

# Confidence in Christ

By Rev. John Wagner

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 10:35  
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## Covenant Free Presbyterian Church

179 Midway Road  
Lexington, SC 29072

**Website:** [fpcna.org/churches/covenantfpc](http://fpcna.org/churches/covenantfpc)  
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My text is found in verse 35 of Hebrews 10 where the apostle exhorts these Hebrew believers,

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

Church historians tell us that Christians were treated by Jews and Gentiles alike as the scum of the earth for the sake of Christ, nothing more than bags of trash that were good for nothing but to be burned. You see, to be a Christian meant something in those days. They were constantly being ridiculed and mocked and laughed to scorn by family, by friends, by neighbors, by strangers, and it didn't end with ridicule. Many times their earthly possessions were taken from them as the pagan governments imposed outrageous fines upon them that left them completely bankrupt. They were driven from city to city because no one wanted these Christians in their neighborhoods. And quite often we know that they were put to death but put to death in ways that could only be influenced by hell itself. They were burned alive. We know that Nero did cover many a Christian with tar, with pitch, and he set them in his gardens, put them aflame while they lit up his moral debaucheries that took place at night. We also read that they were taken to the amphitheater and there they were torn in pieces by lions. It was no different for these Hebrew Christians to whom the apostle wrote the words of this text.

You realize something of the intensity of what these believers were facing by way of persecution when you discern just why the apostle was writing this epistle in the first place. Because things were so bad, because the persecution was so intense, they were being tempted, these Hebrew believers were being tempted and the apostle knew it right well, being tempted to go back into Judaism. Because they had declared their faith in Christ, they had been baptized as disciples of Christ, that brought on the scorn of the Jews, and the temptation was to ease yourself out of that predicament, go back into Judaism, go back to the temple, go back to the Levitical sacrifices, go back to the high priest of Israel and there you're going to find rest and peace and safety. But the apostle spends this entire epistle to show them not only the superiority of the Christian faith over Judaism but the superiority of Jesus Christ.

That's the theme of the book. In the face of severe opposition, deep deep waters of trouble, the apostle says, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." All that the devil was doing in their lives, you see, I glean from those words of Paul, I believe Paul wrote Hebrews. All that the devil was designing to do in the lives of these believers was to shatter their confidence. You tell someone don't cast it away because there's a danger of them casting away their confidence, and the devil, by this persecution, wanted to shatter the confidence of the Lord's people. Not confidence in themselves. You know, I believe that that's what needs to be shattered more and more in the church of Jesus Christ; men went to town and I think this mentality has been adopted by too much of the church, self-confidence, confidence in one's abilities, confidence in one's powers and his talents and his gifts. Hogwash, to use a polite word. No talent, no confidence in our talents, no confidence in ourselves whatsoever. I find that when there is self-confidence something runs right beside it and that is arrogance and that's cockiness and that's pride, that's self-dependence, but when the Lord brings you to a point where you find and you feel that you are nothing, that you have nothing apart from Jesus Christ, you walk humbly then with God. That's the best place the child of God can be in. That's only a by the way remark. The devil wasn't trying to shatter their confidence in themselves, it was their confidence in Jesus Christ. That was the point of attack, to shake them and their trust, and their hopes, and their confidence in the one they professed to be their Savior.

You see, brothers and sisters, it's when our confidence in the Lord is shaken, confidence in the Lord's word, in the Lord's promises, in the Lord's work, it is then that we have the temptation to give up, to give up the race and to throw in that proverbial towel, in some way, shape or form to give up. But the sure-fire defense against that temptation is, as the apostle puts it in another way in chapter 3, he carries this theme throughout the epistle to the Hebrews, he says there, "Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." It is through having firm confidence in Jesus Christ, not in the preacher, not in the denomination, not in your system of theology, but having firm confidence in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ that we will be kept from throwing in the towel, from going back, from forsaking the Lord, from backsliding when the troubles come.

