

A Better Entry

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 24th of August 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled A Better Entry and is based on Hebrews 10.19-25.

And you'll find on page 976 the first reading that we had today from Hebrews 10. We're continuing our sermon series on the letter to the Hebrews and after today we'll have a break until October when we resume with the rest of chapter 10 and chapters that follow.

Let's pray that God helps us now. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you're a God who speaks to reveal himself and your purposes for us and for this world. And we thank you for speaking to us in recent weeks through the earlier chapters of Hebrews and we pray that as we come to this passage you'll speak to our hearts and minds that we'll not only understand what you say to us but also live lives of obedient and faithful response.

And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. A few years ago on one holiday I climbed St Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was a hot day.

[1 : 1 9] You won't be surprised to know that I'm unfit. And it wasn't long before I was becoming breathless and dripping with sweat and thinking this is a crazy exercise. Round and round in circles up a spiral staircase thinking this had better be worth it when I get to the top.

And the closer I got to the sort of 500 steps to the top every step ached more and more. Just occasionally on the way up there were little glimpses of bits of view as you could see out a little window or something on the side of the staircase.

But then the top a magnificent view and a vista over Rome and its domes and spires and a beautiful panoramic view of what's called the Eternal City.

Well in some respects the letter to the Hebrews in recent weeks has been a bit like that. For some of us it may look as though we've been going round in circles. For many of us it's sort of been hard work.

I've certainly found that preparing the last few sermons. A steady climb but let me assure you that in one sense here we've come to the top of that staircase.

[2 : 2 9] And the hard work pays off because the opening verses of today's passage give us a magnificent panoramic vista of the glorious truths that apply for Christian people.

We've seen just occasional glimpses of that in the weeks preceding but now in verses 19 to 22 in particular 19 to 21 we see a magnificent view of what is the reality for Christian people.

There are two glorious things that are summarising what we've learned over the previous weeks that are true for Christians. two things that we have here and now here on earth.

We have access to God and we have a glorious priest over us. Firstly we have access to God. Notice verse 19 says that we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh.

We have this a present tense something that is ours now it's not talking about the access that we will have in heaven but rather the access that we have now to God.

[3 : 42] We have confidence some translations say complete freedom or free access or boldness all those ideas are captured by the word that's in our translation is confidence boldness free access complete freedom to enter the sanctuary the most holy place not talking about a church building not talking about the old tabernacle or temple which has been discussed in recent weeks but to enter God's very presence where he is if you like the heavenly sanctuary of God but not talking about heaven away off at the end of our lives talking about what is the reality for us Christians here on earth today now we have complete freedom and access to enter God's very presence now now that's an amazing truth and if you don't quite capture the wonderful grandeur of that truth then let me urge you to reread the preceding chapters that have built up to this and remember these things that show us just how amazing it is that you and I believers in Jesus Christ can have this complete freedom and access into the presence of God in the Old Testament the priests were scared stiff to enter just the earthly model of the tabernacle but we have complete freedom to enter the real reality of God's presence they're afraid to enter the earthly model and yet we can have freedom boldness and confidence to enter the real presence of God in the Old Testament the access to the most holy place in the sanctuary was severely restricted to one person the high priest one day of the year the day of atonement he had to be wearing the right clothes having gone through the right ritual washings and carrying the correctly offered blood of the atonement sacrifice but our access is for all believers at any time in any place wherever we are complete freedom free access vastly different from the highly restricted access allowed to the high priest in the Old Testament times in the Old Testament times the access was full of fear so the high priest would wear the right garments which included a bell that as he moved you could hear it partly if he didn't do that the instruction in the book of Exodus is lest you die you can imagine if you were the high priest being scared stiff to go beyond the curtain into the most holy place no wonder that tradition tells us that in later times in Old Testament times the high priest would have a rope around his leg so that if he was delayed and people were worried or they didn't hear the bell on his clothing they could drag him out without somebody themselves having to go behind the curtain in Leviticus we read of the sons of the first high priest Aaron who offered sacrifices wrongly and was slain by God for a bad approach to God no wonder the people were anxious when the father of John the

