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SERMON PREACHED BY MR J K POPHAM
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EPHESIANS 3 V 12

"By whom we have boldness and access with confidence
by the faith of Him"

One of the most terrible things, inclusive indeed of other terrible things, resulting from the fall of Adam and our own sin is our exclusion from God, solemnly typified by the expulsion of Adam from the garden of Eden. And another awful thing is that the old way of prayer, of access, of nearness, of communion to and with God, is closed for ever, solemnly, justly closed for ever, and he who attempts, as he would think, to draw near to God in that old way, will do nothing less than presume and cast himself on the thick bosses of God's buckler, to his own destruction. So we are hopeless in Adam and in self; so also we are helpless, utterly, absolutely helpless. And we are legally justly helpless, as helpless under the law and as justly hopeless as the murderer is helpless by the sentence of the law. He cannot help himself to any prolonging of his life, and we, under the law, cannot help ourselves. What then? Have you been brought face to face with the question - What shall a dying sinner do? How can he help himself? Where should he fly, to what refuge? Is another way to God opened? Is it possible, on the ground of infinite justice, that one who has provoked the Almighty to wrath, wrath to the uttermost, can escape that wrath? Possible that a sinner who has outraged the goodness of God, trampled His Name and honour under foot, disbelieved His word, committed endless sins, that such a sinner can ever have access to that Holy Being and be pleasing to Him and escape the wrath to come, justly due to him? These are questions which I believe in some form press themselves on the attention of every true child of God, every one born again. We are immortal; the death of the body is a temporary thing; men shall rise again and then it will be found that there are two places, two states, for immortal men; heaven, a place and state of absolute justification and happiness, and a place hell, there to be under the wrath of God for ever. Now God showed, by the election of the Jews to be His people, that He would have some sinners for Himself; that He would rescue some from the fall; that He would have some people to have knowledge of Him and communion with Him. He brought them into a covenant with Himself. He made it with Abraham, renewed it with Isaac and Jacob and all this wonderful dealing of God was a type of a better people, a better covenant, established upon better promises. And these people who are better, on better grounds and better promises are called Israel after the Spirit. He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, nor is the circumcision of the flesh that which

God intends, but he is a Jew which is one inwardly and circumcision is of the heart; whose praise is of God and not of man. And the ministry that the Apostle treats of in this chapter is the ministry of a spiritual union between the Lord and cast off Gentiles together with elected Jews. These are one body with one Head, and the whole family of chosen Jews and chosen Gentiles, all redeemed, one family, in heaven and earth, named by and after God Himself. And in this covenant of grace, the people so blessed have what the Apostle tells us in the text, access to God. The work of sin is undone; the ruin of sin is under the hand of Christ. The guilt of sin is removed by the righteousness of Christ. The pollution of sin is washed away by the blood of Christ. The ignorance of God in a sinner's nature is taken away by the Spirit of Christ and the prayerlessness, the unbelief, the hardness of heart, the felt distance, the gloom, the misery, the bondage, the fear that people, gracious people, have some experience of, all, all removed from time to time, and these tried people have access, and have with it certain characteristics named in the text - boldness, confidence - and this by faith, by the faith of Christ, that is, by believing in Christ.

Access. Let us take this first and then the characteristics. Access, entrance, ingress, a way of approach. It must have been very beautiful in Eden, very wonderful to an unfallen Adam to have lived, by means of his daily obedience, taking, so to speak, every evening the full tail of obedience to his Maker and his Judge, under the smile of his God. I have often thought of it. It must have been very wonderful to that pure creature, whose mind was undefiled, whose thoughts were righteous thoughts, whose worship was pure worship, to take the obedience which was laid upon him by the law, under which he was made, every day to his God to be accepted. All was lost when he fell, lost to himself and lost to his children and now, says God in Christ to His people, "Come unto Me; draw near to God". And they in the Spirit say each to the other "O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for we are the sheep of His pasture. It is His hand which hath made us." What a change, and some sinners here know what that means. O how wonderful that I should know what that means, that any of you should know what that means - access. A God infinitely distant, a God infinitely, graciously near; near in our neighbour and kinsman, Jesus Christ. Near in the Redeemer's flesh, in the Redeemer's precious blood, in the Redeemer's justifying righteousness, in the Redeemer's eternal love. Near in the covenant, near in the promise, near in the Spirit's teaching, near in a sweet experience. "Made nigh by the blood of Christ". No privilege on earth to be compared with this; no communion on earth between creatures to be compared with this. No relief that one man can give another in any particular case can be compared with this. Heaven belongs to all who get near to God on earth in Christ. Mercy is here magnified.

Let us then, as enabled, take this great blessing and look at it briefly - access.

