

## Jesus Our High Priest

Hebrews 4:14-16

How many of us have seen the movies where the owner brings in his son to be the boss. You know the little whiny brat kid, who never worked a day in his life, yet right after he gets out of college his Daddy gives him a big corner office and puts him in charge of all the worker bees, who have been there for years and are the backbone of the company. When the workers attempt to talk with this guy about concerns they have on the job he doesn't have clue one what they are talking about or what on earth it means to function in real life from paycheck to paycheck. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and gifted a cushy management job upon graduation from college, which may or may not have taken him 5-7 years.

I think we can all agree whether we have experienced a boss like this or not, this would be pretty awful working conditions and you would experience a chasm of space between you and management and feel very little to no support in accomplishing your work. Well, today we are going to look at who God the Father has given us as a "boss"; IE high priest. And praise be to God that He has not sent a son like the one I just described. So, if you turn with me to Hebrews 4:14 we are going to be looking at verses 14-16 today. If you don't happen to have a Bible with you today, our passage can be found on page 1003 in the pew Bible in front of you. Even though we will be looking at 3 short verses today they are packed full of truth and in fact the author of Hebrews spends the next 6 chapters of his letter expounding on the idea of Jesus as our High Priest. Look now with me at verse 14, as I will be reading from the ESV:

**Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.**

The first word we see is 'since', which usually signifies these next thoughts flow from the discussion before. So, we should take a brief moment to set the passage in its proper context. In chapters 3 and for the most of 4 the author has been considering the negative example of the Israelites in the wilderness and how they never found rest in God. Because of their unbelief despite the miracles God had worked for them. With that verse 13 of chapter 4 describes a pretty bleak and stark picture of us before God. Look at it with me now.

**And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.**

Uplifting isn't it. I mean 2 chapters about how the Israelites were presented with every opportunity possible to exercise faith in God, the same God who brought them through the locusts, the water into blood, the frogs, death of the first born, then took and split the Red Sea and then brought it crashing in on what was the most powerful army in the world at that time, and yet they still grumbled and complained. The author must have been thinking my readers could easily be thinking they are much better than the wilderness people, let's bring them back to reality. And boom here is reality, we are all lying barren and totally exposed to God, all of our deeds and inner thoughts are there for Him to see and we must give an account. But thankfully he did not stop there he went on from this picture to bring us

to our passage today and what our hope and encouragement is. Now if you stay with me I promise as we walk through this passage today the bleakness of verse 13 will only magnify the encouragement to be found in verses 14-16, and show Christ's great work that we benefit from.

As we examine this epilogue for the next 6 chapters of Hebrews this morning, the author introduces us to the theme of Jesus as High Priest providing for us a summary of powerful truth. We are going to unpack all of this by looking at 2 questions the passage answers for us. The first of those questions is:

### 1. What is our High Priest like?

The first word used to describe Him is '**great**'. That is He is par excellence, he is superior to all other high priests. This, points to the uniqueness Jesus has as our high priest. Later in chapter 5 the author tells us Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. While the lines of priests of Aaron were priests solely based upon birthright, the order of Melchizedek were different it was based upon the character of the priest, IE who the priest was. As the author later goes into detail later in chapter 7, Jesus was priest based on His perfect life, thus making him great and superior.

So, while we started this morning talking about the owner's son as a boss, let's take a moment here and provide a little more clarification on exactly what the function of the high priest is. The high priest acted on behalf of the Israelites before God the Father. He was their liaison between them and God, once a year on the Day of Atonement he would go into the Holy of Holies and offer sacrifices for the people and himself. However, as we know he was also human and weak and as such was imperfect and merely a shadow of what our author is pointing to know in Jesus as the Great High Priest. Since our sin separates us from God, in the days before Christ it was the Day of Atonement that provided the people the access to God, by providing atonement for those sins.

This brings us to the second thing we see about our High Priest, namely He has "**passed through the heavens.**" Now this may seem like an odd phrasing for us on first glance, like is the author referring to different levels of heavens, or different heavens here, but I think that may be missing the point the author is calling us too. Instead I believe he is focusing on the exalted position of our High Priest, that is He has been in the heavens, He has a seat there, in fact it is on the right of His Father. We just mentioned the High Priest provided access to God by offering the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Jesus functioned as our High Priest by not only offering the sacrifice but being that perfect sacrifice Himself. And while the high priest had to have a rope tied around his waist in case he was unclean and God struck him dead while in the Holy of Holies, Jesus has gone in with into the heavens far beyond the Holy of Holies to the very throne room of God, and provides us with unmitigated access to God the Father!