Baptist was in the temple for what seemed an inordinately long time before he did in fact come out in the Old Testament the priests and the high priest would approach with absolute caution and fear as they came to the earthly sanctuary it's a bit like a game our SEBS group plays and I remember playing when I was in Cubs there are various versions of the game but in one of them one of the children is sitting at the far end of the hall and he's and they have a blindfold over them and the idea is that the other children in the group will come up to pinch something from sitting right in front of them without being heard but if he hears a noise he points and if he's pointing in the direction of a child they're out of the game that's the sort of fearful approach that the priests of the Old Testament would have had am I wearing the right clothes is the bell going to ring okay have I got the right blood is this the right day and then approaching behind the curtain trembling no doubt with fear well in contrast to that you and I have boldness confidence free access to approach the very presence of God anytime any place anywhere any day that's an amazing privilege we can go more closely and intimately into the presence of God that any high priest could even on the day of atonement in the Old Testament that is a breathtaking privilege that is ours now it's not talking about us arriving in heaven at the end of our lives it's talking about what is now the reality for Christian people and the grounds of confidence see what verse 19 says we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus by Jesus death on the cross 2000 years ago for us gives us confidence boldness and free access into the very presence of God

Jesus blood is the ticket that we have that we can wave at the doorkeeper if you like metaphorically speaking and walk boldly and confidently into the presence of God verse 20 says it is a new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain through his flesh because the Old Testament tabernacle had a curtain a veil in front of the holy place behind which only one person once a year could go as I've said Jesus has torn that curtain by his death on the cross by his flesh slain for us what an amazing privilege and as we've seen in recent weeks his death has not only brought forgiveness of our sins but cleansed and perfected our hearts so that we are fit for fellowship with God well that's the first great truth and reality that is ours now that's the first thing about this panoramic vista of the glorious truths for Christians that we've finally reached the top of the staircase to see and the other great truth the other thing that we have in verse 21 we have a great priest over the house of God the house of God not meaning a building like we're in or an Old Testament temple or tabernacle or a cathedral but the house of God being the people of God we have a great priest over us a priest who is greater than the Levitical priests of the Old Testament greater than

Aaron the first high priest a priest who we saw a few weeks ago is according to the order of Melchizedek a figure that appears in the Old Testament a perfect priest because he doesn't need to offer sacrifice for his own sin a perfect priest because he lives forever and has conquered death a perfect priest who's powerful by the indestructible life that he lived as we've seen in recent weeks a priest who takes us to God himself see the high priest in the Old Testament they couldn't take people behind the curtain with them they had to go alone but Jesus has entered heaven on our behalf for us to take us into the very presence of God my friends these are glorious truths our hearts ought to be beating with excitement as we remember them yet again they are realities and truths that apply for Christian believers here on earth today tomorrow the next day whatever we feel like whatever side of bed we get out of whatever happens in our life this is the reality that is ours these are the things that we have through the

