

HOPE CHURCH
RECONCILED IN CHRIST (Ephesians 2:11-22)

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INTRODUCTION

How many people remember Jesse's talk from two weeks ago? And what do you remember?

Most of us will remember the story he told about his friend Brendon – why? We all love that sort of before-and-after story, of a dramatic life change, someone who was in a really bad situation, then their life was transformed through meeting Jesus.

Those stories have always been popular and there are lots of examples.

- We've all probably heard about the Jewish extremist in Israel who organised gangs to go round the villages and search out Christians, beat them up and sometimes even kill them. He didn't usually get involved himself but he egged people on to be violent. His name was Saul of Tarsus – we know him better as the apostle Paul, whose life was completely turned round when he encountered the risen Jesus.
- People of my generation will remember Nicky Cruz, the violent NY gang leader, who met a young street preacher called David Wilkerson and was radically saved. His story is told in the book and film "The cross and the switchblade".
- And the stories of changed lives continue up to today, with people like Jesse's friend Brendon.

When we hear those before-and-after stories, it's tempting to think "I wish I had a dramatic story like that, but I'm just ordinary. Those life-changing transformations only happen to other people."

The message of our passage today is that this type of before-and-after story is your story! It's the story of every Christian.

And if you're not a Christian today, then it could be your story – listen up to find out more!

The link with last time

The first word of our passage tells us that it's related to what Jesse shared last time: "Therefore..." What follows is linked to what's gone before.

Jesse explained the amazing transformation in Ephesians 2:1-10:

- "You were dead in your transgressions and sins" (verse 1)
- "But God (4) ... made us alive ... you have been saved (5) ... he raised us up (6) ... he expressed his kindness to us (7) ... it is the gift of God (8) ..."

Our passage this week builds on this and expands it, explaining more of the before-and-after story that is ours.

This passage has three sections:

- 11-12 Before
- 19-22 After
- 13-18 The link

Context

To understand this passage, we need to remember that Paul is writing to Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in Asia Minor (Turkey), and he needs to tackle one potential major problem in the early church – division between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

The problem

Imagine having a fatal/terminal disease. You discover that Israel has developed a treatment and cure, but they're only making it available to Israeli citizens. How would you feel?

This was position of Gentiles – God's promises were given to Israel, via covenants, law and prophets, and ultimately through Jesus the Messiah. These were to be shared with the world, to bless all nations, not to be kept only for Israel. God's plan was (is) to unite all peoples in one family, including Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles), through Jesus, without distinction or separation. He just chose one group of people as his messenger and example, starting with one man (Abraham), his family (the Hebrews), and his descendants (the Jews).

Paul reminds his readers of this in Ephesians 1:9-10 "he made known to us the mystery of his will ... to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ", the open secret.

But in the first-century church there was a real danger of division, and it needed addressing urgently.

In today's passage Paul lays out the problem and the solution in three sections, covering before, after and how to move between them.

BEFORE (verses 11-12)

Verse 11 – Gentile Christians were being abused and resisted by Jewish Christians, even being called "foreskins"! This was obviously an insult, but it was a symbolic way of Jewish Christians saying that non-Jews were outside God's covenant and promises.

And surprisingly, Paul agrees, at least in the "Before" passage. This is describing the previous condition of Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians.

And he starts with the root problem: Verse 12: "...formerly ... at that time you were separate from Christ".

- Greek *choris* = without, apart, with an empty gap between

Perhaps best to read this as "separate from the Christ", i.e. Gentiles have no link to the Jewish Messiah (Christ).

The Messiah literally embodied all that the Jews hoped for, as the one sent from God who would bring in his kingdom, right all wrongs, judge evil and wrongdoing, restore justice and peace...

But Gentiles were separated from all that. Those who were not Jews had no Messiah, no redeemer, unable to access his grace, mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, restoration, goodness, kindness...

By describing them as "separate from Christ", Paul is emphasising that everything he said in chapter 1 isn't for Gentiles, as all those promises are for people who are "in Christ".

Paul then uses three very powerful illustrations in verse 12 of how far away Gentiles are from what God has promised, as a result of being separate from Christ.

1. Excluded from citizenship in Israel

- Greek *apallonio* = foreign, alien, strangers, outsiders

No privileges, rights or benefits that come with citizenship

RSV “*the commonwealth of Israel*” = community with shared values and benefits

Gentiles could claim none of these things as they were foreigners (refugees??)

2. Foreigners to the covenants of the promise

- Greek *xenos* = “other”, different, no connection or links

God had made a series of unbreakable covenants with his people, through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. Through these he promised to be their God, to provide for them, to give blessings and judgements.

Gentiles were not party to these covenants, so they had no access to God's promises, which didn't apply to them. They stood outside, locked out from what God was offering.

3. Without hope and without God in the world

- Greek *elpis* = forward-looking anticipation of good outcomes
- Greek *atheos* = no God, godless

For Israel, hope was a person. Hope is always linked to the Messiah, the “hope of Israel”, who would come to restore God's rule & reign, bring the fullness of God's kingdom, with physical and spiritual blessings.

Gentiles were literally hopeless, with nothing to look forward to, because as far as they were concerned, there was no God, they were completely separated from him.

In summary, those who were not Jews were separate, outside, alien, different, other, cut off from:

- God's people
- God's promises & purposes
- God's person

“You were...” This was (is) the state of a person without Christ.

Pretty depressing and awful state to be in!

AFTER (verses 19-22)

But Paul explains to his non-Jewish readers that they hadn't remained in this awful state, something had changed dramatically. It's true that they had been separated outsiders with no hope and without God, but now...

