

Ephesians 3:12-16

"Confident Access to God Through

Faith In Christ"

**Ephesians 3:12-16** <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. <sup>13</sup> Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory. <sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

God has a plan for mankind. That plan began to unfold in the Garden of Eden when our Lord told rebellious Adam and Eve, together with Satan, that there would be one born of a woman who would restore man to God.

The seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of Satan and would defeat sin and death. All throughout the O.T. we see this plan unfolding with more clarity as the prophets foretold of the Messiah. More and more information was being revealed describing who this Messiah was and how He would come into this world.

But we also know that there was a time limit as to when all of these things were to take place. God is meticulous when it comes to fulfilling His plan of redemption as Paul points out.

GAL 4:4-5 "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

It was God's perfect plan to have the Messiah come when He did. Up to that point it was the Word of God alone which heralded the coming One, but in the last part of God's plan, no prophet would be sufficient to bring it to fruition. The Son Himself had to be the One to fulfill this plan.

HEB 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

Paul was living in these last days, even as we are living in the last days, in relation to the fulfillment of the Messiah's first and second coming. And as Paul relays God's plan of redemption to the

Gentiles he reminds them that they too were a vital part of that plan as we saw last week.

EPH 3:10-11 "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The plan was accomplished. Salvation was made known as Jesus Christ, according to his eternal purpose, fulfilled the law perfectly and became our substitute paying our debt in full. And now he invites both Jew and Gentile to receive this free gift by faith and taste and see that the Lord is good.

Salvation has been accomplished and because it has been secured in Christ we who have placed our faith in Him may approach God with freedom and confidence." (EPH 3:12)

The NASB puts it this way. "...Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." The KJV uses the same language.

What does it mean to have boldness and confident access through faith in Him? Some have mistakenly taken it to mean that we can boldly go where no man has gone before and come to God's presence knowing that whatever we ask of God He is at our beckon call to fulfill our order.

That's not boldness that is brashness and presumption. The word boldness in the Greek is *parrhesia* and it means (1) freedom in speaking, (2) free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance.

The idea here is that we don't have to fear coming before the King wondering if He will receive us. People feared worldly kings and would never presume to approach the King without first receiving permission. We see an example of this with Esther who was made queen in place of Vashti during the reign of King Ahasuerus, who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces.

In the book of Esther we read in EST 5:1-2 "On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter."

Even a queen could not waltz into the throne room of the King without receiving permission. There was no freedom or boldness to approach unless the King extended his staff. And yet what God has done for us, through faith in Christ, is to extend such freedom.

In that sense we can approach with the boldness of one who has been given the royal privilege of approaching the King of the universe, knowing that we will be received as a child of that King.

There is no fear wondering if we will have His scepter extended to us or not. It has already been extended freely to all who would approach His throne through the blood of Christ. And for this reason we have confident access which will not be denied to every child who's placed his faith in the One who purchased life for us.

This was important for the Gentile to understand because for centuries the Jews made it plain in both teaching and practice that no Gentile could approach God. As far as the Gentiles were concerned the God of Israel was not the God of every person. He was exclusively the God of the Jews.

Paul emphatically assures the Gentile believers that this same God who called Israel out of Egypt and who parted the waters, who fed Israel in the desert for 40 years, who gave them victory over their enemies and brought them safely into the promised land, is the same God who invites all people to come into the promise of life eternal through the One promised to Adam and Eve, so many years ago.

And this same promise of access to our heavenly Father is extended to us as well. No one can keep us from coming to the throne of God in Christ. We, as believers, have such an access, not because we deserved it or earned it, but because the Son of God purchased our privilege to have access to the Holy of holies. No veil of sin separates us because that veil was torn from top to bottom when Christ paid our debt.

This is what the writer of Hebrews means when he says in HEB 4:14-16 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Don't ever think that you can't approach with freedom into the very presence of God. He invites all of His children in Christ to come before Him because it is His delight to have us approach Him even when we feel we're not worthy because of some sin in our lives. It's during those times we should be fleeing to Him, not away from Him.

Anytime is the right time to approach our Lord and Savior and glory in the close relationship we have with our God because of Christ's relationship with the Father, with whom the Father is well pleased.

If He is well pleased with His Son, and we are in Christ by faith, and He in us, then you can know with full assurance that God is pleased to meet you in prayer and in His word and in worship and fellowship as we not only come into His presence, but know we are never out of His presence.

This is the kind of relationship Paul had mentioned earlier in EPH 2:18-19 "For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,..."

And so Paul lets them know that the least in the Kingdom of God, if we can use that type of analogy, has the same access as the greatest. Paul didn't have an advantage, as an apostle, to the throne of God. All of us have the same access.

And so, when Paul says in our text EPH 3:13 "I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.", he encourages them that despite his imprisonment these Gentile believers can know that Paul is completely within the will of God and has access to God and His strength.