Lord Jesus Christ complete freedom into the access and presence of God and a glorious and great priest over us this is the vista that we can see that has been building up in the weeks preceding this and it's been worth the effort because these are magnificent truths and they are secured for us by Jesus Christ so enjoy the view at the top soak in the panorama and marvel at its magnificence because this is a glorious view not just of what applies to us it's glorious view of the glory of God manifest in Jesus Christ and even when we don't feel it we have access to God through the blood of Jesus Christ even when we might feel abandoned in life we have Jesus our priest over us even if we feel far from God that he's not answering our prayers or something we have complete freedom to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus this is a marvelous summit to stand on it is a marvelous picture of the reality the worldview that is correct and real for Christian believers here today and tomorrow and the next day whatever we feel whatever this world throws up at us this is true and real for us access and a great priest Jesus Christ and if God has enabled all of this for us in Jesus Christ far be it from us to offend God by declining the invitation to enter and by refusing the priest he gives us don't decline the invitation and don't abuse the privilege the writer here is saying in verse 19 therefore since these things are ours then let us respond we have two great truths the access and the priest we have three responses that are demanded of us in the verses that follow verses 22 to 25 two great privileges three great responsibilities firstly then since we have these two things access and a priest then firstly let us approach verse 22 says if God provides the access approach him but not casually don't saunter up to God placing your feet on his desk saying hi God how you going sort of casual chat free access doesn't mean that sort of casual nature of approaching God so notice how we are to approach verse 22 says four things about our approach to God let us approach with a true heart firstly that is not half-heartedly not hypocritically not full of pretense not trying to cover up what's on our insides but with a true heart sincere genuine heart a heart that is secondly full of assurance of faith that is a heart that trusts the promises of God the promises that we are accepted and fit for fellowship with God by the death of Jesus that's God's promise to us so there are days when we don't feel fit for God we feel too dirty or unclean or sinful or unworthy but the promise of God is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from such sin and unworthiness and makes us fit for fellowship with God so we approach God nonetheless trusting that promise regardless of how we feel that's what full assurance of faith is about that we trust God no matter how we feel because God has promised that Jesus blood cleanses us from sin and forgives us whether or not we feel it that's the reality

[15 : 17] and full assurance of faith means we approach nonetheless confident trusting in Jesus death for us and that's a strong and resilient faith it's a faith that withstands the circumstances the despairs the conflicts of our life even the doubts that we might have from time to time it is a strong faith trusting the promises of God regardless of how we feel and what this life is throwing at us so firstly a true heart secondly a heart full of assurance of faith thirdly a heart that's sprinkled clean verse 22 goes on the sprinkled clean from an evil conscience we've seen how Jesus blood does that in the weeks leading up to this passage sins cleansed by powerful blood as we've seen in the last couple of weeks the language here is of something that is a past action with a continuing benefit it's Jesus death in the past that has sprinkled our hearts clean from an evil conscience and that remains the ongoing and abiding reality for our hearts as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and then fourthly our bodies washed with pure water not talking about having a decent bath or a shower more than the ritual cleansing of the Old Testament again referring to the effects of Jesus death for us it's all part of a full package it's saying that we as people our hearts our consciences our bodies all of us the whole kit and caboodle is to approach God full of confident faith trusting in what Jesus blood has cleansed in us and for us not an uncertain faith not an uncertain fearful approach like the Old Testament priests like kids in the game I was describing I remember a few years ago in I was in London and I'd heard that for

MCG members you could show your card and there's some reciprocal rights to get into Lords and I thought would be fun to see England lose a cricket match for a couple of hours I'll see if I can get into Lords I must say I was fairly nervous about showing my card and they wouldn't let me in well eventually I conned somebody to let me in and watched a few England wickets fall but that's not the uncertainty that we're to approach God with a bold and confident approach to God with the ticket of the blood of Jesus that's what brings us into the very presence of God himself not just in heaven at the end of our lives but here today tomorrow and every day as we live here on earth and this is more than just praying yes it's partly to do with prayer that we pray right to the very throne room of God by means of the blood of Jesus but it's more than prayers it's about living our whole life in obedient faith in the presence of God it is a life grateful for Jesus and his death on the cross for us and notice to the intimacy here no veil to keep us away from the presence of God no standing at a remote distance but rather by Jesus death we have access into the very presence of God you cannot be closer to God than that it's so often Christians are saying I want to feel close to God I feel far away and often they'd look in the wrong place to find some feelings of intimacy with God the closest we can be to God is approaching him by the blood of Jesus trusting Jesus death for our forgiveness and our acceptance by God that brings us into the very presence of God nothing to do with atmospheres or feelings or emotions it is Jesus death that brings us the intimacy that we require so that's the first exhortation the first responsibility to the two great truths and privileges that are ours we have access we have a priest therefore let us approach and secondly in verse 23 let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering for he who has promised is faithful yes while we have these two great privileges now of access and a priest there is a hope of even more to come when finally we arrive in heaven for eternity we are to hold fast to that Christian hope because it is secure Christian hope is not wishful thinking or dreamy optimism it's not a stupid hope that somehow a lowly football team like mine will beat Port Adelaide in Adelaide this afternoon Christian hope is secure remember back to chapter 6 our hope is an anchor for our soul and Jesus Christ has gone into heaven with the anchor of our hope and anchored it in heaven in God's very presence they're never to be dislodged by anyone or anything that's our hope it is an anchor for our soul in heaven secured there for us so that's why the writer says hold fast your hope without wavering because Christian hope is not just wishful thinking just hoping that somehow the afterlife is going to be better than this life that's not Christian hope