This, you see, Christ is our shield of faith. Christ is our confidence and you and I must learn to raise that shield with the fiery darts of the devil. The fact of the matter is that in whatever day God's people live, the gospel always acts as a great sword that divides people and with that division there will come persecution and there will come conflict. I was explaining this to my children at the family altar last week, the devil hates it when Christians build walls. I pointed out, as we're going once again as a family through the book of Nehemiah, that the reason that Nehemiah and these Jews faced so much opposition from Sanballat and from Tobiah was because the devil hates it when God's people build walls that shut him out. The devil hates separation with a passion. You see, the walls that Nehemiah went there to Jerusalem to rebuild were but a declaration of what God said to Satan in the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:15, I'm sure most of you know it well, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." There is God saying it, "I am going to put a wall between your seed and my seed. I'm

going to put separation." There is going to be variance. There's going to be strife. There's going to be division.

The devil knows it right well and I'll tell you, the reason he inspired so much Sanballat and Tobiah to have those wall, to fight against those walls being built again, it was nothing more than the declaration God was shutting him out, shutting out the influences of the Gentiles upon the people of God and he didn't like it. And I will tell you, every time you go to build walls in your home, every time you go to build walls in your life that will shut out the world, you're going to find opposition, you're going to find persecution, the devil is going to kick. It will be within the church. It will be outside. It doesn't make any difference. He is going to kick because he hates walls being put up and erected. He hates division. It reminds him of what the Lord told him in Genesis 3:15. We will never be reconciled. We're enemies all our days. So Satan tried to shatter their confidence and Nehemiah's confidence. "What do these feeble Jews? Even if a fox comes upon the wall he will knock it down." Nehemiah himself says, "We were afraid that they would make our hands stop from the work," trying to shatter their confidence in the Lord and in the Lord's word to them. The devil has not changed his tactics from that day to this.

Now that which sustained the early church in the midst of her persecution is that which is going to sustain us and I want to speak to you for a few moments this morning on the simple subject of "Confidence in Christ." Confidence in Christ. The church of the Lord needs a great dose of it and I am telling you as the days get worse and worse, and they're getting worse and worse, sorry, post-millennials, they're not getting better and better. As things are getting worse and worse, as all around us this decay is setting in, as the love of the many is waxing cold, there needs to be a healthy dose of good old-fashioned confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ, and what is this confidence, therefore, that Paul is exhorting these believers not to cast away? What is it that's going to sustain you and going to sustain me through thick and thin when you and I feel like casting in the towel? Have you ever felt that way? Anybody here, believer, you felt like throwing in the towel? What's the use of it all? Yes, you have. What will sustain us? What is this confidence in Christ?

There are several Greek words translated "confidence" in our New Testaments. One of those words has the idea of being fully persuaded of something and therefore completely confident about it. Paul uses this word in Philippians 1:6 where he says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Paul says, "I am fully persuaded about something that when God starts a work in some soul, he doesn't quit. He will finish that work until the day of Jesus Christ." He was fully persuaded of that truth about the Lord.

The other most commonly used word sometimes translated "confidence" in our New Testaments has the idea of speaking freely, and hence the thought of boldness and assurance where fear has been replaced with freedom and frankness and courage. If you speak freely, you speak your mind, there's nothing pulling you back, there's nothing holding you back, you go with boldness with this assurance that takes away the fear, and there is therefore confidence. It is understandably the word that the apostle uses in our

text here in verse 35, as well as the word he uses back in verse 19 where he says, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness," there's the word, confidence "to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus." And the apostle writes in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us come boldly," it reads literally, "Let us come with confidence to the throne of grace that we might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Let's come speak frankly with God. Let's come holding nothing back. Let's not come with fear that God is going to rap us over the head, that he's going to cast us aside, but let's come just like little children who will come up to mom or dad when they have this freedom to come and just ask for whatever they want, you know? Let's come with that kind of confidence and that boldness in the Lord.

Now bringing it all together, we learn that confidence in Christ is far more than a feeling because, brothers and sisters, feelings come and go. You might feel confident one day and feel absolutely unconfident the next. Confidence in Christ has to do with being persuaded of something to such a degree that it creates boldness and confidence in the heart, dispelling the fear, dispelling the dismay, dispelling the despair, dispelling the discouragement, and replacing it with courage. Being confident about something to such a degree that now there's not fear but there is boldness and there is assurance, that's what fixes the heart, that's when all around crashes down and says give up, "No, I will not give up! I have confidence, absolute confidence in Jesus Christ." Not myself, not my ability to hold on, to tenaciously have a grip upon him because, my friends, my confidence this morning and yours must not be in your grip of Christ, it must be of his grip of you. That's what you must have confidence in, fully persuaded of some truth that gives you boldness, fearlessness and courage.