Burdened with guilt, distracted by sin, tempted of the devil, harrassed by trying circumstances, plagued with unbelief, turned aside and almost turned over and ruined by infidel thoughts, such a sinner – and he is here is he not? – such a sinner gets near to God. It is very merciful that the Lord has expressed this in terms of distance and nearness; comes down to our apprehension of things. Access. God is no stranger then, no stranger to the sinner who thus comes to Him, and the sinner is no stranger to God. The Lord can never say to some of us here in the last day – "I never knew you", for He has known us. He has known our souls in adversity and He has invited us to His footstool by His Spirit and enabled us to come by His grace. He has told us to open our mouth and we have done it; to cast our burdens on Him and we have done it; to believe in Him, and we have done it. He will never say to you who have been so favoured, "I never knew you". O what a wonder. And He accepted and received you and when you came with your providential troubles and your family necessities and griefs and sorrows He accepted you and received you, and helped you and delivered you. And when you came with temptations, burdening, distracting, driving, He came to you and helped you and made it known to you that your enemies were His, and they are still so. And access has this in it, you see something. They said of old – "We have seen the Lord". Isaiah, in a year of trouble, in the year that King Uzziah died, saw the Lord, saw Him sitting on a throne high and lifted up. Jacob, long before Isaiah, when he was in trouble got a sight of God. He dreamed, and the ladder he saw, whose top was in heaven, whose bottom was on the earth, reached him. He got a sight. Abraham got the same. "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward". And when the Lord spoke to Abraham, Abraham fell on his face. Think of it. Daniel got a sight of Him and when he got that sight his comeliness was turned in him to corruption. John got it – "I saw Him" he said "and I fell at His feet as dead". When you have been near, not in the same way or measure as in the cases I have named, but in some measure of glory, life and light, you have seen the Lord, seen Him in various ways, different ways, sometimes as Hart saw Him

When I by faith my Maker see
In weakness and distress
Brought down to that sad state for me
Which angels can't express;

When that great God to whom I go
For help, amazed I view,
By sin and sorrow sunk as low
As I, and lower too;

For all our sins we His may call
As He sustained their weight;
How huge the heavy load of all,
When only mine's so great

Then ravished with the rich belief
Of such a love as this,
I'm lost in wonder, melt with grief,
And faint beneath the bliss

you will never forget that sight. If you have had it you will never forget that sight. You will never forget the heaven that came into your soul when you fixed your trust on Incarnate Deity and loved Him. You will never forget it. Access – You got near to God; into the chambers of the King you were brought; got so near to Him as to look on Him as the "Apple tree among the trees of the wood" and "sat down under His shadow with great delight". And not only do the saints see Him but they are familiar with Him and He is condescendingly familiar with them. He does not stand aloof from your sore always, does He? No, He speaks kindly, graciously, gently, lovingly, suitably. His words are suitable words, "as apples of gold in pictures of silver". And also His power is known – His left hand is under, His right hand embraces. How familiar the Lord is. In a moment, in a good measure, your unacquaintedness with Him is removed from your heart. "In whom we have access" even in Christ. Everything that God will give is there; everything He will show is there; every blessing He will pour out is there. Heaven itself is, as it were in this very Man, the Man Christ Jesus, the very Son of God incarnate. The effect is very wonderful. Your intense untowardness, your base wickedness, your hardness of heart that seemed obdurate, and all the suspicions and jealousies and evil surmisings of your nature, these were all removed, when you got near, had access. And the Lord speaks too. O He speaks. He says to some "Fear not". He says "I will help thee". He makes Himself great. "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple". He gets the whole heart and He keeps it for the moment. Alas, if ever we should be so base as to run away from Him. In whom we have this; we have redemption. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. In whom we have righteousness. "Surely shall one say in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". In whom we have omnipotence, and all things are possible to him that believeth. Faith becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, and that living faith is so powerful as to persuade its happy, favoured subject that matters are well; things are well for time, well for eternity. Of all the blessings that I would set before you this is one of the chief, and O, poor tried soul, as you get this you will be happy. "In whom we have access". This brings a sinner into some experience of union, in union with God. The

separation of sin is done away with, finished – not the experience of sin – but in truth the separation of sin is done away, and the sinner finds access. Brings union – "I am the Vine, ye are the branches". And the living sap of grace and love and mercy and pardon, and sweet intercourse with the soul brings that fruitfulness that is desired. O the union is sweet. We have this in Christ, we have the blessing in Him. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us, as it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree," that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. What a change from the curse to the blessing, from the law unto the gospel, from filthy rags to a pure righteousness, from a state of pollution to a state of sanctification by the blood of Christ. And all this is in Him. Every grace and every favour comes to us this way. No other way is open. Now my friends, if this is so, and if there is no good anywhere else, how about your souls? Do you get this? Some of you must say, we do, and others of you would say, we wish we could. Others must say, if they spoke mentally and if they spoke the truth, they must say, they neither know it nor seek it, and how terrible is your state.