I think we lose the significance of this picture here as we are so far removed from the temple and sacrificial system. There were many levels to move through the temple and as you moved deeper in the amount of people granted access grew smaller and smaller until you got to the Holy of Holies, where there, you only had 1 person granted the privilege of going and then only once a year. Instead now what we have is a High Priest who has moved through the temple, "passed through the heavens" and has gone to the inner sanctuary and is now dwelling with God the Father to act on our behalf. Not only that, but as Matthew tells us in Matthew 27:51 the veil that covered the access to the Holy of Holies has been torn. Jesus' death and resurrection has provided us clear access to the heavenly throne room, more on what that should compel us to do in our second question this morning.

Next, we see whom our High Priest belongs too. Namely He is "**Jesus, Son of God.**" That's right He is none other than the Son of God. He is both fully human and fully God. The author here is again calling

into focus Jesus' exalted position and calling us to look and ponder His nature as God, while at the same time beginning to foreshadow his next description of our High Priest. The author has previously taken the time to describe to his readers what it meant for Jesus to be Son of God, look back with me at chapter 1 verses 5-12.

**For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son today I have begotten you? Or again I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son? And again when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels he says, He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire. But of the Son he says, Your throne O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of your uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. And You Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same and your years will have no end.**

Wow, what an exalted position and majesty is His as the Son of God. Here is what the readers had just been walked through regarding what Jesus Sonship meant. So, as we think about the description of the High Priest so far, He is described as Great, as passing through the heavens and He is the very Son of God, the author anticipates what is the natural question, that is How can this high priest possibly relate to us? I mean isn't He like the boss's son we talked about first with the silver spoon and not knowing the day to day struggles the worker bee goes through each day? Well, hold on the author is about to flip the script and answer that question/objection emphatically.

**"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness."** The author is answering our objection before we are ever able to raise it and doing it by using a double negative which calls attention to what everyone may be thinking at this point, namely how can this exalted God Priest relate to us. Well the answer is simply in Jesus incarnation and specifically in His temptations while he was here on earth. The author speaking of Jesus goes on to say "but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Let's take some moments to break this loaded phrase down.

First, the double negative of course cancels itself meaning that Jesus is fully capable of sympathizing with our weakness. The idea conveyed here with sympathize is not what we might think of as sympathy when we look at someone who may be homeless, or gone through a tragic accident but rather the idea being conveyed is like that of a mother's feeling for her children. You know the kind of deep sympathy that moves someone, the idea of suffering along with someone. So, what is the subject of this sympathy? That would be our weakness, and specifically we should think of our moral weakness, IE our tendency towards sin. This seems to fit the best with the context given that the author emphasizes the temptations in the next clause and the fact the Jesus was without sin. Also as he moves onto greater detail in chapter 5 the moral weakness of the high priests before Jesus is brought into the discussion.

So, what is it that qualifies Jesus to be able to sympathize with our moral weakness in this manner? Well he has been tempted in every way as we are. The author here is obviously bringing to mind the full humanity of Jesus. Now while here on earth Christ did not exhaust all of the unique specific temptations that Satan has in his bag of tricks. I mean for one thing Jesus was around thousands of years before this whole internet thing. However, as Jesus was fully man he was tempted in every aspect that we are. That is to say while temptations that we face each day are unique to us and the cultural we live in, the sinful desires Satan is preying on are no different than they were 2000 years ago when Christ walked this

earth. While we may find new manners of sin, there is no new sin under the sun. Hence our author knows the great encouragement found in Jesus here is that He has been tempted in every avenue of sin, pride, lust, tempted to give up His faith, etc. Yet he did not sin, which is wonderful for us as He was then able to be the final sacrifice and eliminate our slavery to sin once and for all. And let's think about one of those temptation moments Christ had in His earthly ministry so, we can see that simply because He did not sin, did not diminish the temptations in any way. Also as quick note let's not limit ourselves to the single temptation of Jesus account in the Gospels. Rather I am thinking of when Christ was laboriously praying away in the Garden of Gethsemane with His inner circle who fell asleep. He was praying fervently until he sweat drops of blood. What was it he was praying? He was praying for God the Father to let this cup (the cross) pass Him by. The temptation is the fact He was God, the God who spoke the world into existence, with a single word He could have brought down a whirlwind of destruction on all, I mean lets face it the 3 guys closest to him, His accountability guys if you will fell asleep on Him more than once that night. They only woke up to the mob coming to arrest Him. But yet, Jesus was like a Lamb before his shearers. Why because He knew He was here to do the will of the Father, so despite the temptation to save Himself anguish and agonizing death, he resisted and obeyed.