Christian hope is sure and certain hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension to heaven there to anchor our hope in heaven and so however we feel in earth whatever our illnesses our despairs our conflicts our trials and our tribulations our hope is anchored in heaven and we can hold fast to it tenaciously like a dog holding a bone or a stick never letting it go through thick and thin through the despairs of this life our hope is in heaven secured for us by Jesus Christ never let that hope go so that's the second exhortation we have access and the priest therefore let us approach therefore let us hold fast our hope and then thirdly let us provoke one another to love and good deeds verse 24 says let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds now let me say firstly that this verse when it says let us consider how to approach is not saying let's form a committee that will review and think various ways that we might provoke one another to love and good deeds and let's somehow later on bring down a little report about how we might do that that's not what it's on about about considering the word for consider here is about having focused attention alertness and watchfulness that we may actually provoke one another to love and good deeds that is the primary thing is the provoking of encourage and encouraging each other to love and good deeds not the thinking about it's not about theory or philosophizing it's about action it's about doing it's about provoking one another to love and good deeds that is about proactive involvement in other people's lives it is about spurring one another on it is about prodding one another out of spiritual lethargy and lack of love and lack of good deeds it's like having a stubborn animal that you need a stick to get it up and move it that's the force behind the idea of provoking that we're to provoke one another to love and good deeds well love of course is a fundamental obligation for christian people our love of god and our love of each other are the two great commandments but you can never love in isolation how can we love each other if our christian faith is only ever an affair of our private relationship with god and something in our heart then we're being disobedient to the command to love each other and disobedient to the command to provoke each other to love and good deeds you see if we are to obey this and love each other and provoke each other to love then we must be involved in each other's lives so the writer goes on to say at the beginning of verse 25 not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another see if you don't meet together you can't love each other and clearly this writer is writing to christians to a church where some christians are in danger of giving up the christian faith not by a conscious decision of waking up and saying i'm abandoning the christian faith i'm going to live as a buddhist or a pagan or something but people who are just drifting away out of spiritual lethargy or the pressures the trials the temptations of the world coming in on them and luring them distracting them away that's the danger that these christians are facing and often the first symptom of drifting faith is a slack church attendance the writer here demands of christians not neglecting to meet together as some of his recipients are in danger of doing skipping church is very often a sign of drifting faith oh i can't be bothered today it's a bit cold i'm a bit tired i had a late night all those sorts of excuses i think them every sunday morning when the alarm goes off let me tell you but slack church attendance and involvement is a symptom of drifting faith and the writer here is

