

Christ Our Great High Priest
Hebrews 4:14-15
Part One

Hopefully every one of us here this morning has made a confession of faith in Christ and is presently seeking to hold onto that confession.

But holding onto that confession of faith in Christ can prove to be very challenging when everything in our lives seems to be falling apart, when there does not seem to be anything good coming to us in this life other than pain and suffering.

And it can even become even more challenging to hang on to our confession of faith when the pain and suffering that is coming to us is largely coming to us because of our confession of faith.

And why would it be so difficult for us to hang on to our confession of faith if we were to be challenged in these ways? It is because we are weak and what we are suffering can very easily expose those weaknesses.

But just because we are weak and our sufferings may expose those weaknesses, does not mean that we will not be able to hang on to our confession? And why is this? It is because we have an intermediary in heaven whom cares for us and who, in understanding our difficulties, will be very much inclined to help us as seek to hold on to our confession. And who is this intermediary? It is Jesus, the very one whom we have confessed to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, and who through His death made it possible for Him to save us.

And these thoughts now bring us back us back to our study of the book of Hebrews. And what is the theme of this book? The theme of the Book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ. And what have we seen so far in our study of this book in respect to Christ's superiority? We have seen that Christ is superior to the prophets. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses.

This morning we will begin to explore a new area of superiority. So, what is this new area? Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods

(Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This section of Scripture will begin in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**.

Now obviously this is a very lengthy section of Scripture and will take a great deal of time for us to work through, but I am very hopeful that after we have finished this journey that our love for God and our love for His Son will have increased and our commitment to them significantly strengthened. So how did this section of Scripture begin? The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:14-16 focused his readers on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry.

So now let me read for **Hebrews 4:14-16**. **“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.”** So did the author in these verses focus the readers' attention on Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry? Absolutely!

So why would the author at this particular point in our text do that? These readers had been suffering a great persecution. They, in response to that persecution, had begun to struggle in their faith. The author of Hebrews, in response to that struggle, wrote this epistle to them in order to strengthen their faith by emphasizing the superiority of Christ. And as the author did this he also introduced warnings in order to help his readers not to be dismissive of what he was saying to them. And as we come to this point in our text in **Hebrews 4:14-16** the author had just completed one of these warnings, a very hard-hitting warning that had begun all the way back in **Hebrews 3:7** and did not conclude until we got to **Hebrews 4:13**.

Now put yourself in the shoes of one of these struggling Hebrew Christians. They certainly needed to hear the warning so that they would not be dismissive of what the author was saying to them about the superiority of Christ, but the warning itself could have been very overwhelming to them in light of all that they were presently suffering, which could have led them to say something like this, “I hear what you are saying about the superiority of Christ. And I hear your warning but I have no more strength and I cannot,

even in spite of what you are saying, continue to hold on to my faith, it is simply too hard.”

So with this thought in mind hopefully we can now understand why the author of Hebrews chose in **Hebrews 4:14-16** to focus his readers attention on Christ’s heavenly high-priestly ministry. He wanted to them to know that though they might have felt they were without strength, they were not alone for they had a very engaged and sympathetic intermediary between themselves and God. And who was this intermediary?

Their intermediary was Jesus the Son of God, their great high priest! And why would he want them to know this? He would have wanted them to know this because he would have wanted them to know that even though they may have felt they had no strength, there was a source of strength available to them through Jesus, their great high priest, that would make it possible for them to keep on keeping on if they, as an expression of their faith, were so inclined.

So how did the author focus his readers on the heavenly high-priestly ministry of Christ?

First of all, the author at the beginning of Hebrews 4:14 reiterated truths that he had already established in the epistle. How do we know this? We know this by the use of the words **“therefore since”** at the beginning **verse 14.**

Clearly the author in using these particular words was calling his readers to reflect back on certain truths that he had already in essence introduced in this epistle.

