
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Celebrated High Priest

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 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. 15 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. 16 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.

How many of you enjoy banquets – those “all-you-can-eat” buffets loaded with nearly every variety of food? Why do we enjoy such “banquets” and feasts? Is it not because we find pleasure in sampling the many different flavors? In Psalm 34:8 we read,

“Oh taste and see that the LORD is good...”

We know that the LORD is gloriously infinite. His attributes are plentiful and His works are many. His ways are truly past finding out, but there is nothing stopping us from coming to learn or “taste” all that we can of God in the here and now. And yet sadly, many come to God only to see who He is and what He is like. There are many who come to the banquet as it were, seeing all the exquisite delicacies, and yet never taking a plate up to sample the goodness of God, failing to heed the call, ***“Oh taste and see that the LORD is good...”***

As we come now to Hebrews 4:14-16, we are presented with a type of banquet, a picture of the wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ. After a rather lengthy warning concerning how disobedience to the Word of God results in a failure to truly enter into the rest of God, the author of Hebrews now presents us with the marvelous person of Christ, so that we might partake of Him, that we might “taste and see” that He alone is good.

Many of the first readers of this text were those who had seen a lot concerning Christ, but, having never tasted Him, and facing struggles and doubts, were positioning themselves to abandon the faith, to leave Christ and His people, the Church, in order to go back to some more familiar, more seemingly satisfying way of life, yet a way of life that would, as the author already has mentioned previously in Hebrews 4, disqualify them from ever entering into God’s rest.

What were the problems faced by these first readers? Some here may not really care, that is until I tell you that the problems they were facing are not at all unlike problems we ourselves face. To be sure, I believe many of these first readers came to their struggles through often more intense circumstances than we do, but ultimately the issues they faced are just like our own. They had a time in which a sense of hopelessness in living for Christ filled their soul.

Beloved, do we not sometimes find ourselves in this very predicament? Life has been busy – life has been hard – life has not been fair – we have made some poor decisions that have affected us emotionally, mentally and even spiritually and, although we may know or “see” better with our heads, in our hearts we are having a hard time tasting the LORD as good. In such times our hearts and our heads may fill with doubts and fears of disbelief. We may question why we do what we do and even the validity of our walk with God. Things are just not

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shaping up as we thought they should, or as we would like – disappointment, discouragement and failure seems to be our lot. In this thing called “a walk with Christ,” it seems our sins are magnified rather than rectified and so the idea of following Christ just so I can be disappointed again, either with myself or with the outcome of such efforts, seems pointless.

Have you found yourself in such dismal times of brokenness? Again, the first readers of Hebrews 4:14-16 certainly had occasion for such as well. And so, we come to a passage that seeks to lift up the heart and spirit of such individuals, reminding them of the absolute superiority of Christ. Jesus is bigger than their problems. Jesus is greater than their trials and difficulties. Jesus is able and has provided comfort and peace to all those who will “**taste and see**” the He is good. We have before in these verses three descriptions of who Jesus is that is meant to remind us not only of His supremacy, but also then of giving us an other answer to the question implied earlier in this chapter, the question being, “How can one protect himself from disobedience and failing to enter God’s rest?” The first answer to that question was found in verses 12-13, that we are to know the nature of both God’s Word and God Himself, that His Word is an agent of change, begging the question, “Is the Word of God impacting your life, changing your heart, your attitudes and actions - - knowing that God is not blind to either our troubles or our lives and knows everything about us?” Such a thought is to bring us comfort as we know our lives our in His hands.

But in addition to knowing God and His Word as means of protection against disobedience, we are now given a third means of staying off disbelief, and that is by keeping a strong profession of Christ – or as Hebrews 4:14 puts it, “**let us hold fast our confession.**” The question is, “what is this confession?” I wish to answer that question more fully and will do so momentarily, but let us delve into this text by understanding that this confession is a confession, a proclamation of faith, that is, what we believe concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. I submit to you then three declarations that are to be understood and confessed by the believer if he or she is to have victory over disbelief and disobedience. We will consider them one by one, the first this week and the other two after Christmas.

I. We have a great high priest (Hebrews 4:14)

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.

We begin with the authors own words, “**since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens...**” These words remind us of an often neglected topic when it comes to speaking of Christ and that is concerning what we call His ascension into heaven. In the book of Acts, chapter 1, we have an accounting of this event. It is after the resurrection, and Jesus has spent some time with the disciples, revealing Himself and continuing to prepare them for the great ministry He had for them to be accomplished by the power of the soon to be sent Holy Spirit. After answering some questions the disciples had concerning the timing and coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus promises them the Holy Spirit and commissions them to bear witness or give confession of His redeeming work. Now read with me in Acts 1:9-11:

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. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky

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while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Why were the disciples “gazing intently into the sky”? They were expecting to see Him come back rather quickly. And while the angels confirmed that Jesus would return in manner like that in which He left, the implication here is that it would be some time, at least enough time for which the promised Holy Spirit would come and empower them to fulfill His charge to **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15)**. But the point is, the disciples watched Jesus ascend into the heavens, returning to the presence of His Father, the Most Holy God.