The one in prison and the one who has freedom, both have freedom to commune and have fellowship with God through Christ. Yes, Paul was having to suffer in that situation, but he was not abandoned by God. In fact, he says that his imprisonment was their glory.

And the reason he could say that was because he knew that even in suffering God could and would accomplish His will in our lives. Despite what Paul was suffering God was using Paul to encourage these believers in Ephesus as well as believers all over the world.

And the reason He could use Paul was because he was willing to be used even in the midst of suffering.

We could all learn a lesson from this. God is able to use us wherever we are, and the reason for that is because His grace, not our intestinal fortitude, is more than sufficient. But how is Paul's imprisonment for their glory?

Well, to the extent that God is showing them how much He cares for them that they would receive special attention from God through His apostle Paul, and that Paul had been called out specifically by God to minister to the Gentiles.

So, as far as Paul was concerned, his situation made little difference in the eternal scheme of things. What was important is that God loved these people enough to encourage them through the ministry of Paul. The apostle to the Gentiles, including these Ephesian Christians, was their crown, and God was pleased to minister to them through a man who was willing to be used even in a jail cell.

Realizing that God was with Paul and using him in that situation he says in EPH 3:14-15 "For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name."

What an attitude. Here Paul was imprisoned by the Roman government and he could see how God was still able to use him to minister to others, and he is in awe of His God in that situation and exclaims, ..."I kneel before the Father." Or as the NASB puts "I bow my knees before the Father."

This is not meant to be just an explanation of Paul's posture before the Father in worship and prayer, it is meant to show the reverence he has for God who has allowed him to be in that situation, knowing that nothing will hinder God's will.

Some will take a passage like this and conclude that if there is a proper posture for prayer this is certainly it. But, kneeling before God in prayer is not meant to be a formula. In fact, there are many postures in the word of God where people humbled themselves before the Lord in prayer.

We see both kneeling and standing in 1KI 8:54-56 "When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. 55 He

stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying: 56 "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses."

We see Jesus kneeling before the Father in LUK 22:41-42 "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

We read in PSA 6:6-9 "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. 7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes. 8 Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. 9 The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer."

Here David lies on his bed and cries out to the Lord. Though posture may not be unimportant, what is even more important is the posture of our hearts before our Holy God who most certainly hears our prayers. That posture of the heart is a posture of reverence and faith, trusting that God is big enough to be there no matter what our situation and then able to deal with it or give us the grace to go through it.

Now, when Paul says in EPH 3:14-15 "For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.", he's speaking of God as being the Father of us all, in Christ.

Those people in heaven, who had placed their faith in the Messiah, and we who are still on earth, who have done the same, are part of the exact same family. Our locations may be different for a time, but our relationship to our Father is identical.

We all derive our name from Him whose name is above every name. I like the imagery of deriving our name from God because it shows that this is a family in which we are identified with the name of our Father.

Like earthly fathers who give their names to their children as a way of showing how they are actually identified with that particular family, our heavenly Father gives us His name to identify us with His household and family. His name placed on us, in a very real sense, is the name of His Son as we are in Christ by faith.

PHI 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Speaking of the final consummation of Christ's Kingdom we read in REV 22:3-4 "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

This is not to suggest that our Lord's name will indelibly be inscribed on our foreheads. Rather it is a Hebraism which describes how our Lord has marked us for Himself with the blood of the Lamb.

But there is also a sense in which we will show this mark through our obedience as our Lord will be at the forefront of everything we think, do or say. The living Word, the Son of God, will be our all in all forever.

We see a picture of this in the O.T. Scriptures. In the consecration of Anna Coldiron this morning we read a passage which is associated with this idea of having our foreheads emblazoned with the living word as it describes how we belong to Him and are His adopted children.

DEU 11:18-19 "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

In Israel today, as in the days of old, many Jews wear a frontal. A frontal is a little box which contains the word of God and it has strings which allows you to tie it to your forehead. It's a box stuck to your forehead. It is God's way of identifying you to Himself.

Unfortunately, many Jews believe that this box has an ability to create a relationship with the living God. And yet what do we read in DEU 11:18 "Fix these words of mine in your HEARTS and minds; tie them as SYMBOLS on your hands and bind them on your foreheads."

They've taken the symbol and made it the reality, when in fact the reality is typified in the symbol. The reality for you and me is that,

in Christ, our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. And God's name has been placed upon our hearts as the Spirit of Jesus Christ resides in us.

And because we derive our name from our God and are placed in His family, because He has chosen us in Christ, we can come confidently before His throne as a child comes before his father.

And as Paul continues he points out that because we have confident access before our Father we may pray with confidence. Notice what Paul's prayer is for these Ephesians, which by the way is the way our Savior intercedes on our behalf today.

EPH 3:16-19 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

There is a wealth of information here and we'll get as far as we can this morning. Let's start with verse 16. "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,..."