And there are characteristics of this access. There is a good deal of trembling at the word of God by the people of God from time to time, when they are led to consider their wickedness, to feel their depravity, to perceive their constant wandering, and their intense untowardness to all spiritual things. O they have sorrow then, and they tremble. But this is changed from time to time, when access is granted, into boldness or liberty. "In whom we have boldness" that is liberty "to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way". There is liberty here. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty". Real gospel liberty, no tax, no toll levied, no conditions imposed, but just a free, open, wonderfully open, blessed, holy highway to God and this will be a characteristic of your religion if you have the grace of God in you. Not always will the terrors of the slave make you shake; not always will the lash be on your conscience, making you seek to pray. No, conscience will do a good deal by fears, but love will do a great deal more to attract and give a sense of liberty. An open door, an inviting Saviour, full of kindness and love and mercy. And this gives what every child of God loves to feel, a sweet freedom in prayer. Freedom in prayer is boldness and boldness is freedom. Not the boldness of the presumptuous person, not the boldness of the bold and hard, proud Pharisee, but the boldness of a sinner who says "God be merciful to me a sinner." The boldness of the dying thief who said "Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom". The boldness of the Apostle Paul when, Saul of Tarsus, he said "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" This liberty is very wonderful; as felt, very amazing; as felt, very humbling. O blessed be God for this sweet liberty that God gives to His children, for depend upon it they do a good deal of business when they get this. They do business with heaven. They do business about eternity, and about their present crosses and difficulties

and troubles. They do business with God. It is great to traffic with heaven. You will bring large petitions with you more or less every day. You may be straightened in yourself, but the change that is wrought when, instead of that straightness, there is enlargement, is very great and very acceptable. When the goodness of God is great in your eyes, when His ability is great to your faith, when His faithfulness is great to your faith, and when you see that everything you can require, everything you can ask, everything you wish and more than you can ever think about, is in Him, you are bold then. Lord I am a weak creature, but Thou art able to hold me up. I am a needy creature, but Thou art able to supply every need that I have and shall have through eternity. I am naked, but Thou art righteousness. I am polluted, but Thou hast power in Thine own blood to cleanse me from my pollutions. Large petitions with thee bring. The road is rough, the path is scarcely traced sometimes for you. O then, says one with access,

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
Pilgrim through this barren land

And sometimes faith takes great advantage of this. When the gale begins to blow, faith says, now let us spread the sails. You will understand me who have had this experience. You will want to take advantage of the whispers of His grace and the touches of love, the influences of the Spirit, the attractions of the cross. You will want to take advantage then. Come boldly to the throne of grace; come with large petitions to the God of all grace. It is good to be enabled to perceive the influence of the Spirit and to take advantage of it. Boldness. None can understand it but the people who get it, and they get it from the Holy Spirit through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then also this characteristic is to be noticed - confidence. "With confidence". Confidence may go forth in two ways in the same person at different times, and they may both be in the same person at the same time. First of all every child of God present will have felt often and feels now, perhaps, a perfect confidence in the sufficiency of God in Christ. No wavering here. A perfect confidence in the sufficiency of God. He said to Abraham "I am Almighty God walk thou before Me and be thou perfect". I am God all sufficient. Sufficient for your time needs, sufficient for your weakness, for your barrenness. Sufficient to fulfil My promise, sufficient to bring you into the land I have given you by promise and oath and covenant. Sufficient for your enemies, to overcome them for you. Walk before Me. This confidence will keep your eye on God. This confidence will keep your mind stayed. As long as it exercises itself in your heart, your eye will be fixed on omnipotence, on divine fulness. You will be saved from being that man, that double minded man, who is unstable in all his ways. You will be saved from that by this confidence. Double dealing does not belong to faith. A single eye, a single

mind, faith always has, more or less. You see it in the Psalmist. He had been diverted and distracted. He had looked, with envy, on the prosperity of the wicked. He had looked, with perplexity, on the adversity of the righteous. And, as he attempted to understand these contrary things, he was perplexed and sorely put to it. He was taken into the sanctuary. He saw God; by faith he saw Him. Then, under the instruction of the Spirit, he came to this. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". Now that fixed him. His confidence in the sufficiency of his God fixed him. "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me with Thy right hand". Why, a child of God in difficulties and debt, in trouble, overwhelmed with affliction it may be, will say in his soul - yea and he may say to a friend - now let nobody know about this trouble. God knows, let that be sufficient for us. Let us carry it to Him, let us hide it from man. You will always find, when you have confidence in the sufficiency of God, that will be the state of your mind. Cast your burden there and leave it for the time. You may pick it up again, but for the time you will leave it there. O what a mercy this confidence is; what a blessing it is for faith to eye the sufficiency of God. The sufficiency of God? Why, the Apostle in this chapter declares it thus - "The unsearchable riches of Christ". He speaks of it again in this chapter - "Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think". Look, poor sinner, look empty creature, look poor believer, at this - a sufficient God, a sufficient Saviour, loving, faithful, almighty, reigning over principalities and powers, all wickedness in high places, and devils, and archangels and holy elect angels, ruling over them all. And He says, coming down to temporal things about which we may be exercised "If I were hungry I would not tell thee". That is, if I were not sufficient, I would not tell thee. The cattle upon a thousand hills and the gold and silver, they are all Mine. I am the Almighty God, walk before Me. Walk in your necessities before Me; walk in your weakness before Me. Walk by faith and not by sight and I will show to you great things and you shall be for My praise and glory. This faith will make you great; this faith will tell you that all things are possible to him that believeth. This faith will give you a humble, godly independence of all creatures; confidence in God's sufficiency.

