

Sermon – 06/07/2008 am

Access to the Father

Study Text: Ephesians 3:12

In the days leading up to the recent summit of national leaders in our city high walls were erected around the meeting place. Strong gates were installed and guards were posted around the clock. Only those with official invitations were allowed to enter. I guess was our prime minister who issued the invitations to this select group of people.

I wonder if he gave an invitation to his wife. It seems the wife of the prime minister can accompany him wherever he goes. She has access to so many places because she is the wife of the prime minister. She was not elected, nor is she rich and famous. She has right of access because she is the wife of the prime minister. She tells the guards 'I am the wife of the prime minister', and they allow her through.

Access

In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him (3:12). What is this access that Paul is talking about? Access to where, or to whom? Glance back to 2:18 and you will see. *Through him (Jesus) we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.* He is talking about access to God the Father.

We get a clearer picture of what Paul is saying if we look back to the Old Testament. Under the Old Covenant (OC) Moses made a tabernacle according to the pattern that God gave him. Later Solomon built a temple on the same pattern. When the temple was consecrated access into the temple was forbidden to all but the High Priest (HP). Only once a year, and then only with blood, could the HP enter into the Most Holy place. This was the place where God chose to make his presence among his people under the OC.

There is an interesting account in II Chronicles of King Uzziah going into the temple of the Lord. Uzziah was a good king and God made him prosper. He became powerful and famous. But one day in his pride he entered the temple to burn incense. Although he was the king he was not a priest, and only priests of the line of Aaron were allowed into the temple. The priests warned the king and tried to stop him going in but Uzziah became furious and violent. There and then the Lord struck him with leprosy which remained with him all his life. He was literally trespassing onto holy ground. The Lord God made it clear to Uzziah and all the people that access to his presence was under his terms. What were those terms? A duly anointed high priest carrying blood.

There is no longer an earthly temple with God's presence in it. This was all a pattern or type, as Moses was told. God came and dwelt among us in the form of his Son, but now his presence and the risen Jesus are in heaven. The throne of God is in heaven. Jesus, our great HP has passed through the heavens (Hebrews 4:14). The throne of grace, which is also the throne of judgment, is in heaven (Hebrews 4:16, Revelation 4:2). We must come before this throne of grace to receive forgiveness of sin, and to receive help in this world.

In Christ Jesus

Our verse begins with the words *in whom*. It follows on from the previous verse in which Christ Jesus our Lord is spoken of as the one in whom God accomplished his eternal purpose. It is in Christ Jesus that we have access to the Almighty God and his throne of grace.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the OC priesthood. He is of the order of Melchizedek, the priest who ever lives to intercede for us. Like all priests he was a man, but he was unique in being without sin. He was also unique in that he offered up his own blood. Jesus entered into the Most Holy place with blood according to the pattern of the OC.

In entering with his own blood Jesus opened the way for those who believe in him to freely enter the Most Holy place. The curtain in the temple was literally torn in two from top to bottom as Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51). The writer to the Hebrews (10:20) says that there is now a new and living way of access to the Most Holy place, through the curtain, that is his flesh/body. What a wonderful picture this is. The torn body of Jesus points to the torn curtain in the temple, and to access into the presence of God through his torn body.

We have access to the Father in Jesus Christ because Jesus died to take away our sin that separated us from God. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin allowing us to enter in. He clothes us with his righteousness that we might enter in. We have no right to enter without him. We will be rejected if we try to force our way in by good works like Uzziah.

Many do try to get into the presence of God by their good works. Listen to the Pharisee who thought he was praying to God but was in only praying to himself (Luke 18:11). He said 'God I thank you that I am not like other men, cheats, liars and adulterers. I fast twice a week and give to the poor'. He thought he would be heard because he was a good man who kept the law. Tragically there are many who think they will have an audience with the Almighty God because they are 'good' people; but God will say 'away from me I never knew you'. Why will he say that – because they are not coming to him through faith in Jesus Christ – through faith alone?

Others think that they need more than Jesus to get an audience with the Most Holy God. They pray to a multitude of dead people they call saints and to Mary the mother of Jesus who is also dead. How such dead people can help them gain access to the Father is not only a mystery to me, but an abomination to God. Only Jesus was without sin, only Jesus died for our sin, only Jesus has been raised from the dead, and only in Jesus do we have access to the Father.

Many people think there are other ways to God apart from Jesus. There are 'many roads that lead to heaven' is the popular thinking in our pluralistic society. To say that Jesus is the only way to God is to be dogmatic and intolerant they say. The fact is that this is what Jesus himself said. *I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me* (John 14:6). If you want to come to the God who sent Jesus into this world, the God of creation and the God who will judge the world through Jesus Christ then through Jesus you must come.

Confidence

We have access *with confidence through faith in him* (Jesus – 3:12). The access we have is through faith, not through our own merits. Because it is through faith we can have confidence.

Can anyone ever be confident in their own good works? No. Ask anyone who is relying on their good works, on performing rituals or obeying the law and you will find that they have no assurance that they have access to the Father.

Faith on the other hand is so simple. You either believe in Jesus Christ or you don't. *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead* (Romans 10:9) you can be fully assured that you have access to the Father. Jesus invites you to come to the Father through him. Have you taken hold of that invitation? Are you accessing the privileges that yours in Jesus Christ?

Believe and do not doubt. God has spoken and God does not lie. 'He who comes to me I will by no means cast out' said Jesus (John 6:37). He also said *all that the Father gives me will come to me*. What greater words of assurance can we have! We believe because the Father draws us to himself. He draws us through faith in Jesus Christ.

You may find the word *bold* in this verse a little off putting. It is a word that has negative connotations today. We think of the praying Pharisee and King Uzziah as being bold. 'We should not be bold in approaching God but humble' you say. This word is also found in Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19 – *let us come boldly to the throne of grace*. Some translate this as 'confidence' but we already have the word 'confidence' in this verse in Ephesians.

The word 'bold' lit means 'freedom of speech' – hence some translate as 'freedom'. It means we are free to talk with the Lord, without going through a human priest. When we come to God through Jesus Christ we can freely confess our sin, freely bring our requests. We do not hide anything from God knows our hearts anyway. There is complete transparency and freedom in our communion with the Father. Why? Because Jesus intercedes for us. Moreover the Holy Spirit helps us in such communion.

Are you in full fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (I John 1:3) or is there some barrier, some hesitancy, some lack of confidence on your part? Remember you are coming before a throne of grace. Remember God is pleased to hear the prayers of his people just a parent is pleased to hear the words of their child.

It is frustrating for a parent when their child cannot talk. They do not know what the child wants. They are so delighted when the child can tell them how they feel and what they want. The child will not always get what they ask for but the parent is still pleased that the child is communicating with them and having fellowship with them. Occasionally the child may blurt out 'I love you Mummy' or 'I love you Daddy' bringing tears of joy to the parents eyes.

Do you ever tell God how much you love him? He tells you how much he loves you here in the Bible. He showed you his great love in giving his only begotten Son to die for you. Come before him with thanksgiving and praise. Do not be anxious but be confident. *In everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God* (Philippians 4:6).

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