Tonight we continue our indepth study of the book of Ephesians. Last Sunday was a terrific start as we learned that this deep theological book is the outline of Basic Christianity. Without a doubt, Romans is the closest thing to a full fleshed out systematic theology in the New Testament. Romans is a power treatise on the doctrines of the faith but Ephesians is a scaled down version of that larger book. Ephesians forms the bedrock of the church, the theology and practical rules that breed healthy congregations.

Chapter 1 began with one continuous run-on sentence. 1:3-14 comprise one long statement on the greatness of God and the riches that He has poured out on all of us. Before the foundation of the world, in the past, He made a decision that He would be on the side of His people. In the present, He has created a way for us to live without guilt, shame, or fear. In the future, we praise God that He has written the story and in the fulfillment of time, He will put His master plan into place. We don’t have to worry or wonder if the world is spinning out of control. So chapter one said this: from pre-time, to present time, to post-time, God has you in the palm of His hand. And, for this reason, Paul says that we are RICH, with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Tonight we turn to chapter two and this entire chapter is essentially a continuation of that “past present future” thought. In chapter 2, we find one of the most quoted verses in the entire Bible, vv.8-9, for it is by grace that you have been saved…”

Chapter 2 is an explanation of grace—how God has secured grace for us in our past, in our present, and in our future.

Everyone I know has a past. I have a past. You have a past. There are things in my past that make my heart soar and lift my spirit. Certain songs I hear on the radio will often trigger a memory I have from my past and I will take a trip down memory lane and it’s a sweet ride. There are things in my past, however, that I deeply regret…things that make me feel condemned, guilty, and sad. Like everyone, there is a wake of people left behind that I have hurt by my words, by actions, or neglect. Not everything in my past is worth remembering.

But what Paul does in the chapter is a peculiar thing. He challenges all of us to go back to our past and to rejoice in what God has done on our behalf.

Let me read the first 10 verses…

I’m not going to preach these verses, but I do want to draw your attention to some key thoughts that lead us into our text for tonight. Notice the past, present, and future components of salvation.
2:1, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins…”

If you have ever seen a dead person, you know that this is a condition that is irreversible. The best medicines, the best blood pumping machines, the best heart defibrillators could not bring that person back to breathing and seeing and feeling. That is a picture of the spiritual state of you and I pre-cross and pre-Christ. That is what we were in the past.

2:4, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in our sins.”

We should have been dead, but NOW we are alive, not just physically, but spiritually. It was the great Winston Churchill who once said,

**There is nothing more exhilarating than to be shot at without result.**  
—Winston Churchill

I have never had someone fire a gun at me, hope I never will, but I can only imagine the feeling of relief to know that you have escaped scot free.

Paul says to each of us, there was a time when even God’s arrows of wrath were pointed at each of you, because you were far from him, a lawbreaker, a sinner. But now, because of God’s great love for you, some man stepped in front of you and took the bullet. He was rich in mercy and has made you alive. That is your present state of being as a believer. But notice, the far-reaching future ripple of the grace wave. It extends far from the event of Calvary, and spans into the most distant future.

V.7, “in the coming ages, God will show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

In other words, if you think you are rich in Christ now, you just wait till HE has complete rule over the ruler of the kingdom of the air. When Christ comes in power, you will rejoice that He is on your side. That is the future. Salvation covers your past, your present, and yes, the ages to come.

Now, let all of that be helpful background for the second half of this passage that I am about to read. Look with me at 2:11-22. Look what God has done to create a new family, a new society, a new church for the future.

Read 2:11-22.

The first ten verses of this chapter, which we read moments ago, described the general nature of salvation, for all people. These last verses are aimed mostly at the Gentiles.

We do have a few members in our congregation that can trace their line all the way back to Israel. We have a Jewish member or two, but most of us here tonight would still be
called pagan, foreigners, and Gentile if Christ had not torn down the wall. This passage explains how the church has now become one people united in Christ, a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, global kingdom.

Follow with me very closely. If you have a pen, I want you to mark three critical phrases that outline this section of Scripture. Note these three things.

The Gist of This Message

1. “At one time…” in v.12 (KJV, ESV “at that time”) This is Paul’s discussion of the past, and who the Gentiles were pre-Christ.
2. “But now…” in v.13. This is a description of the present.
3. “So then…” in v.19. This represents the future hope of the church united in Christ.

Let’s now dig deep and look at each of these critical stages in the birth of the church.

