

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed

PART

8

TITLE

We Are Brought Near

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:11-13



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Well, good morning, Providence. It is a joy to gather with you guys this morning and to open God's word together. I want to read iterate what Mark said at the beginning of the service. If you are joining us today because of an invitation to come yesterday, and you joined us on the upper parking lot for Fall Festival, it is really our joy and our honor that you would be with us today and that you would know that we consider it a privilege that you would gather with us. We're grateful you're here. My name is Bryan. I'm one of the pastors on staff here. We're going to be in Ephesians. If you want to open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter two, we're going to be looking at verses 11 through 13.

Before we get to the scripture, I want to tell you a story. Some of you may know, if my accent doesn't give it away, I'm a good West Tennessee boy. I grew up like any good West Tennessee boy with a love for country music. I grew up listening to it, loved it, and in life found myself down the road actually working in the music industry. In fact, I worked on Music Row in Nashville in a country music publishing company. Before you think, "Wow. That's really something," I was nothing. I started there as an intern. I actually went to school in Nashville for music business. I had an internship at the company that eventually hired me. When you're an intern, you do whatever you're told to do. I answered phones. I made tape copies. We actually used tapes back then. I would make tape copies of the songs that were written. I would make copy copies. I would run errands. That didn't matter what it was. If somebody wanted me to go to the corner store around the corner and get them a biscuit, that's what I did. I manned the front door.

I did get to work on Music Row. If you go to Nashville, if you love country music and you go there, you just go as a fan, everybody wants to walk down Music Row. Our office was actually on Music Row. I was right in the middle of it. It was a cool thing. Well, I had a friend during that time that worked for Opryland. That was after the theme park was dead. It was sad. This girl who was a classmate worked for Opryland. One night, she said, "Hey, let's go to the Grand Ole Opry." Now, I've been to the Grand Ole Opry before and sat in the crowd just like you guys are sitting in chairs this morning. I love it. If you love country music, then the Opry is the epicenter of that. It's where you get to see the people who have had a long running career and have been brought into the Opry. They do invite guests in. It's a neat thing.

I've sat as a fan of country music in the Opry house before, but this particular night, we pulled up and parked in a parking lot that the general public doesn't have access to. I didn't think that was a real big deal because she worked for Opryland. There were a couple of us in the car. We pulled up. We park. We get out. We go in a side door to the Opry house. Now things are getting interesting because I'm realizing we're not going to go and like get in and sit in the chairs. We walk in a backdoor that's in the back of the Opry house and proceed to walk to the right hand side, or to your left hand side, backstage. I'm watching the Opry from backstage. It's glorious.

I'm standing offstage and I can see all the guys playing. Steve Wariner was there that night. Some of you are going, "Who's Steve Wariner?" Well, I'm showing my age again or the fact that you don't like country music. However, Steve was there. For those of you who don't know who Steve Wariner is, it's not the same because certainly there are people that have had more success or at least more public attention, but if you love contemporary pop music, it would be like you meeting Taylor Swift or meeting Justin Timberlake kind of sort of. It's a big deal. I'm standing offstage watching him sing. When he's finished, he walks offstage and I'm right there. I get to meet him. Once you're backstage at the Opry, you really don't want to sit in the chairs anymore. It's a different experience and not even one that if you've not been there, you don't even know what you're missing. You can guess. You can dream about it. The point is this. I was invited in to a circle that was not the normal circle. For that night, at that moment, I had access that I didn't have before. I saw the perspective from an angle that I had never thought about before and realized what I had missed seeing it from the other perspective.

You might say, "What does that have to do with the text in Ephesians?" Well, maybe not a lot. It's hard to make a comparison between the gospel and country music maybe, but I think that Paul is doing this ... You can laugh, yes. I think that Paul is doing this because what he's about to do in this text is he's gone through and he's laying a foundation. If you're with us for the first time today, we're in Ephesians. We've been walking through the book. The first three chapters of Ephesians, what Paul does is he lays out before them this remarkable grace that has been unleashed to them because of Jesus. Then he turns a corner in chapter four. He says, "Now because of this, because of what you now are, this is how you ought to live." The last four chapters of the book are actually, "Hey, this is what grace did and this is what you do in response to it because you now have it." Here, in the middle of chapter two, he says, "Hey, Ephesians, I want you to remember that you were outsiders." There's a reason why.

