

Ephesians: The One Body of Christ

“A Dwelling Place for God”

Ephesians 2:11-22”

I would ask you to turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Found in your Bibles. We're looking at Ephesians 2:11-22. And I will just warn you today that Paul has an incredible way of packing a whole lot of information into very small sections of Scripture. So as I go through this sermon, as we unpack what Paul is saying to us, if you are new to the Bible, if you're new to the story of Scripture, I would say follow along. Notice where I mentioned Bible verses that you can look up later. If you want to write them down you can look up what will more clearly elucidate some of the things that we're talking about. But we're going to cover a lot of material over redemptive history, because that's how Paul chooses to present to us this passage.

So turn in your scriptures, Ephesians 2:11-22,

¹¹ 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— ¹² 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. 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 us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,^[a] but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by^[b] the Spirit.

This is the word of the Lord that is given to us.

Please be seated.

Well, the best stories start small and get big. The best stories start small and get big I don't know. I don't care what you're talking about. It might be the hobbits in the Shire. It might be Luke on tattooing. It could be Harry Potter and the Muggles house. We like stories that start small and get bigger stories that start personally or in the mundane, everyday activity of our lives, but end up in some kind of cosmic, universal, grand scale.

Now, I think there's probably a variety of reasons why we feel this way. I think there's something about just the excitement of what seems small becoming big. And yet, I also do think, and I have to admit, because this isn't just true in the West. It's not just true in the United States. It's not just true of the last 40 years of entertainment, but this goes all the way back throughout all of human culture.

Why is it that humans, like stories that start small, seem to be about small things, but end up big? And I think there's got to be something built into humans, something about us being made in the image of God. The fact that all of humanity, just by being human, by definition, every single human is not just about themselves, but they ultimately reference the Creator God, every single human at their ground of being, find something about themselves that actually is much more transcendent than their everyday lives. And that's why we talk about love being everlasting or unending love. We talk about the nobility and the dignity of our great works as humans, as being something that's kind of trans historical and great and meaningful in the universe. I think that's why we like stories that start small with mundane things but then end up being grave and world historical. Because there's something about being human that is both at once very normal and at the same time transcendent. Cosmic. Because we reference God as the author of Ecclesiastes, who says, every single human has within their heart eternity. It's actually interesting. You can translate that word in a couple of ways. In Ecclesiastes, you could say every single human heart has the eternity within it. The word is actually *Olam*, which also means the world or the universe. So you could go either way. Could be every human heart has the universe, or every human heart has eternity. But whatever it is, every human heart fall in or otherwise references a God who is beyond the individual human.

You know, we see a story like those other stories here in the Bible. As a matter of fact, this is exactly the way that God unveils for us, unspools for us the story of redemptive history. It's a story that starts small with one man, one family, and expands out all the way. Think about where the Book of Revelation ends, to the new heavens and the new earth. You see, following the fall, Earth had been thrown into a time of darkness. It's described as almost like a spiritual midnight. Everyone is doing evil all the time, and yet it's out of that darkness of the fall that humanity brought on the earth, that we get this little glimmer of light and Genesis 10: 11 -12, it's this little glimmer.

It's this one man, somewhat successful businessman living in southern Mesopotamia. He hasn't been able to have children with his wife, and so he's wondering if he'll have a heritage that follows after him. But it's out of this one man and his one wife that we get our first glimpse, our first glimpse that there might be hope in the darkness of a world that has been fallen and broken by sin.

But notice, like all good stories, there's a little hint that this isn't just about one man and one family. If you know good storytellers, maybe you are a good storyteller. You know that when you're telling a story, you want to plant a little seed of the story's conclusion early on in the story so that when we get to the conclusion, we go, oh yeah, okay, I should have seen it. There it is. Right? If you haven't yet, maybe your dad or your or your friend is a good storyteller and they know how to do that. Well, I don't even know if they think about it. They just know how to do it. Notice when Abraham is called out of earth of the Chaldees, which is southern Mesopotamia. This is the promise that the Lord gives to him, and it is indeed.

