

Series: God's Love Changes Everything
Title: God's love changes our access.
Text: Ephesians 3:1-13

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I have a good friend who attends this church who has a lot of confidence. He's creative and charismatic and a bit of a risk taker. A few years ago he was at a Billy Joel concert and decided he wanted to see if he could use his skills to get special access backstage. He found the door where the band and artists were entering and decided he would get on his cell phone, take out a few sheets of official looking paper, and try to just walk by security. As he approached the door, security of course stopped him, and my friend just started yelling, "Billy Joel has to sign this contract! Billy Joel has to sign this contract!" The security team assumed he was telling the truth, not only did he get backstage, he actually watched the entire concert on the stage, just 20 or 30 feet from Billy Joel. Having special access is cool.

Several years ago, before I was married, I owned a home and had a few roommates. One of those roommates worked for a very well-known college basketball program. My roommate wasn't famous or well known, but he was well connected with many people who were. And it was so fun seeing the connections he had. One time we went to a basketball game together and we didn't even have any tickets. We just showed up and because I was with this guy, they let us in. After the game, we could walk on the court and interact with the players doing TV interviews. They let us into the locker room. This is access that other people would pay thousands of dollars for, and it was just given to us. And I had that access all because I knew a guy who knew a guy. After the players left, the head basketball coach came out and we shook hands. He had actually just finished showering, so after shaking our hands, he changed, right there in front of us. (It's a locker room so that makes sense, but that was far more access than I was hoping for.)

Whether it's first class on a plane, a special table at a restaurant, or knowing someone with influence, having special access is pretty cool. As we continue in our series on Ephesians, here's what we are going to see today: **God's love changes our access**. As we go through the first half of Ephesians 3, we are going to see that God's love for us grants us access that we would have never thought possible. Let's start reading in Ephesians 3:1 **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles**—(Paul is not using this **prisoner** language metaphorically. He is literally in prison, in chains, and he's there because he was so committed to making sure the Gentiles had a chance to hear the gospel.) **2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly**. Here we see Paul use an important word, **mystery**, from the Greek word *mysterion*. In our passage today, Paul is going to use this word four different times. And when Paul says this word, here's what he means: From all eternity, God had a plan. But it wasn't a plan he broadcasted for everyone to know. It was a secret plan that he didn't tell anyone about. Not even the angels. From all eternity God planned to make the world...everyone knew that...but God also had a plan to save the world. No one knew how he was going to do that. The mystery is that God planned to save the world through sacrificial love, through sending his Son to die on a cross, and that through his death, God would set the world on a path toward redemption. No one had any idea how God was going to do it. And given all eternity, no one would have ever guessed it. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 **We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God**

destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. The mystery is that through the cross, through the power of his sacrificial love, he would save the world. And as we talked about last week, not just reconcile sinful people to himself, but reconcile sinful people to one another, and create one new family of faith with people from every nation, every language, every tribe, every tongue, was not God's plan B. It is what he had in mind from the very beginning.

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people (This phrase, "**Less than the least**" in the Greek this literally reads "I am the

"smallest," the "tiniest" of all God's people. Remember, before Paul knew Christ, he killed people who believed in Christ, he didn't understand the mystery at the time. Now he does, and because of his past, he felt more unworthy than everyone on the planet. But he says even though I am so unworthy...) **this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,** (This phrase, **boundless riches**, is such a profound and poetic way of talking about the riches found in Jesus: This phrase can be translated: The unsearchable riches of Christ, the unfathomable riches of Christ, the unexplorable riches of Christ, the inexhaustible, incalculable, infinite riches of Christ. His riches know no limit.) We live in a world where there are people who have a lot of money. Jeff Bezos is worth well over 100 billion dollars. There is a game that someone invented called "**You are Jeff Bezos**" And you get to try to spend all of his money. In this game, you could, for example, look at the over 1.5 million people who call the city of Indianapolis home, and say, "Why don't you guys take a year off work. I'm going to pay your salary-the entire salary of everyone in the city for a year...and he'd still have enough money left over to end homelessness and buy Ford. Not a Ford, but the entire company of Ford. Jeff Bezos has a lot of riches, but eventually they could run out. The riches of Christ are boundless. His riches have no borders, no limits. There are not enough zeros in the world to calculate his worth. They have never taken a sounding and been able to hit the bottom. His riches are infinite.

So Paul was given the grace to preach the boundless riches of Christ...**9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 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 that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**

This is such an incredible passage of Scripture. And as we began today talking about, and as we said earlier, what we see is that **God's love changes our access.** We see that his love gives us access in three specific ways. To begin, **God's love gives us access into his family.** Now we see this in 3:6. Take a look: **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs**

together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. God's love is what allows us who are Gentiles to become a part of his family. And this is an important concept for us to grasp. Oftentimes we work on the assumption that we are all born into God's family. We aren't. The Bible teaches very clearly the doctrines of regeneration and adoption. Regeneration says we have to be born again. Adoption says we have to actually become a part of his family. John 1:12-13 says **To all who received (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God —children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.** It is God's love that takes us from being orphans who are stranded and alone in the world, to being children who are placed in a family and lavished with love. Access to a family is invaluable.