And in the next place confidence may be with regard to your interest, may be in your soul so that you can say "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". To say "He loved me and gave Himself for me". To say "In Him have I righteousness and strength". I have cast myself on Him. "My times are in Thy hand". "Thou hast redeemed me O Lord God of truth". Then the sinner enters into the mystery of all elected and redeemed people being gathered together in Him. The church in heaven and on earth, one invisible, wonderful church, loved and redeemed. He enters into this and he is one, one with the ancients before whom the Lord reigns gloriously. One with Adam redeemed, and Abraham, and

Noah, and all the fathers. He is one with them. His spirit is one with their spirit and he says he loves them. How have some of you felt, when you have been reading in the Scriptures, that your very souls have been drawn out into union with the truths written and to the men employed by God the Holy Ghost. Confidence about your own state. And this may be with many contrary feelings. This may very well be with the painful knowledge of what you are and a growing knowledge of what you are in yourself. If any of you young people, that is young in the ways of God, are now apt to think that this holy confidence is inconsistent with painful experience of indwelling sin, you will learn after a while that it is not so. I cannot make you know it; God can. I can just tell you that it can be so. The two are consistent. Yea, the stronger your confidence in God, the more painful will be your experience of indwelling sin. You wont live in sin - I do not mean that of course - you will never live in sin when the power of grace is in you. You will never indulge in iniquity, lying, or unfair dealing or deceit of any sort or kind when grace is prevailing, but you will feel the stronger your confidence is the stronger your sweet belief that Christ loved you and gave Himself for you, the stronger is your pain of sin and hatred of it. With confidence. Well, and this confidence will stretch itself out; this confidence will go right to heaven and you will say with one - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee". You will sing with one - "He will not be in heaven and leave me behind". Solemnly and sweetly you will sometimes believe that where He is you, His humble servant, will also be in His time. Is this not wonderful confidence? Ah, says the enemy sometimes, it is presumption. But then look at what the confidence does for you. It makes you little in your own eyes, weak in your own feelings; helps you, constrains you to trust in the Lord. Weak in myself, in Him I am strong. It brings you into line, so to put it, with the Apostle Paul who, in another case, said - "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves but our sufficiency is of God". Distrust of self, real weakness in self, true insufficiency of self for anything good, and at the same moment my sufficiency for all I need, for a godly walk, a consistent life, my sufficiency for all is in the Lord. O what a favour to be a sinner gathered to Christ, blessed with access to God in Him, in whom we have redemption, in whom we have life, in whom we have peace, in whom the covenant is made with us.

And it is by the faith of Him; by faith in Him. Yes, the Lord reduces things in His Word to this with respect to His people here. Faith is that hand that is stretched out to a full God, that eye that looks to a bleeding Saviour, that confidence that goes out to Christ when all created things are dried and emptied out by the dealings of God. Faith is that sweet spirit of credence, that spirit that lives on God revealed to it, that lives on the Redeemer and His redemption, on His righteousness and on His holiness, on His wisdom, on His omnipotence, on His faithfulness. By the faith of Him. Think of it. Here is a sinner, as bad as any creature, as wicked as any devil, and he says it honestly, feeling it, and yet he says, I have a good God. I deserve hell, but I shall never be there. I am covered with

sin but I am holy and without sin. I am full of all manner of evil but I have a good God and Saviour and a blessed Redeemer. And these two things in your souls will make you tender, fearful of your own spirit and of your own steps, and bring you to live a life of faith on the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. Now what more do you want? What more do you want? I will tell you; you want more of this mercy. Not something different, but more of this

Larger communion let me prove
With Thee blest Object of my love

And that is what you want and when you get more, you will want more still, for it is of the nature of this blessed religion that God gives to His people to increase their appetite by giving satisfaction. The more satisfaction you have that you are God's and God is yours, the more hungry you will be for Him. May God give us the experience of this text.

AMEN.