It's about him and it's about his family. But notice the last part. This is in Genesis chapter 12 : 1-3. *The Lord tells Abram, go from your country and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you. I will curse in you. All the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

See, God's plan of redemption was never just about one man. It was never just about one group of descendants sharing a bloodline. It was always about all the families of the earth being blessed. It's interesting, as we read through the Old Testament, if we keep that Genesis 12, in the back of our minds will notice things like, for instance, you ever notice that Moses is told how to deal with countries that live within the land of Israel? As they go into it, he's told how to deal with the Canaanites. And yet, if you read closely in Deuteronomy, you notice that at parts the Lord also tells him how to deal with nations outside of the land. There was always a goal that Israel would spread its influence, that Israel would spread its authority out around the world, but not through warfare, through diplomacy, through suing for peace, through persuasion. And we even get glimpses from time to time, like in the building of the temple, when the king to the north Hiram is cahoots with Solomon, is they're building the temple. And we hear him-- it even seems like this foreign king might be a believer. You see, Israel was always meant to expand over the face of the earth. It was never meant to just be about this little slice of real estate on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. And this is precisely why Paul wants us to be reminded in these passages, chapter two, verse 11 through 22.

He wants us to be reminded that though our story started with one story, it was always meant for one family. It was always meant to be about every tribe and every language and every

nation. This passage Paul is carefully walking through the Gentiles of the Ephesian church, and he's explaining to them, you were always meant to be a part of this plan of salvation.

Now he's speaking particularly here, about the surprising and unexpected expansiveness of God's plan, the surprising and unexpected expansiveness of God's plan. And in doing so, he kind of gathers this, this up, this formula that he had been using in the previous passage. And then we go back to what we read last week. This up, Paul kept saying, you were once this, but now you're this.

You were once dead in your trespasses, but now you are alive in Christ. And notice how he's using the same formula here in this passage. Two he says, you were once this and were once far away, but now you're brought near. You were once two humanities, separated by a wall of separation. But now you are one new man, one new humanity in Christ.

You were once strangers and aliens. Now you're citizens. You see, what he's highlighting to them is that it's not just that their relationship was with God. Was change that kind of vertical relationship that they have with God, which is what our last week's passage was about. You were once dead unto God, now you are alive unto God. But he's saying that our relationship is reconciled and healed horizontally as well between us and the other members of the covenant people of God.

So let's look at the three ways. He has three major ways that he talks about this. You were once and now you're this change that's taking place. So the first one is in verses 11 through 13, and it's where he highlights the fact that you were once far away. He's using the spatial metaphor. You're once over there, but now you're here. Now you're near to God.

As we've said already, the story about God's cherished people, Israel in the Old Testament was never meant to just be about Israel. And yet it is definitely primarily about Israel. It's primarily about the descendants of Abraham. It's true. Every once in a while, we'll see a Gentile roll on to the scene and be a part of what's going on. You'll see. Tamar with Judah came from outside. Okay. We'll see Ruth, for instance, in the book by her name, she's the Moabite who returns into the land with Naomi and Naomi and Ruth's fortunes are kind of wrapped up in each other now, as is all of Israel is wrapped up with this Moabites. We got Rahab, the first Canaanite, that there that they meet on their way into the Promised Land. Actually, they were told to kill all the Canaanites. And yet we find very quickly that the Lord loves to show mercy. And as soon as she says, I want to be counted in your number, not only is she accepted into Israel, but she's put in the line of David himself. That's something showing us that God always meant to show mercy, even to the Canaanites. We see, actually in the story of Samuel, in Samuel, where David commits a sin with Bathsheba, it's Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. We see even in that passage, King David is supposed to be the good man after God's own heart is actually less

faithful than the Hittite, who is serving in his army, the Gentile who would come in to the people of God. And yet we can't say this enough. They, the Gentiles, are a part of God's redemptive plan in the Old Testament, but they're coming into it and almost like a trickle. It's one here, another there, a handful over here. But you can tell this story is not primarily about them. They are those who are far off. And you have to understand how great of a difference this is.

You see, to be a Gentile in the ancient world was to be cut off, to be cut off from the presence of God. God was walking in the midst of Israel. That's where his temple was. That's where his prophets were sent. All of the prophets were from Israel. That's where the covenants were, where rods were cut between God and humanity.