Now what does it mean? What are we to be fully persuaded of concerning Jesus Christ? Well, there's a whole lot in Hebrews, there's a whole lot in this chapter. I've just begun a series dealing with this whole subject in my own church and I'm only going to get to two or three things that deal with what we are to be confident about concerning Jesus Christ and that will anchor our hearts despite what is going on around us.

First, it means confidence in the purpose of Christ. Confidence in his purpose. Now look with me at verse 36. Paul writes, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." John Owen rightly points out that that's not only a reference to doing the revealed will of God in his word in obedience but there's a reference there clearly to that sovereign, eternal decree, purpose of God Almighty.

In Ephesians 3:11, Paul speaks of this as the "eternal purpose of God." I have to confess to you that those words are far easier said than understood, the eternal purpose of God. When the scriptures speak of the eternal purpose of God, they speak of that sovereign will of God that was decreed from all eternity, that will which covers and encompasses all events and all people and places and things. To take the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." Whatsoever comes to pass.

Paul went on to say in that same verse in Ephesians 3 that this eternal purpose God hath made, the word purposed, it means made or formed, "he has purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, this eternal purpose of the Almighty, this eternal purpose of the Trinity decreed before time began that encompasses all people, places and events, whatsoever comes to pass, finds its center upon Jesus Christ, or rather in Jesus Christ. Christ is the center around which this will of God revolves. He is there in the middle of it all, the center of it all.

It was this truth that Peter had in mind when he wrote in his first epistle, chapter 4, those believers there who were suffering for their faith in Jesus Christ, and Peter says that it was according to the will of God what they were going through, and what you are going through is according to the will of God. You see, it is when you are suffering whether physical or mentally or spiritually that you begin to call in question the eternal purpose of God and you begin to ask why, you begin to question the wisdom of the Almighty because you and I are at the end of the day nothing more than flesh and we have that same tendency.

And so these Hebrew believers who were going through it are encouraged to hold onto their confidence, a confidence that was in the fact of this is part of the eternal purpose of Jesus Christ that we go through this. This is what he has decreed that we are to go through right now and I've got to be firm in my hold on that truth and my hold on Jesus Christ and that will grip my heart at the same time. When everything seems to be going wrong in your life, and I don't know about you but that happens once a week with me, and when you are in the depths of despair and you can't understand why God is doing what he's doing, when you feel that the Lord has passed you by, when you feel that life at best is a sick joke, and you feel like saying to God, you might even say it in prayer, "Lord, stop the world, I want to get off," it is then you must not cast away your confidence in the eternal purpose of Jesus Christ.

The hymn we sang this morning, "It is well with my soul," was written over 100 years ago by a Christian lawyer named H. G. Spafford. In 1871, what is known as the Great Chicago Fire not only burned and destroyed most of the city of Chicago but it also turned most of Spafford's real estate holdings into ashes and was a real trial of his faith, but unlike so many he still had his law practice, he still had his family, and he still had some savings in the bank after it was all said and done. Two years later in 1873, Spafford decided to send his children to England for their schooling because many of the schools in Chicago had not been rebuilt as a result of the fire. Just before the family was to leave, there was a last minute business development and that made it necessary for Mr. Spafford to stay behind and send his family on to England. He said, "I'll take a later ship and join you."

The Spafford family sailed from New York to England but in the middle of the Atlantic they had a collision with an English sailing vessel. The ship that Mrs. Spafford was on sank into the ocean and took down with it Spafford's four daughters. Mrs. Spafford was found clinging to a piece of the wreckage barely conscious. She was taken upon a vessel and brought to England. Her husband had heard of the crash but did not know the

whereabouts of his wife. A cable came to him, it had on it two words, "Saved alone." Money and burned buildings could be replaced but his children were now gone forever and it was at that time that the Lord did so graciously move upon Spafford's heart he sat down and penned these words,

"When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul."

