

Divine Appraisal Ephesians 2:11-22

One of the shows I enjoy watching is the Antique Road Show. It's fascinating to me to see the stuff that people have – old stuff that's been handed down to them or that they found at some garage sale or antique shop – stuff that usually doesn't have any practical value – it's mostly some kind of artwork or memorabilia or antique. They bring these things to this road show where they have it appraised by people who are experts in determining the value of old things. And it's amazing to me that these things, most of which look like junk and that others thought was worthless, turn out to be worth hundreds, thousands, and even tens of thousands of dollars. It's fun to see people's reactions and the looks on their faces when they find out how valuable their things really are. They're surprised and overjoyed and their faces are just beaming.

Sometimes I think we look at our lives and feel like we're worthless. We look at where we've come from and things we did; we look at the things we were doing now and feel like we're nothing special – like old stuff in somebody's attic. We compare ourselves with the people around us and always feel like we're falling short – like we don't measure up. We're not as smart as this person, or athletic, or as funny or good looking. We're not as good of a mom or dad or we don't have as good of skills at work. Our failures and shortcomings stick out to us and make us feel down and discouraged – like we're really not that special.

And don't get me wrong, but in some ways we're right. There are 7 billion people on the planet and if we play the comparison game, there are always going to be people that are smarter, stronger, and better looking than we are. There are always going to be people with better skills and abilities. And if that's where our value comes from, the reality for most of us is that we're just average – better at some things, worse at others, but overall pretty ordinary and unimpressive. On bad days, Satan can use these things to really pound on you. I have days like that and most of you do as well. We do our own self-appraisal and it doesn't go very well.

This morning we are going to look at a different kind of appraisal. Like the Antique Road Show, we are going to find out what an expert has to say. We are continuing our sermon series on the book of Ephesus and in our verses for today Paul gives the people he's writing to an appraisal of their lives – he shows them the way things were, how Christ changed everything, and how valuable their lives had become.

He's writing to a church of new believers in the city of Ephesus – people who were primarily Gentiles. Of all the nations of the earth there was one nation God chose to be his treasured possession who would be his people and he would be their God – the nation of Israel. All the rest were known as “Gentiles,” and that's who most of the people in Ephesus and in the church Paul was writing to were – people who could have easily felt worthless, ordinary, and second class when it came to their standing with God. But then Christ came and changed everything for them and Paul writes about that in these verses. He begins by reminding them of how things used to be.

Read Ephesians 2:11-12

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.

Before Paul came and brought the gospel to them, the people in Ephesus were in rough shape. They were called “the uncircumcision,” which is a derogatory title given to them by the Jews. The Jews took great pride in the fact that they were the chosen people of God and the sign that set them apart from all the rest of the people around them was circumcision. Gentiles who were not circumcised were seen as being unclean, immoral, and ungodly. They were seen as the rejects that didn't belong among the people of God.

That's who the Gentiles in Ephesus were, and because of that, Paul tells them to remember four things. First of all they were separated from Christ. Christ was born among the Jews to fulfill the covenant promises God made with them, which meant he was obviously not born among the Gentiles. Thus he ministered to the Jews, not the Gentiles and the Jews had the privilege of being the first to see him, hear him, follow him, and be united with him through faith. And the Gentiles were separated from Christ.

They were also alienated from the commonwealth of Israel – they were shut out of the citizenship of Israel and the people of God. The citizens of Israel were privileged by God because they were his chosen people. Therefore they had many blessings that were unique to them and not the Gentiles. Paul mentions several in Romans 9:4-5: *“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.”⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is*

God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” Because they were the people God chose out of all the nations of the earth they were blessed in these ways and to be part of the commonwealth/citizenship of Israel meant you were included in all these blessings. Gentiles were not. They were alienated from them.

This meant that they were also “*strangers to the covenants of promise,*” as Paul points out. There were certain covenants and promises that God made with only Israel and no other nation that bound him to them. Therefore, Gentiles were strangers to these covenants and their promises.

And finally Paul says that they had no hope and were without God in the world – For the Jew, hope was always before them because God was with them. He chose to have his glory fill the Temple and to dwell among them. He was their hope. Gentiles had no such thing. They had their false gods and goddesses and all their twisted beliefs which generated fear and uncertainty, not hope.

This was Paul’s description of how they used to be. If they played the comparison game, they would feel like worthless, throw-away junk to God. Their own self-appraisal would have left them feeling like garbage – the same way that we often think. But Paul goes on to remind them that something happened to change all that. Their value didn’t come from how they compared to the Jews anymore; their faith in Christ had changed everything.

Read Ephesians 2:13-18

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.

So they used to be completely separate from God and the people of God, but because of their faith in Christ they were now united with him and that changed everything. By dying on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, Christ had brought them near to God. The dividing wall of hostility that used to be between them and the Jews was totally removed so that there was no longer any barrier – no more separation between Jew and Gentile when it came to access to God. Christ had made them one. He did this by abolishing the Law – a law given to Jews that

regulated their worship and religious practices. The observance of the law separated Jew from Gentile. Jews followed it and Gentiles did not and in that way it created a dividing wall of hostility. But Christ abolished the law by fulfilling it's every requirement on our behalf – both in his life and in his death. By fulfilling it, he nullified it – it was no longer required for anyone. Thus it became a non-factor.

So not only did Christ bring the Gentile believers into the fold, but he also removed the dividing wall of hostility that restricted access to God. Because of Christ it didn't matter whether you were a Jew or Gentile. God's people were people of faith whether they were Jews or Gentiles. They were reconciled to God as one man through the cross. Paul says in Colossians 3:11 that in Christ "*there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*" And because of that, all believers, whether of Gentile or Jewish background, had the Spirit of God in them and through him had access to the Father.

Jesus had changed everything, especially for the Gentiles. He completely changed their standing and now everything was completely different. Paul finishes by telling them where their true value could now be found.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, 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 the Spirit.

You can picture Paul, like an appraiser on the Antique Road Show, examining the new believers in Ephesus and telling them what they were now really worth. No longer were they strangers and aliens, but they were fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. He describes that household like a temple. That temple has a cornerstone, which is Christ – he is the one on whom this whole new temple is being built. The foundation is made up of the original apostles and prophets who went forth with the gospel to proclaim the good news – people like Paul and Timothy who brought the gospel to Ephesus. And upon them, the rest of the structure was being built – these were the believers like those in Ephesus, each one of them was a stone or wooden beam in the temple. And all of them were being joined together, growing into a holy temple in the Lord to be a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. That's where their true value came from. Not by how

they compared to one another any longer, but by who they were in Christ and the purpose and value God had given them.

Like the person on the Antique Road Show who finds out that thing they pulled out of the attic and thought was worthless was actually worth tens of thousands of dollars, the Ephesian Christians could now see how valuable their lives had become.

Brothers and sisters, this is where our value comes as well. This is the measure or standard by which our self-appraisal ought to be done. It doesn't matter how we compare to the people around us. Our worth is found in being loved by God and being part of his holy temple in which he will dwell. None of us is worthless – we all have a holy calling to reflect the awesome glory of God.

1 Peter 2:5, 9-10 says this: *“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* And in speaking to both Jews and Gentiles it says: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

When those times of comparison and discouragement come and you feel like you're worthless, remember that you are precious and valuable in the sight of God. He sent his Son to die for you to bring you back to himself and he has placed you in his holy temple to rejoice in him for all eternity. This never changes – on your good days and bad – your value is priceless in the eyes of your Maker.