The Three Unfolding Stages of God’s Plan

Stage One: Who the Gentiles once were (vv.11-12)

Look what it says…

Before Christ, the uncircumcised people were “cut out” of the plan. Now this is a little bit of a play on words. Think about the act of circumcision. Jews were “cut in” by this symbolic act of obedience, an outward sign that a person was a member of God’s covenantal people.

Even though God loved the Gentiles, and had an ultimate plan to bless all the peoples of the world through Abraham, they were at a serious disadvantage in the world. Paul outlines five challenges or disabilities for the Gentiles in the previous age. They were in bad shape!

- **They were separated from Christ.** This is tragic, especially for those of you who were here for last week’s sermon! Paul laid out in chapter one all the spiritual riches that available to those “in Christ.” The Jews always had something to look forward to, something to hope in—a forthcoming Messiah. Even when exile came or hard times, they had promises of God in their hand, that His ruler would set things straight. There was always light at the end of the tunnel. The Gentiles had no such thing. They were cut off, they were completely on their own.

The second and third disabilities are mentioned next…

- **They were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.**
- **They were strangers of the promise.**
God had made big and bold promises to Israel, to be their ruling God, to be their protector, their helper, their refuge, their tower of strength. The Gentiles were not of Abraham, and were literally sheep without a shepherd.

The fourth and fifth disabilities are the most harsh for us to accept…

- They had no hope.
- They had no relationship with God.

Even though God had promised to include them one day, they had no knowledge of His intentions, and they had no loving God to sustain them. William Hendrickson sums of the state of the Gentiles when he says:

They were Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless.

V. 13 says it best: “they were far away from God.”

Have you ever used the phrase, “it’s all I’ve ever known”? We say that when we realize that our current state is not so good, but since we’ve never had it better, we did not comprehend what we were missing.

The seat in my wife’s car, I have recently learned, is a thousand times more comfortable than the seat in my car. I discovered this when we drove her vehicle on family vacation this past year. As I drove down the highway, it felt like a thousand angels were hugging my back. I had never noticed how soft and well-padded her seat was. Then, we returned home and I went back to driving my vehicle. I don’t want to complain because my mini-van is a quality car, but when it comes to the driver’s seat, I had no idea how bad it is. It was “all I’ve ever known.”

That’s a trivial example, I know, but it helps us think about the Old Testament Gentiles. They were lost, afraid, bored, troubled, sick, dying, wounded people, and there was no sign of doctor, or a counselor, or a medicine. Like a terminal cancer patient, there was no hope for a remedy. They were far away from grace, but it was all they had ever known. They didn’t even know how miserable they were.

Now, some of us in the room, can identify with this more than others. Some of us ran from God longer than others, and put ourselves through a thousand episodes of pain in our pre-Christ days. We fought grace hard before we finally surrendered to Christ. Those with greater sin in the past may be tempted to feel condemned or unworthy in the present, but the woman with much sin, who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears—she understood it best when the Lord said to her, “He who has been forgiven little, loves little.”

The more aware we are of where we’ve been, the faster we run to verse 13…

“But now, in Christ Jesus...everything has changed!!!” “You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”
V.13 marks a new chapter in our story, “But now…”

Paul elaborates, second,…

**Stage Two: What Jesus has done for the Gentiles. (vv.13-18)**

- **He has brought them near.** This idea of spatial orientation is a bit awkward because we know well that God is spirit and does not dwell in temples built by human hands. God is everywhere, not in one particular zip code. However, the idea of God coming near is given for our benefit, designed to be a picture of a redefined relationship. The blood of Christ has brought Him near.

  Nearness is a term of intimacy. Human beings grasp this quite easily. When two people hug, they hold each other close—they eliminate the space between them. When a husband and wife kiss at the altar, they bring their faces from far to near and this creates intimacy. Since we are an adult audience tonight, I can point out that the Old Testament metaphor for sex between a man and a woman is that he “knew her.” When it says that Adam “knew” Eve, it means that they came together in a most intimate way. Nearness creates intimacy.

  This is a picture of what God has done for the Gentiles. They once were distant and detached and cold. Now they are near and in a loving relationship—he has bound himself to them and they can now know Him more intimately.

