

Able to Be Touched

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Together let's open God's word to Hebrews 4 this morning. Hebrews 4. We're going to read the entire chapter. Our text is the first part of verse 15. Hebrews 4 beginning at verse 1.

1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. 3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. 6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. 12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. 14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We read the holy and inspired word of God to that point this morning.

Our text is the first part of verse 15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Beloved of God, the Lord Jesus Christ's humanity was a real and true humanity and therefore he had when he was upon the earth real human responses to things and even real human reactions to things. The difference, of course, between his real human responses and reactions and ours is that his were sinless whereas ours are stained with sin. His sinless responses and reactions are part of the righteousness that he imputes to us for justification. They are part of his obedience, his lifelong obedience as he lived upon this earth, that he reacted and responded so purely, so perfectly to things, and that is imputed to us to cover our sins and our unrighteous responses and our unrighteous reactions to things. But not only that, the Lord Jesus' perfect and sinless responses and reactions when he was upon the earth are also set before us on the pages of sacred scripture as an example, as by the power of the Spirit working within us they become something that molds and shapes our responses and our reactions to things too, sinless in this life though they will never be.

This morning, we consider the response and at times reaction of compassion in the Lord Jesus. I take my lead into Jesus' compassion from Hebrews 4:15 and limit my focus specifically to the first part of that verse where it says that he is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Children, if the text says we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, then that means that we do have a high priest who is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. That's an astounding reality and that's a comfort for us and that's an incentive to draw us to the table of the Lord this morning. The theme is "Able to Be Touched." Able to be touched, reality and the comfort and the incentive.

Our King James Version of the Bible accurately and very beautifully translates the Greek here with that word "touched." The Lord Jesus is able to be touched. The Lord has this ability, this power, that he is able to feel what another is feeling when the Lord perceives that they are feeling it and why they are feeling it. That is, he has this ability that the experience of another goes through to him into the inside, into his mind and into his heart. That's what it means that he's touched. That word "touched" is part of a phrase in our text, "touched with the feeling of." In the Greek it's simply one Greek word, "touched with the feeling of" is one word and it's the word from which we get the English word "sympathy." It's one of the great New Testament words for compassion. Able to be affected in a sympathetic way; able to feel our infirmities when we have them; to feel our sufferings, our lack, our needs that cause us pain and trouble.

This ability that he has to be touched means that when our infirmities come to him they do not meet a brick wall with him but they get through to the inside and they grab ahold of him; he senses them and he has compassion for us when they come inside of him. Of course, in God and in Jesus Christ, sympathy and compassion is much more than a human emotion or a human feeling. In God and therefore in Jesus Christ, compassion, sympathy, is a will and it is a power, and we'll get to that in a moment. It's more than an

emotion but at the same time, beloved, we do have to say it isn't less than an emotion. Because Jesus Christ is God enfleshed in our humanity, because he took upon himself a real and full humanity, the Lord had emotions, he had feelings, and in his compassion emotions were a part of that; it isn't all that his compassion was but it was a part of it.

Emotions are instinctive feelings and Jesus had them. You can't have a real and true humanity if it's void of them. You see this on the pages of the gospel accounts. In Matthew 8:9, for example, the Lord hearing the faith of the Centurion is amazed by it. Matthew 8:9 and 10, "When Jesus heard it, he marvelled," that is, he was amazed, "and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith." In Luke 22:15 we read of a strong desire within him for an experience in the future, "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." A strong word in the Greek, to long for with deep longing. We read of him exalting in the spirit in joy in Luke 10:21, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father." We see him love and, of course, again all of these are more than emotions but they are not less than, emotions are a part of it for him in his humanity. And he answered and said unto him, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." Then Jesus beholding him loved him and said to him, "One thing thou lackest." He experienced sorrow, as the man of sorrows observe him weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. He experienced sinless frustration in Mark 8:12, "And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign?" He experienced righteous anger at rebellion and affront and blasphemy against God. Look at him in the temple cleansing that temple in righteous pure anger.

But of all of the responses and all of the reactions that are recorded on the pages of the gospel accounts about him, it is this one that we are observing in Hebrews 4 that is recorded and described as coming out of him the most, compassion. How often do we not read that he was moved with compassion? Mark 1:41, "And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean." Matthew 9:36, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Matthew 20:34, "So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him." And other times as well. That word refers to a deep churning in the soul, feeling the reality of what he is observing and the need of the one who is before his eyes. It went into him. He was touched by it and it led to a churning within his soul and compassion and sympathy.

