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Jason Henderson
Market Street Fellowship

Ephesians 2:20 - 22

Today I want to finally get back to our study of the book of Ephesians. It has been quite a while since we departed from this study. In fact, it may have been so long that a few of you who have been coming for a while don't even know that we started the year with a goal of working our way through the book of Ephesians. I never once thought that we would get through Ephesians in just one year, nor did I think that we would actually stay on that course without taking several temporary diversions. But we did start in January with the loose objective of trying to slowly work our way through the epistle of Ephesians.

We made it through chapter one and most of chapter two. We stopped in the end of September after talking about Ephesians 2:13 – 18 – the reality that He Himself is our peace. Hopefully most of you recall that message.

Today I want to try to work towards Ephesians 2:20 – 22. I say “work towards” because I will be taking a round-about way of getting there. I've had a couple things on my heart recently – having to do with creation, the kingdom and the priesthood, purpose, etc...and I wasn't sure what to share about. Then it struck me that our next verse in Ephesians is such an enormous reality with so much Old Covenant testimony behind it that I could probably smash together all of my heart's rabbit trails into these three verses. I tried to do that...but somehow it ended up as more of an advertisement for the Old Testament.

It may sound strange or unnecessary to advertise the Old Testament, but I thought it would be good to remind us of its purpose and significance as we look at this verse in Ephesians. The salvation that we have is the fulfillment of all that God planned before the foundation of the world and testified to for thousands of years. That may sound like simplicity itself, but I guarantee that we don't really realize the weight of that statement.

We have the fulfillment of what they were promised. But we cannot comprehend what we have unless we come to know it as the realization or attainment of what was promised. It would be a little like watching the last 30 seconds of a movie and saying “Boy, I appreciated that movie. That was fantastic!”. How in the world do you know? What exactly are you appreciating? Can you really appreciate the ending of a story that you don't know?

Maybe its a bit like getting married to somebody that you have never met or talked to. Rather than that marriage being the consummating of something that your heart knows and has longed for, it would actually be the beginning of something that you are entirely unfamiliar with. Or maybe you could compare it to jumping into a marathon for the last quarter mile. Sure you arrived at the finished line, but there is no appreciation or understanding of the journey that brought you there.

Those analogies are attempts to illustrate that if we try to understand a Scripture like Ephesians 2:20-22 apart from deep, spirit given understanding of the eternal purpose of God that it is satisfying, then how can we really value or understand it. So...Lets start by reading the verses, and then we'll rewind a few thousand years and try to understand what we've just read.

Eph 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Let me just say something very quickly about verse 20. I'm not going to focus on that verse this morning. I'm going to stick primarily with verses 21 and 22. But I'll say a couple things about it in passing. Many in the church world today have made a great deal out of this verse, claiming first of all that the church is built on the foundation which IS the apostles and prophets, and then that leads nicely into a second claim that they themselves are those apostles and prophets. It seems to be a new fad in church world today to confer particularly these titles on ourselves in order to feel spiritually significant or powerful.

I come from a background where a prophet is anybody that can tell you what is in your sock drawer, and an apostle is any leader with a church over 1000 members, or a leader who has been called an apostle by somebody with a church over 1000 people. And then of course there are bishops, and psalmists, and on and on we go naming ourselves things that make us feel important. My point isn't to really show that to be silly. I think that is self-evident. My point is only to say that regardless of how you read this verse, it is not declaring the apostles and prophets to be the foundation, but rather declaring Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone and foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Enough on that. It's the last two verses that are going to have our attention today. Very briefly, these verses encapsulate God's eternal purpose and His view of salvation. Here we have a people of God, reconciled to Him through the cross, come to be His dwelling place and the instrument of His increase and glory.

Ok. Lets rewind. And in rewinding I want to examine some of our assumptions. I want to force us to look at things that we've perhaps assumed to know without understanding.

What was God's view of salvation before He created? That is a question that I've come to ponder more and more. What did God have in His heart, in His view, before He made the first thing? You all, of course, realize that purpose preceded creation. There was intention and objective before there was the first drop of water or the first breath of life. God had a view of the end from the beginning, and without saying much about that, that view was of Christ who is the beginning and the end. Christ the beginning – the fullness that God beheld out from which all things were made. Christ the end – the goal, destination, and dwelling place into which all were meant to come.