“*You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but...*”

- Foreigners, Gk *xenos*, completely different, outsiders, separated
- Strangers, Gk *paroikos* = resident aliens, living alongside or nearby but not belonging

Now their status had changed – how? Paul describes this change in three ways.

1. Fellow-citizens with God’s people and also members of his household (v19)

- Greek *sumpolites* = from the same town
- Greek *oekious* = part of the extended family

Not foreigners or even people living nearby, but residents, one of God’s chosen and set-apart people

Full rights and privileges, not visitors or second-class citizens, but part of the community, belonging to the family

2. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone temple (v 20)

Established on the basis of the new covenant, as taught by the apostles and prophets, held together by Jesus.

3. Joined together to become a holy temple ... a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit (v 21-22)

- Greek *sunarmologeō* = laid closely together, fitted compactly, close-jointed

Not loosely associated with what God is now doing, but an integral built-in part of it.

- Greek *katoiketeria* = permanent house

Destined to be **with God**, living with him on a permanent basis

In summary, something has happened that allows people who were previously separated cut-off outsiders to become:

- Part of God’s community and family
- Beneficiaries of God’s covenant and promises
- In close and permanent relationship with God himself

“You are...” This describes the person who is with Christ: you? me?

Wow, what an amazing position!

Contrast

What an amazing contrast between “You were” and “You are”:

BEFORE (verses 11-12)	AFTER (verses 19-22)
Separate from Christ	No longer foreigners and strangers
Excluded from citizenship in Israel (not part of God’s people)	Fellow-citizens with God’s people and also members of his household (part of God’s community & family)
Foreigners to the covenants of the promise (excluded from God’s promises & purpose)	Built on the foundation of the apostles & prophets (beneficiaries of God’s new covenant)
Without hope and without God in the world (cut off from relationship with God)	A dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit (in close and permanent relationship with God)

How is this transformation possible? How can anyone get from Before to After?

Verses 13-18, Paul says it is **through Jesus**.

THE LINK (verses 13-18)

Verse 13 *“But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ”*

These verses emphasise that it’s all about Jesus – not a process, not a religious rite or ceremony, not earned – it’s his work:

- He himself is our peace [the Prince of Peace] (v14)
- He made two groups into one (v14)
- He destroyed the dividing wall of hostility (v14)
- He set aside (fulfilled) the law (v15)
- He creates one new humanity out of two (v15)
- He reconciles both to God (v16)
- He came and preached peace to us (v17)
- Through him we have access to the Father by the Spirit (v18)

Everything on the “After” side is as a direct result of what Jesus has done

- v19 *“Consequently...”*

We can move from “Before” to “After”, from “You were...” to “You are...”, from “separated/outside” to “part of/together”

None of this is as a result of our own efforts, not deserved, not earned, but it is freely made available through Jesus:

- v13 by the blood of Christ
- v15 in his flesh
- v16 through the cross

His death opened the way for people like us to become accepted into God’s people, adopted into his family, partakers of his promises, and reconciled to Father God.

SO WHAT?

Paul wrote to 1st Century Christians in Turkey to explain that they were not outsiders, different, other, separated... Not second-class believers.

As he goes on to say in Ephesians 4:4-6, *“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

This was an important intervention in the development of the early Christian church, addressing a real and present danger that could have split them in two. And it worked, as history shows.

But is this passage relevant to us today?? YES! At three levels:

1. All of us here are (probably) Gentiles, non-Jews. So we start in the “Before” column described in verses 11-12, outside the people of God, excluded from the promises of God, separated from God himself. But we can transfer to the “After” column through Jesus.

His work is open to all, not just to Jews, or to good people, or religious people, or rich people, or nice people...

Anyone can benefit through what Jesus did on the cross – he makes it possible for you to be adopted into God’s family, inherit his promises, and enjoy his presence.

- For every Christian, this is your dramatic before-and-after story, of transformation from a desperate situation to being rescued and blessed, through meeting Jesus.
- If you're not yet a Christian, this is for you!

2. Paul was addressing division in the church, among believers. He’s already told them that God’s purpose for the universe is unity, to bring everything together in Jesus (Ephesians 1:9-10).

We need to know that God takes church unity very seriously. He only has one people, one family, one body – and we need to guard against division.

3. There’s also a personal angle here. Verse 14 “*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*” [Me and my sister]

We need to address broken or damaged relationships between individuals in the church. Where there is mistrust, hurt, resentment, offence, lack of forgiveness, any breach of relationship, it needs to be tackled. We need to see our brother or sister as they stand in Jesus, because “*he himself is our peace*”, and the wall is broken down “*in his flesh*”.

Interestingly, the Greek doesn’t actually mention hostility when talking about this wall. It’s just a middle partition that separates. God’s house is meant to be completely open-plan, no dividing walls. Let’s not put them up when the house owner doesn’t want them. And if they’re already there, let’s allow him to take them down.

AND FINALLY

How should we respond to these truths, insights and challenges. Paul gives us a clue at the start of our passage, in verses 11-12:

- “*Therefore, remember... remember that at that time you were...*”

Let’s think about these things:

- If you're not yet a Christian, reflect on what you're missing out on. Look at what Jesus has done to make it possible for you to be adopted into God’s family, to benefit from all his promises, and to live in permanent close relationship with him each day. Ask him to make it real for you today, to give you your own before-and-after story.
- If you're already a Christian, recall what life was like before you knew Jesus, remember that all of us were once separated from God’s people, excluded from his promises, and cut off from his presence. Rejoice that through Jesus you’ve moved from “You were...” to “You are no longer...” Celebrate your before-and-after story. And let that influence your worship, your witness, your discipleship and your service

PRAYER