

Christ Our Great High Priest
Hebrews 4:16
Part Two

When people embrace Christ as their Lord Savior by grace through faith and become one of His followers, should they expect that living their lives pleasing to Him will be easy? No!

He did not promise us that did He? So we should not anticipate that should we? There will at times be hardships, there will at times be difficulties, there will at times be heartbreaks and when we are exposed to those things, the weaknesses inherent within our humanness will be exposed and it will be very difficult for us to continue to keep our lives focused on Christ, and to continue to live a life pleasing to Christ.

Sometimes we might even find ourselves in those difficult times beaten down and losing strength and even perhaps thinking about surrendering ourselves to the forces of darkness that pulling at us and seeking to ensnare us.

So, what should we do in those times? Should we just simply try harder? If that is our singular approach let me tell you what will happen. We will wither, and we will be defeated.

This is not what God in His word has taught us to do when we are under duress rather we need to what? We need to come into God's presence and ask Him for help. And if we do this, though our lives may not be any less difficult, we will not be defeated, for we will be supplied what we need to live in righteousness and enjoy the fruit of righteousness.

And these thoughts now bring 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 respect to Christ's superiority? We have seen that Christ is superior to the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-4). We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels (Hebrews 1:1-2:18). We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses (Hebrews 3:1-4:13), and we are now in the process of seeing that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This section of Scripture

begins in **Hebrews 4:14** and continues all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**.

Now obviously this is a very lengthy section of Scripture and we will be breaking it down into more manageable parts. And last week we began to look at the very first part of this much larger section. So, what was this very first part? The author in Hebrews 4:14-16 focused his readers on Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry.

So now let me read these verses 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. (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!

How did the author focus his reader's attention on the heavenly high-priestly ministry of Christ in Hebrews 4:14-16?

First of all, the author at the beginning of Hebrews 4:14 drew attention to truths that he had already introduced earlier in the epistle. So how did the author communicate to his readers that the truths that he was about to put forward had already been introduced to them earlier within the epistle? It was by his use of the words **“therefore since”** at the very beginning of the verse.

So, what were the truths that the author had already introduced earlier that he was about to reiterate in **verse 14** in order to focus his reader's attention on Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry? One, his readers **“have a great high priest”** and two, their great high priest **“has passed through the heavens.”** These were the two truths that the author had already introduced earlier in this epistle and was now reintroducing in order to focus his readers attention on the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ.

And who was their great heavenly high priest according to this author in **Hebrews 4:14**? He was **“Jesus, the Son of God.”** Isn’t this exactly what **verse 14** tells us? Yes, it is!

So would this have been new news for his readers? Of course not! They knew exactly whom the author was referring to when he spoke to them about having a great high priest who had passed through the heavens.

So why would the author at this point in the text feel the need to identify Him as **“Jesus the Son of God?”** The name **“Jesus”** was Christ’s human name. The name **“Son of God”** was Christ’s divine name. So why would the author at this point in the text feel the need to identify Him as **“Jesus the Son of God?”** It was not to identify Him as much as it was to explain Him, or in other words to make it clear to his readers that the reason why their high priest who had passed through the heavens was so great was because their **“great high priest who has passed through the heavens”** was both 100% man and 100% God.

So after the author focused his readers’ attention on the greatness of their heavenly high priest and therefore on the greatness of His heavenly high-priestly ministry by re-introducing truths that he had introduced earlier in the epistle at the beginning of **Hebrews 4:14**, what did the author do next in order to continue to focus his readers’ attention on Christ their great high priest and on His high-priestly ministry?

The author, based on the truths that he had reiterated at the beginning of Hebrews 4:14, then exhorted his readers.

So, what was the first exhortation? We found the first exhortation at the end of **verse 14**. So let me now read this verse once again 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). Or in other words, based on what he had just said about the greatness of their high priest and the greatness of His high-priestly ministry it would therefore

behoove them to hold fast to what they had already professed to be true concerning Him when they initially embraced Him and His gospel by faith.

And how might that confession have sounded, that they were being exhorted to hold fast to? It might have sounded 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 any human works might be saved by grace through faith.

It is this kind of confession concerning Christ that flows from faith in His gospel and it was this kind of confession that this author, in light of the great heavenly high-priestly ministry of Christ, was exhorting his readers to “**hold fast**” to.

And certainly this was a very appropriate exhortation in light of the fact that, in the midst of all that they were suffering, some of them were actually losing their grip on their confession.

But even though it was an appropriate exhortation, the author knew they needed more, for when people are at the end of their rope, when they feel as if they have no more strength, an exhortation like this may not help them, for they may very easily say to themselves, “I hear what you are saying, but I just can’t do it. I have no more strength. And what I truly want to do is just sink beneath the waves of my adversity and descend into whatever place awaits me.” So, what did the author do in light of this awareness?

Let me read for you **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.**” The author, understanding the desperation of his readers and understanding the difficulty that his readers would have in holding fast to their confession in the midst of the great persecution they were suffering, wanted them to understand that even though their great high priest had passed through the heavens, He was not indifferent toward them but rather because of all that He suffered in the flesh as a human being while on the earth, He could understand their struggles and be sympathetic with their weaknesses.

