

A Special Reminder to Us.

Text: Eph 2:11-18

1) Of our former misery

Suggested Hymns:

2) Of our present blessedness

768, 368, 765, 355, 330

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 2:11-18, ¹¹ *Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands --* ¹² *that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

¹⁴ *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,* ¹⁵ *having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,* ¹⁶ *and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.* ¹⁷ *And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.* ¹⁸ *For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In today's Gospel we heard about Thomas who did not believe the disciples when they told him that Jesus rose from the dead. A week after Easter Jesus appeared to Thomas and then he believed.

Jesus said to Thomas, *"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."* ²⁸ *And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Our text today stresses the importance of how blessed we Christians are. Sadly, we so easily underestimate the value of the blessings which God so richly and daily showers upon us, regarding them simply as a matter of course.

Spiritual blessings especially, are not held in as high esteem by us as they deserve to be held. Is it not a most wonderful gift of God's grace and mercy that we have been made His dear children through faith in Jesus, our Saviour? The marvellous love which God has shown us in making us Christians, true believers, is something we should never forget and for which we should daily thank God from the bottom of our hearts.

To this end Paul in our text issues *A Special Reminder to Us*. Let us consider this reminder. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. A Special Reminder To Us Of Our Former Misery

The apostle in our text addresses himself specifically to the Gentile Christians, who constituted the majority in the Ephesian congregation, and tells them, "*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands.*

There was externally a difference between the Gentiles and the Jews. The former, not being circumcised, were regarded as unclean by the Jews and were looked upon with contempt.

The apostle, however, indicates that the Jews, merely because they were circumcised, had no reason for boasting. He speaks contemptuously of the so-called "*Circumcision made in the flesh by hands,*" showing that in itself such circumcision had no moral or religious value.

It was very foolish for the Jews to make a mere external rite a matter of boasting and to imagine that because of it they had any advantage over the Gentiles.

There was, however, a tremendous difference, a difference of the utmost significance, between the true Israel and the Gentile Christians prior to their conversion.

The apostle reminds these Gentile Christians to whom he writes of their former misery when as heathens they were 1) without Christ; 2) without a country; 3) without promises; 4) without hope; and 5) without God.

Our text says, *at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* What an accumulation of miseries! In very dark colours Paul paints to the Ephesians their old heathen condition!

“At that time these Gentiles did not yet know Christ, and they were excluded from citizenship in the kingdom of Christ. They had no share in the covenants of the great Messianic promise which God gave to Abraham and the patriarchs. As a result they were without hope; being ignorant of the salvation promised in the Messiah and realised in Christ, they had nothing to hope for beyond this world.

Moreover, the last element, the climax of the darkness and misery of their former life, was the fact that the Gentiles were without God in the world. In this world, in this miserable, vain, and transitory world, they were God-less, without knowledge, without worship of the true God, and therefore without a support, like a mast-less and rudderless wreck in the midst of a typhoon.”¹

Oh, could the misery of their former state be pictured more vividly? Without God and without hope in the world — a deeper misery cannot be thought of.

Every unconverted person finds himself in such a deplorable situation. There may be various external differences between Christians and non-Christians, differences pertaining to position, culture, training, etc. And yet these differences amount to nothing at all when compared with the great differences in spiritual matters that exist between Christians and non-Christians.

Unbelievers enjoy no freedom from sin, death, hell, and Satan. They are actually without God and without hope. Even while relying on their outward morality and righteousness of life and expecting to earn for themselves the bliss of heaven, they have no comfort, no good conscience, and finally they perish miserably.

My dear Christians, think of the misery from which you have been saved! You will find it wholesome and beneficial to do that. In spite of all earthly fortune, fame, and happiness, unbelievers are the most miserable people under God’s heaven.

Where is the Christian who, as he rightly considers the miserable plight of unbelievers, will not daily thank God for having saved him from this wretchedness?

And where is the Christian who would be willing, for the sake of riches or honour or earthly pleasures, to return to his former state of misery and wretchedness, especially when he ponders the blessedness which he now as a child of God enjoys by God's grace?

2. A Special Reminder To Us Of Our Present Blessedness.

In our text the apostle reminds the Christians of this blessedness when he says, ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* This is one of the brightest verses in the Bible.

