

Jesus, Our Great High Priest

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 4:14-16
Preached on: Sunday, December 11, 2016

It's an amazing privilege that we have to study God's written revelation to us and I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 4. This morning we will be looking at verses 14 through 16 and I've entitled my discourse to you "Jesus, Our Great High Priest." Let me read the passage to you this morning. Hebrews 4, beginning in verse 14,

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.

This morning I wish to examine this amazing passage of Scripture under three very simple headings that I believe are consistent with the author's intention for his Jewish audience many of whom had heard the Gospel and yet had never wholeheartedly committed themselves to Jesus as their Messiah or had they therefore renounced Judaism, and because of persecution, because of ignorance and certainly the sin of unbelief, some of their hearts were becoming increasingly hardened toward the Gospel. So the Holy Spirit inspires his author to present three essential truths concerning Jesus as their high priest. The categories are simply this: we will look at the superiority, the sympathy and the soul care of our great high priest. And I might add that the significance of this passage cannot be overstated. The reality of Jesus, the Son of God, being our great high priest is one of the most magnificent truths in all of Scripture and yet I would submit to you that many believers really do not grasp what this means. Ignorance is the great thief of blessing but stubborn unbelief is a far greater villain and, frankly, anyone who fails to understand the implications of this passage of Scripture and the inherent blessings contained therein, will be doomed to wandering their entire life in a wilderness of sin and disappointment and they will never experience both the temporal, much less the eternal, blessings that are available to all who have committed themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I begin this morning with a true story of great suffering and sorrow which really highlights the tragedy of one who does not fully understand the text before us. I read this in a blog by Justin Taylor and it really demonstrates how religious people can so easily forfeit God's blessing in their life because they don't understand and don't apply some of the great truths of Scripture, especially as it relates to the high priestly ministry of the

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Lord Jesus Christ. The title of the blog that I read is "The True Story of Pain and Hope Behind 'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.'"

In March of 1863, 18-year-old Charles Appleton Longfellow walked out of his family's house on Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and—unbeknownst to his family—boarded a train bound for Washington, D.C., traveling over 400 miles across the eastern seaboard in order to join President Lincoln's Union army to fight in the Civil War.

Charles (b. June 9, 1844) was the oldest of six children born to Fannie Elizabeth Appleton and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the celebrated literary critic and poet.

Less than two years earlier, Charles's mother Fannie had tragically died after her dress caught on fire. Her husband, awoken from a nap, tried to extinguish the flames as best he could, first with a rug and then his own body, but she had already suffered severe burns. She died the next morning (July 10, 1861), and Henry Longfellow's facial burns were so severe that he was unable even to attend his own wife's funeral. He would grow a beard to hide his burned face and at times feared that he would be sent to an asylum on account of his grief.

On November 27, 1863, while involved in a skirmish during a battle of the Mine Run Campaign, his son Charley was shot through the left shoulder, with the bullet exiting under his right shoulder blade. It had traveled across his back and skimmed his spine. Charley avoided being paralyzed by less than an inch.

He was carried into New Hope Church (Orange County, Virginia) and then transported to the Rapidan River. Charley's father and younger brother, Ernest, immediately set out for Washington, D.C., arriving on December 3. Charley arrived by train on December 5. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was alarmed when informed by the army surgeon that his son's wound "was very serious" and that "paralysis might ensue."

Then on Christmas day, 1863, Longfellow—a 57-year-old widowed father of six children, the oldest of which had been nearly paralyzed as his country fought a war against itself—wrote a poem seeking to capture the dynamic and dissonance in his own heart and the world he observes around him. He heard the Christmas bells that December day and the

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singing of "peace on earth" (Luke 2:14), but he observed the world of injustice and violence that seemed to mock the truthfulness of this optimistic outlook. The theme of listening recurred throughout the poem, eventually leading to a settledness of confident hope even in the midst of bleak despair.

And I will argue that the perceived hope that he had is very impersonal, more religious rhetoric than something that is satisfying and soothing to the soul as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and a deep abiding relationship with Christ.

Well, here's what Longfellow wrote,

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

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It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Well, understandably, Longfellow longed for justice to prevail on earth and he thought that perhaps with the North winning the Civil War that would be accomplished. He wanted divine intervention but like so many people, Longfellow misunderstood the great theme of Christmas.

