

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 7-4-21

Come with me back to our studies in the Book of Ephesians. We have made it into Chapter 2. We finished the first ten verses, and today we're going to start into a section of Ephesians that actually was not on my mind when I chose to study Ephesians, but once I did, I thought, "Oh, this is *great* for the time in which we live!" And so, in the rest of Chapter 2, you'll see what I'm alluding to there. But as we begin to look into this, I'll tell you in advance: It's going to be about 95 percent introduction; and then I'll read the three verses that are printed in your bulletin as our text for this morning—but I hope you'll see why, and I hope it will help us grasp even better.

Indulge me in a bit of musing before we begin. I've been preaching for over four decades now, and I have been *teaching* preaching for a couple of decades now—even teaching mainly in Russia, actually. And I have some standards for preaching. Among those are that any expository sermon—in other words, not just stating your opinion or doing a study pulling verses together on a theme, but when you're systematically teaching through what the Bible says, like we do most of the time here—any sermon that deals honestly and objectively with the text should stand up to two tests.

One is: Could I preach this same message in a different country and a different culture? And Number 2: Could I preach this same sermon five or ten or twenty years from now, without having to change it? Now, I know there are things that change; there are idiomatic expressions, things that come and go, and you would maybe want to change things like that. There may be passing references to current events—like, if you were going to preach this sermon again, you *probably* wouldn't mention Independence Day, and I'm not going to...but it *is* Independence Day. So, stuff like that—that changes. But the unchanging Word (Ps. 119:89) of our unchanging God (Mal. 3:6) should always be proclaimed according to the intent of the eternal heavenly Father, just as it was written down through the temporal human author (2 Tim. 2:15). The meaning *never changes*.

Now, I make myself face that cross-cultural test. I've been to Russia 22 times now, and I preached at least a few times on each of those trips. And it's always interesting, editing a sermon for Russia. The problem is, I only get to preach *half* of one because of the interrupter [translator] that I have to wait for. But, the *content* is the issue. And it's a worthy bit of self-examination, and it's a test of your hermeneutics, that you make sure you get it right.

On the matter of timelessness, I enjoy putting myself to that test right now, while we are studying Ephesians. I preached through this book for the first time over four decades ago; it was right after I became *the* pastor—or, the preaching pastor, whatever you want to say. And then, I had the privilege to do it *again* in a different setting, about ten years later. Then, after several more years, in the midst of planting some churches, I got to preach through the second half of Ephesians again—somebody else preached the first half, and we were working as a team. So that means I have been able to exegete Ephesians—study it from the Greek, in-depth—and then review that exegetical work 10 years later, 15 years later; and, I trust, to put it into words that are at all times intelligible and practical, and I've been able to do that several times. And it is a blessing to me to realize: Because it's God's Word, *I don't have to change anything!*

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Now, I've grown. Frankly, I've gotten better at preaching. Just think about how bad I *used to be!* You get better at knowing *how* to communicate; you get better at framing things. I'm a better author than I was then, therefore I'm a better speaker than I was then. This is an *unchanging* Word.

Now, through a chapter and a half of Ephesians, as I have worked through this, I want to tell you: I haven't changed *anything*, except to improve the precision and the delivery of those sermons that I wrote 15 years ago, 20 years ago, 40 years ago; and occasionally, to dig a little bit deeper—maybe to update a few passing references. As a matter of fact, I'm having somebody transcribe sermons from before I had them electronically saved, so that I can actually put them on the screen and hear myself from a different millennium, teaching this same book. And it's been a blessing to go over it again and again. It's not that what changes is *ever* what the passage means—that *never* changes—but to *confirm* that meaning, and then to think about, "How can I help my brothers and sisters apply this the best now?"—*that's* the joy of it all.

Now, what *has* changed—and has changed *drastically*—is the mindset of the culture in which we live, the culture in which we have to apply what is taught here (cf. 2 Tim. 3:13). I don't know if you've noticed, but there are some attitudes running pretty hot in our world these days, in our society—and not *just* in America—and they are affecting churches as *never before*, with messages that divide people. And especially, the subject is racism; we'll get to that in due time as we see our text in Chapter 2. It is our job as Christians to understand the "times" in which we live (Matt. 16:3; Eph. 5:16)—and that takes a little bit of work these days. But then we also have to offer up *solid* answers which appropriately apply the Gospel to the times in which we live.

