

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

## The Celebrated High Priest (Part 2)

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.*

My task this morning is to remind you first of all what we have already studied from this passage a couple weeks back and then tie that into what we will discover from the rest of these verses. I cannot begin to tell you how impressive these verses are and so, let us begin right away.

Recall then first of all that these verses are coming after a rather stern warning, that warning being found in Hebrews 3:12-13

***Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.***

***“Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”*** – who would want that as the description of their lives? And yet Hebrews 4 launches right into an example of those who were so deceived by sin that this was their epitaph. And how did sin deceive those described in the first part of Hebrews 4? They were deceived by being disobedient to the Word of God. Whenever we are disobedient to what God has commanded us to do, we are being deceived by sin in some fashion or another. So, as we come to Hebrews 4:14-16, we come to a passage that seeks remind us not only of the absolute superiority of Christ, 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?” Secondly, we are to know 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,

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

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?” This confession is simply 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 considered the first one last time. Let me restate it for you and then we will see and study the other two.

## **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.*

The first confession of the believer is to proclaim we have a great high priest. But exactly what is it that makes Him so great? If you recall Hebrews 4:13, you might remember a sobering truth. There we read –

***And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.***

Every thought, every motive, every word, every action we have every committed is known to God. And worse yet, for every such deed we are accountable to God. I know of no one, if they be truthful to themselves, who can deny the truth that the entirety of their lives has been lived in utter perfection. We all recognize that humanity is flawed to some degree or another. And yet the word of God declares in Hebrews 12:14 –

***Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness – perfection] without which no one will see the Lord.***

The question becomes, “How does fallen humanity make a way to God?” The answer is, “Fallen humanity does not, but Jesus [the earthly, human name of] the Son of God, who is our great high priest. He is fully human, like you and me, yet without sin, and has **“passed through the heavens”** that is, He has made the way for humanity to be in the presence of God. Our confession, our proclamation of faith is just this, that Jesus is both God and man, and that as man and our high priest, He mediated the way for those, who by faith, that is by their transformed lives into the image of Jesus, will follow Jesus right into heaven, right before our Father God. No other earthly priest had been able to do this. At best he was able to come before the presence of God in the earthly holy of holies only long enough to make a temporary sacrifice for the sins of the

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

people and then he must leave and come back a year later to perform the task again. But Jesus made this sacrifice one time and as man sits in the presence of God, inviting us to become like Him by faith and by the power of God transforming us day by day into His image.

In short, we have a friend in high places, Jesus, truly God and truly man, sitting at the right hand of God, interceding on our behalf. This is not only the great high priest, but truly the greatest high priest man has known. And, as we consider that Jesus has made the way for us to be in the presence of a perfect and holy God, our response to sin should be nothing short of seeing its termination in our lives, for this is why the great high priest gave His life, so that we might be holy, blameless and perfect before God.

## II. We have a sympathetic high priest (Hebrews 4:15)

*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.*

In addition to having a great high priest, Hebrew 4:15 tells us that we also have a sympathetic high priest. There is no doubt that Jesus, as man, as high priest and even as God in the flesh is great! We often and just recently marveled at the thought of God becoming man. And yet, such thoughts, if not balanced with other truths, could present us with a Jesus who is unapproachable. If we so focus on the deity of Jesus, we can paint a picture of Him so lofty and so removed from the normalcy of human life that He becomes less than real to us humanly speaking. How many of us have had thoughts that although knowing Jesus is both God and man, that somehow as man, He must not have really faced the same realities as the rest of us? So often we speak, and to an extent rightly so, of our desire to become like Christ. For even Romans 8:29 tells us that God's goal for believers is conformity to Christ. But Hebrews 4:15 speaks of just how human, how like us, Jesus really became (yet, as we will see, without sin).

### *The Sympathetic High Priest*

Our text speaks of this truth, our high priest is sympathetic. Now the word "sympathetic" is made up of a preposition "sun" – meaning "with" and the verb "patheo" – meaning "to suffer." So "sympathetic" or "sunpatheo" literally means "to suffer with." For we do not have a high priest who cannot or has not "suffered with" our weaknesses. To be sympathetic means to enter into the experience and heartache of another.

What does this tell us about Jesus? I believe this is truly remarkable. For Jesus does not simply know by fact the weaknesses of humanity, but also knows

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

by personal experience such weaknesses. In Psalm 139 we read some of the most comforting words –

**1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.**

Now, while these words are comforting, telling us that God knows all about us, these verses tell us only that God knows the facts about us. Without the revelation of Hebrews 4:15 and other passages concerning the coming of God in the flesh, we might be able to say, “But God cannot sympathize with us because He does not know what it is like to be human.” You see, there is a huge difference between knowing something by fact and knowing something by experience. Just over a year ago now a massive tsunami devastated south central Asia and Indonesia. Some 250,000 people lost their lives. Whole communities and cultures were displaced and lost. And while our hearts may indeed hurt and our eyes even shed tears for what these people endured, knowing the facts of the devastation, we really do not know what it is like for we have not endured the same. But Jesus is not one who only knows the facts about humanity’s weaknesses, He also knows by experiencing such weaknesses Himself. Do you see that the intent of the verse here is to promote the humanity of Jesus? For Jesus to be a sympathetic high priest means that He has experienced what humanity experiences.