The central message of Christmas, dear friends, is not good-will toward men, good relationships, and peace between fellow human beings. No, God did not send his Son to this earth so that we could get along with each other and so that we could get along with God. He sent his Son to provide a way for us to be reconciled to a holy God, for us to have a way to be at peace with God and end the war. When the angel appeared to the shepherds to announce the Savior's birth, Luke records that suddenly he was joined by "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.'" That's the King James version, an unfortunate translation that can be very confusing. Many misinterpret this text, many use it out of context. You can walk around the area and you can see yard decorations now at Christmas time and it says "Peace on earth," and what they mean by that is an absence of conflict. "Let's stop all the wars. Let's enjoy a relaxed peace of mind. Let's all get along. Let's have tranquility." And that's typical of our naïve theologically ignorant culture in which we live. What most fail to understand is this: that because of sin there is a great war going on between sinful man and a holy God and the wrath of God abides upon

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sinful man. We are separated from God, we are alienated from God, we are rebels but because of Christ we can be reconciled to God and we can enjoy peace with him.

So the Gospel message of the angels was this: glory to God in the highest because he has provided a way for us to be at peace with him. And the phrase "goodwill toward men" tends to promote the kind of naïve thinking reflected on many Christmas cards. "Let's all just show kindness toward one another." That's the idea; a sentimental version of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But the better translation is, "peace on earth among men with whom he is pleased." Literally, peace among men of his good pleasure. The angels were saying, "Glory to God in the highest," why? Because God has provided a way to save sinners solely on the basis of his good pleasure. Dear friends, those of us who belong to Christ are recipients of his free grace and we have received it solely on the basis of his uninfluenced sovereign good pleasure, and because of this we can now have peace with God by grace, through faith in Christ, the Savior. This was the theology that evoked the angelic adoration that day.

So the fundamental message of Christmas is that God has come to earth to help man be in relationship with him, not with each other, and God's goodwill toward men is expressed in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear friend, please understand: God's very purpose in creating us was that we could be in relation to him, that we might give him glory and enjoy his glory and enjoy him forevermore. And with this background, you must understand that this was the role of the high priest of Israel which brings us to this text. The high priest of Israel was the man God appointed to be the mediator of this fundamental relationship. There is nothing more important in all of the universe than man's relationship with God, but sin has separated man from a holy God yet God has provided a remedy so that we can be reconciled in that relationship, restored to fellowship, restored to blessing and this was pictured in the Levitical priesthood that we read about in the Old Testament. In fact, in chapter 5 and verse 1 of Hebrews we read, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."

Now, let me give you a bit of a background here regarding the high priest of the Old Testament. We read about it in our Scripture reading in Leviticus 16. Let me give you a little summary of what we read, a summary of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The day would seem to begin as usual with the offering of the morning sacrifice, the burnt offering of a one-year-old lamb. The high priest would then move methodically through the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement as prescribed in the text that we read in Leviticus 16. Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, was required to remove his priestly garments. He had to wash and then put on the special garments that God required for the sacrifices which took him into the Holy of Holies. He would then secure the necessary

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sacrificial animals: a bull for his own sin offering, and two male goats for the people's offerings, and two rams, one for Aaron's and the other for the people's burnt offering. Next he would slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. Before entering into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull, Aaron had to create a cloud or a veil, so to speak, of smoke, of incense in the Holy of Holies. This would cover the Mercy Seat. This was done to veil or to dim the glory of God so that he could enter into the presence of the glory of God safely and his life could be spared.

To enter the Holy of Holies safely, he had to pass through three areas in the tabernacle and later the temple when it was built. He took the blood and went through the door into the outer court and then through another door into the holy place and finally he disappeared behind the veil into the Holy of Holies. Three areas. Once there, he had to make his sacrifice very quickly. There were no seats in the Holy of Holies, no place to sit down. He had to do it quickly without delay lest he die. Once inside, he would take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat seven times. The Mercy Seat was called "the place of propitiation." There the justice of God would be temporarily appeased because all sin must be punished. There atonement would be made for the sins of the people, atonement always requiring two things: substitution and satisfaction.