So, without changing *anything* from what I have long known to be the meaning of the remainder of Ephesians Chapter 2, I *am* going to endeavor to help you apply it in fresh ways—ways that are *needed*—in order to equip you to stand firm in the faith in a tumultuous time; and to not be unnerved, to not be knocked off balance. It's as if I got several practice runs through this passage, to make *sure* I know what it means in order to be able to apply it to a time that is, really, unprecedented in our country.

Our danger in studying this passage is not so much to misunderstand it; it isn't *really* all that hard. But our danger is to fail to comprehend *just how amazing* the truth is that is taught here.

Now, think of some of the conflicts you're aware of. Think of tensions like the conflict between Jew and Arab and Palestinian in the Middle East; it's been going on throughout my lifetime. Or, think of Black and White in South Africa. Or, one that I saw firsthand: Watts, in south Los Angeles in 1966, when a whole neighborhood was burned. Or, Alabama—almost *any time* in the '50s and '60s. Think of the tension between the North and the South at the time of our Civil War in 1861. Imagine the tension between Jew and Nazi in Germany in the 1940s. That's on the order of magnitude of the tension that mounted for *centuries* between Jews and Gentiles. And *this passage* has the answer to facing something like that.

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Now, much of the same attitudes that have torn *so many* portions of society apart—they're tearing right now at the *fiber* of our society these days. Only the names of the groups change. The fundamental beliefs are being shredded around us as words are being redefined with *profoundly* different meanings, and you're being *forced* to take sides in a lot of ways.

Try to imagine that all of a sudden, all of the tension is broken; and now *everyone* on both sides of one of those conflicts is supposed to have feelings that have been built up with all that tension for all of those years, *just reversed*. The reality of Jew and Gentile being one in the Body of Christ *is* that big of a deal; it is an *enormous* reversal of things!

Now, it *took time* for this amazing truth to take root, but it did—and it is *astounding*. You're going to learn that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the *only* thing that can resolve such strife in a way that *actually solves the root problem*, and *truly* brings people together in ways that they *never imagined possible*, after *lifetimes* of strife and antipathy and factions and feuding.

It *is* possible to sometimes negotiate a ceasefire, if you can get people to stop shooting at each other, stop screaming at each other, for their own mutual good. You can do some things like that, humanly speaking, in the flesh; but you don't *solve the problem*, except by the Gospel.

Today, I want to look mostly at *historical* events. And then, we'll get to the *theology* that is the development of those historical events—the theology that *explains* it all when we get to Ephesians. So, you can remember that we're in Ephesians 2, right? *We'll get there*, I promise; that'll be the last book that I quote from this morning.

But for now, I want to back up to the Book of Acts. Let's start with Jesus's final Post-Resurrection appearance before He ascended to the Father. He told the Apostles not to leave Jerusalem until a spectacular promise was fulfilled spectacularly. Acts Chapter 1, Verses 4 and 5. We'll start there; I'm going to hopscotch through about half of the Book of Acts.

Acts 1:4-5—"Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

I hope you can remember, way back to ancient history when we studied the Book of Mark—we finished just over a year ago. Or even if you haven't, I'll catch you up. We learned there, as you especially study that last week of Jesus's life, that the Jews of His day—and *especially* those who believed in Jesus—held a *strong* belief that they were going to see the Kingdom of God burst forth on Earth at any moment. They thought that Jesus was going to reign at any moment on "the throne" of "David" in Jerusalem (cf. Lk. 1:32; cf. Mk. 11:10; Acts 15:16)—the Kingdom of God would come to "earth" (Zech. 14:9). Their anticipation was palpable (Matt. 21:9, 15).

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Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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And by the way: it continued *right up to this day* when Jesus ascended. We're told in Luke Chapter 19 that as Jesus approached Jerusalem that last time—what we call the "Triumphal Entry"—many of them thought that they were going to see the Kingdom of God then; they thought they were going to a coronation (Lk. 19:11).

