

I Can Boldly Come to God

Series: I Know Who I Am

Ephesians 3:12

January 31, 2016

It is so good to be together again in worship.

Let me ask you something. Who is the one living person you would like to meet?

Next Sunday is Super Bowl Sunday. One of the perks of being the winner of the Super Bowl or the World Series or anything like that is that you get invited to meet the President at the White House. But if you or I want to visit the White House, it requires some prior arrangements.

But if you or I want to visit the President, we would probably find it impossible to obtain access to the President. The only people who have the opportunity to have an audience with him are those who have important matters to discuss with him and who can make arrangements to meet with him with the proper members of his staff.

But even though I don't have unrestricted access to the President, I have something much more valuable – access to God Himself.

During our series "I Know Who I Am", we are studying the book of Ephesians. We are learning who we are in relation to God, as followers of Jesus Christ.

Today, I want to look at Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)

*Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.*¹

On a surface level, this verse is really pretty simple. All believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. But that rather simple concept has some important implications for us and our relationship with God. This morning I'd like us to focus on three implications for my access to God.

First, our access to God is only through Jesus.

Paul has made it clear from the very beginning of his letter that it is the work of Jesus Christ that makes it possible for us to experience all the spiritual blessings of God. Our access to God is no different. That access is made possible to His children totally and completely through Jesus Christ. Jesus emphasized that principle to His followers shortly before he made that access possible when He redeemed us by paying the price for our sins on the cross:

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*²

The Gentile culture of Paul's day had all kinds of gods and the people believed that the affliction and misfortune that came into their lives was a result of offending those gods. So whenever something bad would happen – someone got sick or died, the crop failed, a storm wiped out one's property – it was assumed that someone had done something to offend one of the gods. So the people would engage in some kind of ritual in an attempt to appease the gods.

Those rituals often took the form of some kind of sacrifice, even the sacrifice of one's own child in many cases. There were also different forms of prayer and acts of penance that might be entered into. But the problem is that the people could never even

¹ Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)

² John 14:6 (NIV)

be sure of which god had been offended, alone be sure that their acts of appeasement would be adequate. Within that culture, the whole concept of having access to or a relationship with the gods was completely foreign.

But Paul makes it clear that we don't have to try to appease God in order to be able to enter into His presence. In fact, whatever we do to try to appease God will always fall short. But it doesn't matter because Jesus has already provided that access for me. Paul reinforces that principle in 2 Corinthians 3:

*We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.*³

In our passage here in Ephesians, Paul uses a word that indicates a formal introduction into the presence of a king. In much the same way that not just anyone can approach the President today, in the ancient world, one could not enter the presence of the king unless they had been summoned and were brought into the presence of the king by one of his court officials.

Perhaps you remember the story of Esther in the Old Testament. After she had learned of Haman's plan to kill the Jews, she couldn't just go into the king to tell him of the plot, even though she was the queen. She either had to wait until she was summoned by the king or hope that if she chose to enter without being summoned the king would hold out his golden scepter. If he didn't, do that, she would be killed. Fortunately, because of God's providence, the king did offer her his scepter when Esther took the risk of entering into his presence without being summoned.

For those of us who are God's children, Jesus serves as our introducer who escorts us into the presence of the King. And He's the only one who has the authority to do that. And just to make sure we don't miss this principle, Paul ends verses 12 with one more reference to the fact that Jesus is the one who has gained access on our behalf.

*Because of Christ and our faith in him...*⁴

Paul tells us that this access comes as a result of the work of Christ and our faith in him. Our access is a result of placing our faith, or trust, in what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We live in a world today that increasingly tells us that there are many roads to God and that all we have to do is to pick the one we want. But the Bible is clear on this matter. There is only one way we get access to God and that is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A second implication for my access to God is that I can be myself in God's presence.

Obviously entering into God's presence is a serious matter. So I need to approach God with reverence and awe. But I don't need to be afraid to just be myself there.

When God first created Adam and Eve, they had access into the presence of God. And even though we don't get a lot of details from the account in Genesis, there is

³ 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (NLT)

⁴ Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)

every indication that they felt free to be themselves in the presence of God. For instance the Bible records that they were both naked and felt no shame. But when they sinned everything changed. Because of their guilt, Adam and Eve ran and hid from God. And from that time forward, humanity's relationship with God was forever changed.