Lots were then cast for the two goats to determine which one would be slaughtered and which would be the scapegoat that would be driven out and loosed in the wilderness. The goat for slaughter, which was the goat for the people's sin offering, was then sacrificed and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies. It was applied then to the Mercy Seat as the bull's blood had been done previously. Cleansing was then made for the holy place, seemingly by the sprinkling of the blood of both the bull and the goat, and this entire ceremony of atonement of the holy place was done alone without anyone present to help or to even watch.

Next, outside of the tent, Aaron was to make atonement for the altar of burnt offering using the blood of both the bull and the goat. Then the second goat, the one which was kept alive, had the sins of the nation symbolically laid on its head in a ceremony and then it was led outside the camp to a desolate place from which it would never return. Jewish tradition has it that the goat was led to a high cliff and then pushed backward over the precipice to prevent it from returning to the camp.

Then Aaron entered the tent of meeting, removed his linen garments, washed and put on his normal priestly garments and the burnt offering of two rams, one for Aaron and his family and the other for the people, was then offered. When the earlier sacrifices of the bull and the goat were completed, the fat of the sin offering was burned on the altar and the remains of the bull and the goat were then taken outside of the camp where they were

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burned. All of those who had been rendered unclean by handling the animals on which the sins of Aaron and the people were laid were to wash themselves and then return to the camp. Do you get the idea that God is serious about sin? And this would happen once per year. Year after year after year. Of course, the Day of Atonement foreshadowed and pictured, anticipated, a greater more permanent cleansing of God's people and of his dwelling place which was to be accomplished by a better priest who offered a better sacrifice.

This is the understanding that the Jewish people had and with this background, we then see, first of all, the author's argument when he speaks, 1: of the superiority of Jesus as our great high priest. Notice verse 14, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens." Now, let's stop here for a moment. Jesus didn't just pass through a symbolic veil, a veil that symbolized the separation, that separation between sinful man and a holy God, he passed through the heavens. You must understand that the heavens consist of three parts biblically. They understood this; three parts like the areas of the tabernacle in the temple that the priest had to pass through. You have the first heaven which is the atmosphere. You have the second heaven which is outer space. And then the third heaven is the place where God dwells; the place where Paul was "caught up" as you might recall in 2 Corinthians 12. Moreover, Jesus did not merely enter into a symbolic place, but he entered into the presence, the very presence of the living God. And when he got there, he didn't hurry up and get out, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, the Father, his work being forever finished.

The point that the author is making here is that the shadow that was portrayed in the Levitical priesthood with all of its sacrifices and cleansings and rituals and symbols has become reality. What was promised has been fulfilled. And who is this great high priest? It is Jesus, he says, the Son of God. Very important, two titles here: Jesus was his human name denoting his humanity, the Son of God, the title of his divinity. The great high priest was a Theanthropon, he was a God-man, the only God-man. This is the one who entered into the presence of God on our behalf. It had to be a man that was both human and divine, one who could supernaturally fuse the human nature with the divine to form an indissoluble bond. Jesus had to take on himself the nature of a man in order to be punished for our sin yet also he had to be God in order to endure the sufferings for the elect.

Wesley captured this so perfectly in his great hymn, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." In the second verse he said,

"Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, the incarnate Deity:

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Pleased with us, in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!"

God with us.

Verse 14, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, let us hold fast our confession," he says. Hold fast. That is the opposite of letting something slip away, letting something slip through your fingers. It's as if he's saying, "Despite how spiritually low you might feel, dear friends, don't yield to the pressure and fall back into the perceived comforts of Judaism. While you may enjoy the benefits of fellowshiping with your family and your friends, you know the nagging ache within your soul. You know the emptiness and guilt of not being permanently reconciled to God. Hold fast our confession. Don't fall away from it. Jesus is the superior high priest. He is the one that has accomplished the atonement for all our sins for all time. Place your trust in him today without delay and enjoy the perfect rest that comes when you walk in fellowship with the living Christ." You see, friends, this was the passionate cry of the author's heart and this is the message he is trying to communicate to these beleaguered people, some who knew the Gospel but not Christ, some who knew both but were not walking with Christ.