Well, what was God's view of this plan? What was God's perspective of this salvation? I mentioned last week that our view of all things, including salvation, including purpose, has to do primarily with a felt need. In other words, we create our understanding of God based on how he meets some facet of our felt need. We

define salvation based on how we understand it to satisfy OUR felt need. We also prefer sermons that are aimed at addressing and ministering to our felt needs. Let me give you an example or two. If you were to ask most Christians what God's salvation was all about, I suppose many would probably say "it is about forgiving sins". "It is about getting us off the road to hell". It is about redeeming us from our path of self-destruction". "It is about loving us and helping us get to heaven with Him."

Its not that I am suggesting that these things are not true (if properly understood), or that they are not realities found in Him. It's just that they don't describe God's purpose. They aren't God's view of salvation. God didn't create a problem only to fix it. Do you see what I mean? God didn't make a mess only to clean it up. That wouldn't be His purpose. He created all things with one thing in mind. And when His creation decided to live by their own mind, and became cross-purposes with Him, then He offered redemption to them unto His original purpose. That's an incredibly brief summary, but I think it's accurate.

Part of that redemption is the forgiveness of your sin. Absolutely. Part of that redemption is saving you from self-destruction. Yes. But your redemption was not an end in itself. It is wonderful, but there is a greater purpose in mind. You were saved unto a divine intention. I don't mean to play-down realities like "forgiveness of sin". That is an amazing part of our salvation in Christ. It is unspeakably good. Its just that the body of Christ has a way of focusing on the things we think we understand to the exclusion of what God would have us know. We put the spotlight on those things that address felt needs, but we are happy to remain ignorant of the end for which God has met that need. In other words, we're content with a miniature view of how God has met some need of the soul, and rarely bother ourselves to look beyond that.

I guess that's what I'm trying to have us do this morning – to look beyond that. To see beyond that. We were talking in the Hebrews group on Saturday about how we are so content to remain in spiritual ignorance so long as we think that "we're covered". God I don't know much about life and purpose...but I do know I've got the bases covered. I'm safe.

But sooner or later the heart of man has to face something. Well, we don't have to. We can play the fool and pretend that ignorance is bliss. But ignorance is ignorance. And when it comes to eternal, spiritual reality, ignorance is death. Anyway, if you have any inkling to know the truth, if we have any drop of thankfulness for what God has done in Christ, if we have a shred of desire to know Him or find our place in His purpose...then we have to face in to something. We have to face the fact that God has gone to great lengths not only to procure salvation for us, but to give us an approach to understanding that salvation through the things that He has made, the institutions He has created, the covenants He has established, and the testimony that He had recorded to the most minute detail.

Do you realize that the Old Testament, with all of its unending detail and description, is God's gracious attempt to try to put His plan and His salvation into display in such a way that the human heart and mind can begin to approach Truth with a desire to know Him? "These things" writes Paul in 1 Cor 10:11 "were written for us upon whom the end of that age has come."

Would there be any way that mankind could even begin to know God and the truth of His way, His nature, His purpose, if God had not communicated something of this through the stories written, the covenants recorded, the prophecies that he preserved in what we have as the Old Testament. Even the meaning of the sayings of Jesus "I am the door", "I am the bread of life", "I am the way", etc. would be unknowable mysteries unless they were understood as the fulfillment of all that God had previously described in the testimony.

How kind and condescending for God to give us an approach to understanding what He has done for us in Christ. A pattern by which we can better understand the reality. How wonderful that God would spend thousands years perfecting a testimony of what He desired to give us, and in fact, what has been fully accomplished and realized in Christ. And how strange it must be to Him that we often consider it the "boring" part of the Bible. We don't want to look there to gain His comprehension of what we have here. We'd rather remain ignorant. Worse than that, we'd rather imagine it for ourselves.

I'm saying all of this in order to introduce what I want to spend some time talking about. Personally speaking, I very much want to lay down my understanding of salvation and exchange it for His. I want to know as I am known. I want God's big picture to be so much bigger in me than my little imagination. Ephesians 2:20-22 is about God's big picture.

When you are looking at the Old Testament, or "the testimony" as I like to call it because that is how I understand it to function...there are several ways to summarize the major types and shadows of salvation in Christ. For instance, I have in the past, given an overview of the testimony by showing it to describe an old man, an old creation, and an old covenant that come to an end in the cross where God makes all things new. A new man, a new creation as His eternal abode, and a new covenant whereby he relates to all who are in this New Man – Christ. If you weren't here for that, that was the eight-part "Salvation" series that I did about a year ago.