These Hebrew believers were going through deep and dark waters and what they needed right now was an unshakable confidence in the purpose of Jesus Christ, confidence that this was part of a gracious purpose. This was not, and they had to understand this and you and I must understand it, this was not the wrath of God being poured out upon them. Haven't you felt that way at times when you are going through the deep waters, "O my, how angry God is with me and he's pouring out his judgment upon me and I'm being punished." No, this was part, you see, for the Lord's people the purpose of God is always gracious. It's never one of condemnation. Bless God, the justice of God and the wrath of God was emptied upon Jesus Christ on Calvary and it will never come to a child of the Lord.

So when we are there in the midst of it and when everything is telling us to give up, we come back and remember that whatever you are in right now and whatever you are going through, it's part of the gracious purpose of Jesus Christ, a purpose grounded in the grace of God, not his wrath. It is a purpose that is a good purpose. Paul said, "We know, we know that God makes all things work together for good to them that love God." I know you don't feel that way but it's for your good that he brings us into these times and these places in our lives when everything is saying, "Give up your hope in the Lord, go back!" It's then we must have confidence in this purpose. It's a good purpose. It's for my good. It's not meant for my evil. God says, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, not of evil, to give you an expected end." Oh, that we would know the same thing.

And furthermore, it is a glorifying purpose. Now it's not easy to swallow but the fact of the matter is if Jesus Christ is going to be more glorified by my going through the deep trouble than my not going through it, then I must let the troubles come. We don't want the troubles, we don't want the deep waters, we don't want the heartaches, we don't want all that comes with this persecution and this strife and everything else. We want it to go easy but, you see, what did Paul say there? He prayed for that thorn in the flesh to be taken from him. "Three times I asked God to take it away from me." Three times. And the Lord finally said, "My grace is sufficient." And Paul said, "I see it now. When I am weak and

when I have no confidence in myself, then am I strong because now I'm a platform for the grace of God." People, the heathen will look at me and say, "How is that man going on? How is he still trusting in his God?" And there was Paul's own life declaring, "It's the grace of Christ in me." That's why I'm saying, brothers and sisters, it's a glorifying purpose this eternal decree of God that is designed that God, that Christ Jesus might be glorified through your troubles.

Now we turn from the actual confidence in his purpose to the second thought that comes and why he said to have this confidence and that's in the priesthood of Christ. "Cast not away your confidence therefore," why the "therefore"? We go back, what was it all about? It's all about the priesthood. As a matter of fact, the theme that's traced throughout Hebrews is the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It's mentioned in every chapter but two, chapter 1 and chapter 11. Every other chapter is directly referencing the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our text says, "Cast not away your confidence therefore," why? Because of the priesthood of Christ. Turn with me back to verse 21 to 22. Paul says, "And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Now please note with me there that Paul is linking the priesthood of Jesus Christ with this full assurance of faith. He is uniting confidence with Christ's priestly work. In other words, there is truth about the priestly work of Jesus Christ that has been designed by God to instill confidence in the Lord's people and right now, brothers and sisters, we don't want to be guilty of some of the problems amongst these believers, these Hebrew Christians. Remember going back to chapter 5 Paul says, "This Christ, he's like a Melchizedek." There's a wonderful picture there and he says, "I've got many things I want to say to you about Christ as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek but ye cannot bear them now because ye have grown dull of hearing." You know, Paul, can you imagine the preacher standing up in the church and reading the letter and he's going to now go into this discourse about Melchizedek as a high priest, picturing Jesus Christ and [yawning], "Time to take a little snooze now because this really is not interesting to me." We don't want to find ourselves in that trap because we miss a wonderful wonderful blessing if we fail to understand what confidence that the priesthood of Jesus Christ actually gives the people of God, actually sustains our life. Don't be like those professing Christians.

What is the truth about the priesthood of Christ that it is designed by God to give confidence in the Lord? First, it's confidence in Christ's pardon as high priest. True confidence, you know, really begins right here, being persuaded that all of your sin has been pardoned by Jesus Christ and put away out of God's sight forever by his atoning blood at Calvary. I felt the Lord just stamping and burning that truth upon my own heart as I listened to you sing that hymn this morning about the blood covering the sin, it's been all put away forever. It doesn't matter what's going to happen between now and the grave, every sin that I've ever committed and ever will commit has been dealt with once and for all by Christ upon Calvary.

