You were hopeless. But if you are in Christ, you were made alive by the cross, by God's grace. You were brought near by the grace of God. And that same reflex that we in our family feel when remembering the miracle of our little boy is just a microcosm of what all of us are designed to remember every single day when we remember the depth of our despair that God rescued from by the grace of Jesus Christ. And some of you may not feel that way every day. And normally, that's because you don't stop to remember. You never take the time to think about how helpless you were apart from God's grace. And that is precisely satan's

strategy. He wants to keep you from contemplating the past because he knows just how powerful it can be. He wants you to be numb to it. He wants you to believe a false narrative that you weren't that bad, that it's not that big of a deal. And he wants you to have a heart that never pauses to reflect on the depths of your spiritual despair because then you'll never actually feel the joy and the liberation and the relief of your salvation.

But Jesus is giving you this reflex. This call to look back into the past and remember it as a gift. But that's just one of the gifts that he's giving to us in this text. The second thing that we need to see is how this passage tells us to remember, not just the past, but remember the present and look at reality. And it's essential to remember the present because the, and to look at reality, because reality reveals your peace. So, look with me at the next several verses in Ephesians chapter 2 starting in verse 14.

<sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup>And he came and preached peace to you who are far off and to those who were near.

A language all throughout that passage is peace, peace, peace. He says it four times. It's easy to miss the force of what's going on here but Paul is talking to these Gentiles and he's saying, you have been brought near. And the imagery that we get is almost like somebody who's sitting on the front row of some event and they're saying, how in the world did I end up end up here? I don't belong. How did I get here? Paul is talking to these Gentiles and it's easy to forget the massive rift between Jews and Gentiles throughout thousands of years of the history of the Earth. So, take whatever divide you want; white and black, Democrat and Republican, rich and poor, Longhorn/Aggie. There is no gulf bigger between two sets of people than between the Jewish people and the Gentile world around them. And it was even built into the fabric of Israel's worship. So, for example, in the temple in Jerusalem, there was an inner court and then there was an outer court where the Gentiles were. If you were a Gentile, you could become observant but you could never become fully Jewish. You could receive circumcision but you would never really be one of us. Such that there was a literal wall in the temple separating the Jews by birth and those who were practicing but were Gentiles. And on that wall, there was a sign in in the Jerusalem temple in Latin and in Greek saying, if you are a Gentile and you come past this line, you will die. We will kill you. So, how's that for a welcoming guest strategy? You know, let's take whatever the primo sections are. We're Baptists so they're probably in the back and and cordon them off and say, "Hey, if you're not one of us, we will literally execute you if you sit here." This is the message that was going out for years and years. And you, this is what this text is talking about in verse 14. It's talking about the dividing wall of hostility. This is literally perhaps the wall that said you're not allowed in here but it's also the wall, the gulf, between sinful man and a holy God. The gulf between two peoples that warred against each other for hundreds and thousands of years. It's the law itself that couldn't save sinful hearts. But God is saving us and he's doing it how? He tells us in verse 16, he said, he created in himself one new man in place of the two thereby making peace. One new man. The significance of this language is what this text is showing us then is that all of our earthly divisions are carnal and pointless. What this text is showing us is that the Gentiles were so rotten to the core. It required a

completely new entity to save them. But it also shows us that the Jewish people were so bad that they too needed this one new entity to rescue them, to save them, to purify them, to make them holy before a holy God. And that new entity is the resurrected Jesus Christ. In his sacrifice He brings together God and man but also man with one another. He unifies them in one new body and he brings peace. And the language of peace, when you think about it in the original language, in the Hebrew, peace doesn't just mean what we think of it often in English as an end to fighting or an end to a war. But peace means wholeness, completeness especially in relation to relationships. So, what this text is talking about in part is relational togetherness and closeness. Deep friendship is one of the things that you and I get in the cross of Jesus Christ. Not just with God but also with one another. And we need to remember that reality.

And that means when we look around the present and we see reality, we also see that reality reveals God's presence. So, look at next verse. In verse 18, it says,

<sup>18</sup>For through him we have both access in one spirit through the Father, to the Father.