I remember about ten years ago I tried to gain access to Keren's family. We were in our mid-twenties, I had known Keren for about six months at that time. We were friends, but nothing romantic had taken place yet. The more I got to know her the more incredible I realized she was and the more interested I became. So I went to her father and asked if I could have his blessing to take his daughter on a date. Again, we were in our mid-twenties, but I felt like talking to her father was the most respectful way to go about it. He listened to my request very politely and then said, "Definitely not." I was kind of surprised. I was just asking for a date, I thought he was going to give me a thumbs up, but he said, "I don't think my family knows you well enough. You seem to be a good guy, but we've only known you for like six months. Stick around for another year or so, let us get to know your character, see what kind of man you are, and then reevaluate this time next year." How about that for a conversation with a dad?! It's a long story, but it ended up taking me almost five years to win Keren's heart and break into her family, but I eventually made it in!

Do you know the incredible thing about God's love? He gives us access into his family right away! We don't have to earn it. We don't have to prove ourselves. He just accepts us. I have many friends who have adopted children. Adoption is one of the most beautiful, wonderful, gospel-centered decisions anyone could ever make. Some of these families have had to wait more than two years to get their child. Its excruciatingly long. But not with God; we become children in his family the moment we place our faith in Jesus. It's his love that makes that possible.

But it's more than just access into his family. **God's love gives us access into his church.** Now I know some of you are thinking...ahhh...you kind of lost me there. Everyone loves talking about being a part of God's family...but the church, is it really that special to be a part of the church? And the answer is...without a shadow of a doubt, YES! Far more so than most of us realize. Look again at Paul's words: 3:10-11 **God's 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, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.** So often we look at the church and we focus on her blunders and mistakes. And we can be honest and recognize the church had made many mistakes. At times we are divisive and small minded, hypocritical and judgmental. At times our leaders make poor choices that don't reflect the character and goodness of God's. We've even had some leaders that have been outright predatory, who have taken advantage of others and deeply wounded them. And that is heartbreaking beyond words. But whenever you want to evaluate something, you don't evaluate

it based upon its weakest expression, but based upon its best. If someone came to the United States and had never seen a basketball game before, you wouldn't take them to watch first graders who are still learning how to dribble and shooting on six foot goals. You would have them watch the NBA Finals. That's what basketball is about. Evaluate it at its highest level to see what it's about.

And Paul says when you look at the church God created, designed, and invited us into, **the church** actually puts on display the **manifold wisdom of God**. The word manifold means multi-colored, multidimensional, or multifaceted. It's like a little child looking through a kaleidoscope. With every turn you make you see new colors, new shapes, new contours, new beauty. And Paul says that's what looking at the church should be like--we should look at the church and say: "Wow! God is so brilliant. What an incredible idea?!" This is something far greater than anyone could have ever conceived. That's the kind of church we want to be. At Indian Creek Christian church, we want to be the sort of church God can look at the angels and say: "Look! You see, that's what I had in mind for all eternity. That is my wisdom and majesty, my love and power on full display." The rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms can look in and see what God is up to in the world.

That's our goal, and I think we are on our way there. Just a few weeks ago I received an email from a young man after his first week visiting our church for the first time. This is what he said, "First off, it was great attending The Creek last Sunday. Both my friend and I were amazed at the feeling of welcomeness that we received. We both agreed that it felt great to come to a church that was growing, rather than dying. I wanted you to know that we were very impressed, not by the building, the worship, or even your message (all of which were great, by the way) but with the way your church made us feel. We were greeted at the door, you as the pastor made a personal connection with us after service, people all throughout the building said hi to us. I am absolutely amazed that the church has that type of community given its size. My last church of 170 people wouldn't begin to know how to create that culture." He concluded by saying, "I believe when you find something someone is doing well, it makes all the difference to go out of your way to acknowledge it. My friend and I are excited to come back to church next Sunday. I believe this is the first time I can ever remember saying those words."