One of the certain effects of sin is fear. Fear is the very antithesis of confidence, of boldness, and of assurance. A coward, one who is trembling, you would not mark him and say that that man, that woman has confidence. What was the first response of Adam when he fell into sin when God went looking for him? Let Adam speak for himself. Listen to what he says, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." "Sin? I'm afraid. I've lost the confidence. I've lost the assurance that you and I could come and walk and talk together and that's been lost now. I don't have that confidence and now I'm afraid and so I went and I hid myself when I heard your voice come looking for me." He who had communed with God face-to-face is now hiding in fear because sin has entered into his heart. And I'm going to tell you that nothing has changed from that day to this. Sin still robs God's people of their confidence. Of their confidence in prayer. Of their confidence in the power of God, in the power of Christ's blood. Confidence in the promises of God's word. Sin robs us of our confidence in Jesus Christ.

There are still so many of God's people that live in fear about their standing before God. They fear that they're not really saved and they don't really have any heart of full assurance that their sins have been forgiven. They can't say with Paul, "I know whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." They can't say it. They don't have confidence.

Many Christians live in continual fear that God is just a hair's breadth away from bringing his rod down upon their backs. There is little confidence in the Lord's unflinching love for them. They picture God because of his lack of confidence in his love for them that he is like them because when someone crosses you and does you dirty, it seems like your love dries up, doesn't it? But not the Lord. In spite of everything that we are and everything that we do, God's love has never wavered, has not changed one degree. His heart still beats in an infinite love for his children. Christ continually loves his people but sin robs us of that confidence and there is a lack of confidence in the great longsufferingness of God, that God will bear up with us in all of our faults and our failings.

Sin robs us of that confidence and because believers lack this confidence they become an easy prey of the devil and they're trounced and tossed all around by fear and by doubts. Every failure in their Christian walk is taken up by the devil as a club and he beats them over their heads and their hearts. Now you see why I say that true confidence in Christ begins with being persuaded that he has pardoned all of your sin. Look there, please, at verse 19 of chapter 10, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." The apostle speaks of having boldness, this confidence to enter into the holiest of all, that's the most holy place, the reflections the Jews knew well of the holiest. You know, it's never really called the Holy of Holies in scripture, you won't find that term at all. It's the most holy place. They knew he was referring to that place that the high priest only went into once a year but he's telling these people in the pews, so to speak, "You've got boldness therefore to enter into the holiest place. Therefore," why? Well, you go back to verse 17, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore,



brethren, boldness," why? Because sins have been all remitted and dealt with by the blood of Jesus. They're covered and the wrath of God cannot find them. The law of God has been satisfied and therefore we can come with confidence to the Lord.

There's never, never, never a lock or bar or gate upon the throne room. Don't think, child of God, that the devil comes along and you have failed the Lord, as we all do, and he wants to beat you over the head that you've got to first brush yourself up and get yourself into a right state, you've got to have a certain degree of repentance, and you've got to be in a place where you can now shed tears and then the Lord will hear you. Rubbish. That is popery. I'm going to tell you, my friends, it's nothing more than Roman Catholicism. I can go to my Savior anyplace, anytime, regardless of what I have done, regardless of how much I have failed the Lord Jesus Christ, and I will have an acceptance before his throne.

Do you believe that? I wondered why Spafford wrote that verse. Was he being tempted to think, "Your four daughters have gone down because of your sin"? Is that why he wrote,

"My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!"

I have a sneaking suspicion that's exactly what was going on in this man's heart and the Lord came and reminded him, "The sin has been dealt with by Christ and his blood."

Confidence in Christ means that you have confidence in the ability, the effectiveness of his shed blood to answer any and every charge that the devil would bring against you or that the law of God itself would bring against you. Do you remember I said you're persuaded of something and you're persuaded, you're persuaded of the truth that you have been forgiven, you're persuaded that your sins have been put away, you're persuaded that God can never be angry with you again, you are persuaded that Jesus Christ has pardoned you of all of your transgressions. You're confident about that.

It also, this confidence in the priesthood of Christ, not only confidence in Christ's pardon but confidence in Christ's position as high priest. We find that as the high priest, interestingly enough, he's on the throne. Hebrews 1:3, "when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 8:1, "We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." Here in chapter 10 in verse 21, Paul says we have "an high priest over the house of God."