First, Paul realizes the awesome God he approaches in prayer and that He is able to give us what we need to be strengthened in our faith. These riches are described as glorious riches. The NASB comes closer to the thought when it says, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory..."

The idea here is that all the glory and majesty of God comes into play when He grants us the riches we need to live by faith and serve our Most Glorious God. I might add that He is not necessarily talking about earthly riches, but rather those riches Paul mentions in the beginning of this letter.

EPH 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

These are the riches that come from God's hand and enables us to trust and obey, whatever the cost, and to represent our Lord faithfully in this world. That's the difference between being earthly minded, as many Christians are today, and heavenly

mindful as we're equipped to further Christ's Kingdom which is not of this world.

Many Christians are naming and claiming their particular want and expecting that God is some sort of "Go-fer" who is filling their orders and bringing it to them because they've got a bible verse which they use as some sort of ticket to be redeemed.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't be coming to God with our earthly needs, but to suggest that God owes us something simply because we're "Kings Kids" is really indicative of what kind of kids these are, who more closely resemble those in a play pen, than children who are growing in relation to their salvation which is eternal in nature.

The riches Paul talks of here are being given to strengthen us through God's Spirit in the inner man. This strength is not meant to be used to show ourselves off as spiritual Arnold Schwarzeneger's as we flex our spiritual muscles and taunt the spiritual forces at work in this world.

No, rather we are to take the strength which God supplies so that we may go forward to obey and serve Christ. I'm sure there were those who looked at Paul rotting in a Roman prison and concluded that he was without any strength and power in the Spirit and the devil most certainly had beat him down to where the enemy gained the victory.

That could not be further from the truth. Paul was a man filled with the Holy Spirit empowered daily to trust, obey and serve right where he was. It was the empowering of the Spirit that enabled him to write this letter as he was inspired of the Spirit to give us this letter which is the very Word of God.

The power that God gives may be used in a prison to proclaim God's word to one person, or in ministry, like on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 came to Christ. Don't always measure the power of God in numbers, measure it as God is able to strengthen you right where you are and encourage you to minister to others with the gifts He's given you.

It's not how flashy we are with the power of God, it's how faithful we are to be used by Him as we look to Him for strength in the inner man by the Spirit.

The inner man. What is the inner man? This is not to be confused with the new man we are in Christ. It is certainly influenced by the

new life we have in Christ, but here in our text the reference is to our souls, that spiritual person we are, which happens to be housed in an earthly body. It includes the intellect, emotions and will. And it is this inner man that will be reunited to our resurrected body on the last day.

It's in contrast to the outer man which is the flesh and its desires. In fact, as one commentator puts it, "the expression [inner man] is synonymous with "heart", the controlling center from which life is comprehended and choices are made." (Snodgrass)

This is the level on which Paul wants us to live for Christ. That's where we are able to see with spiritual eyes and hear with spiritual ears. That inner man is what the Spirit of God prompts and empowers to trust and obey, despite contrary feelings or whether we know how it will all work out.

Man is tempted to walk in the flesh and we're all familiar with how that works itself out in our lives where we let our emotions rule or we lean on our own understanding and look for the quick fix. But as Paul encourages these Ephesian Christians, he reminds them that since we have access to the throne of God, we should go to God with the understanding that there is real spiritual power to carry out God's will.

This is what the prophet Zechariah records in ZEC 4:6 ...'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."

It's not as though Zechariah was excluding might and power, it's just that the might and power he refers to is not anything mere man can conjure up, but rather that which comes from the Spirit of God who is all powerful and Almighty, and who has as close a relationship with man as one can possibly have this side of heaven, for we know Christ by faith and are indwelt with the Spirit of the living God..

This power comes from God alone and is therefore meant to be used according to God's will. But it is real power none the less. And yet we find that the power of God often reveals itself in very subtle ways which doesn't bring attention to us, but is used to strengthen our faith, to strengthen our resolve, to strengthen our conviction that the God we serve is always there for us.

And it is used to strengthen our ability to trust, obey and serve Him, even as Paul did, under less than ideal circumstances. Next

week we'll finish chapter 3 and discover some of the ways God works in and through us to His glory, in His power.

But remember, 1) in Christ we have freedom to come and speak to God anytime, anywhere knowing that we're never out of His presence.

2) The posture God is concerned with is that of our hearts as we demonstrate love, faith and trust for Him.

3) We need to seek to be strengthened in the inner man through the power of the Spirit as we live by faith, depending on Him for all things as we trust His will as revealed in His word.

Let me close with an encouragement from the man who knew what it was like to have plenty and yet also to have nothing, and in all things to be content in the power of the Spirit who was always there for Paul, who placed his hope in the Messiah Jesus, who loved him before the foundations of the world.

ROM 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

This power is practical and yet it is supernatural. It is from God. Therefore, let us seek God's filling to live and serve Him in this present world as we have an eye on the next in His presence forever.