Now, I have chosen the words “presence” and “most holy” God purposely. For the author of Hebrews is presenting Christ to us now as “the great high priest” meaning that Jesus is unlike any other high priest yet known. Remember that once a year, according to the Law of Moses, the high priest, after making sacrifices for his own sin, would then make a sacrifice for the sins of all the people, slaughtering an animal and collecting its blood so as to sprinkle it on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. And where was the ark of the covenant? It was in the temple, in a place called “The Holy of Holies” or the most holy place. No one but the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies, which meant to stand in the very presence of God, except on the Day of Atonement and even then it was only long enough to perform his duty, offer up a prayer and then leave so as not to suffer the wrath of God. This ritual was performed year after year by the high priests of Israel. But now we read of a great high priest, greater than all who have gone before Him, even Jesus, who has passed through the heavens. Never before has it been said that a high priest of Israel had passed through the heavens. What does this mean? Let us consider three important truths.

1. The need for a High Priest

We are first confronted with the truth that man needs a high priest, someone who would be his mediator, the one who would bridge the gap between God and man. Of course the question is, why is there a gap between God and man? Why does man need a high priest? I know that many are familiar with the answer. Back in Genesis 3 is the account of mankind’s fall into sin. According to the word of God, sin not only entered into the hearts and lives of Adam and Eve by their act of disobedience to the Word of God, but sin also entered into the world, that is into the hearts and lives of everyone born of Adam and Eve, bringing with it death, not just physical, but also spiritual, the worst of which is spiritual death which is eternal separation from God.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned —

According to God’s own Word, the only remedy for mankind’s sin and the pains of death is its removal. The wages of sin must not only be offset, but the sin itself removed for a restored

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relationship to God, along with the hope of eternal life in the presence of God. The problem is this, “what can a sinful being do to make himself holy? How can that which is broken fix or restore itself to the way it was originally designed?” I recently had one of my computers at home proverbially “crash.” Now, I have heard some people speak of their computers crashing, losing some data and such, but this computer really crashed. Not only was data lost but the computer components themselves failed. As much as I might have like it, this computer of mine had no means of fixing itself. To be sure, some of the components might be used again, but in order for that computer to be restored, I would have to install new key components – for the computer simply cannot do it itself. In a simple way, people are like computers that have failed. Some have crashed deeper than others, but all have crashed and are in need of new components, component which they cannot manufacture or put into place on their own. This is what we mean by the phrase “total depravity” – not that man is as bad as he could be, but that he is as bad off as he can be. He is incapable, either by ability or merit to repair and present himself to God as fixed. Sin renders man “crashed.”

But God, in great mercy, provided a temporary means by which man’s sin may be dealt. Because the wages of sin is death, the death of an animal, usually a goat or a lamb, would be recognized by God as a substitute, if it was offered to Him in faith, believing that God not only would accept the sacrifice as a temporary substitute, but also believing that God would one day provide the perfect and complete sacrificial lamb. Remember that only the high priest could offer this sacrifice on behalf of the people, thus making the high priest a foreshadowing of the great high priest to come. Man needed a high priest, someone who would bridge the gap between God and man.

2. The temporary effect of the high priest

As alluded to already, the great problem with the work of the high priest and their sacrifice was that they had to do this year after year. The high priest’s work was never done. Hebrews 10:3-4 says,

3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Talk about depressing! Year after year, animal after animal, blood after blood and yet man’s sin was never fully dealt with. But all this was to show that there was to come a true and complete sacrifice that would once for all deal with the effects of man’s sin, as Hebrews 10:10 states

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The point is however, that even man’s efforts, as prescribed by God, were only temporary at best, reminding man to look to someone greater than himself for the true remedy from sin.

3. The insufficiency of the high priest

When the high priest performed his duty, sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, offering up his prayer before the presence of God, he then had to leave

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the Holy of Holies and return to dwell among the people who shared his sinful nature. The point is, even with all his preparation and piety, the high priest could not remain long in the holy of holies – he was not able, due to sin, to remain in the presence of God. But praise be to God, that this was not true of our Lord Jesus Christ as our High Priest. For not only did Jesus fill the role of man's needed high priest, but He also provided, as noted, a sacrifice for sins, once for all (Hebrews 10:10) – no more blood is needed.

But in addition to all this, Jesus did several things no other high priest did. First, we are told that He, **“passed through the heavens”** – that is, He ascended to the very presence of God and there He stays, until the appointed time of His return. You see, the disciples may well have been gazing intently to the sky in Acts 1:9 because they may have expected, as with their previous experiences of the high priest, that Jesus would have to soon come out of the heavenlies, out of the presence of God. But He did not. Rather, Jesus commissioned them as we said to be His witnesses, as those who boldly proclaim who He is and what He has done. And remember secondly something else already taught to us in the book of Hebrews - not only did Jesus ascend into the heavens, entering into the most holy place, the presence of God, not in some earthly tabernacle but one in heaven, but Hebrews 1:3 and 10:12 tell us that Jesus did something else no other high priest did, He sat down.