And their hopes were dashed: "You mean, *we have to wait* until *tomorrow*? Oh, it's going to be at the Passover! Oh, yeah—it's going to be on *Friday*, maybe!" And then Jesus *died*! And then He rose again. "Oh, it's coming *now*! This *surely* is it!"

40 days go by; now here they are at this meeting, and look at the next verse: Acts Chapter 1, Verse 6—"So when they had come together, they were asking Him"—this was an honest question; to them it was as *logical* as can be, and it *was* logical—"saying, 'Lord, is it *at this time* You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' " They expected the Messiah to sit on the Throne of David in Jerusalem, and all the "nations" would stream to them to "worship" (Zech. 14:16). Honest question! (see Matt. 19:28)

Ever since John the Baptist, they had heard the message over and over again: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Jesus came. What did He preach? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).

Then, through His time of ministry on Earth—including several parables and several other ways that He did this—He began to teach that there is coming a phase of the Kingdom Program of God that *is* about to begin, but it was *not* going to be with Him reigning in Jerusalem. Instead, there was going to be an *extended* period of time (Lk. 19:12; 20:9b)—a time of *sowing* during which there would be mischief from the enemy of the Kingdom, who would counter-sow contradictory messages (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

Nevertheless, there would be relentless growth in the numbers of the followers of the Messiah (Matt. 16:18; Jn. 6:37a), and there would continue to be a lot of counterfeiting (Matt. 7:15-20). That's the era in which we live! It's been going on that way for about 2,000 years. I think we are rather close to the *end* of that era, but we don't know; and you'll see that said in just a moment here.

So, the next two verses: Acts 1:7-8—"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority'—He said, 'You're not knowing when I'm coming, or when the Kingdom is coming'—'but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' "

Jesus's message was: Number 1—"You don't yet understand." Number 2—"I'm *not* bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth right now." Number 3—"I have a lot of work for *you* to do in spreading the Gospel until I come again." Number 4—"I will supply the power to you to *do* the work that I call you to do." He kind of knew about Ephesians 2:10, even though it hadn't been written yet, regarding these "good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." And Number 5—He said, "This is going to knock down barriers *like nothing else can!*"

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I want you to understand: Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8—"You will receive power...and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"—that was not an action-plan on the part of the Apostles! They didn't sit down in a committee and think that up! Jesus said: "This is *what* is going to happen—contrary to your expectation, which you have to finally understand *needs to be adjusted!*"

Now, I mentioned in our daily e-mails this week, where we're working through the Gospel of John: We've seen that before Jesus said this was His plan for building His Church on Earth, *He* set the example. We studied through John Chapter 2 and John Chapter 3—Jesus dealt with Jews in Jerusalem. Then, Chapter 4—He deals with Samaritans, and a whole bunch of *them* believe. And then, Chapter 4 of John ends up with Jesus dealing with a Gentile, and *he* comes to faith.

As you work through the Book of Acts, you see this promise—of Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8—coming to pass, and you see the example of Jesus *magnified* spectacularly. The Holy Spirit comes—that happens in Acts Chapter 2; that's the promise of the Father that Jesus said to "wait" for (Acts 1:4; cf. 2:33). And you have this spectacular response to Peter's sermon that day, which was used to bring "three thousand" people to faith in Christ on one day (vs. 41). And the Gospel kept spreading like wildfire among the Jews, and the group in Jerusalem grew—"three thousand" (vs. 41), "five thousand" (4:4), and then it just says "multitudes" (5:14). And they kept adding people, to figure out how minister to all of those folks—and even, "Well, what about the Greek-speaking ones versus the Aramaic-speaking ones," and taking care of all of the "widows" (6:1). They *handled* all of that. It was spectacular, unprecedented growth. And the Gospel rather quickly became the major point of *division* among the Jews: Those who *believed* in Christ, those who *didn't* believe in Christ.