Let's look at the text and then we'll hop right in. This is what Paul says, Ephesians chapter two starting with verse 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. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Let's pray. Father, would you in the next few minutes let us just marvel at what Paul is saying? That you would take us from outsiders and all the things that brings and that you would move us near. God, would you let us just live in the amazing nature of what you've done on our behalf and all that it brings to us? May Christ be glorified in your word? We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

Paul, in this text, is writing to the church at Ephesus. The church at Ephesus is primarily non-Jewish. The believers at Ephesus were non-Jewish people. They were Greek. They were part of the Roman Empire and they had come to faith and belief in Jesus Christ. Paul is writing to them in the context of where they are. He's writing to help them understand the nature of what God has done for them. He says to them, "Guys, you are outsiders." You might say, "Well, outsiders of what?" Well, primarily what Paul highlights is they were outside of the people of God and that's a big deal. Paul's going to tell us why. He says, "Hey, remember at one time you Gentiles in the flesh ..." Now, that term, Gentile, actually comes from the Greek word *ethnos*. *Ethnos*, in our English language, we get all kinds of terms that have to do with ethnic or ethnicity, comes from that Greek root. What Paul is saying and actually literally the translation for *ethnos* is the nations.

You might say, "Well, that doesn't make a whole lot of sense." Well, it was primarily used by the Jews to indicate anyone who was outside of the family of God, anyone that was outside of the lineage or the genealogy of Abraham and his descendants that were Hebrews they would have called Gentiles. It was actually a derogatory term. It was meant to express, and it was spoken with contempt. When the Jews called them Gentiles, they were pointing a finger and saying, "You guys, you're outside of the promises of God." The Gentiles wouldn't have called themselves Gentiles necessarily. They just would have called themselves Greek or whatever they affiliated with in the form of where they lived. This was primarily applied and used in the context of the Jews. The Gentile believers would have known this. They would have understood because they came to faith in Yahweh, in the one true God, the God of Israel. They would have understood the nature of the term being used. He reminds them not only that they're outside of the family and that they're not Abraham's children, but that they were also regarded that way by the very children of God. He says in the text, "You were called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is done in the flesh."

What separates a Jew from a Gentile in Paul's world? What is the dividing line there? Well, it's two things, really, primarily. One is ethnicity. That is more an issue of genetics, blood, than it is necessarily of affiliating with a group of people, although you could technically have been a part of the Jewish people and not have been one of Abraham's children. There were very few people that fell in that category. It was an issue of genetics. Paul is saying, "Remember, hey, you weren't born of Abraham." Not only that, not only was it an issue of ethnicity, of blood, but it was also an issue of the flesh, of the law. The other thing that separated Jews from Gentiles was law. The law was given to the Jewish people to show them the holiness of God and to set them apart from everyone else. They weren't children. Part of the law was the covenant. Gentiles were not privileged to being children of the covenant.

What does this covenant look like? Well, we're going to take a real quick history lesson down in the book of Genesis to understand how it sets itself up and why Paul is honing in on this idea of highlighting the fact that they were not a part of God's people and why he would even call them to remember that. The promises and the covenant of Abraham, in Genesis chapter 12, God calls a man named Abram out. He's not a believer. He does not worship Yahweh. He worships other gods. God, the one true God, speaks to him and he hears his voice.

He says, "Abram, I want you to leave your home and your people and I want you follow me. I'm going to take you to a land that I'm giving you. I'm going to make you into a great nation. I'm going to bless you and your descendants and I'm going to bless the world through you." Abram, who is not a worshiper of God, hears the voice of God and obeys. He does it. He believes. He packs his family up and they move toward a land that he doesn't even know where he's going but he says, "I'm going to go where God calls me." He goes.

Well, in Genesis 15, God reiterates the promise that he's made to bless Abraham, or Abram at the time. He changes his name. To bless him with descendants. This is what he says in Genesis 15 five and six, "Look toward heaven and number the stars if you're able to number them. So shall your offspring be." Abram, at that moment, in his 70s with no children, believes God. It says in the scriptures, "He believed the Lord and the Lord counted it to him as righteous." Then, God said in response to Abraham believing the promise of God, God seals the promise with the covenant. The covenant, in that time, it was a covenant, a practice that would have been done of people groups at the time of Abraham. What God said to Abraham was, "I want you to take these animals and I want you to cut them in half. I want you to lay each half of the animal on the ground."

