

Hebrews 4:14-16

Jesus Christ Our Great High Priest

The most powerful weapon in the whole universe is the Word of God.

Like a sharp double edged sword it penetrates and cuts to the innermost center of the human personality. Nothing is hidden in the human heart that is not revealed by the Word. Nothing is left unexposed to its penetrating light. Everything is open and laid bare to the eyes of the Lord God. It exposes our depravity and the root of our sin nature (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Has the Word of God pierced you? Has it penetrated into your innermost being? Has it exposed your wicked heart? No word of man can do that. The same word that brings conviction also bring promises of God's great provision. The Word of God assures the believer that none of those who are really saved shall miss the perfect and eternal rest that God has provided for us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior and Great High Priest is the supreme motive for holding fast to our profession of faith in Him.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16, NASB95). [All Scriptures unless otherwise noted are from New American Standard Bible NASB95].

The only person in the Bible who was ever called a "great high priest" was Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus Christ as our High Priest is the most distinctive theme in Hebrews. The priesthood of Jesus is central to the theology of Hebrews. Everything that is discussed in this letter is developed around the theme of Jesus as High Priest. The central theme will be developed in chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10. In chapters one through six the author is laying the foundation for that presentation. Because Jesus is our representative in heaven before the throne of God we must hold fast our confession.

We have a Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14)

The emphasis in Hebrews 4:14 is on the word "great." In the person of Jesus Christ we have a "great High Priest." He is of par excellence. He is unique in that He is *megas* literally "great priest." It speaks of supreme dignity, excellency and all sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He is the greatest of all priests, no one can be lifted to comparison with His greatness. The author of Hebrews is declaring that Jesus Christ is greater than Aaron and the levitical high priests because He is not the one who entered the Holy of Holies only once a year and sprinkled blood to atone for his own sins and then those of the people. Jesus is superior to all other priests.

Earlier in his letter the writer of Hebrews told us that Jesus is our High Priest. "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). And in 3:1 he wrote, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Hebrews 3:1). It is almost like 3:7-4:13 is a parentheses that takes us back to 3:1 which has introduced us to the priesthood of Jesus.

What makes Him so great is that He is the Son of God, appointed to be the High Priest, who has made propitiation for our sins and passed through the heavens and is interceding on our behalf at the throne of God. As our Great High Priest nothing can hinder Him in accomplishing His eternal purpose on our behalf. What a great God and Savior! Our great High Priest is the Son of God.

Our High Priest is infinitely great in His person and office. He has dignity and glory because He is the Son of God. He is without sin, separated to God the Father. Moreover, he is of the order of Melchizedek--He is High Priest and the Messiah. He was ordained a High Priest by an oath of God Himself. His sacrificial offering was without spot and blemish. He knew no sin. His covenant, His administration, and His sacrifice are perfect. It never has to be repeated. It was once and for all. This cannot be said of any man. The divine justice of God has been perfectly satisfied by Jesus Christ. His is an eternal perpetual office of priesthood. We can now come boldly before His throne of grace anytime, anywhere, and in any situation.

Jesus is in heaven.

It is helpful to keep in mind the Jewish High Priest passed from the altar through the outer court and the Holy Place behind the dividing veil into the Holy of Holies only on the Day of Atonement. He was a shadow of the coming day when our Great High Priest by means of His ascension passed through the heavenly places to the actual throne room of God. Jesus is accomplishing only what Aaron and other levitical priests could shadow in a symbolic manner. Our High Priest passed through the created heavens into the presence of God.

The writer of Hebrews tells us literally, Jesus has "passed through the heavens." Jesus has gone into the very presence of God. The Jewish people used the word "heaven" often to avoid speaking directly of God. The plural "heavens" probably does not have any special meaning here. The idea is Jesus is in heaven at the throne of God interceding for us right now. The gospel writer Luke recorded for us this great historical event in Acts 1:9. "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Jesus transcended all the limits of time and space. How majestic is His greatness. "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). Jesus has entered where God is. "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26).

This was the promise of Jesus the night before His crucifixion. He said to His disciples: "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). In the words of the writer of Hebrews He is providing us an eternal rest.

Jesus the Son of God

Our great High Priest is further identified with both His title Son of God and His incarnate human name Jesus. This High Priest is Jesus, who is the Son of God. This is Jesus who was born in a manger, died on the Roman cross, and rose bodily from the dead. It emphasizes His ministry, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. He is the son of Mary and the Son of God. No, God did not have sex with the virgin Mary to produce Jesus as some modern cults teach. Jesus is God incarnate, truly man and truly God. He is the God-man. Therefore, He can identify with God and with man. No one else could possibly provide reconciliation between a holy God and radically depraved man. This is why we need a great High Priest.