This is one of the high points of this entire passage. God has come in and made peace in the most unthinkable way possible. Jesus has brought together tribes that were warring with one another, with blood feuds against one another and with God. And now, you have God's presence. He has brought you near. He has knit you together. He's made you one. And you, if you are a Christian, if you are in Christ, have God's presence dwelling within you. That means when you are fighting temptation, and you feel like you can't beat it, remember that the power that raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead courses through your soul. When you feel like you have no hope, you have the spirit of God dwelling inside you. But there are some of you who feel like you're on the outside today. You feel excluded. You may feel lonely. I don't know your particular circumstance but I know that this text speaks directly to you because part of what you're feeling is exactly what Paul is addressing to these Gentile believers. That when we see that this verse is designed to be a promise to cling to when life seems dark and lonely. Because if God can and did close the gap between a sinful, treasonous humanity and a holy God. If he reconciled people who had warred with one another for thousands and thousands and thousands of years, then He is strong enough and He can and He will address that problem in your life. This word is bringing you that promise through the cross of Jesus Christ.

And with all this talk about peace and about presence there's something else that I want us to see here in these verses and it's the logic that's behind what Paul is saying. So, think about this with me. Just take a look back at verses 15 and 16 with me. God, through Jesus, the text said, is working to create in Himself one new man in place of the two, making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. Jesus's death reconciles both God and man and man with one another. So, what do these verses mean? What they mean in part is that God ordained the death of His own Son so that people like you and me can live and love and serve in unity with one another. That's how seriously God is taking this. This is how seriously Jesus is taking this. But sometimes in the church, what happens? I cannot believe what she said. I'm done with her. I cannot believe what they did to my favorite program. I'm out. There are a million different ways that this can show up in the life of the church and it can take on lots of different forms. But when you peel everything back, what's the heart motivation that's going on there? Ultimately, it's either a failure to remember God's promises or a failure to believe God's promises. Because Jesus died. This passage is

showing us. Jesus died in order to reconcile us together. So, if or when, we let a cultural issue tear us apart, or a political issue you cause division, or a personal issue cause division, or the color of the carpet cause division. What we are saying, whether we realize it or not, is my preferences are more important than God's priorities. What we're saying is my designs are more important than God's desires. Jesus took our unity and our love for one another so seriously that he died for it. So, this text is saying, remember, I have brought you peace. Remember, I have knit you together. Do not fight one another because when you do, you are defying the reality that I have created on the cross. Hear that word this morning and remember the present reality of what Jesus has done and is doing. It's because Paul gives us this instruction to look at our reality because it is so easy to forget who we are. We've got a fool-hearted memory.

But what this text is also showing most clearly in this third instruction from this passage is not just to remember the past and not just to remember the present. But also to remember the future and look at your rank. And when I say rank, that almost sounds like something in the military or something in a monarchy. And does that mean that some people are better than others? No. Notice what this means it means your rank reveals your belonging. So, look with me starting in verse 19 through 20. It says,

<sup>19</sup>You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

So, consider the Ephesians that are reading this. This letter is going to Gentiles and Gentiles who are within the Roman Empire. The word that's coming to them is one of welcome. You're no longer strangers. And it's one of belonging. You are fellow citizens. So, just think about this for Gentiles who have been stiff armed, they may feel, by the people of God for thousands of years feeling like second-class citizens. They're saying, "Come, you're members of the family." But also to people who are members of citizens of the Roman Empire, they're saying, "You're citizens of the heavenly kingdom." So, just think about how these Ephesians are enmeshed in all of their identity in all of these different ways, they're second-class citizens who are being told, you've got a family. But they're Roman citizens who are now said, "You're citizens of another kingdom and that kingdom is a threat to Rome." And Nero is the emperor of Rome when this letter is being written who is no friend to Christians. So, on the one hand, you're being welcomed and on the other hand, you know you've got this welcome but it brings with it a warning in this present life. Which is why Paul reminds them, you are citizens in heaven. Your real citizenship isn't to a Roman Empire but to an eternal empire that will come in fullness. And what Paul is telling them is, "You have a place where you belong." And you don't just have a place, you're a member of the household of God. And that sounds just like poetic way to say you're one of God's people. But just put this in earthly categories. And if I say you're a member of the household of the Queen of England. That means you're part of the aristocracy. You're part of the nobility of the really important people. And in other words what Paul is saying here to the Ephesians and to us is that you are part of the heavenly aristocracy. Have you ever stopped to think about that? You, as a Christian, are an heir with the Lord of the universe and you share in his kingship. Scripture teaches over and over again. And the point of all this is that God is reminding them, you have a place where you belong. And not only that, God is saying, I have made you a part of my royal household. And not only that, that means he has created you to function within his household and he has designed you for greatness. That sounds