## *Our weaknesses*

Our text tells us that Jesus does indeed sympathize with our weaknesses. By using the word “our” I do not think this means ours in distinction or in contrast to Christ, but rather is referring to our shared humanity with Christ. This passage is not speaking of our weaknesses in contrast to Christ’s strengths, but again speaks of the weaknesses of humanity, a humanity that Jesus Himself shared in. Earlier the author of Hebrews made this very point in Hebrews 2:14 saying –

***Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same...***

So then, what is meant by the work “weaknesses”? For if Jesus shared in or “suffered with” our weaknesses, then we must rule out the idea that weaknesses here are actual sins but rather are “frailties” or “infirmities” to which

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

humanity is prone. Let us define “weaknesses” as “physical and moral predispositions to sickness.” Humanity’s physical predisposition to sickness refers to those things that undermine our resistance to disease, meaning that humanity is subject to things like colds, flues, cancer and the like. Humanity’s moral disposition to sickness refers to those things that undermine our resistance to temptation. The key phrase here is “undermine our resistance.” To be undermined does not mean one must give in to such things but rather that the potential for giving in is always present in humanity. And the truth is, we are always giving in, perhaps not always by choice physically speaking, but certainly by choice morally speaking.

These weaknesses represent humanity’s limitations. Man is limited by his physical and moral weaknesses. The question is, “Can this be said of Jesus?” Was Jesus limited by the weaknesses of humanity? The answer is yes. Consider:

- The All-powerful God who created the world became a helpless babe totally dependent upon His mother and father, Mary and Joseph.
- The All-knowing God became a man who had to increase in wisdom and knowledge.
- The Everywhere present God became one who visited one village at a time, traveling by foot.
- The All-sufficient God became one who hungered after a 40-day fast and who slept in a boat after an exhausting day of ministry.
- The All-glorious God became one who was mocked, abused and eventually killed.

Yes, Jesus “suffered with” us by being dependent upon others, by being tired and hungry, and even by being ridiculed and scorned. In Jesus, God suffered with our infirmities, with our experiences, with our difficulties and in our struggles and trials. I believe that one of the applications we must make from this is that when we cry out to Jesus for help, we are to know that we are not simply appealing to an all-powerful God who knows only the facts of our trials, but also to a truly all-knowing God who has actually experienced the trials which we have faced.

*Tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*

The word for “tempted” literally means “testing, scrutinizing, or trying.” We are told that Jesus “has been tempted,” referring to a past completed action that has ongoing effects into the future. Jesus has faced all our temptations and so now will always be able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Jesus has been

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

tempted in “all things.” This does not mean that Jesus has experienced every detail and nuance of each person’s sin, but that He has experienced every type or category of sin.

It cannot go without saying that the greatest weakness of humanity is found in its inability to resist sin, or, we can say, in its ability to be easily deceived by sin. Remember the warning of Hebrews 3:13?

***But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.***

Turn with me if you would to Genesis 3. You know the story well. Here we have the fall of man due to the lie of Satan given to deceive Eve and of which Adam willingly gave into. Reading in Genesis 3:4-5 –

***The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."***

The lie of Satan here was not simply a questioning of the statement of God in verse 4, but also of not telling Adam and Eve the consequences of their disobedience (sin) to God. And just what are those consequences? Listen well – for what Adam and Eve did not understand was that –

- knowing good they would be unable to do it; and
- knowing evil they would be unable to resist it.

In Adam we find someone who “gave into” the temptation to disregard or disobey the command of God. Sometimes I am asked why it is not said that sin entered into humanity by Satan. For isn’t Satan responsible for introducing sin into humanity? No, Satan is only responsible for introducing temptation to humanity. And with regard to temptation, we must remember two things. First, we must remember that temptation is not sin. Sin was found in humanity when Adam chose to “give in” to the temptation to disobey God. He was hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Is this not the testimony of the Scriptures? In James 1:13-15 we read -

***13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own***

---

# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

***lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.***

Not only are we to remember that temptation itself is not sin, but secondly we must remember that temptation to sin exists everywhere, not only from the world and the devil, but also from within. The question is, did Jesus “suffer with” us in temptation? Was Jesus tempted? Our text says He was, only without sin. But some have concluded from this that the temptation of Jesus was not the same as ours, that as God, Jesus was not subject to the same power or pull of temptation. Such a notion is so far from being true, for in reality it must be said that Jesus knows to a far greater extent than any other human the powerful draw of temptation. How can this be said? Let me appeal to one who has said better than I. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis rightly observes:

*A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist.<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus knows the difficulty of being righteous in this world. Jesus has felt the powerful inducements and rationales that men have used to choose sin rather than God. It has been said that if Jesus had sinned, as horrible as it would be to our salvation, at least He alone would have had a thousand times better excuse than any other man ever had. But listen well my beloved – for even though the fact that Jesus was truly God ensured that He would not or could not sin, His temptation to sin was as, if not more real than anything we have experienced and could only, and I repeat, could only be overcome by means that are available to all. For we read in 1 Corinthians 10:13–

---

<sup>1</sup> [*Mere Christianity*, quoted by Kent Hughes in *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, 131].

---

# † The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

***No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man [and therefore common to Jesus]; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.***

In short, the only difference between the temptation of Jesus and the temptation you and I face is that He responded to every temptation “without sin.” And remember, that the level and depth of His temptation far exceeded that of our own. But praise be to God, this makes Him a sympathetic high priest. If we desire sympathy; if we desire to relate to someone who has truly been there and done that – let us turn to Jesus.

---

## *Soli Deo Gloria*

---

**Copyright © 2006 Edward K. Godfrey.** *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street Rogers, AR 72758.*