"The wages of sin is death." Jesus went to the cross and paid in full our sin debt to the righteousness of God. Only someone without sin who is one with man could accomplish that for us. He became our representative and died in our place as our substitute sin offering. He took our place on the cross. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6, 8).

The writer of Hebrews stresses that it is Jesus who has passed through the heavens and seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

Let us Hold Fast our Confession (Heb. 4:14-15)

The writer has already told us to "consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1).

We are to do this without wavering until the end (v. 14). Moreover, the writer encourages his readers saying, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:23-24). Why in the world would we ever want to throw away that confidence in Him?

Our Christian life begins with faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and confession with the mouth. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). We have believed with the heart and confessed with our lips. It is both inward belief in God's provision through Christ, and outward profession before men. With the heart you believe and are justified. With the mouth you confess and are saved.

Jesus can sympathize with our weakness.

Our great High Priest can identify and empathize with us in our needs. He is not off in some remote distant space, but is ever present with us. "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age," He promised us.

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). The writer's conviction is so strong he uses a double negative in the original to stress completely the sympathy of Jesus to our weaknesses. "We do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize."

He is man, as well as God. He is highly exalted, yet He can descended to our level.

Not only is Jesus faithful as High Priest, He is also merciful.

It is true that Jesus did not have a sinful nature, but that does not mean He was not tempted to sin. He endured every temptation successfully.

Jesus has been tempted in all things.

Jesus whole life on earth was lived under assault of Satan. We can never understand the intensity of temptation thrown at Him by Satan (Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-11; 16:16-23; 27:40-46). We are incapable of grasping the profound level of temptation against Him because of our depravity.

As an incarnate man Jesus under went the same things we endure, but in a more intense manner. Because human depravity has so affected our mind, will, desires we can never grasp the profound depths of His temptations. He faced temptation as the sinless Son of God in a manner in which we can never grasp.

A. W. Pink observed, "He was tempted as we are, yet without sin. Sin may be considered as to its principle, and as to its effect. Men are tempted to sin by sin, to actual sin by habitual sin, to outward sin, by indwelling sin." But Jesus was not liable to such temptations unto sin from within as we are. Jesus was tempted from without.

The writer of Hebrews places one of the greatest emphasis on the deity of Christ in the New Testament, but he also stresses the real humanity of Jesus. He points out the limitations of Jesus' human frailty.

Yet without sin

Jesus endured every temptation "yet without sin." He never experienced personal sin. This is the only thing that separates Jesus from us in the matter of temptations. He did not sin. He was and is sinless. Jesus was genuinely tempted, yet without sin.

John Owen said, "He was absolutely in all things 'without sin'; He neither was tempted by sin, such was the holiness of His nature; nor did His temptation produce sin, such was the perfection of His obedience." The Son of God who could not sin, yet He was tempted just as we are.

Jesus was tempted, yet He sinned not.

Had Jesus yielded to just one sin He would have been in the need of a Savior. As a sinner it would have been impossible for Him to make atonement for other sinners. Like the levitical priests in the Old Testament He would have had to first make an atonement for Himself and then for the sins of the people. However, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). He did not need to offer up a sacrifice for Himself because He was "without sin." He was the sinless Savior. He was uniquely qualified to offer up a sacrifice "once for all when He offered up Himself."

If Jesus was not without sin, we would still be in our sins.

Jesus is the "guarantee of a better covenant" because He was sinless. He is the "Son, made perfect forever" (Heb. 7:28).

Jesus is the Lamb of God that lifts up and take away our sins (John 1:29). We have been "redeemed . . . with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Later Peter adds, "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). This is consistent with the message in Isaiah 53:9, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth" (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus confronted religious leaders with the question, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?" (John 8:46) No one responded. They had no evidence that He was a sinner. The apostle Paul

stated probably the key verse to the whole Bible in 2 Corinthians 5:21. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Draw near to God with confidence (Heb. 4:16).

The moment Jesus died He tore open the veil that separated us from entrance into presence of a holy God. We have access into the presence of a holy God based upon the perfect atoning sacrifice Jesus made upon the cross. "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Hebrews 10:19-20). Christ made full expiation for our sin through His blood.

The Day of Atonement was a shadow of the real provision God would make to cover our sins. The Jewish high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies only one day of the year and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat after making a sacrifice of his own sins. However, based upon that perfect sacrifice of Jesus for our sin, the believing sinner can now have free access to enter into the presence of God.