So, what was the first truth that the author was reiterating for his readers at the beginning of **verse 14** that he had already in essence mentioned earlier? The first truth was that they did in fact **“have a great high priest.”**

So where can we find this truth mentioned earlier in this epistle? First of all, we can find this truth mentioned earlier in this epistle in **Hebrews 2:17** where the author in describing this very same high priest described Him as a **“merciful and faithful, in things pertaining to God,”** which he then pointed out included **“making propitiation for the sins of the people.”** And then secondly, we can find this same truth once again in essence being

mentioned earlier in **Hebrews 3:1** when the author exhorted his readers “**to consider Jesus**” who he then described as the “**Apostle and High Priest of their confession.**”

So when the author at the beginning of **verse 14** told his readers, “**therefore since we have a great high priest,**” was he reiterating what he had already in essence told them earlier in the epistle? Yes! But this was not the only truth that he was in essence reiterating at the beginning of **verse 14**. There was a second truth. So, what was this second truth?

Not only did they have a great high priest, but also they had a great high priest “**who has passed through the heavens.**” And where in essence had this truth been stated earlier in this epistle? This truth had in essence been stated earlier in this epistle in **Hebrews 1:3** when the author in referring to Christ, told his readers that “**when He had made purification of sin** (which of course according to the Old Testament was the work of the high priest, the author then told his readers that He, or in other words Christ) **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high**” which clearly would have required what? Which clearly would have required Him or in other words Christ, their great high priest, to have passed through the heavens.

So, what was the first thing that the author did in order to focus his readers’ attention on the heavenly high priestly ministry of Christ? He through reiteration reminded his readers that they did in fact have a great high priest who had passed into the heavens.

And who is this great heavenly high priest? Let us go back to the **verse 14** and continue to read. “**Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens** [which is a reiteration of earlier truths within the epistle, then he identified Him as], **Jesus the Son of God.**” According to this author, it was Jesus, the Son of God, who was their great heavenly high priest.

So now let me ask you this question. Did the author, as he focused his readers attention through reiteration on the great heavenly high-priestly ministry of Jesus, elevate Jesus and His high-priestly ministry over and above every other high-priestly ministry that had ever been conducted by any other high priest prior to Christ under the Old Covenant? Absolutely!

Other high priests under the Old Covenant were sons of Aaron and entered the earthly “holies of holies” once a year in order to make atonement for the sins for God’s people. But Christ was not a son of Aaron but rather He was the Son of God, who after having made atonement for sin with His own blood once for all, and after having passed through the heavens into the heavenly holy of holies, sat down at the right hand of His Father in glory.

So in light of this should any of these struggling Hebrew Christians return back to Judaism and to a religious system which was simply a shadow of that the reality that pictures? No! Of course not!

And this brings us to the next part of the verse. So, what did the author do next? The author, based on the truths that he had reiterated in at the beginning of Hebrews 4:14, then exhorted his readers.

So, what was the first exhortation? We can find the first exhortation at the end of **verse 14**. So let me now read this verse for you. **“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.”** So, what was the first exhortation at the end of **John 4:14**?

Because Jesus the Son of God was in fact their great heavenly high priest, the author exhorted his readers to hold fast their confession (Hebrews 4:14). And doesn’t this exhortation make sense in light of the superiority of Christ’s great high-priestly ministry? Absolutely! Especially when we consider, in light of all that they were suffering, that some of them were even thinking about returning back to Judaism and thus abandoning the Christian faith.

So now let us consider what this exhortation means. First of all, we need to understand the words. So, what does it mean to **“hold fast?”** The word translated “hold fast” is used 47 times in the New Testament. The word can refer to the grasping of a person or some particular thing but here it certainly does not have that meaning. So, what does it mean in this context?

The word “hold fast” (KRATEO) in this context refers to “commitment” (Mark 7:3-4). It is the same word that we find in **Mark 7:3-4** describing the kind of commitment that the Pharisees exhibited in observing their traditions, which of course would communicate a very strong and

unwavering commitment. And what were these readers to “**hold fast**” to? They were to hold fast to their “**confession.**”

So, what is the meaning of the word “**confession?**” The word “confession” (HOMOLOGIAS) literally means, “to speak the **same** thing.” So based on this definition, what would be the confession?

In this context the confession would be what we together with God and others declared to be true when we in response to the gospel received Jesus as our Lord and Savior and thus in effect as our great heavenly high priest. This would have been the confession that the readers of this epistle were being exhorted to hold fast to by this author in light of Christ’s greatly heavenly high-priestly ministry.