So, what is our High Priest like, well He is Great, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father interceding for us, He was fully God and fully human the latter making Him uniquely qualified to sympathize with us, to know what it is to be down in the trench against Satan and sin, because He was firsthand there, and came out victorious. So, then what should our response be?

### **How should we approach this High Priest?**

Let's quickly hop back up to the phrase in verse 14 we so briefly touched on earlier that is "let us hold fast to our confession." What is our confession and why is it so important? Simply our confession is the Jesus was truly the Son of God that He was who He said He was, and He accomplished our salvation by dying on the cross for our sins and raising again that we may also have newness of life. And why is this important, well without holding fast to this confession you are not recognizing Jesus as your High Priest, and therefore you are unable to come to Him to enjoy the benefits of His High Priest role. It is not until you confess and cling to that confession, that exercising of faith in Christ that you are able to follow the exhortations of verse 16. This holding fast to the confession is in direct contrast with the example of the Israelites provided in the preceding verses to our passage today. They failed to enter rest because they did not hold fast to their confession of the one true God. So, let's keep the first things first and hold fast to our faith.

With this faith then, we need to **draw near to the throne of grace**. Now this drawing near doesn't not to be done timidly but with confidence. I am deathly afraid of heights, if you need any confirmation on that just ask Nik, he will glad to fill you in. But I bring that up because far too often I think when we fail or when we are being tempted from every side in our weakness we approach Jesus and His throne like I approach the edge of the roof. We approach it crawling and gingerly like one little false step and we will topple over to our death. When the reality is Jesus knows exactly where we are, He knows our deepest inner thoughts He knows what we are feeling in our weakness He is more qualified than any to know that. The throne brings up again the image of authority and rule, we have someone in the inner sanctuary on our side.

The author is exhorting us to come to Jesus, to come with confidence that He will help us. Romans 8 is a beautiful picture of our status before the throne, 8:1 says therefore there is now no condemnation, and Romans 8:15 reminds us we have not been given a spirit of fear but rather a spirit of adoption whereby we cry out Abba Father! Do we cry out to God? Do we approach the throne of grace in confidence?

Now a quick note here for us strong willed pull ourselves up by our boot straps American's, the author has mentioned in time of need. So, that does require that we admit our need and I don't know about you but I certainly need Jesus in the areas of temptation and weakness, unlike our Savior, I am fully capable of falling to temptation. So, this confidence we have as we approach the throne, is not in ourselves but rather the one sitting on the throne and His promises to provide mercy and grace to us. That is are we approaching with the expectation of receiving grace and mercy? That is exactly what our author tells us we will receive.

Look back at verse 16 with me will you. The result of us approaching the throne of grace with confidence is we will be the recipients of **"mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."**

As we approach the throne we find mercy, that is we find compassion and forgiveness, we do not find the condemnation we deserve we find a loving Savior opening His arms to us and looking at His Father and pointing back on the cross saying I paid it, I paid their penalty, your wrath has been satisfied. And not only that, but we also find grace, that is unmerited favor. So, in the one view we see Jesus pointing back to the cross where you provided mercy and then the other hand is pointing back to His perfect life going yes Father see my righteousness, that righteous life I lived yes I imputed that to them, they are Your Children now.

This is the person we are to have confidence in as we approach the throne this is our High Priest, the one who uniquely understands our struggle and sits on His throne ready willing and able to dispense mercy and grace in the time of need. When we most need it He is there. Since it is our Great High Priest who is the one dispensing this mercy and grace He is sovereign overall and thus He knows exactly when that time of need is and will dispense what is need in that moment. What manner do we approach the throne, do we act like I do on the roof all timid and ashamed or do we cry out with confidence in Jesus, Abba Father?

As we close today and ponder on Jesus our Great High Priest, I think I will allow the author of Hebrews to summarize his own points, as he closes out the section on Jesus as High Priest with a parallel passage to the one we dived into today. That is Hebrews 10:19-23:

**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way the he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**