It was always in Israel. If you were a Gentile, no matter how faithful you might try to be. Let's say that by God's providence, like Ruth, you met an Israelite and you heard about her God, Yahweh and his mercy. And you were converted and you worshiped Yahweh. You worshiped Elohim, and you went in and lived with them. And you faithfully observe the law as the fruit of faith.

And you did all the things right. You operated, you accrued wealth. Do you realize that no matter what, you were never going to get access to the temple because you're a Gentile, no matter how much wealth you accrue accrued, no matter how much land you purchased, you would never have an everlasting portion of the land, and it would go back to its original family owners after a period of time, because you didn't get a portion of the land, because that was only for Israel.

You see, as a Gentile, you were in a precarious situation, even if you were faithful, even if you had repented. To illustrate the point, you know that in the Pentecost and in the prophets, when God wants to check on Israel's faithfulness right when God wants to come down and see his Israel being faithful, he actually tells them through Moses and then later through the prophets, I'm going to put like a it's going to be like a thermometer, and I can come down every once a while and I can check the thermometer and it'll tell me, do you understand who I am?

And are you living out the covenant faithfully? And he says, I know I can't just check. How are you being with your neighbors? Because you might be loving to your neighbor because you're getting something in return. So who am I going to check? It's this trifecta, right? It's the *orphan*, the *widow*. And then the last, the *sojourner*. Okay, I'm going to check how you are with the orphan, the widow and the sojourner, because they are the ones who can't give you anything back. So I'll know if you really love me by whether or not you care for them. Think about it. The orphan doesn't have a parent, so he has no inheritance, so he can't offer you anything that's lasting.

The widow is the woman who has been left, who doesn't have a husband, who to locate her within the patriarchal society of Israel. And so she's somewhat exposed. We see the story of Naomi being about a widow who's trying to find a place in the country. And just as difficult as those situations, just as precarious as those situations, is the situation of being a Gentile who has been converted into your wisdom in the Old Testament and is now living in the land, because they're always in a sort of lesser status, a status of precariousness and exposure.

Can you imagine how the Israelites must have felt when they heard Ezekiel's prophecy in Ezekiel 47:22? If you want to look it up, it's interesting passage. It's where he's talking about this grand temple that will come in the restoration, and the new prince who will come and give sacrifices that will finally be acceptable to the Lord. And then he says, And I'm going to give everyone a portion in the land, just like in the first conquest, everyone will get their portion of the land.

Benjamin and David, Naphtali and Zebulun, they'll all get their portion in the land. But then he says, and the sojourners who come back with you will also have a portion of the land. You can imagine an Israelite going, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, Ezekiel. That's not the way it works. Haven't you read Joshua? They don't get portions in the land. Only we do in. Ezekiel says no. In the restoration, they will have a portion of the land. They will have a place. They'll have a status like yours. And the restored Israel of God.

Now, of course, this is never recognized or realized in the Old Testament. They don't get to that promise because the Old Testament closes on the partial restoration going on with Ezra and Nehemiah. As a matter of fact, if you don't believe me, go look at the last words that are said. Thy a Jerusalem night in Jerusalem. In the near historical narratives of the Old Testament, we have Nehemiah, probably sometime in the fifth century. Look at the very last words of the book of Nehemiah. What does it say? Oh Lord, remember me for good, right? What is he saying? Saying, Lord, don't forget about us. We know the full restoration that the prophets talked about hasn't happened yet. We know that there's not streams flowing in the desert. We know there's not a true Davidic king sitting on the throne, and all other kings are bearing witness to him and giving tributes to him.

We know that there's not a grand historical, you know, cosmic temple that's filling the earth with living water. Lord, don't forget about us. And then the curtain closes on Nehemiah saying, Lord, don't forget about us. And we'd go into that 490 year long intermission where we wait for the second part of the drama.