He wanted them to understand this so that they, in the midst of their struggle and in light of his exhortation for them to hold fast, would know that they were not alone but that their great heavenly high priest was not only aware of them but was able to sympathize with their weaknesses and therefore would be very much inclined to help them. In other words, they were not alone.

And this brings us to the author's second exhortation to his readers in **Hebrews 4:16** which was also designed to focus the readers' attention on the heavenly high-priestly ministry of Christ. So, what was this second exhortation?

Because Christ was their great heavenly high priest and could sympathize with their weaknesses, he exhorted his readers to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace in order to receive help in the time of their need (Hebrews 4:16).

So now let us read **Hebrews 4:16** and see if this is not so. **“Therefore [in light of the fact that we have a great heavenly high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses] let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.”** So did the author, based upon what he had just said about Christ and how He, as their great heavenly high priest who could sympathize with their weaknesses, exhort his readers to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace in order receive help in the time of their need? Yes, he did!

If these readers, in the midst of their struggle, wanted help from their sympathetic high priest, what would they need to do? They would need to **“draw near”** to **“the throne of grace.”**

So, what is this throne of grace? The **“throne of grace”** is the throne of God from which God distributes grace. And who is sitting at the right hand of this throne? Jesus, the Son of God, our great sympathetic heavenly high priest is sitting at the right hand of this throne. And it is to this throne that these readers were being exhorted **“to draw near.”**

So, what was the author seeking to communicate to His readers when he exhorted them to “draw near” to this throne of grace?

The word translated “draw near” (PROSERCHOMAI) is a present tense indicating that the readers were to be continually approaching God’s throne of grace. This is what the author was seeking to communicate to his readers when he exhorted his readers to “**draw near**” to the throne of grace or in other words to God’s throne from which God distributes grace.

This meant that whenever the readers were in distress and their weaknesses were being exposed by what they were suffering, they were to be continually approaching God’s throne of grace, the throne from which God ministers grace.

This author exhorting these readers to be continuously approaching God’s throne of grace is mind-boggling. Under the old covenant the only person allowed into God’s presence within the tabernacle was the high priest, who entered the “most holy place” or in other words the “holy of holies” once a year on the Day of Atonement, so that he might in offering a blood sacrifice, on behalf of the people of Israel, provide atonement for the sins of the people of Israel that they had committed the previous year.

So now let me ask you this question. Once those former high priests under the Old Covenant made this sacrifice, were the people of Israel then able to enter the holy of holies, the place of God’s presence? No! But here we find the author of the book of Hebrews exhorting his readers, based on the heavenly high priestly ministry of Christ who in having offered Himself to death on the cross of Calvary in order to atone for sin, to draw near to God’s throne of grace and to be continuously doing so.

And did the author, as he gave this exhortation for his readers to “**draw near**” to God’s “**throne of grace**” and to do so continuously, expect his readers as they “**drew near**” to do so sheepishly? No! What does the verse say? “**Therefore** [in light of the fact that we have a great heavenly high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses] **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.**” So, what does this word “**confidence**” mean?

The word “confidence” (PARRESIA) can also be translated “boldness” (Acts 4:31). When this author exhorted his readers to draw near to God’s throne of grace and to do so continuously, he wanted them to draw near to

God's throne of grace with **"confidence"** or in other words with **"boldness."**

So, what would make it possible for his readers to approach God's throne of grace in this way? They could approach God's throne in this way, not because they knew that Christ's death on their behalf had atoned for their sins making it possible for them to enter God's presence, but they knew that as they came into God's presence that Jesus, the Son of God, who was One with God, and who was also their great high priest would be able to sympathize with them, and would provide for them whatever He felt they needed when they needed it.

So let us go back and once again read the verse and see if this is not so. **"Therefore [in light of the fact that we have a great heavenly high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses] let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."** So could these readers, if they came confidently to God's throne of grace, expect to receive help absolutely!

Notice the terms "mercy" and "grace" that were used to describe this help.

In the Bible mercy and grace are like two heads of the same coin. So, what is mercy?

We experience God's mercy when the judgments of God that we deserve are withheld from us.

We experience God's grace when the blessings of God that we do not deserve are poured upon us.

These readers were finding it difficult, in the midst of a great persecution, to hold onto to their confession of faith. This is what God wanted them to do, and this is what the author of Hebrews was exhorting them to do. But all that they were suffering was exposing their weaknesses, and they were in danger of falling away.

So, what did they need to do? Try harder! No, they needed to draw near to the throne of grace where they would **"receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."**

When people embrace Christ as their Lord Savior by grace through faith and become one of His followers, should they expect that living their lives pleasing to Him will be easy? No!

There will be at times hardships, there will be at times difficulties, there will be at times heartbreaks, and when we are exposed to those things, the weaknesses inherent within our humanness will be exposed and it will be very difficult for us to continue to keep our lives focused on Christ and to continue to live a life pleasing to Christ. But we are not without resources.

May we, knowing that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, draw near with confidence to God's throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of our need.