In normal custom covenant practices, what would have been done is there would have been two parties that came together and made an agreement. They would seal the agreement and this was one of the ways that they could have sealed the agreement. They would cut animals in two and they would lay the pieces of the body on each side and then each person who was entering into the covenant would walk between the pieces of the carcasses and they would basically in essence be making this confession: If I don't uphold my end of the covenant, then let to me happen what has happened to these animals. In other words, a visual representation that may destruction fall on me if I don't uphold the covenant.

God says to Abraham, "Take the animals. Lay them out." Abraham does it. He sits and waits all day long. God shows up when it gets dark. He shows up as a smoldering pot, a representation of God in a torch. Here's the remarkable thing. God moves between the animals. Not Abraham. God says, "My covenant to you is due to my faithfulness, not yours. This is my promise to you and I will seal it with a covenant." God moves through the pieces. Then he seals the covenant that he makes with Abraham with the sign of the covenant. In Genesis 17, the covenant is sealed with the sign of circumcision. He says to Abraham, "This is my covenant with you you shall keep between me and your offspring. So that you'll remember what I promised you and you will know that it's true and your people will be set apart, this is what you'll do. Every male among you shall be circumcised and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you."

Paul, the Ephesians would have understood this history. At this point in their life, they would have understood this history of not being a part of God's people and all of the things that happened with Abraham and even down the road with David as well. Paul reminds them. He says, "You were not of the people of God. You were called the uncircumcised by the ones who have the sign of the covenant, made in the hands of flesh." He goes on to say, "Remember that at that time, you were separated from Christ. The messiah was a Jewish promised messiah who would come to save God's people, the people that were set apart and marked by the covenant. You were separated from Christ. You had no access to the messiah because he was not messiah. The promise of the messiah was not made to you. It was made to those who were by blood and by law Jewish."

He goes on to say, "Not only that, but you were alienated by the commonwealth of Israel." In other words, they weren't citizens of God's people and they had no stake in the benefits that came from citizenship. Nothing that God had promised to Israel was true for the Ephesians because they were far off. They were outside of the family of God. Not only that, but they were strangers of the covenant of promise. They may not have even known that God had made a covenant with Abraham. They certainly weren't partakers of it, nor were they the recipients of it directly because they were not Abraham's descendants. It was only applied to those who were Hebrews. Anyone outside of the Hebrew faith may have known that their God, the God of the Hebrews, had made some promises with them, but they would not have been privilege to them. Not only that, but he goes on and he says, "Not only were you strangers to the covenant of promise, but you had no hope."

Now, the reality is that the Ephesians, the Gentile believers there, as unbelievers, we have hopes, right? You don't have to be a believer to have hope in different things, but what Paul is saying is, "With regards to your sin and to righteousness, you had no hope that you could be reconciled, none, because you were not part of God's family and none of the promises applied to you. Not only that, not only did you have no hope in relation to your sin and your righteousness, but you were also were without God in this world." Now, the reality is the Ephesians, they were in a Greek and a Roman culture and they probably worshiped a pantheon of gods. Most of the Ephesian believers, before Christ, likely worshiped multiple gods. Paul's not saying, "You didn't have a god to follow." Paul is saying, "You now understand that God is the one true God. Before, when you were not a part of the family of God, you stood outside of the people of God. You were without God in this world." That wouldn't have mattered to the Ephesians before their faith, but it certainly would matter to them afterwards.

On this side of God's salvation, the Ephesians can look back and recognize just how perilous their life really was without God and so can we. It's why it's so pertinent to us today that even though Paul has written this to Ephesian believers in the first century after the resurrection of Jesus, that it matters for us today because God is calling us to the same thing. Remember what you were before Christ. Remember. Why remember? What is this big deal with Paul about remembering? Well, it's not so much that he's saying remember because they've forgotten, right? We've got four kids and so in the mornings, we have to tell them, "Remember, brush your teeth," because they forget to brush their teeth and then everybody suffers for it afterwards.

Paul is not telling the Ephesians, “Remember what you were before Christ,” because they’ve forgotten. Actually, Paul is saying this, “Remember because the more you stare into the reality of what you were before the power of God saved you, the more miraculous you realize the work of Christ on the cross really is, the more glorious to you Christ becomes. Remember what you were because it makes what Jesus did that much more glorious.” Paul is saying look back to what you’ve been saved from and marvel at the grace of God unleashed on you, that you would be moved from death to life, that you would be far off with no hope of coming near, that God, through the shed blood of Jesus, would draw you near.