That's the church, in a very small way, revealing the manifold wisdom of God. When someone shows up for the first time and says: I felt welcomed. I felt valued, and I can't wait to come back. Tony Merida says: **"There is more going on with the church than meets the eye. If you are part of the church, then you are part of a cosmic sermon that is being preached to spiritual rulers and authorities."** It's so common these days to bash the church, but Paul speaks about the beauty of the church. The church will always make mistakes because it is filled with imperfect people who make mistakes, but never lose sight of God's plan for the church. In Acts 20:28 Paul admonishes leaders of the church to, **"Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."** In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, **"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** Every once in a while, I meet someone who says they are a sincere Christian, but they are not that interested in church. They love Jesus, they'll say, but not the church. Jesus didn't give us that option?!..You can't be committed to him and not committed to his bride. You can't be committed to him but not committed to his body. You can't be committed to him but not committed to his people. Biblically speaking, it doesn't

work that way. I know I may be a bit biased here because of my role in the church. But I am not just saying this as a pastor who leads a church, I am saying this as a student of the Bible who reads God word: Your level of commitment to the church should mirror God's level of commitment to the church. If you believe in Jesus and want to live like Jesus, what did Jesus do with regard to the church? Jesus loved the church! Jesus laid his life down for the church! The church is Jesus' plan for the salvation of the world!

So whatever church you are a part of, for many of you The Creek is your church home, but we have guests here and we have a lot of people who listen in online from other churches. Whatever church you are a part of, don't just be someone who attends when it's convenient. Church should actually be the priority we build our weekends around. We shouldn't just attend; we should find active ways to get involved and build community. We should be excited about finding ways to serve and ways to give. I was having a conversation a while back with someone who does not attend this church. He was asking for my opinion on him not giving to his church and instead giving all of his tithe to a friend of his who is a missionary. And I said, "Giving to a missionary is a good thing. But always begin by giving to your church. Take 10%, give it to your church family-that's the place you call home, the place you gather for fellowship, the place that preaches the Word over you and leads you in worship, the place providing spiritual authority for you. Give to your church. And then support your missionary friends over and above your normal giving."

I want to be very clear: you aren't going to find a verse in the Bible that says: You have to go to church every single week, and you have to get plugged in, and you have to serve, and you have to give 10%. That verse doesn't exist. But all throughout the Bible the importance of the church is paramount. The church is central to God's plan for the world and his plan for people. Jesus died to save the church. Everything else will pass away...but the gates of Hades will not overcome the church. And our level of commitment to the church should mirror his.

God's love gives us access into his family, into his church, and there is one more thing. **God's love gives us access into his presence.** We all know how hard access is to get to certain people. A few years ago I saw LeBron James out in public. He had about six security guards with him to keep people out of his personal space. A friend of mine was at a gathering several years ago where the President of the United States was speaking. It was a smaller group of people. Anyone who wanted to get a picture with the President was invited to do so as long as they made a \$15,000 contribution to the campaign. It's hard to gain access to certain people! But look at what Paul says in 3:12 **In Christ and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.** How incredible is that?! Not just access to his presence, but access with **freedom** and **confidence**. It's not like we can only come into his presence on rare occasions. No! Complete freedom. And we don't have to come in with our tails between our legs, overcome with fear and timidity. We come boldly, knowing that as eager as we are to meet with God, he is all the more eager to meet with us! Look at what Jesus says in Revelation 3:20: **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.** Do you see that? How incredible is that? It's not just us knocking on the door or beating down the door, desiring access to God's presence. He actually comes and knocks on the door of our heart; he wants access to us! Unbelievably intimacy with the God who formed the galaxies!

The thing I've found about intimacy with God is that it takes time. Just like everything else in life that is worthwhile, it takes an investment on our part. People don't become a medical doctor in one semester. Nobody wants a surgeon who only had a few weeks of training operating on them. It takes time. Did you see this social experiment on Twitter from last Thanksgiving? A whole bunch of millennials and Gen Z people sent texts to their parents and asked this question, **"How long does it take to cook a 25 pound turkey in the microwave?"** Then they would post their parents' response online. One mom said: **"Have I taught you nothing? I feel like a complete failure."** Another mom said: **"Order a pizza...and study harder at school."** One mom got really into it...let me show you their exchange:

-Mom: "Do not put the turkey in the microwave. It can only be cooked in the oven."

-Daughter: "I'm going to do it for 20 minutes."

-Mom: "I SAID DO NOT PUT THE TURKEY IN THE MICROWAVE"

-Daughter: "OK, only 12 minutes???"

-MOM: "DO NOT PUT THE TURKEY IN THE MICROWAVE...I'M CALLING THE POLICE."

I love how nurturing moms can be. Listen to how one dad responded: **Wrap it in tin foil. Then put it on high heat for 30 minutes.** We know that there are certain things in life we can't rush. And the same is true in our spiritual life. We cannot rush intimacy with God. But here's what we can do. With freedom and confidence we can enter into his presence. And just like with any relationship, it's spending time in his presence that deepens our connection with him.

All of this is made possible because of God's love! His love made a way for us to enter into his family, into his church, and into his presence. If I gave you a key, and said this key gets you into my house. Whether I'm home or not, pop on by. You might say thanks, and put it on your keyring. You now have access, total access to my house. But it's only going to matter if you use it! God's love has given you a key. Let's put that key to use!