

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

The Celebrated High Priest (Part 3)

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.

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at this passage of Hebrews and considering why Jesus Christ is to be the celebrated High Priest. What is it about Jesus that should cause rejoicing? What is it about His works that ought to cause our souls to abound in celebration? In Hebrews 4:14 we read the call saying, “let us hold fast our confession.” That confession is not simply the recitation of words, or the memorization of some creed. The confession of the believer is actually to be both a verbal and vital declaration; a proclamation by both word and deed, by belief and body regarding the work and person of Jesus Christ.

The confession of the believer in Jesus Christ has been outlined and defined in part by our text. We have learned that Jesus has mediated, or made the way to God accessible to sinners. We have learned that Jesus is the High Priest who really knows what we go through because He has suffered with us, enduring the very temptations we face, only without sin. These are not to be simple academic facts to be learned and recited. This is not some creed or catechism to be memorized. Rather, these truths are to be practices of life, the very substance of that which changes and revitalized your heart and mind toward the things of God on a continual basis. For without knowing Jesus as the Mediator, the one who stands between God and man, between the awesome and often terrifying purity, perfection and ultimate holiness of the majestic God and the obviously sinful, broken and ultimately profane condition of man, there is no salvation, there is no deliverance from this condition in which we find ourselves and there is no hope of restoration with God. And, without knowing Jesus Christ as the sympathetic high priest, who both knows by His own experience our needs and has the power to meet those needs, there is no such thing as walking with Christ; no such thing as a personal relationship with Jesus. As Amos 3:3 confirms, “*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (NKJV)*” – unless they have some common understanding and agreement with one another?

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Remember then that we have been looking at Hebrews 4:14-16 in terms of “holding fast our confession” of Jesus. We have looked specifically at two of three declarations or professions we are to have concerning Christ. This morning we will examine the last of these declarations. The three declarations are:

- I. **We have a great high priest (Hebrews 4:14)**
- II. **We have a sympathetic high priest (Hebrews 4:15)**
- III. **We have a gracious high priest (Hebrews 4:16)**

Let us now examine this last declaration, namely that in Jesus we have a gracious high priest.

III. **We have a gracious high priest (Hebrews 4:16)**

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.

This is a most beloved verse that has given peace, help and even confidence to multiple generations of saints. Often times it is present to God’s people as a call to prayer, and not just any kind of prayer, but the boldest of prayer. To be sure, I see prayer in this verse and part of our confession or declaration of Christ is to be that He is approachable in prayer. But I see more than prayer in this verse. For the very terminology used speaks of actual worship. Rather than simply a call to bold prayer, I submit to you and will seek to demonstrate that this is a call to confident worship.

Oh what a word this is for us. While I know that there are many who view God as nothing more than a smiling grandfather figure who graciously turns His eye away from our indiscretions and inconsistencies, there is also a group of people who see and understand clearly that God is rightly described in Hebrews 4:13 as knowing every detail of our lives and that everything is laid bare before Him. With such an understanding we might fear we could never come before God again. Think of it - every time you approach God in prayer or service, He already sees everything about you. He knows your hypocrisies. He knows the darkness of your heart. And He knows your every inconsistency. How could any of us every approach God?

Remember what we have learned. The author of Hebrews is stressing the very humanity of Jesus Christ in these verses. In other words, we have one from our own race who is seated upon the throne. We have one who is familiar with our weakness because He Himself has suffered through them. So now, with all

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this background, Hebrews 4:16 begins with the profound connective, “*therefore.*” In light of truth that Jesus is the great high priest, a man, who Himself has passed through the heavens, making the way to God open to all who will follow after Him in faith; in light of the truth that Jesus, being real flesh and blood is able to sympathize with our daily struggles, frailties and weakness; therefore, we are to make our approach, that is “draw near” to the very throne of God, not in timidity or fear, “*for God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and discipline*” (2 Timothy 1:7); nor are we to come in silence and caution, “*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’*” (Romans 8:15); but in full and utter confidence. And as we must come to see, this confidence is not arrogance or presumption, nor does it lack proper humility, but is a seemingly outrageous conviction to come before the throne of the living God. Oh that we would learn to have such a confidence in our worship of God on a daily basis! Let me present to you then four thoughts concerning this idea of confident worship, a worship that not only serves God, but also then declares that Jesus is are great, sympathetic and also gracious high priest.

I. What We Must Do For Worship!

After the connector, “therefore” we are presented with a directive, a call but also a plea. As believers in Jesus Christ, “*let us draw near...*” One of the reasons why I believe that this passage has the broader vision of our lives worshipping God than simply praying to God is because of this call to “draw near.” It actually one word in the Greek, *prosechomai*, and means simply “to approach.” However, it was used to describe the service of the priests as they approached God in worship. Interestingly enough, every time this word is used in the book of Hebrews, and it is used seven times, it has this connotation of worshipping God by coming close or drawing near to Him.