The next dramatic step in the fulfillment of Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, comes in Chapter 8. It was at the hands of one of the deacons—usually so-called, those seven men who were appointed in Acts Chapter 6 to help the Apostles with the administering of the various aspects of the ministry—one of those deacons came from the Mother-Church, a man named Philip; and he took the Gospel to the capital city of Samaria, and *countless* men and women believed.

So, skip up to Acts Chapter 8, Verses 14 through 17. He's gone to Samaria, preached, and a lot of people believed. "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John..." Okay, now, Philip is a good guy, but he wasn't one of the Twelve Apostles (cf. Eph. 2:20). They heard about this happening; they're like Hallmark—they cared enough to send the very best—they sent Peter and John (cf. Gal. 2:9). They "came down"—you say "down," even though on the map it's "up" from Jerusalem to Samaria, because Jerusalem is the highest point, and everything in Israel is lower than that. They "came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit."

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Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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That was *more astounding* than you can imagine! The Gospel brought together Jews and Samaritans *in the same fellowship!* (cf. Jn. 4:9b) These are the people who, when you travelled from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north, if you were an Israelite, you would cross the Jordan River, go up the other side of the Jordan River, and cross the Jordan River again—so that you wouldn't get any Samaritan dust on your sandals! They hated each other *that much*. And by the way, it was not one-sided; it was both ways (e.g., Lk. 9:51-53; 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

This was an *astounding* development! *No one* had sat around and been praying, "How will we ever heal this breach between us and the Samaritans?" Nobody tried that. Nobody thought that. Nobody showed the desire to reconcile the two, until God sent Philip there. The cultural divide—that ingrained hostility—was conquered *only* by the Gospel.

Now, as Philip was returning to Jerusalem, we kind of get a foretaste of the *next* big development. By the providence of God, he had an encounter with an Ethiopian. He was "an Ethiopian eunuch" (Acts 8:27); he was a trusted servant of the queen of his homeland. He had already come to believe in Yahweh, the God of Israel, and he had been to Jerusalem to participate in as much of the worship as was possible. Being a eunuch, he was not allowed into the temple (Lev. 21:17, 20); being a Gentile, he was also not allowed past the Court of the Gentiles (Ezek. 44:9).

Philip met this Ethiopian eunuch while he was in his chariot, and he was reading Isaiah Chapter 53. He had a scroll of Isaiah—that's pretty amazing. He was reading about the suffering and the crucifixion of the Messiah, and Philip famously asked him—you didn't know this, but Philip spoke King James—he said, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" (Acts 8:30). A little bit hard to maybe understand that right away!

Acts Chapter 8, Verse 34—"The eunuch answered Philip and said, 'Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' [And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.']" Now, check your footnotes on the brackets in your Bible; part of that is not included in the best manuscripts—but it's no problem, even if it did happen exactly that way.

We move on: "And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing." I've done *hundreds* of baptisms—I'm *still waiting* for that to happen! Nobody would forget *that one*, right?

Here is the first recorded case of the conversion of a Gentile after the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean it's the first one; this is the first *recorded case* of that, and it's here in the Book of Acts for us to learn from.

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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Well, the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus comes in the next chapter. Remember: he was on his way to Damascus; he had been persecuting Christians in and around Jerusalem; he had papers from the Jewish mucky-mucks, allowing him to go persecute and imprison Christians elsewhere; he was doing that. He gets knocked to the ground, he's blinded, he heard the voice of God—and you can read about his conversion.

Not surprisingly, the disciple in Damascus named Ananias—the one whom God used to restore Saul's vision; he was dispatched by God, and God gave him a special message—you can understand: He was reluctant to welcome into his home the one who was "ravaging" the churches in that region! (see Acts 8:3) So God gives him orders in a vision. Chapter 9, Verse 13 of Acts: "But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' " That's *another* confirmation of the design of God! The plan is unfolding.

"Saul," who came to be known as "Paul" (Acts 13:9)—he was, indeed, a specially-chosen Apostle (Gal. 1:15) whom God used as the primary *human* leader of ministries that knit together believing Jews and believing Gentiles. The culture and the attitudinal barriers between Jews and Gentiles were even older and deeper than those between Jews and Samaritans (see 1 Kings 12:16-19). That breach was healed *only* by the Gospel (Gal. 3:28), Paul being the main instrument.

