

“DRAWING NEAR TO THE THRONE OF GRACE”

I. Introduction

- A. There are moments in all of our lives when we find ourselves dreading having to face someone after they have found out about something shameful that we have done, whether due to our sin or our frailty.
 - 1. The one thing that can make those moments a little more bearable is if the person is able to convey some degree of sympathy with us in our weakness.
 - 2. Of course, the fact that we are all sinners means that if we look hard enough we can always find some common ground between ourselves and the sins and failures that we see in other people.
 - 3. We don't always do this, but it is true.
 - 4. These verses in Hebrews tell us something that is much more amazing than that.
 - 5. They tell us that the sinless Son of God sympathizes with us in our weakness and that he stands before God as our great high priest.
- B. This passage begins a new section in the letter, a section in which the focus is upon how Jesus is a better priest than the priests who served under the old covenant.
 - 1. The passage is bracketed by two exhortations, exhortations that begin with the words, “let us.”
 - 2. Once again, the writer is urging us to persevere in the faith.
 - 3. But he is exhorting us in a different way than he did in the previous part of chapter 4.

4. There, he warned us of the danger of failing to enter God's rest.
 5. Here, he encourages us by directing our attention to Christ.
 6. This prompts Martin Luther to describe Hebrews 4 in this way: "First, the apostle terrifies us and then he comforts us."
 7. Having looked at the terrifying part of chapter 4 last week, tonight we come to the comforting part.
- C. As we study these three verses tonight, I want us to see three comforting things that they tell us about Jesus.
1. Jesus is our great high priest.
 2. Jesus is our sympathetic high priest.
 3. And Jesus is a high priest who is worthy of our confidence.

II. A Great High Priest

- A. We begin by considering Jesus as our great high priest.
1. In verse 14, we are reminded of the unfathomable blessings that we have in Christ.
 2. Take special note of the word "have" in this verse.
 3. This is the thing that we need to keep in mind when times of discouragement come into our lives.
 4. It is so easy for us to lose sight of what we have in Jesus Christ.
 5. Regardless of the circumstances that you face, never forget what you have in your possession when you possess Christ by faith.

B. Here in verse 14, the writer tells us that we have Jesus as our “great high priest.”

1. The only thing that is unfortunate about that statement is that the word “great” is perhaps the most overused word in the English language.
2. It is so overused that I like the idea of church historian Darryl Hart when he suggests that we should start referring to things such as the “Great Awakening” as the “Pretty Good Awakening.”
3. In spite of the fact that we use “great” in all sorts of not-so-great ways, the writer of Hebrews really means it when he calls Jesus our great high priest.
4. Israel had a high priest.
5. There were a lot of things that were impressive about the ministry of those high priests.
6. Aaron was Israel’s first high priest, and he ascended Sinai with Moses and saw the God of Israel.
7. Israel’s high priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement every year.
8. Those things were pretty good.
9. But Jesus is in a class all by himself.

C. Jesus is the only great high priest because he has done something far more significant than enter into the Holy of Holies once per year.

1. Israel’s earthly sanctuary was only a representation of God’s presence.
2. It wasn’t the reality.

3. But Jesus has gone into the heavens, into the real sanctuary of God.
 4. He is presently ministering on our behalf in that heavenly sanctuary.
 5. This is of enormous significance for us.
 6. It tells us that Jesus has brought a glorified human nature, the same human nature that we possess, into the very presence of God.
 7. This is why we can be confident that we who are united to Jesus will enter into God's eternal Sabbath rest at his appointed time
- D. The other thing that we should note about what is said in verse 14 is that our great high priest with God is God's very own Son.
1. This is another reason why he is a great high priest.
 2. He is not just a human being.
 3. He is not a priest who has his own sins to deal with.
 4. He is both fully human and fully divine.
- E. As we study this letter, you will see that the writer keeps directing our attention to Jesus.
1. The reason why he does this is because his goal is to help us hold firm to Christ.
 2. The writer knows that the way to hold firm to Christ is to keep looking at who he is and what he has done.
 3. This is why it is so important for us to be continually in God's Word.

4. It is why our focus as we study God's Word should not primarily be to look for practical tips for living but to see Christ.
- F. Verse 14 ends by saying that in light of all what we have in Christ, we should adhere to our confession of Christ.
1. The fact that the writer would say this means that he knows we will be tempted not to hold fast.
 2. There are times in our lives when it is hard for us to keep on believing.
 3. There are times when it seems like Jesus may not be all that great.
 4. Don't succumb to such thoughts.
 5. Keep reminding yourself of the greatness of Christ.
 6. There is nothing in this world that can surpass the greatness of what you have in him.

III. A Sympathetic High Priest

- A. We turn now to the second thing that this passage tells us about Jesus: he is our sympathetic high priest.
1. As we noted at the beginning of this sermon, it is a wonderful thing when someone sympathizes with you in your weakness.
 2. So often in life people have no sympathy for the weaknesses that they see in others.
 3. Sin clouds our perspective, and we fail to realize that we could very well have failed in the same way if we were in the same circumstances.