Well, now all of these references and many more like them show that there is a blending of Christ's kingly office and his priestly office. It is as high priest that he sits at the right hand of God and that truth underscores two things about Christ, that he sits as high priest upon the throne – listen carefully, two things it says, it says a lot but two things in particular that will give us confidence. It speaks, first, of the success of his priestly work. He sat down. You know, you don't sit down, well, you shouldn't anyway, you don't sit

down until the work is finished. You go back to read the tabernacle in the wilderness and do you know what was missing in the holy place, in the most holy place? Do you know what you won't find there? A chair. A bench. They were always standing when they ministered in the holy place. There was no place to sit down. Why was there no place to sit down? Because the work was not finished. And yet when Jesus Christ came upon the cross, he shouted out that one word, "Finished! My work as high priest to atone for sin of my people is accomplished." And as high priest he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. "My work, I was successful. I got the job done."

The success. I don't have to worry about me doing some work to finish it. He has done the work and he has succeeded because he is seated at the right hand of God. But it also speaks of the sovereignty of the high priest. He's on the throne. The high priest, Jesus Christ, is on the throne. That tells me, brothers and sisters, he has all power. The high priest has all power as king upon the throne, the king-priest upon the throne to defend his people. Let the persecutions come, let the attacks come, whatever it might be, my Savior, my high priest is king upon the throne and he has all power and will avail himself of all the power of the Trinity to defend his people.

It gives him all authority, does it not? This king gives us the authority of heaven. In other words, we have no need to come with our tails tucked between our legs. We have no reason to cower before the worldlings. None. The authority of Jesus Christ is upon us and we are called kings and priests because the high priest is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Don't slunker away, if there's such a word as slunker. Don't slunker away from people. Don't be ashamed. Don't be cowardly. It doesn't matter what the world thinks or what the world does. Don't give tuppence for their opinions. You have the great high priest sitting upon the throne and he has vested you with authority, his authority. Do you see what it would have done for these Hebrew believers? My, oh my, confidence in Christ.

Confidence furthermore in Christ's pleading as high priest. In chapter 7 Paul writes that as high priest Christ "ever liveth to make intercession for all that come unto God by him." He ever liveth, note the words, to make intercession. Christ will forever and ever and ever be high priest so he can plead to us for God. It will not even cease when the church is glorified and brought to be in heaven. He ever liveth because he has an intransmittable, an unchangeable priesthood. He's the last priest and he will ever live throughout eternity as high priest to intercede and to pray for us, to plead for us.

I tell you, that has been designed by God to instill confidence and courage to you. What boldness it ought to give us in the face of the worst of persecutions and trials, and the fact of the matter is our prayers are marked by feebleness. Have you ever felt in the place of prayer, "My, that was a good prayer. I really got liberty." And you prayed with particular power about something and you got up off your knees and how you seemed to walk on air because you thought you had such power in prayer and the very thing you prayed about and some sin you had been struggling with, there it is 5-10 minutes, half a day later and you fell prey to it. "I thought, I thought, I thought it was never going to happen again. My, I had such power." And the Lord just says, "It's not you. It's not your feelings of

liberty in prayer that bring down answers. It's my Son pleading and you depend upon him, and don't you depend upon your liberty, and don't you depend upon your eloquence, don't you depend upon your grammar. You depend upon my Son who is the great high priest of the church. It is his prayers that I heed. I listen to you because of him. He makes your prayers acceptable in my sight."

And you know, brothers and sisters, when you understand that truth, you're not so worried come Wednesday night in the prayer meeting and you're about to pray and, you know, your heart's beating fast and you kind of get a few phrases together so you can start off just right. Do you know what I'm talking about? Yes, you do. And it won't make any difference what Brother So-and-so thinks about your praying, and it won't make any difference if there are English majors in the congregation and your grammar might be flawed, because God's not impressed with grammar, he's impressed with his Son. You have confidence now in Christ's pleading.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said this, "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. et distance makes no difference. He is praying for me. He ever liveth to make intercession." Can you imagine if you could come to this door here and you hear the Lord Jesus Christ mentioning you by name, "O Father, I pray for this one," and you hear your name, my, you'd walk out upon air but the fact of the matter is he's doing it even though there is distance between us and that's been designed by the Lord Almighty to instill this courage and this confidence in your heart in the pleading of the great high priest. Prayer that always prevails. It's never weak. It's never praying out of ignorance that doesn't know the will of God. He always knows the will of God and therefore his prayers are always answered. He never prays with a cold heart. His prayers are never marred by sin. So our dependence is upon his pleading. You know, as a denomination we place great emphasis upon prayer, there can be the danger the devil will use that and you begin to make prayer and your Bible reading a god, and you depend upon those things instead of Christ. It's not your pleading, it's his. That's the difference.