Dear friends, those of you that know Christ, these truths are applicable to us as well today. Think how easy it is for us to allow the inevitable difficulties of life to tempt our fickle flesh to ignore Christ and to fall back into some foolish realm of perceived comfort and safety; to begin to enjoy a Christ-less Christianity so indicative of cultural Christianity where you never find any rest, you never find any satisfaction; a place perhaps like Longfellow where all you have to stand on is religious rhetoric and tradition. All of that is powerless. I know so many people, including sadly some of you, who claim to know Christ but you are not in rest with him. You are chronically sad and depressed, dissatisfied, even bitter. Some of you are spiritually low and apathetic. You're looking for some thing, some place, some person who will give you quick and easy relief because somehow Christ isn't enough, even though you may not admit that. Past relationships don't seem to be working anymore, including your relationship with Christ. Your marriage is boring, the church isn't meeting your needs, you don't really love your brothers and sisters in Christ. You just don't seem to connect with your church family. Oh, you connect with lots of other people but none of those people are walking with Christ. None of them are advancing the purposes of God. You connect with them but you don't connect with your church family so you feel lonely, you feel discouraged, perhaps abandoned. And of course, none of this has anything to do with your heart, your attitude, it's everybody else's fault. You're as innocent as the driven snow.

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Isn't that how we think? That's how our flesh works. "It's not because I don't really love them, it's because they don't really love me." So we become proud of our microscopic vision that allows us to see the speck in our brother's eye but we make no effort to see the log in our own; we make no effort to understand what God may be up to and teaching us in the midst of whatever trial we are experiencing. We make no effort to seek wise counsel from the shepherds that God has given us within the church. We make no effort to forgive and restore wounded relationships. We make no effort to initiate new ones. We make no effort to serve Christ and love his people. And the idea of holding fast to our confession, our confession of who Jesus really is and all that he's doing, I mean, that never goes through our mind. No, we want relief more than we want blessing.

So we polish up our victim's badge and we gradually withdraw ourselves from those that truly love us and begin to break fellowship perhaps with our spouse, with our family, even our church family. We start spending time around others who are as immature as we are because that's where we find happiness, and like many of those early Jews, we fall back into a place that we perceive is safer, is happier. Many yield to the selfish lusts of the flesh and begin to fall back into the world where they can find real happiness. You know, that's always the danger of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy leads to bitterness, bitterness leads to spiritual apathy, spiritual apathy inevitably takes us down into the depths of worldliness. Then we convince ourselves that we need to take a break from Christianity, "After all, I just don't get along with those Christian people. The church isn't meeting my needs anymore." You may even look for another church where people are going to treat you like you deserve. That's how it works and like countless others, you create for yourself a fool's paradise in which you live where you think you're going to find lasting peace and joy and fulfillment that will soothe your aching soul and you say, "Oh, how great it is to be away from that oppressive spouse or that oppressive family or that oppressive church," or whatever it might be. It's party time. And do you know what? It is for a while. There is pleasure in sin for how long? A season, the Bible says. "There is a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof is death." But do you know what? In the middle of the night when all is quiet and you hear the faint voice of your convicting conscience that you are trying to silence, the Holy Spirit graciously causes you to feel the dull pain of being out of fellowship and the futility of wandering through life apart from Christ, and what you discover is that all that you had hoped for is nowhere to be found. Everything you hoped to escape is once again surrounding you, like the oppressive heat of a barren desert. And when, not if, tragedy strikes in your life, you have no place to stand. You collapse in despair.

Oh, dear friend, I encourage you to embrace your problems with the confident assurance that God is in them, that God has even ordained them and he is up to something in your life, and know as we're going to see, that your great high priest, the Lord Jesus, has

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experienced everything that you could possibly experience and he is there to meet your every need. What did James say to the 12 tribes that were dispersed abroad that were living in such agony? He said, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have its perfect result so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." I hope that you will learn this lesson well from this passage. Learn what it is, dear friends, to hold fast our confession.

You say, "Pastor, how can I practically do this?" Well, it occurs to me that we just sang about that. You need to ponder, dear friends, the unsearchable riches of Christ who is our great high priest. And for some of you, this is just going to begin with basic intentional Bible study. You need to ponder the glories of our crucified and risen and reigning Redeemer. You need to learn to meditate upon and contemplate the infinite riches of the blessings that are yours if you are united to him through saving faith: that you are hidden in him, you are secured by him, you are loved by him. You need to learn what it is to reflect upon the countless blessings of his grace past, present and future, and then thank him for what he is up to in your life right now, even though it may be painful, it may be confusing. And then seek his will from his word, run to the throne of grace, as we are going to see, and then choose to live consistently with who you are in Christ. Learn to bloom where you have been planted. God has placed you there for a reason. Rejoice in him. Be a living sacrifice. Get serious about living for him and you will find rest in him.

