

Entering the Throne Room

Hebrews 4:12-16

Introduction

Not only did the church I attended as a kid have a worship service on Sunday morning, we also had Sunday night church. If you grew up in roughly the same time period you as I did, you will quickly understand that a worship service Sunday evening meant you never got to see the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz*. Every year from 1956 through 1991, with only a couple of exceptions, CBS ran that show on Sunday nights starting at 7 p.m.

On the nights the Wizard was on, if the pastor's sermon was any reasonable length, and if Mom and Dad didn't talk to a lot of people after the benediction, my brother and I could usually count on being home in time to see the flying monkeys make their appearance. But if the sermon was a bit long, or if Mom and Dad (usually Mom) got into a conversation with Janelle Brown, Dorothy and the gang could already be entering the Emerald City before we had our pajamas on and were able to plop in front of the TV.

If you remember that movie, I want you to picture that moment when Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion came into the throne room of the Great and Powerful Wizard for the very first time. Can you picture how terrified they were? Do you remember how intimidated they were?

Of course they reacted like that! It only makes sense! Whenever mere mortals like you and me come into the presence of the great and powerful, it is an intimidating and terrifying experience ... whether it is the throne room of a carnival huckster like the Wizard or the throne room of Almighty God.

That natural response for mere mortals like us is such a powerful contrast to the mood described by the Apostle Paul in verse 16 of the Hebrews text:

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence... (Hebrews 4:16)

The King James Version reads: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.*

Imagine that! Come into God's presence with confidence! Come boldly! That is far different than how many people come into God's presence. They come with fear and trembling, just like Dorothy and the gang exhibited before the Wizard.

It shows up in many ways. Ask someone to pray or lead a Bible study or share their testimony and you will hear: "Oh, I can't do that." We find that many people are more similar to Dorothy than Hebrews.

And that's so unfortunate, because no less than God Himself invites us into His presence. One of the great truths of Christianity is that the Holy God wants to spend



one-on-one time with you. How awesome is that! Every one of us has significant issues, concerns and questions that need to be shared with God – and we need to be able to talk to Him without fear in the full assurance that He listens and that He cares. And He wants us to do that!

A confident conversation is the way it was intended to be. Back in the earliest verses of Genesis, right after God has finished creating everything, we read that each evening God would stroll through the Garden of Eden because He wanted to be with Adam and Eve. The three of them enjoyed each other's company. And it was "good." Just as God intended it to be.

That great hymn of the church describes it beautifully:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.
(In the Garden, C Austin Miles)*

So do we get back to that place? How can we get there ourselves and how can we help people move from a position of fear and trembling to a point where they can come into God's presence boldly and with confidence? This text identifies a three-step process.

STEP #1: THE BIBLE DOES ITS PART

Verse 12 reads:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

There are four characteristics identified here. I look at them in pairs.

1. Pair #1: It is alive and active:

I've never worried too much about people who want to study the Bible only as if were a piece of ordinary, historical literature. Have at it! Because I know, the Bible is not just words on paper – it is a living thing. Like yeast – ACTIVE dry yeast – if you add it to your life – no matter your motive for doing so – it starts to bring about change. It bubbles up. You can do your best to punch it down, but once it is in there you can't get it out.

2. It penetrates your soul and spirit and judges your thoughts and attitudes:

The only person the Bible will ever kill is the devil Himself. But it can and will make the rest of us uncomfortable. It works like a surgeon's scalpel, exposing what is deep

inside you. You thought you were hiding it well, but the Word of God brings it up to where you need to deal with it.

When the Apostle Paul described the Word of God to his protégé Timothy, he wrote:

All Scripture is ... useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness ... (2 Timothy 3:16)

And when God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed the impact of His Word, He promised those listening that it:

... will not return to me (God) empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

So when step #1 happens ... when the Bible does what the Bible does, we come to the place described by Hebrews 4:13:

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13)

Not granted, that doesn't sound like a place of boldness and confidence, but it is only step one. When we begin to engage with the Word of God, it begins to do its work in our lives, exposing our sinfulness and shame, then ...

#2: JESUS DOES HIS PART

Look at verse 14:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. (Hebrews 4:14)

Therefore – that is, because of what the Word of God has done – we can turn to our great high priest, Jesus the Son of God.

In Old Testament times, the role of the high priest was to carry the sin and shame of the people to the Holy Place and offer the appropriate sacrifice. He would cry out to God on behalf of the people, asking God for mercy and forgiveness for their sins. And God would listen. And according to His faithfulness, He would forgive those sins.

A great system – but it was a system with two fatal flaws.

1. The high priest just ran through the motions. He didn't understand the depth of your sin and shame. He had no empathy with the sinner standing before him.
2. The high priest also had his own sins that needed to be forgiven.

But now Jesus serves as the high priest. As verse 15 tells us, we no longer have a flawed high priest, we have a perfect one! We have one who understands what we have gone through AND who is not Himself in need of the same forgiveness.

We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

The sacrifice He offered was Himself, a perfect, one-time, once-and-for all time Lamb. That is the prayer we will sing in just a few moments:

*Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.*

So Jesus, functioning in His high priestly role, takes all of the gunk that has been uncovered and exposed through our interaction with the Word of God. He carries that into the Holy Place and because He does, our sins find forgiveness.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

All the reasons you were unworthy to be in God's presence are gone because of what Jesus has done. Prior to the work of Jesus in your life, you had no reason to be bold or confident in the presence of God. The Corinthians text goes on to say this:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

So ...

- Step 1: The Bible makes us aware of our unworthiness, and makes us afraid ... which leads to ...
- Step 2: Jesus makes righteous, and in so doing eliminates the reason for our fear

All of which brings us to:

#3: WE NOW CAN DO WHAT GOD INVITES US TO DO

Again, verse 16:

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

I like the reminder that appeared in the earlier verse:

... let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. (Hebrews 4:14)

Hold firmly to your faith and approach the throne confidently. And when you do, you receive mercy and grace for whatever you are facing. In that renewed relationship with God, you hear Him say: *Welcome! Thank you for coming! Let's enjoy each other's presence.*

APPLICATION

If you understand that, it will have serious implications for your journey of faith, and particularly for your prayer life.

- You and God can talk intimately and deeply about anything.
- You do not need to be afraid of Him, because you have been forgiven and stand before Him as a righteous individual.

As the title of a book on my library shelf proclaims, *Ask Him anything* (Lloyd John Ogilvie).

It begins with your interaction with God's Word and your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Amen.