At one time these people stood afar off, but now they have been "*brought near.*" They have been brought near 1) in justification, 2) in adoption, and 3) in sanctification. They are now living in personal fellowship with the Saviour. What an honour!

How did it happen that these Gentiles were added to the number of the true believers? "*By the blood of Christ,*" that is the answer which Paul gives. "*The blood of Christ,*" that was the means which brought about the wonderful effect.

This thought is carried out at length in the remainder of our text. ¹⁴ *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,* ¹⁵ *having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,* ¹⁶ *and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

¹⁷ *And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.* ¹⁸ *For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*

What a marvellous power there is in the blood of the Redeemer! It was Jesus Christ Himself who "*through His blood*" established peace between Jews and Gentiles, the two parties that seemed so irreconcilable. He brought them together in one perfect union.

This Jesus did by removing the partition which had separated Jews and Gentiles, by abolishing the Ceremonial Law, which as a fence had shut out the heathen from the privileges of the Jews, and by fulfilling personally the Moral Law, The Ten Commandments.

The curse, the guilt, and the punishment lay upon Jesus Christ. And so the Law has expended its might and power in His case. *“By going into death for the sins of the world, Christ put the Law out of commission, abrogated it as a master of men.”*² He made peace between Jews and Gentiles *“through His blood,”* removed the enmity between them, and gathered them both into the Christian Church. Through Christ both have access in one Spirit to the Father and can address Him with the words *“Abba, Father.”*

Friends, think of the extraordinary blessedness which you as Christians enjoy! Through the Gospel, Jesus, your Peace, comes also to you and brings to you peace with God and the salvation earned by Him on the cross through His suffering and death. Through His blood He has brought you near to the Father. ***In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near.*** What a blessed reminder in our text!

Augustus Montague Toplady, author of that precious hymn *“Rock of Ages,”* who for many years lived the life of an unbeliever, tells us that, while visiting some friends in Ireland, he was converted to God when one Sunday he accompanied his mother to a humble preaching-service and listened to a sermon delivered by the Rev. James Morris on this text, Eph. 2:13, ¹³ ***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

Overcome by the message through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, he gave his heart to Christ and resolved to enter immediately into the service of his Master. Later he referred to this turning-point of his life with the words, *“Strange that I who had been so long under the means of grace in England should be brought near to God in an obscure spot in Ireland, amidst a handful of people, under the ministry of one who could scarcely spell his own name. The excellency of the power must be of God!”*

Friends, God has also converted us marvellously. He has translated us out of darkness into His marvellous light. He has taken us out of misery and has placed

us into our present blessedness. We are now a people near to God and enjoy His favour.

Assuredly, my dear fellow-Christians, our present condition as children of God is a most wonderful one. The Law can no longer curse and condemn us; we are reconciled to God, we are citizens in God's kingdom, we have free access to the throne of grace, an access that inspires confidence because it is in Christ.

As Scripture says in Ephesians 3:12, *we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him*. It is quite a procedure if you want to meet with the Prime Minister or even the Queen.

However, access to your heavenly Father and into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord may be had through the Mediator Jesus Christ, by whose death on the cross the veil in the Temple was torn in two.

Freely we may now come to the mercy-seat and commune with God. Of all these things we are reminded in our text. Oh, let us be careful not to despise the blessings that are ours! Let us in all humility thank God for His mercies and magnify the greatness and freeness of divine love.

Let us work with increased energy for His cause. Let us love Him who first loved us and who reconciled us to God through His blood. Let us also as Christians and as members of one and the same kingdom live together in peace and harmony and strengthen one another's faith through the Gospel of peace. Christ died for every one. Before that awful tragic event on Good Friday all mutual enmity should be hushed.

In the love of our Peacemaker, which is shown in His dying for us, we have the strongest possible motive for a common fervour of love to Christ that should quench and drown all petty animosities and unite all Christians into one body.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,³

So may we join Thy name to bless,
Thy grace adore, Thy power confess,
From sin and strife to flee.
One is our calling, one our name,
The end of all our hopes the same:
A crown of life with Thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, NT Vol. 2, St. Louis: Mo, CPH, 1921, p269

² Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, NT Vol. 2, St. Louis: Mo, CPH, 1921, p269

³ 355 v 2