He was almost immediately persecuted—Interesting, the persecutor became the persecuted one—he was persecuted by the unbelieving Jews, but the believers took care of him and they got him off to safety.

Then we are told this: Acts Chapter 9, Verse 31—"So"—with Saul now out of commission, converted; now he's Paul—"the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." Do you see that? "The church"—here's a deep grammar lesson for you: *that's singular!* "The church"—one church, one body, same group, same Gospel, same salvation, same Holy Spirit, same message, same Bible—they are now "one" (Eph. 4:4-6): "the church" that is "throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." That is *spectacularly amazing!* It's hard to just grasp how big a deal that was, that the Gospel broke down barriers like that!

And you know how Paul *did* his ministry. He was the guy who wrote Romans; and he does say, in Chapter 1, that "the gospel" is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (vs. 16). What did he do *every time* he went anyplace new? He found the "synagogue" (e.g., Acts 13:14); he preached to the Jews (vss. 15-42), he reasoned with them, he brought as many as would believe to faith in Christ (vs. 43); then he would usually get thrown out of the synagogue, and he would go to the Gentiles (vss. 46-47); and he would bring those believing Jews with him, and a new body was formed of Jew and Gentile together (14:1).

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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Now, what we are coming to in Ephesians is the theological explanation of how that promise in Acts 1:8 was fulfilled *in history*, as recorded in the Book of Acts. So, we're looking at the history; the *theology* of it is mainly in Ephesians Chapter 2.

The next blockbuster in this series of events was the vision that God gave to Peter in Acts Chapter 10. There was another Gentile involved in this one who had turned to Yahweh; it was a man named Cornelius. God gave Peter the vision—remember: lowering the sheet; Peter was hungry, he was waiting for lunch; in a vision, God gives him the picture of the sheet with all the clean and unclean animals on it; and He tells Peter, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" (vs. 13). And Peter says, "No way! That's not on the menu of Jewish guys like me! We don't eat stuff like that!" And God did it three times; Peter was trying to figure out what the significance of that is.

So God arranged for Peter to meet Cornelius and his "friends" and his "relatives" (vs. 24). Interesting: When Peter showed up in Cornelius's home—by the way: that's a Jew in the home of a Gentile; that's a no-no, except in the Gospel (vs. 28)—Cornelius actually fell down and tried to worship Peter (vs. 25); Peter—for once, he got that one right—he made him get back up (vs. 26), and said, "No, that's not how we do things." (cf. Acts 14:11-18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9)

Skip down to Acts Chapter 10, Verse 27—"As he"—that's Peter—"talked with him"—that's Cornelius—"he entered and found many people assembled. And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me.' " Well, Cornelius explains the vision that *he* had, that he received from the Lord. He told Peter, "I called this meeting, I gathered my friends and my relatives here, to hear whatever you have been 'commanded by the Lord' to say."

So, we get down to Acts Chapter 10, Verse 34—"Opening his mouth"—Peter finally gets to use his gift—"Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality...' " Now, stop there for a second. I want you to file that word in your memory banks, because we are going to come to it again later in Ephesians Chapter 2. It's a *vivid* Greek word. You can remember *prosōpolē(m)psia* if you want to—that's a really cool word, and I'm glad that I know enough that I can pronounce it in public, and not have to giggle; it means, literally: "to receive a face." God does not deal with people based upon *what they look like*, "the outward appearance." God doesn't do that! The *issue* is "the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), not what a person looks like (cf. Jas. 2:1, 9).

"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in *every nation*"—ooh, that would include: all the Gentiles—"the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him (cf. Is. 56:3-7). The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed." Then Peter goes on to give them a summary of the Gospel: Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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Date: 7-4-21

Skip down to Chapter 10, Verse 44—"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter"—the Jewish believers—"were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God"—exactly like what *they* had heard in Acts Chapter 2—"Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?' And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days." It's kind of like, "Peter, did you really mean that? That you actually will *stay* in a home *with Gentiles*?" And he did.