See, it's important that Paul is saying Jesus is the one who makes those who were far off near. But he doesn't just say that. It's not just that spatial metaphor that you were far off as a Gentile. Now you've been made near. Rather, he says, you've now been bonded together with Israel, becoming now one person, one new man is the word that he uses there. He says that

distinction that we had between Israel and the Gentiles in the Old Testament. This fundamental distinction was so important. It's almost like it created two kinds of humanities. You had those that God calls the Son of God. You realize that when Moses goes to Pharaoh to the conceit behind the Exodus out of Egypt is this Moses is supposed to tell Pharaoh, Israel is my firstborn son.

Let him come out into the desert and worship me. That's the that's the first request, that's the first ask of the Exodus event. But notice there's Israel, my firstborn son, and then there's everyone else. The nations they're called. Sometimes the peoples or the Gentiles.

You see, it's like there were two different kinds of people in the world, and that did create a separation, a kind of wall or a barrier between Israel and the Gentiles around her. As a matter of fact, the Gentiles would say, we are sons. We're the sons of God. You, however, not being the sons of God, you're the dogs.

You're the dogs that walk around the household looking to feed off the trash that comes from the sons. Now we have to give Israel a little bit of credit here. They had good reason not to trust in the Gentiles around them as a matter of fact, most of the stories that we see between Israel and the Gentile nations are somewhat negative, aren't they?

You have the Syrians who come and spread out the lost tribes of northern Israel and spread them out so that many of them are lost for good. We never find them again. And then you have Babylon, who comes and destroys the temple and imprisons the Davidic king, putting him in a dungeon. Back in Babylon we have the Persians who come, and they seem a little better than the guys before.

Right? They still exact exorbitant taxes from Israel. And if Israel wants to build a wall around the city in order to protect herself from the nations that are marauding and coming in and raiding them, they have to ask for permission from the Persians. They can't just do it by themselves. You see, there's a lot of reasons why Israel might be hesitant to love and care for and follow out that mission that they were always given, which was to take the word of the Lord to the nations around them.

Perhaps the best example of Israel's disdain for the world was the person of the prophet Jonah is called to go to Nineveh to preach judgment. We might ask, why doesn't he want to go? Is it because none of us unclean? Or is it because he doesn't like to travel or something like that? We don't find out until we get to the very end, when the Lord has now shown mercy to none of us, because they heard the judgment of, of the prophecy of judgment.

They repent and they're forgiven. And you would expect Jonah, to say something like, well, Lord, I gave a prophecy and then you didn't fulfill the prophecy. But he doesn't say that. Now,

that's what he says. He says, I knew you were going to do that. I knew when you send people to a prophet, to another people and you, it's.

They have a prophecy of judgment. I know the purpose is so that the people will repent and you'll be able to forgive them and have mercy on them. We actually find out that the villains in the story of Jonah is not Assyria at all. It's Jonah because he's lost the call to mission. The Israelites might even point out, well, we have the cleanliness codes of Leviticus 11 through 15.

We have the cleanliness codes where we're told that some things are clean and some things are unclean, and Gentiles are unclean. We are clean, they are unclean. That's why they can't be priests. That's why they can't serve in the temple. They are unclean. They're dirty, they're profane. We are the holy people of God.

You see, what began as a call to mission for Israel became what Paul calls a wall of separation. And that's why it's so important for Paul to point out that from the very beginning, Christ is about the work of bringing the mission to the Gentiles. Do you notice even right away, even in his infancy, what's the first thing that we see about Christ Jesus in his birth?

Wisemen, representatives of kings. And by the way, just so you know that wise men and sages in the Bible, they're always serving in the King's court. They're representatives. They're part of the kingly, the royal entourage. That's why, actually, and even our Christian memory, we both call them the sages. And then we also call them the Three Kings. Right.

What do they do? They come and they bear witness to the birth of Messiah King, the Son of David. They even give him gifts and they honor him. Why? Because he is bringing his authority to bear on earth. Jesus continues to show us throughout his ministry that he's not just concerned with Israel getting saved, but he's concerned with the Gentiles being saved.

We see him in Mark chapter five, and he goes out to that area called the Decapolis, and there's a man there called the man of the Gerasenes, and he's filled with a thousand demons. And Jesus says, what's your name? And he says, I'm legion. I'm not even just one. We're self-conscious demons. We're a legion of demons. And he cast them out.