Confidence in Christ's pity as high priest. I don't think I'm stretching the text too far when I say it takes us back to chapter 4. Turn there with me, please. Well-known verses but it's always good to get the well-known verses again. Hebrews 4, please, verse 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. 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. Let us therefore come boldly," confidence, "unto the throne of grace." Note, please, the high priestly work of Jesus Christ being linked again with boldness and with confidence, and in this particular case it is a confidence that we are to have in his pity because the apostle says, "We have a high priest who is touched," yes, he not only understands but he's touched "with the feeling of our infirmities," that means literally able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Sympathize. You know, I'm in a college town here so you know the difference in empathy and sympathy. You can empathize with someone, you can understand. Sympathy means there are chords that reverberate in your own heart. You can feel with them, not just mentally grasp what they're going through but you can sympathize with them.

It is in the midst of persecution and in the midst of the fiery trial that you discover how weak and frail you really are. You find, when you're being attacked, that you're not so holy after all. Pride comes up. "Who is he to say that to me?" But you're not as spiritually strong as you thought you were, that you're not as confident as you imagine, that what you thought was confidence in Christ was self-confidence and the Lord begins to move into your life and he begins to shatter your self-confidence and you find out it wasn't really confidence in the Lord and you're shaken.

Paul tells them not to cast away their confidence in Christ because he is able to sympathize with their weakness. Why? Because in all points he was tempted like as they were by the devil yet he was without sin. Not only does he understand but the word "touched" tells us that there are chords of pity that reverberate in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. What did Isaiah write, "In all their afflictions he was afflicted."

And we must hold onto this confidence that Jesus Christ, he pities us in our weakness as we face the attacks of hell. What did the psalmist say, Psalm 103, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." We never need doubt that or call it into question because it's written, forever written in God's word that he pities us as a father pities his children. He has put it into writing. He shares our griefs and he carries our woes. He is not this, our Savior is not this cold emotionless deity who is unaffected and callous by what we go through in this world.

Yes, it is true he has decreed it all will happen and yet he's not the author of sin. He foresees because he has decreed. It's part of that eternal purpose but, you know, that foreknowledge does not leave God without a heart for our troubles and our tears. I think I can probably best sum it up by a very simple illustration. The child in the doctor's office when the doctor has to perform some painful procedure upon the child. If you've had kids, you've had them in this situation, have you ever watched the doctor, there's the 2, the 3 year old, the 4 year old screaming their eyes out. It's painful. The doctor doesn't drop a tear, does he? Not one groan comes from his heart. No, he's got a job to do and he knows that when he does this procedure this is what's going to help the child and the child's going to be all right. But, my, you let a mother and father in that room.

I remember the time when Rachel was 3 or 4 years old and she was in Children's Hospital in Philadelphia and had to go through a certain test and it was a very very painful test. My wife could not go in because there was the suspicion that she might be expecting one of our seven children so I had to go in, and as they injected the dye into the area that they had to do the test on, Rachel began to cry and say, "Daddy, please make them stop! Please make them stop!" The doctor went on. "It's all right. We'll be done soon." Didn't affect him, but if I could have, if I could have, I would have stopped him. Why? Because I'm a father who pities the child in pain.

And there you are this morning, you're going through a lot of pain and the Lord pities. Yes, his heart goes out to you. He sympathizes and he understands. He's not cold. He's not callous. And when you are confident in that time that this Savior is pitying you, my,

what confidence it gives. Men's pity, that won't do me any good. There are people, you know, when they're going through rough times they want to throw a pity party but man's pity won't do a lick of good but the pity of Christ, that makes a difference because when he pities, he moves, he flies to the relief of his people.

The time has gone, I've got to stop. Rest in his purpose. Rejoice in his priesthood for "he knoweth the way that I take and when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."