So, what might their confession, that the author was exhorting his readers to hold fast to in light of the superiority of his heavenly high-priestly ministry, have sounded like? It might have gone something like this: In light of my sin and my desperate need and desire to be set free from it I confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of living God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me on the cross of cross of Calvary as an atoning sacrifice for sin so that I through His death and apart from human works, might be saved by grace through faith.

It was this kind of confession that flows from our faith in the gospel that this author, in light of Christ’s great heavenly high-priestly ministry, was exhorting his readers to hold fast to and thus not to waver from.

Were they to hold fast to this confession even if their lives were not easy? Yes! Were they to hold fast to this confession even if their lives were filled with suffering? Yes! Were they to hold fast to this confession even if they were being persecuted because of it? Yes!

They were to hold their confession fast until the end without wavering. But how could this be? How could they be expected to do this in light of all that they were suffering?

Let us now continue on in our text. After the author had reiterated for his readers at the beginning of **Hebrews 4:14** that they did in fact have a great heavenly high priest, and after the author at the end of **Hebrews 4:14**

exhorted his readers because they did in fact have a great heavenly high priest that they needed to hold fast their confession, he then said this in **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.”**

So because these readers had a great heavenly high priest, they were exhorted to hold fast their confession. And how could they be expected to hold fast their confession in the midst of such great difficulties? They could be expected to hold fast their confession in the midst of such great difficulties because though their great high priest had passed through the heavens and is presently seated at the right hand of God, He was not indifferent toward them. Quite the contrary, He was very much aware of them and their difficulties and was very much inclined, because of everything that He Himself had gone through, to help them.

So now let us break this verse down and see if this is not so. So the verse begins with the author telling his readers that that they did not have a great high priest who could not sympathize with their weaknesses. So, what does this mean? To understand what this means we have to understand what the word “sympathy” means and what the word the word “weaknesses” mean.

The word “to sympathize” (SUMPATHEO) literally means to “suffer with” and is experienced when an individual, in response to another person’s distress, finds themselves inclined to help (Hebrews 10:34). So, what is the next word we need to look at? It is the word “weaknesses.” So what does this mean?

The word “weaknesses” (AESTHENEIA) does not necessarily refer to sins, but may refer to the various frailties, which often are the occasions for sin.

When we are going through difficulties, when we are going through suffering, when we are being persecuted, our weaknesses will be very much exposed. And when those weaknesses are exposed we can be very much challenged in our minds to think that we can hold on. But in those times we must remind ourselves of the truth put forward in **Hebrews 4:15**, that our great heavenly high priest who has passed through the heavens and is presently seated at the right hand of God is very inclined to be responsive to our distresses brought on by our weaknesses. And why would this be?

Let us continue to read **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.**”

So, what does it mean? Christ can sympathize with our weaknesses because He has gone through what we have gone through and far more than what we have gone through yet without sin. This is what it means.

There have been a lot of things in life that we all have gone through. And as we have gone through those things I am quite confident that our weaknesses have been exposed. And unfortunately as our weaknesses have been exposed by what we have gone through, we often times, spiritually speaking, have crashed and burned.

But this is not what happened to Christ. When He suffered what He had to suffer He did not crash and burn even though His testing was infinitely far greater than our testing, rather He withstood it without committing sin. And in withstanding it He learned something about the struggles and difficulties we as humans and professing believers have as we strive to live lives pleasing to God. He of all people, in terms of His earthly sojourn, truly knows how difficult that is. And this knowledge can be and should be very helpful to us.

Holding onto our confession of faith in Christ can prove to be very challenging when everything in our lives seems to be falling apart, when there does not seem to be anything good coming to us in this life other than pain and suffering.

And it can become even more challenging to hang on to our confession of faith in Christ when the pain and suffering that is coming to us is largely coming to us because of our confession of faith in Christ.

But because we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we must! And we can for our great high priest, because of all that He suffered, is very sympathetic to us and is very much inclined to help.

Because Christ is our great heavenly high priest, may we by the grace of God continue to hold fast our confession no matter how difficult our circumstances might be.