These words were written to people who believe. I’m speaking to you this morning, to the population of people that the vast majority of you believe Jesus is your Lord and Savior. The reality is some of you here today don’t. You’re here and you may have questions about Christ and the validity or the claims of Christianity. I want to take a second to talk to you about why I think what Paul says is important. If you are here and you have not trusted Christ as your Savior, I don’t expect you to run head over heels toward Jesus because none of us do. The scriptures tell us that no one seeks God on his own. Most of us can agree, whether we’re in the church or part of the church or not, that the world is broken. We don’t have to look very far to figure that out. We don’t have to wonder if things are messed up and they don’t operate the way that they ought to or at least the way that things would be good. We see that. We can literally turn our phones on or our TVs or our radio and we’re bombarded with the fact that things are messed up.

What we don’t always agree on though is what can fix it. You might be here and not confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you may be here with honest questions and curiosity. You may be here because somebody invited you to come in. You might be here with a ton of skepticism. That skepticism might even be warranted because of the actions of people in the past that you’ve known have claimed to be believers. You might be here because you see brokenness in your own life and you believe there has to be an answer but you have no idea what it is or where to turn. You might know nothing about Jesus or you might know more about Jesus than a person sitting next to you who’s been a believer for decades. You may be here because something inside of you said come but you don’t really know why.

Here’s what I want you to know. If you’ll listen to the gospel, Paul is reminding the Ephesians of the truth of the gospel. It will answer life’s biggest questions. What is my purpose? Why am I here? Well, the gospel answers those questions. God tells us in the scripture that we were made to know him, to be in perfect relationship with him, to enjoy all the benefits of the relationship with him, the one who made us. We have a problem. Every one of us do. The gospel also tells us that because of our problem, our sin, we’ve been separated from this relationship with God. It’s a relational issue. This is why things are broken and messed up.

Paul says it this way to the Ephesians, “Remember what you were before Christ.” You were far off. You were broken. Your sin separated you from the one who made you because you were made to love and worship him and enjoy a relationship with him. How do I know that we’re separated from that? Because the truth is that every one of us on any given day, at any given moment, in our minds, even right here, right now, we can be thinking about anything other than the greatness of the God who made us. If we put our attention on anything else in life as if it will satisfy us or it will be what brings us the greatest joy, at any point, it could be our kids. It could be our spouse. It could be a job or a hobby. It doesn’t really matter, but in that moment, if our hearts are pursuing anything other than the majesty and the glory of God, we stand in opposition to him and relationally we’re broken and every one of us find ourselves in that place. Every one of us.

God says, “When that happens, there’s only one end to your brokenness. That is that you pay for it because you were made to worship and know me. You’ve turned your back on me and you’ve walked away.” That leaves us like the Ephesians with no hope if that’s where the story ends, but it doesn’t end there. God, in his grace, he says, “But I’m going to do what you can not do for yourselves. I’m going to restore and reconcile the relationship that you were meant to have with me through the shedding of my own blood.” God sends Jesus into this world and he lives perfectly in relation to God the Father so that he might willingly shed his blood on our behalf and pay for our sins so that we might be restored and we might receive the benefit. God tells us in the gospel that now because of that, if we find ourselves believing in Jesus, that there’s a promise that goes beyond this life. Death isn’t the end. No, that’s the result of our sin. God has overcome it. Jesus has overcome it because he came out of the grave, showing that he had power over life and death, and that that is granted to us. We will not die in our sin, but that we can know for certain that we will spend eternity with him.

You see, fundamentally, our biggest problem is a relational problem. It’s not with one another, though that is a symptom of our biggest problem. God, in the gospel, he says, “I fix it through the shed blood of Jesus.” Paul knows it full well. Paul was a man who was not searching for Jesus. On the contrary, he was a man who he thought was passionately serving Yahweh, the god of Israel, the one true God, by the letter of the law that God had given. At that time of conversion, when Paul became aware that Jesus was the messiah, he was actually on his way to seek out people who were Jewish but confessed belief that Jesus was actually the messiah who had come. He was going to have them arrested. He had papers from the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. He had papers to go to Damascus and to have these Jewish Christians, these people who had professed faith in Christ, arrested and, if possible, put to death. God met him on the road. This was not a man looking for Jesus.