The scriptures speak of him having sympathy for his people in their physical needs. In Mark 8:2, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat." And especially it describes him having compassion for the spiritual needs of his people, moved with compassion because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And especially, beloved, moved with compassion at this spiritual need, the battle that his people face against their own sin. That's most specifically what his sympathy and compassion in our text, Hebrews 4:15, is about, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." What infirmities? Especially these, "but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without

sin." The temptations that lead to battle against sin. He sinlessly knew temptation in his own humanity and knows the battle that we face. All of these, then, together are the infirmities that go into him and that touch him. Sin and its consequences, all of it upon us, the physical and spiritual needs of the sheep, they do not pass him by. They entered when he was upon the earth, into his real human eyes, into his real human ears, through the receptors on his real human hands, and they got to him on the inside in his mind and heart, and the seat of his affections and they caused a powerful deep churning within him. They touch him.

Now there's been some debate in the history of the church about one part of that last sentence that I spoke to you, that the physical and spiritual needs of the sheep cause this compassion, this churning within him. Do our needs cause that compassion to rise in him as though these things outside of him have a certain power over him and cause this response within him? Some have said no in the history of the church and have explained it this way. If you think of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus weeping at the sorrow of Mary and Martha, that what was happening there was not that it was the sorrow of those around him that went into him and drew this compassion out of him so that it expressed in tears, but rather he himself remained completely unmoved by it, was perfectly stoic by it in himself, it had no power over him but he recognizing that this is the kind of situation among human beings where one would have this kind of compassion that he willed in himself to be compassionate and to have tears in this moment. Calvin said no, that explanation denies the full and real humanity of Jesus Christ, and Calvin taught instead that Christ when he took on our humanity also took on our emotions knowing that experiences and perceptions would go into him and would draw this out of him as they do with us, only sinlessly in him.

When he was at the well in Samaria, he was thirsty. Was that simply a show? The lack of water outside of him did not cause him to be thirsty? And we might say that, lest we say that that had a certain power over him, that instead he recognized that this was the kind of situation in which human beings would experience thirst and so he willed thirst to rise within him? No, he really was thirsty; taking on a real human body and a real human nature meant being under a certain direction of circumstances always according to the perfect decree of God. But it meant being thirsty, really thirsty and so it meant really experiencing sinless compassion at the right time, at the right place, in the right way. Always in control and always without sin, but affected by things. So Calvin concludes this is what allows him to be Hebrews 4:15, a high priest who is able to be touched, a compassionate high priest really touched by things that go into him and move him, not just to will to feel them in a certain moment but that they'd come into him and draw this out of him. So that Calvin says so does he feel sympathy for us, that by a strong feeling of grief and by tears he shows the he is as much genuinely affected by our distresses as if he had endured them in his own person.

Do you hear that? Do you hear that those of you experiencing loss, loneliness, trouble in your body, pain, confusion with the Lord's way with me, as if he himself endured it in his own person? And what about in your battle against your own sins that you have observed in this past week again? The temptations you must fight against, hand-to-hand combat

with the evil one, as it were? You fight, child of God. You fight and you fight knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ understands and understands the difficulty and is even compassionate as he sees the battle his people are in.

Now don't go into the other ditch with this and conclude, then, that if I have a certain feeling, that automatically means Jesus has that feeling too. Whatever I feel he must feel. His emotions are sinless and his compassion is sinless. Ours is not. It often arises unlawfully. It's often not directed to a lawful end, can be stained with so much self-seeking, desire for power or for control or whatever else. Sometimes it's undue. Sometimes it's way less than it ought to be. Sometimes it's not submitted to the holy will of Jehovah God whereas every reaction and response in Christ is utterly pure. It's all adjusted and regulated in obedience to God and altogether free from sin. Never wrongly applied. Never out of balance. Compassion and holy zeal for right. Always perfectly together in him, kissing in him. They're never beyond what is due and never less than what is due but they're always always real. Real, ignited by the real needs of his sheep and always purely and deeply felt.

The fact that he is sinless does not mean that he feels it less, in fact, it means that he feels it more. We're dulled by our own selfishness often. He's not. How deeply and how fully he feels all of the pains and sorrows and difficulties of his people, how his innards churn and churn the struggles of the people of God. How each one comes to him and receives the full due amount of compassion that it ought to receive out of him in his real humanity. This ought to astound us. He's utterly pure and utterly holy and sinless. Sometimes you have a holy person who has a hard time feeling sympathy and compassion. "Why doesn't everybody just hold it together like I do?" But here's the sinless one, pure, utterly pure, no thought, nothing contrary to the will of God and yet perfectly and utterly compassionate.

And what's more, beloved, this is not just what he was, this is who he is. We have not a high priest. Not we didn't used to have a high priest when he was back there on the earth and now it's all different that he's ascended into heaven. But right now, right now we have a high priest who is able to be touched. Though he's ascended into heaven, though he's glorified in his holy humanity, this has not changed about him. In perfection he yet sympathizes, he yet feels the churning within for us in our needs.

In Revelation 1 the Apostle John sees a vision of Jesus in his ascended state, in his glorified state, and he's utterly different than anything John remembered. He has these eyes as flames of fire. There's a Roman broadsword coming out of his mouth. And what do we read as John falls down scared of him and the Lord Jesus puts his hand upon him and touches him, the touch of compassion, "It's me, John. It's still me." He still is this.