And I might add that as we look at this text, we can see that this holding fast really speaks of something so powerful. We must understand that Christian perseverance is made possible because we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens. He is the one who is right now at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf. An amazing thought. He is the one who through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is the one who is coming again to take us unto himself. But unless we know these truths intimately, unless we meditate upon them, unless we keep them in the forefront of our mind, unless we embrace them as our greatest treasure, our flesh will inevitably lead us away and then our flesh will cause us to go in secret search of other lovers, idols of our heart that promise but never deliver, and our soul will be greatly disappointed. What was it that Paul said in Philippians 3? He said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord."

What an unfathomable blessing to know that because we are united to Christ who is now in the presence of God, we are guaranteed that we are one day going to be with him, and how easy it is for us to lose sight of these great truths and when we do, we lose sight of the fact that he is at work in us right now. He is always up to something. And I might add that when God is up to something in our life, he never causes us to do anything to fall

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back into something inconsistent with our confession. He never causes us to fall back into some relationship, some religion, some lifestyle, that appeals to our flesh but prevents us from holding fast to our confession.

You say, "But oh, pastor, you don't understand." My, have I heard that a thousand times. "You don't understand, my situation is special. My situation is unique. You see, my heart is aching. I feel hopeless and helpless. I feel alone and afraid. I feel depressed and frustrated. I feel like a ship that is being battered about by a stormy sea and the tempest is breaking upon me and I feel like I'm going to be torn apart." Dear friends, that's exactly how those ancient Hebrews felt. That's what they felt and countless millions have felt that ever since. I have felt that before. And what is the answer? Verse 14, "since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, let us hold fast our confession." Jesus is, as the writer of Hebrews called him, the anchor for our souls.

So first he speaks of the superiority of our high priest, secondly: the sympathy of our high priest. Notice in verse 15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses." The term "sympathize" is a precious term. It means "to suffer together with someone." The King James version translates it this way, "for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Isn't that precious?

"But One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Folks, this is absolutely astounding to me. In fact, this whole section of Scripture has probably been used by God to speak to my heart maybe more than any other, to think that Jesus felt the full range of human temptation and sorrow. As we look through Scripture and his ministry, we see that he experienced mental and physical exhaustion, excruciating pain, tears, heartache, slander, mocking, persecution beyond our ability to even fathom. And he experienced something we would never experience and that is being forsaken by the Father. You see, all the pressures of hell were released against him. Sorrow and suffering beyond anything we could ever dream of therefore no matter what I experience, what you experience, no matter what the pain or the pressure or the confusion in terms of what's happening with all of the things going on, no matter what it is, Jesus has experienced it yet without sin. He understands it and like no one else he can actually enter into it. Sometimes when we're hurting, somebody might say, "Oh, I know exactly how you feel." No, you don't. We are all different. There is no way I can know how you feel. I might have had some things happen to me that are similar and that's good, we can comfort one another, but we are all different, but what's fascinating is Jesus does know exactly how we feel.

You say, "But how can Jesus know all that we experience when he has never sinned?" Well, you must think closely about that. You must understand that his temptations to sin

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were far more acute than ours, more intense than anything we have ever experienced because unlike us he never yielded to temptation. I mean, think how we are, our flesh typically succumbs immediately to temptation. The very thought of sin simply seems irresistible to our fallen nature so we really know nothing of what it means to experience the full force of temptation. Furthermore, because of his utter holiness, his sensitivity to sin was infinitely greater than ours therefore the level of temptation that was thrown against him was infinitely greater than anything we could have endured.

I ask you: have any of you ever sweat drops of blood? I haven't. Have any of you shed blood on the cross? Have any of you been forsaken by the Father? But Jesus did yet without sin therefore in Hebrews 12, beginning in verse 3, the writer says, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself." Why? "So that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin." And folks, as we read this, we realize that our precious Savior that passed through the heavens that is now in the third heaven, is not some distant God who is indifferent to our needs. He is not a God who is far removed from our experiences. He is not insensitive to our frailties. In fact, he's now at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf because there is nothing that we could possibly experience that he has not already endured. Oh, dear Christian, don't let this escape you: no matter what's going on in your life, he knows the pain of your heart. You carry no burden that he has not already borne. He's basically saying, "Look, whatever it is, I have already navigated these treacherous waters before. Won't you trust me to bring you through them safely?"

