

Hebrews 10:19-22

MW Lent 2, February 21, '24
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Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

When we lived in Florida, there were a number of Major League Baseball spring training complexes not far from where we lived, including the Detroit Tigers who were having their spring training in just the next town over. And one spring morning, I decided to head over there just to see if I could watch them practice. And after I'd arrived and parked, I realized that I had no idea where to go, since the complex was rather expansive. So, I walked into the team store in the stadium to see if anyone could point me in the right direction. And that was surprisingly empty, so I walked into the stadium, at which point a security guard started yelling that I couldn't be in there. So, I quickly left, started walking around the stadium along a sidewalk, when two other security guards stopped me and told me I couldn't walk *there*. I asked them how to get to the back fields, and they told me to go around the parking lot. So, I started doing that, and when I reached a certain part of the parking lot, another security guard yelled at me for walking there! I did eventually reach the practice fields and was able to watch batting practice, but the whole ordeal was kind of embarrassing.

It can be unnerving to be somewhere with security guards, with barricades, where you're unsure of where you're allowed to go, wondering if you might get kicked out. We see that type of thing all the time—roadblocks, barriers, security—and that's fine, those things are good, but they certainly can make you a bit more nervous. Because if you ever find yourself in a place where you're not supposed to be, *that* can be really embarrassing.

That type of barrier existed in the Temple as well. I mentioned it last Wednesday, there was that thick curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. It was there so that you couldn't get in; you were not allowed behind the curtain. And this wasn't just some arbitrary rule, it was a barrier set up for people's good, for their protection. You see, if *just anybody* walked into the Holy of Holies, they would die. That's what God described in Leviticus 16. They would die, *not because they broke the rules*, but because they were sinful people stepping into the presence of a holy God. And if *that* happened, the only possible result would be death.

But this separation, this barrier, it didn't exist *only* in the Temple. It had existed since almost the very beginning. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they created a barrier between mankind and God. God drove them out of paradise, and from that point on they and all their offspring lived in a sinful world. Isaiah described that barrier between man and God in his book, ***"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."*** (Isaiah 59:2) Sinful mankind could no longer *see* God (as Adam and Eve had done in the Garden), for no sinner could see God and live. So, there was now this barrier between man and God, between earth and heaven. And no person dead in their sins could possibly enter and see God.

And so, the temple veil represented this reality, it was a visible sign of this relationship between man and God. There was the section that was barricaded from view; entry was not allowed to just *anyone*, only the High Priest could enter and only at a certain time of year. The previous chapter of Hebrews tells us what took place: ***"The priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual***

duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.” (Hebrews 9:6-7) One time a year, one individual, carrying the blood of offering for his sins and for the people’s sins. Any other time, even if it were the High Priest entering, death was the only result.

And God was serious about this. In Leviticus 10, we can read an account of someone who didn’t take this very seriously. **“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”** (Leviticus 10:1-2) Apparently, they thought that it would be no problem for them to just approach the Lord uninvited, without the proper security clearance, so to speak. But they were wrong! And they paid dearly.

This same barrier due to sin still exists between us and God. It’s not something that we can just ignore and hope for the best, hope to not be kicked out. Later on in this chapter, the author to the Hebrews writes, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:31) So, with this barrier of sin in place, the roadblock to keep us from getting into heaven, our inability to approach God without fear, what are our options?

Let’s turn to the first verse of our text: **“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places…”** Confidence to enter? **Boldness** to approach God, knowing that we don’t belong there—what happened? What’s changed between us and God? Where did the barrier go? We’re told in the previous chapter: **“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”** (Hebrews 9:24) Christ vouches for us. He, the *only one* who has the inherent right to enter heaven—He gets us in. And He stands before the Father as the proof that we belong there too.

He presented, as our text says, **“the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh.”** Through His own sacrifice for sins, offering up His own life instead of ours, He became our access to God. That age old barrier, that veil of sin that separated man from God was torn down by Christ, just as the temple curtain was literally torn in two when Christ died. This was not just coincidence, it was God’s visible sign of the invisible reality. It’s just as Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6)

With Jesus as our way, our access to the Father, we are now *able* to appear before the Father without fear of death, without fear of being turned away as not belonging. Rather, we can have **“confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,”** so **“let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”**

When you look inward and see the filth of sin in your own heart, there’s no way you could ever feel confident or assured or bold when it comes to God and your chances at heaven. So, let’s look away from ourselves, and instead keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who says, **“I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”** (John 14:2-3) This is Jesus’ promise: because of what He has done, you have access to God. You have eternal life already, and you won’t be turned away at the gate. No, rather, by His blood, we have as the final verse says, **“Hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”** Through Christ, we have access to God. So, let’s **“draw near to the Lord with a true heart and in full assurance of faith.”** Amen.