like really positive, really self-helpy kind of language, designing somebody for greatness. But it's literally true, according to Scripture, because God is measuring your life on an eternal time horizon. And no matter what this life looks like, He is preparing you to rule and reign with Him for eternity. You will literally reign over the universe with Jesus. That's what Scripture teaches and that's what we almost never stop to consider. And that should reframe our entire life because if you realize your eternity and if you realize your real home is in God's eternal kingdom, you will hold more loosely to this life. The simple truth is, you were made for a different world. You're a new creation with a different home. You're built for a different environment, a different ecosystem. In this life, you are a royal ambassador representing a different kingdom. The problem is even though we're designed to represent a heavenly kingdom among earthly kingdoms, we get to those earthly kingdoms and in our sin, we go native. We start to forget that we're here to represent our true home. We start to behave and live like the world around us. And it's like one friend of mine wrote, when that happens, you hunger for a worldly life. But that worldly life is like air and when you're hungry, you can gulp down as much air as you like but it will never satisfy you. Why? Because you were designed for food and when you settle for less, than your true dignity, when you settle for less than what is God's actual purpose on your life, when you ignore that, you go through life like a starving man in a world full of air. Your hunger will never stop gnawing at you until you stop gulping down the airy nothings of the world. But when you realize that you are part of God's household, then you realize that you were made brilliantly and intricately with a plan in mind and a mission from God in this world. And that shows us that your rank reveals not only your belonging but also your becoming. And we see this in the very last two verses in this Scripture. In verses 21 and 22,

<sup>21</sup>in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

A dwelling place. Think about that language. You are a dwelling place for God, this Scripture says. This is putting together all the language of the Bible, Genesis one, you were created in the image of God. Ezekiel 37, the promise of a new covenant. I will be their God and I will dwell with them and they will be My people. 2 Corinthians 5, you are a new creation and the Spirit lives within you. And when you add all this together, what you see is that if you are a Christian, you are a recreated image of Jesus Christ, of the king of the universe. And in the same way that an expedition plants a flag on new land saying, this belongs to our kingdom, Jesus Christ has done that in this world and in your heart and in the life of this church. And what this text is showing us is that you are being built together, the passage says. That's what it's talking about. The Holy Spirit is residing in your heart, in this church, making you more like Jesus, making you more into who you will be for all eternity. You ever think about that? God is preparing you right now for your eternity. He's bringing the future the present into your life. So, the question is, will you embrace your future? You're designed to remember that future. It's right here in Scripture. Eternity is promised. It's given to you so that you'll remember. Remember that you're designed to live forever. Remember that if you're a Christian, you have been declared holy and God is making you that way. Remember, if you are in Christ that satan has no hold on you and you can have victory in the cross. Remember that you are destined for greatness in the eternal kingdom of God and Paul wants us to remember the future so it will transform our present.

That's the bottom line. Our hearts are prone to wonder. So, we're called to remember because so often, we're tempted toward comfortable sins that we think will satisfy. We want to return to our slavery and the Scripture says, look to the past and remember. And so often we languish in loneliness or we lash out in selfishness and we forget that the cross brings us near. But this passage says, look to the present and remember. And so often we crave the things of this world more than the things of God. We forget who we're designed to be. And this passage says, look to the future and remember what God is saying to us, to you and me, in this Scripture is look to the past and remember, you're free. Look to the present and remember, you're with me. And look to the future. Remember, what will be. In other words, when you find yourself in times of trouble, remember never just let it be.

Let's pray.

Father, speak through what You've spoken in our hearts and in our lives. Make us more united. Give us love for one another, for the lost world around, for the people in our lives, and in our neighborhoods. Father, I pray that You would use this text to work Your divine effect in our hearts. There's a response that I need to have and that everyone in this room needs to have and it may be different for everyone of us. But I pray that Your Spirit would convict, would lead, would knit, us together in love, that we would be a church where every generation is reaching the next generation, telling them about the glory of Your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.