And we know that he's a Gentile, this isolated, lost man on a coastline. It was the least public thing that Jesus did amongst his people, Israel. But he goes and he finds him, and we know the man's a Gentile because he's in the Decapolis. And there he is, living next to a herd of pigs.

You see Jesus, the Son of David, Messiah King. True. Israel goes out of his way to find the lost and isolated, nameless man on the banks of Galilee. Notice he does it again just a little bit later in Mark chapter seven, where he meets a Phoenician woman, and he has this interesting back and forth where she says to him the things that the Israelites believed about the Gentiles.

She comes and she says, I have need. And notice what Jesus says. I came for the children, not for the dogs. Sounds kind of harsh at first, doesn't it? You read that and you think Jesus is kind of harsh on the nose, isn't it? You know, do you really mean to say it like that? And then notice what does she say?

She says, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the children. And here's where I think we see what Jesus is actually doing. What does he say now, then, in front of all of these scribes, all of these students of the law who had read Genesis 12 and knew they were supposed to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, all of these Pharisees who are telling the Israel in diaspora, as long as you hold Torah deep in your heart, then God is with you.

But it doesn't say anything about evangelism. And in front of all of them Jesus says, I haven't seen faith like this in all of Israel. I think it's right there that we learn exactly what he was doing. He was not being, you know, he wasn't being mean. He wasn't being cruel when he said, I came for the children, not for the dogs, he was inviting out from her statement of faith because Jesus knew what Abraham knew and what Moses knew.

And as it said in Genesis 15, when you have faith, that faith is reckoned to you as righteousness. As a matter of fact, that's the only way you can be saved. Israel.

If you are faithless, it doesn't matter what your bloodline is. Look at the sun. Look at look at the Coral Height Rebellion Dothan in a Biram and the others who participate in the rebellion against Moses. Does the Lord say, well, I can't do anything because they're in the bloodline of Abraham? No, they are cut off from the people.

You see, Jesus is saying, if faith is the way of salvation, if faith reckoned is reckoned to you as righteousness. I haven't seen faith like this in all of Israel. I've only seen it in this Canaanite woman. You can see the power of what he's saying. As a matter of fact, Jesus does not consider himself as Messiah King to just be King of Israel.

He is king over all of the earth. That is the foundation of the Great Commission, is it not? What does it say before it tells us to go out and preach the gospel to the nations? Evangelizing and discipling, baptizing and discipling the nations? What does it tell us beforehand? He says, all authority, right? Notice, no caveat, no exception.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, when you go out and do this, you are just rightly proclaiming my kingdom over those who are already under my authority. Paul goes so far in Romans 13 to say, Even Caesar and he's talking about Nero at the time. Even Caesar gets his authority from God and will be held accountable for his authority and how he uses it by Christ.

Christ will hold Caesar accountable. You see, Jesus throughout his ministry is not just calling the Gentiles to him. He is reconciling in his teaching, in his death, and in his resurrection in the Gentiles to him. And he now reigns over the Gentiles. See, as a result, says Paul, there used to be two humanities, but now there is only one humanity.

If you are in Christ. The Jew and the Gentile are both parts of this new congregation, and that's why it is wrong. I just want to point this out. It's wrong for us to say that the church is just a continuation of Israel. It's not. It is a new thing. And yet we should consider Israel to be like the main trunk.

The main line of which we as Gentiles are grafted in to use as Paul's language. Right. We're like branches that have been grafted onto a trunk. Israel is the trunk. We're grafted in. There's been an outpouring, the spirit. So there's a lot of us grafted in now, and we make a new tree. We are a new man. And yet it's also wrong to say that the church is completely different from Israel.

The church doesn't replace Israel, but rather it is a fulfillment of what Israel was called to be. The church is the redeemed congregation, and that's all. Do you know this? That's all the church means. It just means congregation. It is the redeemed congregation or assembly of worshipers who worship under Messiah King, the High Priest of God, Jesus Christ.