It is not difficult to see and summarize God's dealings in the Old Testament along these lines. Another way you could summarize the Old Testament would be to demonstrate that all things written pertain to these three things: the wrong man, the right man, and the increase and glory of the right man.

That may sound like an oversimplification of 4000 years of God's dealing with man, but so much of the Old Testament is precisely the demonstrating of this reality. Right from the beginning you have one man seen in juxtaposition with another man. One man represented in the tree of good and evil and another in the Tree of Life. The first man chooses death. The first man believes a lie and seeks to live by His knowledge of good and evil. This man falls from purpose, falls from glory, and immediately God demonstrates the need for his destruction.

The first man believes the lie, and perpetuates it in himself. Out of his loins comes the increase of himself. He is fruitful and multiplies and the Scriptures say that the world is filled with violence, filled with corruption. God says "all the thoughts and intents of this man are only evil continually". This is the wrong man. The man who lives by the lie and brings self and sin and death into everything he touches. And the flood was one of the first demonstrations of what God understood about the end of this man. This man must come to an end, be put away, and there must be the commencement of something altogether new.

And as you read through the pages of your Old Testament, you see God speaking of this end. You see God describing the putting away of this first man, this adamic man, his judgment, his separation from any purpose or inheritance, and then the wonderful coming of the second man. And more than his coming, His increase. Of the increase of His government there shall be no end.

I'm going somewhere with this, so stay with me. I'm heading back to Ephesians chapter 2, but like I said, I'm taking the scenic route. The more we can see along the way, the greater Ephesians 2 will look. So don't skip ahead.

Your Old Testament is the story of these two men. And you'll notice that the wrong man always comes first and is replaced by the right man. And then the right man has his increase. The first is put away, and the second is established and multiplied. The second fulfils purpose and is glorified. We've looked at these before, but here here's a few:

Cain and Able. Cain is clearly the wrong man – the man of sin and death. He is the first fruits of the lie. He kills for his own gain. He kills because his offering is not acceptable to God. And when He is cast out of the presence of God, Able is replaced by Seth – who bears the lineage and birthright of the firstborn.

Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael is the man of the flesh. The wrong man. He is the product of Abraham's unbelief. He is the creation of flesh trying to do the will of God. He is cast away, and is replaced by Isaac. And all of God's promises regarding increase and greatness are bound up exclusively with this second son – who God calls Abraham's only son. It is through Isaac that God said He would multiply the Seed exceedingly.

Jacob and Esau. Esau is displeasing to his parents. He joins himself to foreign women. He discards his birthright for the passing pleasures of the earth. He does not receive the father's inheritance. Jacob, though a deceiver as a young man, comes to live by faith. His name is changed to Israel, and he brings forth the beginning of the increase promised to Abraham.

Saul and David. Saul is the king after man's own choice, and shows himself to be ruled by anger, jealousy, and fear. He is a demonstration of the man who needs to be put away. And in fact he is put away by God through Samuel and replaced by David – a man who depicts the New Man, the man after God's heart. In David we have another clear picture of increase and dominion and glory.

We could go on and on. Your Bible tells this story time and time again – bringing out more and more intentional details to illustrate what was coming in the cross of Jesus Christ. But in each case you will see that the picture of salvation depicted in these stories is not exactly how we want to preach it. If we could super-impose our current understanding of salvation onto the Old Testament pages, and have them become representative of our understanding of salvation...they would look very different.

We would have Cain saying "my punishment is more than I can bear", and then God would say..."you're right. I forgive you, come back and live with me in the garden." We would have Abraham crying out "Oh God, why can't my son Ishmael live before you"...and God would reply "well, I guess you did your best. He'll do...after all, I am

a God of love". Maybe you're not following me. I'm simply trying to make the point that God's eternal plan and purpose was not creating man, watching him fall, and then forgiving him. God's plan of salvation was the replacement of one seed with Another through death, burial, and resurrection unto the increase and glorification of the New.

God's plan was not felt-need driven. It was purpose driven. It meets all needs, but is so much bigger than fixing our problems. If God's focus was on the problem, he could have avoided it altogether by not creating. His heart was on His purpose. This plan, this salvation was so much greater than meeting our felt needs, forgiving sin-sick sinners, helping us out of a mess. Does he do all of this? Yes. Is there anywhere else that needs are truly met? Of course not. But God's dealings with man are done with purpose in mind. And that purpose is not a pardon that comes with a permit to a better place. Although I'm getting ahead of myself, that purpose is to make you into a living habitation, an eternal dwelling place, a temple of God's ever increasing glory. That is what Ephesians 2:20-22 is all about.