That's why Paul can look back on his life and he can say of himself in Philippians three, "If anyone else thinks that they have reason for confidence in the flesh by the law, guess what, I have more. I was circumcised on the eighth day. I was of the people of Israel. Not only that, I was from the tribe of Benjamin. I was from the royal tribe, the messiah, the messianic tribe that God has promised David that one would sit on the throne forever. This messiah would come through his lineage. Well, I'm a part of David's family. Not only that, but I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law, a Pharisee. I followed the law perfectly. As to zeal, I even persecuted the church. As to righteousness under the law, I was blameless. If the law said it, I did it. Guess what. Whatever gain I had, I count it a loss next to the sake of knowing Christ Jesus."

Paul knows and what he's telling the Ephesians is, "Guess what. You weren't a part of the family of God by blood or by the law, by blood or flesh. You didn't fall into there but those things don't matter because I'm a testimony of that as well. I had the law and I had the lineage, but I consider it all nothing next to knowing Jesus Christ." Paul says to them, "Remember what you were. Remember you were not a part of the family of God. God made your dead hearts alive." "You were moved from death to life," he tells us just a few verses before, "and the eyes of your heart were open to the truth of Jesus and you were saved."

Listen to this. Paul is reminding the Ephesians, because of the gracious act of God, everything that separated them from God's people hasn't simply been removed. It's been fulfilled. God did not take all of the requirements and the joy and the promises that came from the covenant and take them away, but God, in Jesus, fulfilled them and they're granted to us by an act of grace. He says to them, "You've been moved from far away from the people of God. Now you've been brought near by the blood of Jesus. You weren't family. You were enemies. Now you've not become friends. You've actually become family. You've been reconciled to God. Not only that, you've actually been reconciled to his people. You've been granted access into the family of God, the church."

You know, I can't go very far into this because we're going to get there next week, but I want you to see where Paul is going with what he is saying with this idea of being outside and being brought in. He's saying there is a new family and you've been invited into it. With all of the arguing and the divisions and the discontent that seems to run rampant in the church today, despite our own shortcomings and imperfections and sometimes just outright sinfulness, the church of God truly is one of the greatest testimonies of the power of God that the world has been given. Why? Because the very gospel that saved them is the gospel that draws them into a family, that there's no other reason why people would come together under a unifying umbrella other than the shed blood of Jesus.

The good news of the gospel says that Jesus freely gave his life and that our redemption, because of his gift, is secure. The church becomes a gathered body of people who've been reconciled to God and reconciled to one another through the church. There's no greater truth that unifies us, men, anywhere in the world. It doesn't matter what your alma mater is or your social status or your citizenship or even your skin color. What is true for all of us is this. It's one common factor that our entire relationship is built upon in the context of the church. No one comes to Jesus Christ with a better resume or a better genealogy than the next. We all come sinful and we all come needing a savior. It doesn't matter if you drove here this morning from ITB or you walked here from next door. The one thing that is true is that when you step under the grace of God, because of Jesus, you are family. We ought to look like what God has done for us. Nothing in history can unify people across divides, borders, oceans, and even time. The church has stood since the coming of Jesus and it will stand because God draws far people near. That's his promise. Paul says, "Look. Remember what you were." When he gets to 13, he says, "But remember what you are because of Christ. You have been brought near."

What's so good about being brought near? Well, a couple years ago, I had the joy, Ellie and I did, of taking two of our children with us on an international mission trip to Romania. My daughters at the time were, I think, either seven and nine or eight and 10. I've got too many of them now. I can't remember age. Don't tell them that. We were going. One of my daughters is pretty outgoing. I mean, she could take or leave being with us. I mean, she's not really afraid of crowds. She's fine. My other daughter, she's not. For her, the nearness to us was her good. Wherever we were, she was with us. If she could not see us, she was not in a good place. When she was with us, she was fine. Now, why? Because she understood that being close to us was a place of safety. It was a place of love. It was a place where she was protected.

The same is true of God. To be near God is to enjoy all the benefits of a relationship with him. The Psalmist in Psalm 73 says this, "Behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You put an end to everyone who's unfaithful to you, but for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge and I may tell of your works." There's another place where one of the Psalms says, "Blessed is the one you choose to bring near to dwell." Even Moses in the law in Deuteronomy, he says to the nation of Israel, "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord God is to us whenever we call upon him?" There is something special about the nearness of God that we find acceptance and we find love and we find protection.