Hebrews 1:3

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Hebrews 10:12

but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

No other high priest could sit down in the holy of holies, in the presence of God, because their work was not finished, but the work of Christ was complete, it was finished and that is the reason for the blessed truth of Hebrews 10:14 which tells us –

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Sometimes I am asked why I believe in the perseverance of the saints, that is, how I know that those whom God saves cannot be lost or lose their salvation. It is because I have so great a high priest who is the presence of God, making intercession for me and of whom it is said **“has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”** Where the high priests before Christ were insufficient, Christ alone is sufficient – the one who alone is the great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

Now, this statement of identification that we find next in Hebrews 4:14, **“Jesus, the Son of God,”** why is this here? Let me retreat back to the opening remarks. There are times in our lives when we sense the frailty of our humanity; when we see our sinfulness in such a light that it causes us to do more than realize we do not deserve God, but also at times leads to fear that we really have no hope. Our lives can feel or appear far to messed up for God to redeem.

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We can despair that we have made too many mistakes to be of any use, much less have the hope of being in the presence of God. At such times we see humanity rightly as undeserving, but we may fail to properly appropriate the truth that God has made the way for us to be reconciled to Him through His Son – Jesus.

Remember that when the author of Hebrews uses the earthly name of Jesus, he points us to His humanity. Jesus is God, but Jesus is just as human as you and I, only without sin. And why is this important? Let me ask you, who passed through the heavens? Jesus, the Son of God. A human passed through the heaven to sit down at the right hand of God to enjoy the glorious presence of His Father. You see, Jesus, the man entered heaven, showing us that if we will hold fast our faith, our confession, our belief in the work and person of Christ, we too one day will pass through the heavens and enjoy the presence, or, as Hebrews 4 refers to it, the rest of God. Beloved, if you are in the spiritual pits of despair, or upon a time as you may so find yourself, and you want to be spared from the pains of disbelief and disobedience, then not only must you heed the Word of God and consider the Person of God as seen in Hebrews 4:12-13, but you must also **“hold fast”** your confession of Jesus, the Son of God, as your great high priest, who, as your mediator, as your bridge between God and man, brought you into God’s presence by the cleansing power of His own blood, restoring you, repairing you and preparing you for eternal occupancy in the presence of God.

But we must close by coming back to this last statement of Hebrews 4:14 of which I spoke but momentarily, **“let us hold fast our confession.”** What does this mean? The word in the Greek for “confession” is *homologias*. It is made up of two parts, *homo* meaning together and *logias* which is a form of that familiar Greek word *logos* – or word. Remember that Jesus is the Word, the Logos as seen from John 1:1, 14. Jesus is the Word, the communication of God to man. I see then in Hebrews 4:14 the end of an interesting progression with the use of this word.

In Hebrews 4:2 we read,

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Here the **“word,”** or logos, is equated with the **“good news preached”** the message of Christ’s coming and of His sacrificial death. These here did not profit from that “word” or logos because it was not “united by faith” – there was no real heart action or response. In fact, we are told that these were disobedient to this word. All this begged the question, how do we stay off disobedience and disbelief – the answer began in Hebrews 4:12, by understanding and responding to “the word (logos) of God.” In Hebrews 4:13 we are told that we will give an account or a word (logos) to God in respect to His word. In other words, we must have our word line up with God’s word.

And now, in Hebrews 4:14, we are told to **“hold fast our confession”** our *homologias*. Again, this word means “word together” – but a word together with what? I see this confession as a confession of faith, in what we believe and this then brings us back to Hebrews 4:2; for it is the word united by faith (and faith is simply belief in action) that profit. So, our confession is our word together with faith. But what exactly must we believe? Or, what exactly is our

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confession? This brings us back Hebrews 3:1 – this is to be our confession – this is what we are to believe and proclaim,

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession...”

If we have come to know Jesus as our great high priest, having Himself provided the proper sacrifice for our sins so that we might be reconciled, put back in right relationship to our Creator God, we must then be diligent to hold fast, a word that means “to retain; keep a firm hold on” our confession, which is really a profession, a verbal and public proclamation, or a “putting together the words” by faith that speak of and glorify Jesus Christ.

The command to “hold fast” this confession is call to being a bold and solid witness of Jesus Christ. As one great preacher put it, *“The writer everywhere insists on the duty of public confession of the faith. The crisis claimed not simply private conviction but a clear declaration of belief openly in the face of men.”*¹

Beloved, may our desire to see disbelief and disobedience eliminated from our lives be realized – but realized as God has commanded – through devotion and introspection by means of the Word of God; by an increasing knowledge of the Holy God; and by fervent and public proclamation of our belief in the person and work of Christ. We have been so subtly programmed to be individualistic by our culture to the neglect of making public confession of our faith. But remember, our bold and public confession of faith is not for the benefit of God, but is rather to our benefit, helping us to be obedience to the Word, because this Word, united by faith, seeks to be made known and makes itself known by proclaiming, by celebrating the greatness and superiority of Christ over all things. Let us not be content with limiting our confession of Christ to only those with whom we feel most comfortable – our souls need to make proclamations of Christ in unfriendly surroundings as well for such allows us to see and experience the reality of our faith. So, let us hold fast to our confession and celebrate the great high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria

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¹ Bishop Wescott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 102