And we could simply read it, but then we would miss all of the effort and time and thought and care that went into detailing, promising, and testifying of what we now have. We can just read the Bible verse, and say "wow that's neat...something to think about during the next commercial".

We could have just read the verse today without going back into the Old Testament, but we would not know what we were looking at. If we try to understand these words of Paul apart from the multitude of verses, stories, ceremonies, commands, and years of testimony that they fulfill, then we just cannot appreciate it.

How can a human being read words that tell you that God Almighty has made you into His own sanctuary, the temple of His glory, the kingdom of His increase....how can a human being read these words and respond appropriately? It is impossible to know where to put such a statement. Do we stop long enough to even consider with the natural mind what God is saying here? We obviously don't know what we're reading. We obviously don't apprehend even the smallest fraction of this reality or we would be utterly speechless and undone. The fact that we can read a verse like this and then put the Bible down, grab some bean dip and watch M.A.S.H. speaks volumes of our comprehension.

Are you following me? I'm not saying we like M.A.S.H too much. I'm saying we don't know what we're reading. I'm saying that words can be as shallow or as deep as you have come to know the reality of which they speak. I'm saying that these words in Ephesians 2:20-22 will be virtually meaningless to you unless you know them as the great consummation, the long awaited realization of what God has always wanted. The grand achievement of His eternal purpose. In these 20 or 30 words, Paul gathers up 20 or 30 books of the Old Testament and says "it is finished".

You see we are the kind, the nature, that is rejected for a better man. And though we are crucified and judged in the body of Christ, nevertheless we live, yet not us, but Christ lives in us. One kind judged put away, and yet there is life for us...but not ours. Christ who lives in us. We have become the kingdom of His dominion. We have become the land in which His Seed finds increase. We have become the temple that bears His name and His glory. We have become oaks of His righteousness, the

planting of the Lord. We, having died with Him, have been raised with Him and we are where the increase of His government will know no end.

We looked briefly at 1 Corinthians chapter 3 last week. We are the plant that is the increase of His Seed. We are the building that is the enlargement of His foundation. We are the temple that displays the glory of God. This is what Paul is gathering describing in Ephesians 2:20 – 22. We are “the dwelling place of God in the Spirit” that was made new by Christ to be filled with the true cloud of His presence.

God has been speaking of, testifying to, describing, promising this reality from the beginning. If I had more time, I had planned to show that enormous amount of material in the Old Testament that describes the priesthood and the kingdom speaks to the same reality. Christ our High Priest. Christ our king.

Christ the High Priest bringing death and judgment to all of Israel in the Lamb. The High priest who bears the judgment of the sons of Israel before the Lord continually. The one who prepares the door in blood. The one who brings a people through the death of the old into the eternal dwelling place of God where we stand reconciled, joined, accepted, in Him.

But more than that. More than the end of the first in blood. More than the acceptance of the second in righteousness. There is increase. There is multiplication, expansion, spread, growth. The New Man has his increase in us. This is the kingdom. And if we had time I could show you that the kingdom, as it is typified in David, bears witness of the destruction of uncircumcised flesh, the circumcision of what God calls dead and offensive, in order that His King can have reign, dominion, glory and expression in you. “The kingdom of God” Jesus says “is not coming with outward signs to be observed. The kingdom of God is within you.”

The priesthood is how we come to dwell with God and God with us. The kingdom is the increase of this reality and relationship in and through us.

There is so much God has said, so much he has shown, so much he has promised that speaks of what Paul claims in Ephesians 2:20 – 22 to be a “now” reality for us Christ.

Exo 15:17 You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, In the place, O LORD, which You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established. 18 "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

Exodus 25:8 ~ "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I might dwell among them"

Exodus 29: 45-46 ~ "I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. They shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt SO THAT I might dwell among them."

Zechariah 2:11 "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord. Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become my people. Then I will dwell in your midst"

Ezekiel 37:26 "I will make a covenant of peace with them (peace with God?), it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them,; and I will be their God, and they will be My people."

Isaiah 66:1 "Heaven is my throne and earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for me? And where is a place that I may find rest"?

Here, in Ephesians 2:21-22 God has his answer. Here God has found his house. God has found His people, His dwelling place, and the increase of His glory.