Verse 16, "Therefore," he says, "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 brings us to the soul care of our high priest. I want you to notice something here: Jesus gives more than sympathy, as marvelous as that is, but folks, he gives something that no other priest could ever give: he gives us personal access to the throne of grace, access into the very heart of God. Why? So that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. That's why he says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to this throne of grace."

Now, you must understand, this was inconceivable to the Jews. They knew that because God is holy, because he is utterly transcendent, he is totally other, that he was distant. He was unapproachable. I mean, you get near him, you will die. You see him, you will die. They understood that God dealt with them in the old covenant in ways that was primarily indirect, distant, not intimately personal. But you see, all of this has changed with Jesus. This was mind-boggling to them.

And beloved, what we need to take away from this is the great truth that when our heart is breaking, there is one thing that we need more than anything else in the world and that

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Jesus, Our Great High Priest

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Bible Text: Hebrews 4:14-16
Preached on: Sunday, December 11, 2016

is mercy. It is God's mercy. And this speaks to the great doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. You see, unlike Israel who collectively had to stand outside the veil and only the high priest could enter in on their behalf, unlike them, we have access into the throne room of God. Isn't it interesting, the high priest would disappear from their view and they couldn't enter into the presence of God; they had to be left outside. What a picture of Jesus. Jesus disappeared in his ascension, didn't he? He went into the presence of God the Father and there he intercedes on our behalf as the high priest did before the people, and one day he is going to reappear in all of his glory. But in the meantime because he has entered into the veil and because we are united to him, because we are together with him, we are hidden in him, we too have access into the divine presence and therefore, by the way, we don't need a priest. We don't need a priest. There is no need for some priestly mediation between God and man. That's totally unbiblical and that insults the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as I think about the original audience that heard this for the first time, I think how sad to think of those Jews still standing outside when they could have had access into the presence of God through faith in their sympathetic high priest that had provided for them that very access. And how sad to think that maybe some of you are just like them because you have never really committed yourself to Christ. Or some of you have committed yourself to Christ but you lack the confidence to enter into his presence to find mercy and grace and help in your time of need. Instead you come up with your own strategies to make life work apart from God, you develop your own plan without seeking his will, and instead you seek help from all the things that are out there. You seek help from drugs and from alcohol, from food, from friends, phony religion, new relationships because, after all, the old ones don't work. You seek it from entertainment, materialism, immorality. I mean, the smorgasbord of futile remedies and fleeting pleasures, it's endless when all along you had Jesus.

I don't know what else I can say. My friend, if you belong to Christ, you have access to God and only in his presence will you find lasting remedy for the longings of your broken heart. And isn't it a comfort, and so many of you understand this, isn't it a comfort to know when your heart is breaking that you can run into the presence of God? You know, those times when your head is swimming and your heart is breaking? What a joy it is to just get alone with God and celebrate all of these great truths. But, you know, if you don't know them, if you don't understand them, if they're not a part of your heart, you can't enjoy what you don't know. That's why, as I say, ignorance is such a thief of blessing. But oh, unbelief and stubbornness, it is indeed the greater villain. To be able to cry out to the one who has been there before, the one who can actually feel my pain, that's just staggering to me. The one who alone can produce joy in the midst of sorrow. The one who can produce clarity in the midst of confusion. The one who can produce boldness in

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the midst of fear, who can give us satisfaction in the midst of desperation. Oh, the resources we have in Christ, the riches of undeserved mercy and grace. Why would we ever choose to remain in spiritual poverty when we have all of this?

Well, may we all celebrate Jesus our great high priest by holding fast our confession. Why? Because we have his great sympathy for our weaknesses therefore let us draw near with confidence, with boldness, to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these great truth and I pray that by the power of your Spirit, you will make them clear and compelling to every heart. May we apply them in our lives and may we celebrate them all the more as we come to this Christmas season where we celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God, and all that that means. O Lord, use these truths to bring sinners unto yourself and to cause those of us who know you and love you to be more conformed to the image of our precious Savior for it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.