That was pretty astounding. It happened in Acts Chapter 2, with the first believers that were gathered. Then the Church starts *exploding* from there. Then it spills over to the Samaritans. Then there's that little down-payment in the account of the Ethiopian Eunuch. And then, now it's open to *the Gentiles*! (cf. Is. 49:6)

Well, Peter went back to Jerusalem. He told them what happened and, not surprisingly, the first reaction of the Jewish believers there was *a little bit less* than unbridled excitement. Acts Chapter 11, Verses 2 and 3—"And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying"—now, listen to what they were upset about: "You went to uncircumcised men and *ate with them*." Oh, my! Do you see how *deep* the divide was? Those dietary laws were partially *to keep* Israel separate from the world; it's just that they went way too far with that.

Peter goes on, and he explains in detail all that happened; and then, the attitude changes. Chapter 11, Verses 17 and 18. See, I told you this was 95 percent introduction; we're getting near the end of the introduction. This is Peter speaking: " 'Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?' When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.' " (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25)

It's hard to describe how big of a deal that was! It was like the Hatfields rejoicing that the McCoy's are coming over for Thanksgiving dinner, *unarmed*. It was like the North and South resolving their conflict without a shot fired. It was as if the Jews and Palestinians decided to vacation together at the seashore down in Turkey. It was *like* that—but it was *infinitely more than that*! This is *new life*! This is *spiritual unity in Christ*! It's something *only God* will do.

Now, let's look to Ephesians. We'll just dip our toe in: Ephesians 2:11-22. While Paul is still explaining about our riches in Christ, our new life in Him, what God has done for us, he describes the unity of Jew and Gentile in the Body of Christ. Do you see how God started doing it *long before* He had willing participants? He *made it happen*, if you will. Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, was *not a command*, it was a statement of what God was going to do—and He did.

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

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Date: 7-4-21

So as we are back in Ephesians, this is all about explaining who we are. And there is something unique about our passage this morning. Today, we finally come to a command. I don't know if there is any reason you would have *noticed* this, but from the beginning of Ephesians through Chapter 2, Verse 10, there is not one single imperative; not one single command: You should do this, you must do this, I order you to do this.

Well, as a matter of fact, there *is* a command in Chapter 2, Verse 11, and it turns out to be the *only* command in *the first three chapters* of Ephesians—because the first three chapters are all about our *position* in Christ. The reason this is a command is that it is a command to *remember* something: Remember that you used to be separated from God—*especially* we who are Gentile believers.

Now, again, keep it in perspective: This is the writing of Paul. He is speaking as a Jewish Christian to a church that is predominantly Gentile. Every place he went, he would always go first to his Jewish brethren, preach the Gospel; then he would go to the Gentiles, bring those groups together—whoever had believed—and the church would grow, Jew and Gentile, "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28; cf. Jn. 10:16).

So, in this passage, he is addressing those of us who are Gentiles. The church in Ephesus, from very shortly after its beginning, was predominantly Gentile; so numerically, he is mainly writing to Gentiles. And by the way, you know what a "Gentile" is: anyone born not Jewish; if you're not Jewish by birth, you are a Gentile. I don't think we have any Non-Gentiles in our fellowship; we might. This is to us.

All that stuff that I began with—about the timelessness of the truth of God's Word, about how it transcends continents and centuries and cultures and conflicts and differences of opinion and even languages—that was all to make the point that this passage is going to have *profound* applications for us in our current world. And I can't wait to get to it, so I'm coming back next week! I can't wait to hear what I say about this.

But let's just set the stage. Look at the beginning of this: You have been "brought near" is the word (vs. 13), and it's going to describe, in two verses, Our Former Position; and in one verse, Our New Position.