So as a result, if you are a Gentile, when you read the Old Testament, I want you to recognize it. When you're reading the Old Testament, you're reading the Word of God for you in Christ. It is for you in Christ. It's not the book for another religious group. It's your book. And yet you read it in light of the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the current reign and Pentecost of Jesus Christ.

And yet, if you were also a child of Abraham, right, and you're reading the Old Testament, you're reading your Hebrew Bible, I want you to recognize this. This is a book that is for you, and yet you should never read it apart from the lens or apart from reading it through the lens of the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the current reign, and the Pentecost of Jesus Christ.

As a matter of fact, that's a good definition of Christianity. We are observing the faith of the Old Testament in light of the resurrection, the ascension, the current reign, and the Pentecost of Jesus Christ. That's what it is. If you don't believe me, go read the New Testament, because all they're doing is showing you how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus.

So you were you were people who were far off, and now you've been made new near. You were two nations, and now you're one nation. And then he moves on now to this last, he kind of changes the metaphor just slightly. And he says, you were once strangers and sojourners, but now you are citizens, members of the household.

It's another way of saying what we've already said, the spatial metaphor. It gives rise now to this kind of citizenship metaphor. You were far, now you're within. You were outside. You were precarious. Even if you converted to even if you were Uriah the Hittite, the most faithful one, most faithful people living in Israel, you still didn't have the standing of the lowliest Benjamin, right?

But now it's changed. Now you have a portion of the land. Now you've been made a citizen, no longer a dog, gleaning from the crumbs that fell from the table. You're now a son. You're a child. The Gentile cannot boast over the Israelite because the Israelite is the older brother. And yet the Israelite can't boast over the Gentile because the Gentile is a true citizen.

And this strikes, of course, at the heart. Of how Israelites, Judeans in Jesus time, may have thought about their place in the world. You see the strikes at the core of Israelite exceptionalism. They would have said, wait a minute, wait a minute. We are exceptional. We have been given all of these things. And Paul is saying, your exceptionality has now been trans, you know, transmogrified.

It's been changed and turned into the exceptionality of the church, that is, those who are elect in Christ. And then we get to where Paul says, and this is why he's doing all of this. Why did he draw the faraway near? Why did he turn two people into one? Why did he take strangers and make them citizens? Paul tells us at the very end of this chapter, because here he is making the temple of God.

One last change in metaphor for Paul as citizens, you are actually bricks. Bricks in the sanctuary of the Lord. You see, this was probably the most core idea of Israelite exceptionalism because they could say, I don't care what you do, Gentile. We have the Lord God of the creator, God who rules over the surface of the earth dwelling within us because we've got his house.

I can point to it. It's right down the road there. He is. That's where he's dwelling with us. That's where he tabernacles with us when we're not in and in in the country, when we're out in our wilderness wandering. That is where God is with us. And no one else has that. And Paul turns around and says, Because of Christ, you are all now Israelites and Gentiles.

The temple of the living God.

It's hard to even get our heads around what he means by that, because if you go throughout the whole teaching of Scripture, we know the temple has shown up in a variety of places. The garden was a temple of sorts. That's why God puts his image there. Because you put the image at the front of the temple. It has a roof.

It is where God's glorious radiance and abundance is. And then when we're shut off from the temple, we don't get the temple again. Excuse me? We're shut off from the garden. We don't

get that sanctuary again until we get the tabernacle. And in the tabernacle we have God again dwelling with us and bringing his holiness in his glory.

And then when they come to Jerusalem, he puts his temple there. And now Jerusalem and Israel, the land become the temple, the presence of God. As the temple building marks at the center of Jerusalem's life. And we know that after it's destroyed, one day it will be restored again.

That's what's so confusing when Jesus is walking one day next to the Herodian temple, as it's described in John two, and he says, you can tear down this temple, but I'll rebuild it in three days. And what is John saying? I love it how John gives us these little footnotes right here that we didn't realize at the time, but he was talking about himself.

Because of the temple of the Sanctuary of God is the place where God dwells with his people. Then what better temple can we have than Jesus Christ Himself, the very incarnate second person of the Trinity, taking on the form of a man and walking with us when Jesus is on earth, he is temple.