And after 2,000 years of being ascended at the right hand of God and the trials of God's people and difficulties and their pains and spiritual oppressions and battles coming to him, he's still touched every time perfectly and purely as though it's the first time something like this has ever come to him. He's not cold and callous. He doesn't say, "Here we go again, another one." But the needs of his sheep still come to him through his

real human eyes and ears and they still get through to his mind and heart and touch him and he churns within with compassion.

What a comfort this is, people of God. What a comfort. He understands. He knows. Isn't it a comfort to know that someone understands and yet no one around us can understand perfectly and fully; even if they've been through the same set of circumstances, there's always enough things that are different. And besides we're not exactly the same as one another so that they can understand to a certain point but there's always something unique to us about whatever situation we are experiencing. But with the Lord Jesus Christ, he is able to understand fully and to sympathize fully. Every aspect is known to him utterly.

Two verses before our text, verse 13, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." That's frightening for the unrepentant sinner. Everything is naked and open. He sees it all, every last motive is before his face. But for the repentant sinner who comes to the table of the Lord, I say this too, he sees every last aspect of what I endure probably better than I see it and I know it, and he feels it perfectly. Every nuance. Every shade.

And what's more, beloved, the comfort is that his compassion fulfills itself in action to help and to help as only the Son of God made flesh can. As we said, mercy, sympathy, compassion, is an attribute of God. It's reflected in the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore it's never simply a feeling, it's never only a churning in the bowels, but it's a churning that fulfills itself in action, a power to save. We never read of him when he was on the earth being moved of compassion and then that's it. Period. That's the end of it. But rather being moved with compassion he acts to rescue. Mighty power to help when he was on the earth, the miracles he performed in sympathy for the people, the long days and nights of teaching and preaching for these sheep who were scattered without a shepherd. And then this, was it not this compassion, beloved, that led him to the action of going to the cross and bearing the sins of his people upon himself, knowing that this is the heart of their trouble? Their physical troubles and all their spiritual troubles is sin and the consequences of sin, and out of that churning within him in sympathy for his sheep, he goes and mounts the cross and says, "I will deal with the heart of it and I will take it upon myself and bear it away."

And is it not still as he rises from the dead and ascends to the right hand of God, is it not his compassion for us that leads us to continue his work on our behalf, to intercede before the throne of God? To send graces down to us, the Holy Spirit? We sang it in psalter #198, "In great compassion for the weak, he ever will maintain their right, will help the poor and save the meek." Their lives are precious in his sight. "Father, this one needs this right now. Send it down to them. This one needs a special measure of the Spirit in this. Father, I know it and not only do I know it but I feel it."

It's always wonderful when we have a brother or sister in Christ who can understand what we are going through, even to the extent that they can, but at the same time, beloved, how much can they really do to help us? Sometimes some things but they're so limited in what they can really do. This Lord Jesus Christ is able and what he does is he conquers the sin,

the death and the grave. In our pilgrim pathway, he turns everything against us to before us and finally in the end he removes all tears, sin and sorrow. With power he helps.

Now take this and add it into the picture. Is this giving to you not also an act of his compassion for you? This is an act of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ. This is a connection between heaven and earth in real time. It is not I who will administer this sacrament to you, it is not your elders who will host this meal, it is the Lord Jesus himself. He said this. He instituted this and he will be present by his Spirit, and he will himself feed your hungry and thirsty souls and he will seal what has been spoken to you of the holy gospel. He does this and he does this in compassion for his people. He could have gone to heaven and could have controlled all things for our benefit at the right hand of God and not told us a word about it, and not interacted with us from thereon out and said, "Well, when everything gets to the end, then I'll see them and all will be well." But during the middle of it on our pilgrim pathway, he makes these connections between himself and heaven and earth. We call them the means of grace and this is one of them and you must see this, therefore, as the Lord Jesus saying, "In compassion for my people as they walk this pilgrim way unto glory, I want to assure them of my love for them. I want to assure them that I am working all things to their benefit. I want to assure them that through this valley of tears I am upholding them and I will lead them to glory. And I forgive their sins and I strengthen them for the battle. I unite them to myself. And I want to assure them that I'm going to bring them around a greater table with all the saints of God because in compassion for them I'm going to come back one day and take them out of all of their sin and suffering, I'm going to set them with all the saints and all the just men made perfect, and we'll eat and drink in the marriage of the Lamb and the supper, world without end."

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Is this not an incentive to come, to eat and to drink in faith with needy hearts at this table? Come see the Savior in compassion, a gift to you, the bread and the wine is his body broken and shed for you. Come, eat and drink. Amen.

Father, bless thy word to our hearing and may it prepare us now to take the sacrament by faith and to receive what thou dost grant to us within it. In Jesus' name. Amen.