Our Former Position. Remember now, the Apostle Paul writing to Gentile brethren: "Therefore remember"—there's the one command: "remember"—"remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

So through Jewish, believing eyes, and in light of what he has said about salvation by grace through faith, Paul orders us to realize six problems that have been overcome for us by Christ; six problems of unsaved Gentiles. This is what we were before Christ came into our lives. I'll just rattle them off today; we may need to circle back a little bit in coming weeks:

Sermon Title: You Have Been Brought Near
Scripture Text: Eph. 2:11-13 (Ephesians #10)

Speaker: Jim Harris
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Number 1—We were without respect. The "Uncircumcision" was regarded with disgust by the "Circumcision." That's just a fancy way of saying: Jews hated you. You were *totally* disrespected by the chosen people of God. And circumcision had become a point of pride and boasting to the Jews in general. That's why Paul makes a point about how it is done "by human hands"; he is emphasizing that circumcision is merely *external*—that it's just a symbol (cf. Rom. 4:11-12; cf. Rom. 2:25); and his way of describing the complete transformation of a person's life brought about by Christ is *just the opposite*—it's "made without hands" (Col. 2:11); it's by the power of God.

Number 2—Then he says we were without Christ. Now, the Jews—messed up as their whole system was, before Jesus came—at least they were looking for a Messiah! The Gentiles were just probing around in the darkness, with all sorts of gods and ideas and philosophies; but they were without a Messiah, or even the *hope* of a Messiah.

Number 3—He says we were without a spiritual state. He says you were "excluded"—that means "kept out"—"from the commonwealth"—that's the Greek word *politeia*, which means "political structure"; we get our word "politics" from it. That was a *big deal*. Being part of the nation that God chose—that was another point of pride for the Jews—and he's saying: "You didn't have any part of that. You had no claim to it." Gentiles lack citizenship among the chosen people of God. That's why Colossians Chapter 1 is so huge: "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and *transferred* us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (vs. 13). You've been *given* a "citizenship" now (Phil. 3:20).

Number 4—Then he says, without a spiritual state, we were without a promise: "strangers to the covenants of promise." That's referring to all the reiterations and elaborations of the basic Abrahamic Covenant of the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:8-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18; 50:24; Lev. 26:40-45). You didn't have any of that stuff. We have it as our heritage; you didn't. And guess what? God has made us one in Christ!

Number 5—We were without hope. "Hope," that same word we've seen several times, early in Ephesians: It means our settled confidence and assurance of a secure future with God (Heb. 6:19). We *didn't have that*, apart from Christ.

Number 6—He just summarizes it: We were "without God in the world." Now, Gentiles have a lot of gods (Acts 17:16; 1 Cor. 8:5), but they were separated and completely without the one true God (1 Thess. 1:9).

My friends: Apart from Christ, we Gentiles—our former position was *not good!*

Now, here's a sneak preview of where we're going. Our New Position: Verse 13—"But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." What a *great* contrast! Remember how we started in Chapter 2, Verse 1—"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...But God...made you alive" (vss. 4-5). Here's another one just like that: "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near"—you now come into the fellowship; you now come into the very presence of God, if you will, without dying and going to be with Him.

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Now, that's as far as we're going to get today, but I want to give you a spoiler for next week and beyond. That fresh application of this passage that I alluded to is the obvious fact that it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and *only* the Gospel of Jesus Christ—which is the true solution to the racism that is rampant in our world. There are *big* problems out there! There are people defining other people by how much melanin they have or don't have, defining people by their ethnicity, defining people by their country of origin or by their ancestors' country of origin. This is a *big, big deal!*

And by the way: There is a *brand new* religion now, being promoted *to churches*, and it has a name. It's called "Antiracism." I'm not kidding you! We'll see more about that in the coming weeks. *All of it* needs to come under the authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Come back next week to see more of how and why it works. And I want to help you understand why *lesser* solutions—well-intended as they may be, perhaps able to gain a little ground here and there—*they won't work* (Jer. 6:14). Only "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3) *truly* brings people together.

So, you know what? The *problems are awful!* The answers are myriad, and all but one of them is wrong. And you and I have the right one, because we "have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Father, thank You that we have been brought near to You by the blood of Christ. Thank You that we have been brought near to our Jewish brethren, through the centuries and around the world, by the blood of Christ. Put that message on our hearts, we pray. Make sure that we understand that all of those human-made partitions are torn down in Christ. Have Your way with us to the spreading of the Gospel, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.