  And look at v.14, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”

- **He has torn down the wall that divides people.**

**Show Temple Image**

To fully understand the power of Paul’s thought, you and I must go on a field trip to the days of the temple. Here is an artistic rendering of the temple. I want you to notice how spatial orientation communicated intimacy with God. The main building in the temple was the Holy Place, where only priests could enter. Inside the Holy Place, was an inner sanctum known as the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could enter once a year. This was a figurative house of God. The closest one could be to the Divine was in the temple. Outside the temple building was the Priest’s courtyard where the Jews would come to offer sacrifice. Then there was a large dividing wall, which created a Women’s courtyard. The women were still invited into his presence, but there was a distinction according to gender. Ladies, before you get offended, hang with me. On the outer wall of the women’s courtyard, was the Gate Beautiful which led outside the temple area to the surrounding Gentiles Court yard. The entire temple structure was elevated off the ground as you can see, there were five large steps leading up to it. So the Jews were elevated when they met with God and the foreigners could only look up. At the foot of those steps was this continues barrier, this wall. That tiny wall that you see around the
perimeter of the temple was the wall of the Gentiles, a one-and-a-half metre stone barricade that sent a strong message. The Gentiles were invited to look up and view the temple and its inner courts, but they were not allowed to approach it. In fact, all along this stone barricade, at intervals, were warning notices in both Greek and Latin. The words read, “Trespassers will be, (not prosecuted), but executed.”

If any Gentile tried to squeeze his way in to the presence of God, he would be killed.

Now go with me, just for a second, on a trip with Paul, because Paul knew the importance of following the law with Gentiles and the temple. Turn with me to Acts 21:27-31, and watch what happens between Paul and an angry mob of Jews.

Are you grasping the depth of the Ephesians passage now? Can you understand the gravity of Paul’s words? What Paul was writing was a suicide note. This is why Jewish people held such blood lust for Paul! He was essentially saying, “Through the blood of Christ, all these walls have now been torn down. There is no more separation between God and any group of people.”

Galatians 3 says it this way:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28

No more separation between men and women, between Jews and Gentiles...in this new family of Christ, no one is elevated. We are all equal, all invited. And if you read the rest of those words that follow, Christ has brought peace and unity where there has been war and division. Look at the word peace in these verses...

Read again vv.14-18 emphasizing peace.

Brothers and sisters, let me tell you. Christ did not eliminate all the evil of the world through the cross, that comes on His next visit. But what He did do was make a way that you and I can live in 100% peace. That’s what I want. So do you.

Now, we must move on. In v.19, we see the final transition of thought as Paul describes the hope for the future of the church.

Stage Three: What God is building with both Jew and Gentile stones.

Look at v.19-22...

Remember, Paul had made it clear that the Gentiles had been cut off from the holy nation, but now they are full citizens in the kingdom. They were not invited into the living space for the family, but shut outside the door. Now, they are members of God’s household.
The Gentiles, says v. 20, are being built on top of the Jewish foundation. And Paul rejoices at the creation of an international, interracial community of Christ. In Christ, we are all being built together into one monstrous holy temple.

V.22 is a description of what God has been doing since the blood of Christ was shed. No longer is he requiring a strict adherence to religious rule and ritual as a sign of holiness. What He is doing now, in this age, is building relationships between He and His people and between His people and His people—and these relationships between Christians on earth are able to cross cultural boundaries.

So What of This?

Let me take all this deep theology and offer some practical application for you and I to consider. Every message needs the “so what?” If all I’ve done tonight is fill your head with knowledge about Old Testament Interior design, what good is that to you? Here are a few principles to pray over.

1. Have I thanked God for full access to Him?

   Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Heb. 4:16

Because of what Christ has done for you, through the shed blood, you can now enter in to the nearest, holiest place with God. There is nothing standing between you and an intimate relationship with Christ…of course, other than you. The only thing holding you back from a more intimate walk with God is you. God has made himself near, but you can still choose to remain far.

How close are you to God? How much are you traveling to his temple, seeking his company? If you feel distant from God, let me assure you: He hasn’t moved.

2. Have I considered the evils of racism?

What this passage clearly teaches is that God wants people to mix! He doesn’t want whites with whites, blacks with black, Hispanic with Hispanics. He wants ONE church and ONE people and He went to great lengths to tear down every wall that segregates His family.

And consider how radical the sin of Eden truly was. Sin did one main thing: it destroyed intimacy between God and his people, but it also destroyed the intimacy between people and people. Adam and Eve felt distant from one another after the fall. The entrance of sin estranged them.

Look what Gen 3:16, after God curses the serpent, he warns Eve of what sin has done:
To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Gen. 3:16

What did God say? Because of sin, hostility is now present in human relationships, even the most romantic ones.

Here’s the point. Sin has separated people from people and one of the ways that we bring the kingdom of God near, is when we tear down the walls that divide us. As Englewood leads our city in defeating racism, we introduce the peace of Christ.

Look at v. 22, “we are built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.”