Paul saying, "Look, guys. You were outside of that. Not only were you outside of the love and the care and the protection of God, but you actually lined up in opposition to him. You were his enemy. All of the power of God and all of its fullness could be unleashed on his enemies and justifiably so and he could wipe them out with a single word. You were outside of that but now, in Christ Jesus, you who were far off, you were brought near." What set apart the Jews and the Gentiles? The blood, the genealogy, and the law, the flesh. Guess what Jesus did. He fulfilled both on our behalf. He was perfect. he shed his blood for us. Because of it, now, we're covered in it if we confess faith in him. In essence, we've been brought into the family of God.

He fulfilled the law perfectly. Every requirement of the law found its fulfillment in Jesus. That's why he says in Matthew five, "Don't think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets. I've not come to abolish them. I've actually come to fulfill them."

Just last week, Pastor Brian alluded to later in Matthew five, he says to this, "Look, guys, in relation to the law, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven. No one is good enough." What he's saying is that the Pharisees, with their law, could not do enough good to reconcile their broken relationship with God. Paul knows it too. Paul could not reconcile his relationship with God by following the law because he couldn't, even though he felt righteous, the reality of his righteousness was that the law told you what to do when you acted wrongly. You get that? He sinned, but the law, he could be righteous under the law because he could do what the law required as payment for his sins.

Paul followed the law about all the sacrificial system and that could make him righteous with God, but it wasn't by his own works. It wasn't eternal because every time sin happened in the nation of Israel, more sacrifice had to be made. Jesus comes along and brings an end to it. The writer of Hebrews says he brought an end to the shedding of the blood of bull and goats, which could never save you, by shedding his own blood, the perfect blood of the one who was righteous. Jesus did all of this for us. By grace, he saved us. Paul says, "Remember what you were. You were not a recipient of that. There was nothing about you that demanded or even put you in a place of privilege. God, in his grace and his mercy, he did it for you."

You can't overcome your position outside of God's people on your own. In fact, you don't even really know that you need to. You don't even know it's a big problem until you hear his word and God brings you near. That's why I think Paul is calling us to remember. Remember what you were. Not remember because you forgot, but remember in light of what you are now. You are part of the people and the family of God, not by your works, but by Jesus's. Remember you were far away. The more glorious the cross is, the more perilous you realize your condition was before you accepted Jesus. Paul says, "Remember that God reconciled you to himself." He's going to turn a corner here and say for that reason you ought to demonstrate that kind of relationship with one another. We'll get there next week.

What do we do now with this idea of remembering where we were and remembering what we are because of Jesus? Well, first of all, if you're here and you do not know Jesus, then know this. God, by his grace, can draw you near through the shed blood of Jesus. I urge you to consider Christ's invitation to be brought near. It is given freely with no expectation in return. Hear the voice of God calling you to be reconciled to him. For those of us who are believers, there are two things that I would encourage you to consider in light of remembering where you were. Don't take the gift of grace for granted. Let your salvation lead you to grateful worship.

This good news of where we were and where we are, it's meant to well up in our hearts, this great confession of amazement of what God has done. Let it drive you in your heart to be turned to him and worship him passionately because you remember where you were and you remember where you are.

Lastly, let your salvation not only lead you to grateful worship. Let your salvation lead you to gracious evangelism. Why? Because you were far away and now, because you're near, you understand the predicament of being far away. Someone spoke the truth to you. By God's grace and the work of his spirit, you heard the gospel and you responded in faith to Jesus Christ. In that moment, he took you from far away to near. Knowing that, knowing that there was nothing that you could do, it wasn't because of who you are or where you were born or all the great things that you amass, but simply because of the grace of God. You know that you are no more deserving than the next. It ought to lead us to long for other people to hear the good news of that gospel and to spend our lives speaking it, exalting Jesus because we remember what we were and what we are. Let's pray.

Father, would you give us the grace today to contemplate the depths of what you've saved us from and to marvel at the lengths by which you went to save us? Even now, as we begin to stand and sing, turn our hearts to you, would you let the words that we speak in these moments and the giving of our tithes and offerings be in grateful response to what you have done? As we know salvation, we know what we have been saved from. All we can do is stand before you in amazement and cry out. Thank you, Father. Thank you for the gift of grace. May we live in light of that grace even today. We pray these things in the powerful and saving name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



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