4. But Jesus is able to sympathize with us in our weakness.
5. He knows what it is like to be human.
6. He experienced hunger, thirst, uncertainty, fatigue, discouragement, loneliness, grief, and pain.
7. He was tempted just as we are, yet without sin.
8. He understands the temptations that you face.
9. He empathizes with you.
10. He knows what it is like to be you.

B. We have a difficult time believing this.

1. We are inclined to think that Jesus' sinlessness means that he is not fully able to sympathize with us in our weakness.
2. There are several things that we need to consider as we think about this.
3. First, we should ponder the fact that Jesus knew the pressure of temptation in a way that none of us will ever know it.
4. He never experienced that twisted sense of relief that we momentarily experience when we give in to a temptation.
5. For all of his days in this world, the pressure was continually on him.
6. We should also realize that Jesus can sympathize with us in the sense that he knows what it is like for us to feel shame for the sins that we commit.
7. He never had any sins of his own to be ashamed of, but he bore our shame when he died in our place on the cross.

8. One other thing that we should bear in mind is that the fact that Jesus never sinned means that he is able to do more than just sympathize with you in your weakness.
9. It is only because he never sinned that he is able to rescue you out of your weakness.

IV. A High Priest Worthy of Our Confidence

- A. This brings us to the third thing that we need to see in this passage: that in Jesus we have a high priest who is worthy of our confidence.
 1. Confidence can make a world of difference in life.
 2. One place where we see this quite clearly is in the world of sports.
 3. The greatest athletic performances are turned in by athletes when they are not afraid of failing, when they just go out and do what they know that they are capable of doing.
 4. When athletes get into that kind of zone, they exude a confidence that elevates their level of play.
 5. Of course, the only problem with this is that sometimes even the most talented and most confident athletes fail.
 6. The good news for you as a Christian is that you have a fail-safe source of confidence when it comes to approaching God.
 7. Your source of confidence is not anything in yourself.
 8. It is in the fact that you have Jesus Christ as your great high priest.
- B. We need confidence when it comes to drawing near to God.

1. We need confidence because we know things about ourselves that nobody else knows.
 2. We know things that we are ashamed of, things that can easily unsettle us when we think of standing before the One to whom we must give account.
 3. But this passages assures us that we really can approach God with confidence because we know that Christ has already passed through the heavens and entered God's presence on our behalf.
 4. He has provided full atonement for our sins.
 5. He has fulfilled the requirements of God's holy law on our behalf.
 6. We can draw near to God with confidence because we know that we are clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ.
- C. When the writer of Hebrews speaks of drawing near to the throne of grace, he is making a point that would have been extremely significant to people who came from a Jewish background back when the temple system was still in operation.
1. The phrase "throne of grace" corresponds to the lid of the ark of the covenant, which was referred to as the mercy seat.
 2. The mercy seat was located inside the Holy of Holies, behind a heavy curtain that separated it from the rest of the sanctuary.
 3. Only Israel's high priest was permitted to draw near to the mercy seat, and that only took place once per year.
 4. But now that Christ has come as the true and great high priest, everyone who places their trust in him has open access to the reality to which that mercy seat pointed.

5. Through Christ, we really can draw near to God's heavenly throne.
 6. We really can bring our requests to God with boldness and confidence, knowing that Christ has made full satisfaction for our sins.
- D. It is also of significance that the writer calls this a throne of grace.
1. This name assures us that when we draw near to God through Christ we will receive mercy and grace.
 2. As John Calvin explains, "the throne of God is not arrayed in naked majesty to confound us, but is adorned with a new name, even that of grace, which ought ever to be remembered whenever we shun the presence of God. For the glory of God, when we contemplate it alone, can produce no other effect than to fill us with despair; so awful is his throne. [This writer], then, that he might remedy our diffidence, and free our minds from all fear and trembling, adorns it with 'grace,' and gives it a name which can allure us by its sweetness"
 3. We are always in a time of need.
 4. We always need God's help.
 5. We should not be cast down at those times when we really feel our need for his help.
 6. Even when we fail, we can have confidence that the Lord does not reject us.
 7. Again and again and again, we need to fall back upon what we have in Christ, not what we have in ourselves.
 8. It is in judging ourselves to be unworthy that we become worthy.

9. As Martin Luther put it, “the more miserable, sinful, and distressed a man doth feel himself, and judge himself to be, the more willing is Christ to receive him and relieve him” [cited in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 149]

V. Conclusion

- A. Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that powerfully applies the truths that are revealed to us in this passage.
- B. The hymn begins with the singer urging himself to take confidence in Christ’s high priestly ministry:

*Arise, my soul, arise,
Shake off your guilty fears;
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears:
Before the throne my Surety stands,
Before the throne my Surety stands,
My name is written on his hands.*

- C. And the hymn ends with this stanza:

*My God is reconciled
His pard’ning voice I hear;
He owns me for his child,
I can no longer fear;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And “Father, Abba, Father!” cry.*

- D. If you have Jesus Christ as your great high priest, then you have that same confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, and you have God’s Word that you will receive mercy and grace to help in your time of need.