Hebrews 7:25

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 10:1

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

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Hebrews 10:22

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 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Hebrews 12:18

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

Hebrews 12:22

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

The idea then is that our lives are to be, as the apostle Paul puts it, “*living sacrifices... which is your spiritual service of worship.*” We are to see our lives as being for the express purpose of drawing near to Him so as to worship or serve Him. Everything else we do in life is to be secondary to that purpose. Are you drawing near to God? We must realize that without coming to God or drawing near to God with the intention of serving Him, there is no worship. You can go to church all you like, but if you are not seeking to come close to Him and serve Him, you have not worshipped God. You can read as much of the Bible as you like, or pray for hours on end, but if you are not seeking to do this in order to be close to Him and serve Him, you are not worshipping God. Genuine worship begins when we long to and seek to draw near to God.

But just how often are we to so long and so seek such closeness to God. The obvious answer would be continually. We might ask, “When is it right not to be close to God?” Or, “When is it okay to not serve God?” The answer is, “never.” How profound and all-encompassing are the words of 2 Corinthians 5:15 which says,

And He died for all, so that they who live might no long live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

To draw near to Jesus, to be close to God is to live for Him who died and rose again on your behalf. This is worship. This is what it means to follow

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Christ. And just how often should this manner of life be followed. Our text says, “let us draw near...” – a present tense command indicating a continual, daily practice that is not to ever be abandoned. On Greek scholar has said it well, “Let us keep on coming to our high priest, this sympathetic and great high priest. Instead of deserting Him, let us make daily use of Him.”¹ Are you drawing near? Are you serving Jesus daily? Are you making use of Him, His grace, His mercy, and His blessings? Beloved, “let us draw near” to so great a Savior and God.

II. How We Must Do Worship!

In addition to telling us what we must do, namely to “draw near,” we are also told how we must do this. And again, here a most remarkable truth. For while we know how holy God is, how all seeing and all knowing is His being, piercing through all the ugliness of our sinful humanity, yet we are command to come how, “with confidence.” Oh blessed thought, that the God who knows my sinful heart would yet utter the words, “draw near with confidence.” What does this mean?

To begin with, we must come to grips with this word “confidence.” I do not believe any one word in the English language does this word justice. It literally means “all-outspokenness; frankness or bluntness.” In classical Greek the word meant “free and open speech of citizens with one another.” This word confidence goes back to our idea of declaration or confession. It speaks of our speaking out boldly what we have come to know concerning Jesus and His work on the cross for us. You see, the only reason why we can come before the throne of God with confidence is because we are sure that God sent His Son Jesus Christ specifically for our own sins, that He suffered, died and rose again for my sins, and that He alone made sufficient payment for my sins that I might claim that now before the throne of God.

Sometimes I will ask people the question, “If you were to die tonight and stand before God; and He were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven? What would you say?” The answer is to be a confident declaration, “It is not what my hands have done – it is not what I have merited. I can enter into the glorious heaven of God only and because of how Jesus satisfied your wrath and judgment for me. Oh, God, you did not look down the corridor of time and see that I would believe, rather seeing that I could not believe apart from the intervention of Your Spirit and Your Son, You made this provision for me, even before the world began. My confidence of which I speak is found in the eternal and sure word and decree of You, my living God, who chose me in Him before

¹ Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*

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the foundation of the world, that I would be holy and blameless before You; to the praise of the glory of Your grace (Ephesians 1:4, 6).

When we speak of drawing near to God with confidence, we are saying that we can come to God without hesitation or tentativeness, wondering if everything is alright; fearful of whether or not what Jesus has done for us would be sufficient to secure our position before God. Remember that many of the first readers of this letter had lost confidence, but not personal confidence; rather they had lost confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus. We can be faced with the same temptation. They can come when people, or sometimes even our own hearts ask the questions, *“But are you sure about this Jesus thing?”* *“What if Jesus was just another man, just another prophet and nothing more?”* Honestly, sometimes such questions rarely move us, but at other times such questions can plague our hearts and minds – until we “draw near” – approaching God in order to worship Him and then are reminded by His Word and Promises of who He is and what He has done for us.

I read a story this week that illustrates this point. A man by the name of Booth Tucker was conducting evangelistic meetings in the great Salvation Army Citadel in Chicago. One night, after he has preach on the sympathy of Jesus, a man came forward and asked Mr. Tucker how he could talk about a loving, understanding, sympathetic God. This man said to Mr. Tucker, “If your wife had just died, like mine has, and your babies were crying for their mother who would never come back, you wouldn’t be saying what you’re saying.” This man was asking the “Are you sure” and “What if...” questions.