saying don't neglect to meet together now periodically people say oh you know i've sort of stopped going to church quite so much i don't seem to get a lot out of it but that's only half the point the point is that we put in you see the church attendance and involvement here that is being demanded of christians is not just that they get out of it but so that they in going prod and provoke others to love and good deeds that they will receive benefit as they give benefit to others that is we gather together to encourage each other to build each other up to spur and prod each other on to love and good deeds now this is a tough call today see our society is an individualistic society that says i'll live my life you live yours i'm not going to interfere with you you don't interfere with me i'll do my own thing you do your own thing that's what our world thinks that's what our society thinks it's not what god thinks you see we have a responsibility for each other not just my responsibility as the vicar or pastor but it is your responsibility for each other and your responsibility for each other and mine for you and you for me and so on in christian fellowship to provoke each other to love and good works and that's a tough call in an individualistic society we don't like to take action we don't like to interfere we hold back but we can't afford to do that in fact our christian brothers and sisters can't afford for us to do that so when we notice a christian struggling with their faith it is our responsibility to take action to stir them up to love and good deeds and if we see one of our christian brothers and sisters whether or not we know them well drifting away from faith or being slack in church attendance it's our responsibility all of us to take action to provoke them to love and good deeds and if it's happening to us we better pray that somebody else takes the responsibility to provoke us to love and good deeds as well this is a mutual responsibility and no christian is exonerated from this responsibility or free from from it we are all to exercise provocation and encouragement to love and good deeds it's a hard call but it is our responsibility notice how the passage actually began therefore my friends he says that's a weak translation the trouble is it's trying to be non-sexist the language is my brothers meaning my christian brothers and sisters not just friends that is you and i are brothers and sisters together in christ because of what jesus death has done for us we belong together as an eternal family of god we're not just a collection of individuals who have nothing to do with each other we are family together and we have responsibility for each other to provoke us to love and good deeds and the first thing by way in which we exercise such love for others is by meeting together on sundays regularly in small groups bible study groups and in other ways during church life during the week and when we slack with that it is usually more often than not a sign of drifting faith well being a christian is not easy in our world doesn't come naturally and that's why these exhortations apply to approach god to hold fast our hope and to provoke one another to love and good deeds in essence the three exhortations are to have faith hope and love to approach with a heart full of faith faith to hold on to our hope and to provoke to love faith in a faithless world like ours is hard work hope in a despairing society like ours does not come naturally and love in such an individualistic culture takes effort

but in view of the panoramic vista of the glorious truths that belong to christians you and i believe is in the lord jesus christ the free and unrestricted access we have to god and the great priest we have over us in the lord jesus christ we are and must surely approach with full faith hope with steadfastness and love each other and all the more so as we see the day approaching as this passage ends at the end of verse 25 because there is an urgency about this we cannot afford to put off to tomorrow or next sunday or next year or a year or two's time doing these things because the day is approaching that is the day when jesus christ returns to judge this world and to take his own back into heavenly presence for eternity there is an urgency about this we cannot afford to be slack we cannot afford to sit back and let our christian brothers and sisters drift away from faith and trust in the blood of jesus for them because jesus is coming back and he's coming back soon though we know not the day we know it is soon and we are to live with that sense of urgency every day that jesus is coming back soon so what measures are you taking to ensure that you are not drifting from christian faith for if you're like me you know plenty of people who began life as christians and have given it up for whatever reason what measures are you taking to be responsible responsible for yourself to ensure that you keep on approaching god with a true heart in full assurance of faith that you keep on holding fast the hope without wavering and that you keep on meeting together and provoking each other to love and good deeds what what are you what measures are you taking to ensure that you are not drifting from those things are you approaching god daily in faith in your prayers in your life lived before him in your confession of sins and so on how are you exercising your hope each day trusting in the promise of god that jesus death has brought you fellowship with him and longing for his return and what are you doing actively to provoke other christians to love and good deeds urging them on urging them on encouraging them on and being encouraged in the process my friends my brothers and sisters in christ we have a marvelous free and unrestricted access into the presence of god by the blood of jesus we have a great priest over us jesus christ who ever lives to intercede for us and who has anchored our hope in heaven for us intercede for us so let us then in the light of these glorious privileges exercise our great responsibilities to approach god with a full a true heart in full assurance of faith let us hold fast our hope without wavering and let us provoke and spur each other on to love and good deeds and all the more as we see the day of christ coming amen