Before Jesus, no one had continuous access to God. From time to time, God chose to appear to leaders like Moses or to His prophets. But God decided when and where and how to do that. But even though no one had unrestricted access to God, God wanted to manifest His presence among His people. He chose to do that in the tabernacle, and later in the Temple.

The tabernacle and the Temple consisted of three different areas. There were the outer courts, where all of His people could go. Then there was the Holy Place where the priests ministered before God on a daily basis. But the cloud of God's presence was contained within the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place, which contained the Ark of the Covenant. The only person who was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies was the high Priest and even he could only enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement.

But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain that separated man from God's presence in the Holy of Holies was torn in half from the top as a picture that God's children have now been granted permanent, unrestricted access to Him. The writer of Hebrews explains that concept more fully:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.⁵

Not only can we enter into the presence of God because of the work of Jesus, both Paul and the writer of Hebrews tell us that we can enter boldly and with confidence.

In our passage from Ephesians, the term translated "boldly" is a word that originally conveyed the idea of freedom of speech. It came to mean confidence in approaching someone in authority. When Paul uses that word here, I think it conveys both ideas. We can approach God with confidence and we also have the freedom to speak openly before Him.

Imagine that you did get to meet the one person you've always wanted to meet. You would probably put on your nicest clothes and be on your best behavior that day. You wouldn't do or say anything to offend that person else you might immediately be escorted from their presence.

But when you or I got home that night, I'd probably throw on a pair of sweats and a t-shirt and just be myself without worrying that I would say or do something that would cause Myra to throw me out of the house – although I'm sure I've probably come close a time or two.

Although I obviously need to have respect and reverence for God, there is a sense in which my access to Him is much more like hanging out with Myra than it is meeting that one person. That means that I can just be myself before God. I don't have to pretend to be something I'm not. I don't have to use fancy words when I talk to God.

⁵ Hebrews 10:19-22 (NLT)

And since my access to Him is based on what Jesus has done and not my own efforts, I don't have to worry that God is going to cut off my access because of something I say or do.

A final implication for my access to God is that it has both a personal and corporate aspect.

All of God's children have personal access to our heavenly Father. We don't need a pastor or priest or other person to act as a mediator between us and God. Jesus has already done that for us.

But unfortunately in some circles, that idea has been taken to the extreme where followers of Jesus Christ claim that they can live out their faith on their own. They don't need to be part of any local body of believers and they certainly don't need anyone else to tell them what the Bible means – they can figure that out on their own. But when you read Ephesians, you see time after time that our Christianity is not just for us. It is to be lived out within the community of faith we call the church.

*Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.*⁶

Notice Paul uses the word "we" once again. By doing that, Paul seems to be implying that there is a corporate aspect of our ability to experience the presence of God in our lives.

And Paul is not the only one who does that. The writer of Hebrews also emphasizes this idea of corporate access to God. Just a few minutes ago we looked at the passage from Hebrews 10 that described how Jesus became our High Priest who allows us to enter into the presence of God. Let's continue reading the next few verses of that passage:

*Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*⁷

According to the writer of Hebrews, one of the benefits of having direct access to God is that we can gather together with others who enjoy that same privilege for the purpose of encouraging each other in our faith and helping others to live the life that God has called us to live.

One of the best things when I was a youth pastor was scheduling trips to go snow skiing or water skiing or to Six Flags or Kings Island. It's fine to do that stuff by yourself, but it was so much more fun to do it with a group of people you know. I'd find kids all over the place, and see how much fun they were having. And it's always better to ride a roller-coaster with ten friends than just one. Doing it all was so much more enjoyable with others.

Even Jesus spoke about this idea of corporate access to God.

*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*⁸

I can go to God on my own any time I want because of what Jesus has done for me. And I should do that. But there is also a sense in which my relationship with God

⁶ Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)

⁷ Hebrews 10:23-25 (NLT)

⁸ Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

will never be all that God intends for it to be until I enter into his presence in community with His other children.

This whole idea that I can enter confidently into the presence of God is so amazing to me. But what's even more amazing to me is how many times I fail to take advantage of that great privilege. You see, Jesus has opened the door, but I have to be the one who chooses to enter in. God will never force us to take advantage of the access he has provided for us. So we need to heed the advice of James:

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*⁹

God is waiting for you to come near. The rest is up to you.

⁹ James 4:8a (NRSV)