But then this raises the question Jesus isn't on earth anymore. This is just as the logical issue for Christians to wrestle with. Jesus isn't here. His body is risen. It's a real physical body. His resurrected body sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. So where is this temple? And Paul says, well, let's look and find where his spirit is.

Gentiles, you are no longer unclean. You're no longer far. You're made near. You're no longer strange. You're made citizens. You're no longer divided. You're made one with Israel. But why is that? It is so that you may be part of the building blocks of the temple of God, the very presence of God, the tabernacle of God on earth, which is his church.

In this series we've been asking the question of Paul what is the church? And he's now adding to that. Yes, we are adopted sons. We are heirs. We are assured. We are redeemed. We are in Christ, who was far above all other dominion and power and authority. But now he's telling us you are church. You are temple dwelling place of the living God.

I just want to draw out briefly.

The profound truth that our Christian faith has to offer us. I'm actually convinced this is a unique thing amongst world religions that offer all kinds of hopes. This is a unique thing. Christianity, the gospel of Jesus Christ, does not just offer you a way up the mountain to be with God. It doesn't just offer you a way of living, it doesn't just offer you like a set of beliefs that will get you saved, but rather it offers you God himself, taking up residence within you as a unique and innovative gift of our gospel.

But it also creates a kind of tension.

Those of you who are in Christ, you know this. You know that there is a conflict within us because we now have this embassy of the new heavens and new earth living within us. And so it's at war with our flesh that Paul talked about before. The passions of the flesh. They're at war together. There's a conflict there.

There's a push in a pool in a way that actually can make life more difficult at times than it was back when you were just living in darkness.

I don't want to give you the impression that the life of those who are united in Christ, who are made temple by the spirit dwelling within them, is an easy go lucky life. It is not easy, but it is abundant.

It's not passive, it's active. It's a struggle. Because that spiritual man, as Paul calls him, or sometimes Paul just says it's just Jesus. I no longer live. It's just Jesus living within me. Right in Galatians 220, now that he's there, though, it's warring with what is Paul call it my body of death. So I don't want to do the things that I do want to do, and I do the things that I don't want to do.

As a matter of fact, this ought to give us a lot of compassion about our fellow Christians struggle with decisions and behaviors, and they struggle with knowing what's the right way to move forward. As a Christian now, sometimes even seeming, they start to sound like this people, sometimes we feel this way too, that James describes in James one, where he says they're double minded, right?

They're like a ship being tossed back and forth on the ocean. We can relate to them because we know what it's like to have the spiritual man warring within us.

And yet Paul says, don't take that as a sign of the lack of God's presence. Take that as a sign of God's presence. You see, we've been given the answer to the question every Israelite would have asked. They would have known that that Israel was meant to be a gift to all the families of the earth. They would have known that the story started small was but was supposed to mean big.

They knew that. God said, I'm going to fill the ends of the earth. But they couldn't see how they knew that God was with us. They knew the title Emmanuel, God with us, but they didn't know how that could be. But now we see it in the ministry of Christ. In the call to the Great Commission and the expansion of that worshipping congregation, the church over the face of the earth, that is not just worshipers of God but is the temple of God itself.

Look around you, nations that Paul and Peter and John could not have imagined are now worshipping Yahweh Elohim in lands that they couldn't have concocted out of their wildest imaginations.

You see, when we come to Christ, when we are united with him, we are not merely brought near from being far off. We're not merely fused together into one new man. We're not merely citizens of the city. We become the dwelling place of God on earth itself. And as a result, our bodies matter. Our Bible study matters, our minds matter, our relationships matter.

Our church community matters because we are the presence of God on earth in Christ. It's so wondrous. It sounds almost heretical to say, but that doesn't make it any less true. You are the temple of God. Let's close in prayer. Heavenly father, as we come before you, we are. Our minds are vexed by the beauty and the glory of what has been accomplished for us in Christ.

Lord, as we consider these things, may we be encouraged and drawn to you in the Spirit of Christ, who indwells us now by faith, dear Lord, that we might be the expanding temple of God over the face of the earth. We long for that day, Lord, when the whole world is the temple again, the new heavens and new earth.

We long for that day, but until that day strengthen us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.