A few days after this, Mr. Tucker’s wife was killed in a train wreck. Her body was brought to Chicago and carried to the Citadel for the funeral. After the service the bereaved preacher looked down into the silent face of his wife and then turned to those who were attending. “The other day when I was here”, he said, “a man told me that, if my wife had just died and my children were crying for their mother, I would not be able to say that Christ was understanding and sympathetic, or that He was sufficient for every need. If that man is here, I want to tell him that Christ is sufficient. My heart is broken, it is crushed, but it has a song, and Christ put it there. I want to tell that man that Jesus Christ speaks comfort to me today.” The man was there, and he came and knelt beside the casket while Booth Tucker introduced him to Jesus Christ.²

Mr. Tucker could confidently draw near to God and continue to be outspoken because he knew God and what God had done for Him. In reality, such a confidence speaks of our ability to pour our hearts out before the Lord. We can speak of any and all things. There is no conversation that is off-limits as

² Adapted from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 114

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we draw near to God, for our Savior knows our heartache and trials. This is all reminiscent of the truth of Psalm 62:8 which says,

Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah.

May we have such an assurance, such a confidence to draw near to our God, serving Him and knowing that we can fully trust Him and can completely pour out our hearts before Him, for God is our refuge.

III. Where We Must Do Worship!

Our third point tells where we can confidently draw near to God. We might think of coming to God at church or in our prayer closet; but in truth, all true worship transports us out of and beyond the shackles of this physical realm and brings us to the very throne of God. Think of it beloved! Far above and vastly superior in splendor to the houses, palaces and edifices of kings and rulers in all their pomp and circumstances is the throne of the Almighty King – Creator of heaven and earth, Sovereign over all things. What is this throne really like – I can only imagine, but Revelation 4:2-8 does give us some glimpses into the absolute awesomeness of both this throne as well as He who sits upon it:

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. 3 And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. 5 The Throne and Worship of the Creator Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. 7 The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

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These images are both inspiring and frightful, yet it is before this throne that we can come with confidence.

But note something else remarkable about our text. For this is not simply the throne of God. A special title is now attached to it. It is not the throne of God's judgment for those who confidently draw near, but rather it is the throne of grace; a throne where the unmerited favor of God is poured out upon us. It is a throne where those who draw near with confidence receive things not deserved but are yet benevolently given. Our high priest is gracious then because He has provided those who follow Him through the heavens access to the throne or repository of grace.

We must come to see that our worship brings us before this throne of grace; before the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We must learn to praise, give thanks and worship the God who brings all things to pass, some seemingly good, some seemingly bad, but all for our ultimate good and for His glory. Indeed our God pours upon us grace upon grace.

IV. What We Must Expect From Worship!

We end then by looking at what we can and must expect from worship. When I say "expect" I do not mean to suggest we expect these things because of something we have done, but because they are the stated results of confidently drawing near to God. Note the two things we must expect.

First, we should expect to "receive mercy." Mercy is simply "not getting what we deserve." All we deserve from God is His wrath and judgment for our sins. Yet at the throne of grace we receive mercy. We can confidently come before the throne of grace even as sinners because it is at this throne that mercy is realized – at the throne we are to be amazed at what we do not get, yet deserve – judgment for our sins. In effect then, to "receive mercy" is something we receive for past failures.

The second expectation then is that we would "find grace." Grace is similar to mercy but varies slightly. Grace is getting what we do not deserve. And whereas mercy is received for our past failures, grace is needed for our present and future needs. We need the grace of God's presence and power right now to keep us from sin. Is this not part of the so-called "Lord's Prayer?" In Matthew 6:13, the prayer of the disciple of Jesus is to include:

And let us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...

We need the presence and power of God to, as Jude 24 says, keep us from stumbling, and to make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless and

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with great joy. We do not deserve this, yet this is promised for those who confidently draw near. And note the timing of this promise. The reception of mercy and the finding of grace will be granted **“to help in time of need.”** In a sense this means all the time because we are a poor and needy people. But specifically this is to be another booster of our confidence. God’s grace is always bestowed at the proper time. To be sure, the proper time may not always be our timing, but keep drawing near to God and you will be assured of mercy and grace at the proper time.

Additionally this teaches us that God’s grace has no end. As James 4:6 so wonderfully declares, **“He give more grace.”** May we not be an arrogant and presumptuous people who think that we can instruct God on how and when to exercise His grace. Our duty is simply to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” knowing that mercy and grace will find us at the right time and in the right measure and all to the glory of God.

These then are the blessings of the gracious High priest, who also is our sympathetic High Priest who knows and has experienced our weaknesses. And because of all this, our declaration and confession must be, **“we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.”** Let us hold fast our confession! Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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