Every believer, young, old, weak, immature, ignorant, have now "in Christ Jesus . . . been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). Freedom of access to the very throne of the LORD God is now the right and blessing of every believer in Christ.

Throne of grace

It is the majestic throne of God's sovereign grace. What a glorious privilege for the child of God.

God's throne of grace is His mercy seat. He gives us the boldness to enter into His presence.

Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense for all those who did not deserve it. The author of Hebrews is asking how can we withdraw in cowardice, impatience, faintheartedness when we have such a great High Priest who is our righteousness and strength?

Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our Melchizedek. Jesus is our peace. Jesus is our life. How can we possibly neglect so great salvation?

Our great High Priest watches over us, prays for us, holds us fast, brings us into the presence of God. He bears us on His loving heart. Therefore, we come boldly to the throne of grace. It is only in the person of Jesus Christ that we draw near to God the Father. "The throne of majesty and righteousness is to us a throne of grace. The Lord is our God. There is not merely grace on the throne, but the throne is altogether the throne of grace. It is grace which disciplines us by the sharp and piercing Word, it is grace which looks on us when we have denied Him, and makes us weep bitterly. Jesus always intercedes: the throne is always a throne of grace. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne. Hence we come boldly," observed Adolph Saphir the great Hebrew Christian.

Receive mercy

God relieves us of our miseries. The word "mercy" stresses our weakness. We can come to Him for timely help before it is too late. Jesus is filled with compassion because He is the great High Priest. He is always ready to empathize and treat us with mercy. He was tempted. He suffered. Therefore He knows us intimately. We can therefore, come to Him expecting full, tender, deep sympathy and compassion. He is every ready to comfort, forgive and give us His divine strength. He comes in mercy to restore to us fellowship with God.

Thank God He does not give us what we deserve. We each deserve an eternal hell, but God in grace and mercy gives us eternal life if we will call upon Him. He invites us poor and need to come as we are in our depravity and trust His saving grace to cleanse us, forgive us and save us for all eternity.

"Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:16).

We have in Christ "both pitying mercy and pardoning grace."

Find grace in time of need

Like the apostle Paul, Jesus says to us, "My grace is sufficient for you." The only qualification is be in spiritual need. Only depraved sinners qualify for God's grace. Self-righteous persons never qualify in God's eyes.

God's timing is always perfect. He comes to us in our times of weakness, temptations, and sin and gives us forgiveness, cleansing and power to overcome sin.

Through Christ we have open to us "access" in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18). "Access" (*prosagoge*) is "a leading or bringing into the presence of" through the assistance of another. We have an entrée by means of the Holy Spirit into the presence of God the Father. By faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ we have access into the throne of grace of God. We have this access in one Spirit through Christ to God the Father. We have this access to God "in Christ." The word was used for introducing a person into the presence of a sovereign. It was also used for the dock where a ship harbors, or haven. We have the perfect haven of God's grace.

The Word of God is penetratingly clear: we are sinners. We are in the need of God's saving and sustaining grace. We are the ones who have disobeyed Him.

The Bible also tells us that Christ is the great High Priest. He is ever ready to intercede on our behalf. We do not have to go to anyone else. He stands ready to listen to our guilty plea and cleanse and forgive us of our sins.

The only sacrifice that will cover our sins is the all sufficient death of Christ. Jesus paid our debt to the righteousness of God. Nothing else will do.

When we come in faith as sinners He reconciles us to God. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. God the Father declares us just in His sight based on the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. "Saved by grace" will be our theme through out eternity.

The application to the believer is that Jesus is ready to help us in every time of need. We need His mercy. God in His mercy causes all thing to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Rom. 8:28). There are no exceptions. Hard times, difficult experiences, pressures in life come our way that we may draw near to Him and call upon Him receive strength and glorify His name.

There is hope for us today because we have full assurance and confidence that we are always accepted before God in the person of our Great High Priest who is His Son. "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Therefore, the writer of Hebrews admonishes us to constantly be coming to the throne of grace. Let it become a habit to come to Him.

Listen to these promises: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).

These passages of Scripture remind us the help in time of need is available every moment in our daily life. We are without excuse. God has made the great provision for the lost sinner as well as the believer. Whenever and whatever the need may be God's grace is all-sufficient and is ever available.

Our great High Priest offered the supreme sacrifice for our sins on the cross, and as a merciful and faithful High Priest He invites us sinners to come to His throne of grace.

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