

Hebrews 4:14-16 – Third Sunday of Advent
Town North Presbyterian Church – Rev. David J. Rogers
December 15, 2024

Today see that Christ took on a human nature to HELP His people in their need.

God gave these words in Hebrews to suffering Christians.

They were Jews who followed Jesus Christ as the Messiah and they were suffering for it. Many of their friends and family members who were Jews had REJECTED Jesus. So when these people began to follow Christ they were largely SHUNNED and REJECTED by their family members and friends.

They endured a HARD STRUGGLE with MANY SUFFERINGS. They were publicly exposed to shame and embarrassment. They had their possessions unfairly taken away – and many were even arrested and put in prison.

Through it all their faith in Jesus Christ was SORELY tested.

They were tempted to return to Judaism – to regain all they had lost – and be accepted by family and friends again. They had a HARD TIME pressing on in following Christ as they suffered SO MUCH PAIN and DISTRESS.

Maybe you feel the same way as you follow Christ today.

Maybe you're not in physical danger or being threatened to renounce your faith in Christ. But maybe you are in some other DIFFICULTY or DANGER.

But maybe you are facing some other DIFFICULTIES and DANGERS.

Maybe you are a college student – and you are growing COLD toward Christ.

Or maybe you are facing some new and “*uncharted territory*” – and you are scared. You feel unequipped for it and you are stressed. You wonder how you possibly glorify God in it.

Or maybe you are facing some DEEP PAIN – and you don't know how to

keep going – let alone glorify God in it. Your only plan right now is to simply “*creep through it and try to SURVIVE!*”

Or maybe you are facing some other PAIN or AFFLICTION as a follower of Christ.

If so, YOU are the kind of person God is speaking to here through the writer of Hebrews.

And notice what we are told in **verse 14**.

“*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, **let us hold fast our confession.***”

Notice the writer tells these believers along with himself:

“...**let us hold fast our confession.**”

Notice we are told: “**LET US...**” **DO THIS** as Christ’s people.

WHAT are we to do?

“*HOLD FAST their CONFESSION.*”

WHAT is their “confession”?

[To “confess” in this case means we all say something together.]

It is an expression of our submission and allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The writer is picking up from what he just said earlier in **chapter 3**. He said (**verse 1**):

“*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our **CONFESSION**...*”

They all believed that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah – the Son of God – who came down from Heaven – to SAVE His people from their sins.

And so the writer is now telling them to “**HOLD FAST**” to that confession.

And what does it mean to “HOLD it FAST”?

It means to CONTINUE to HOLD FIRMLY onto Jesus – and your trust in HIM as the LORD and SAVIOR.

To “HOLD FAST” means to HOLD ONTO it FIRMLY – with all your STRENGTH!

Illus: Picture a running back in football holding onto the football.

He HOLDS that football TIGHTLY – so that no one will strip it away.

And players on the other team are always TRYING to STIP that football AWAY! So he hold onto it TIGHTLY. He WRAPS both arms around it when he is running up the middle.

So in the same way, God is telling these believers to HOLD ON TIGHT – to “HOLD FAST” – to their confession.

The REASON WHY the writer was telling these believers to HOLD FAST to Jesus Christ is because they were in real DANGER of either TURNING AWAY from Christ to return to Judaism – or GRADUALLY DRIFTING AWAY.

These are the real DANGERS we face as followers of Christ in this world – especially during TRIALS and AFFLICTIONS. Jesus told a parable explaining seed that fell on “rocky ground.” The plant immediately sprang up. But when the sun beat down on it over time – it “*withered away.*”

Jesus said that plant is like the person who hears the good news of Jesus Christ – and immediately receives it and sprouts up quickly. But when TRIBULATION or PERSECUTION arises – the person FALLS AWAY.

As followers of Christ we will face great OPPOSITION in this world. Our profession of faith in Christ is ASSAULTED and PRESSED. And it ISN'T only

assaulted by a terrorist holding a gun to our head – telling us to renounce Christ.

No, the Devil has many more SUBTLE ways of attacking us and pulling us away from LIVING for CHRIST – and STRONGLY pressing on for His glory in life. Many times the Devil’s attacks come in the form of PAIN and AFFLICTION. The PAIN causes us to simply want to GIVE UP all together. You begin to think LITTLE about how to GLORIFY CHRIST – because you simply become focused on SURVIVING!

Or, we face the DANGER of having our relationship with Christ simply become FORMAL or SECURE. It’s AMAZING how EASILY we do this! It’s easy and more comfortable to simply “*stick with the routine*” – and have a more “*comfortable Christianity*.” So the Devil pulls us into FORMALISM or SECURITY.

We face MANY DANGERS following Christ in life.

Because of this, we desperately HELP as followers of Christ!

And the HELP we NEED is HELP that **ONLY GOD** can give.

THAT is WHY God tells us another “LET US...” for us TO DO as Christ’s people.

Look at **verse 16.**

“**LET US** then with confidence *draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”

Notice we are told “*LET US...DRAW NEAR to [God’s] throne of grace.*”

The writer is telling us to RUN to God for the HELP we need in all these afflictions. You HAVE HELP available from God – and God is ENCOURAGING you and ENTICING you to do that here. And to do it, God uses the fact that Christ took on a human nature!

As Joel mentioned, over the past few weeks we have seen (in the book of Hebrews) what Christ has DONE for us by taking on a human nature.

A few weeks ago, we saw that Christ took on a human nature so that He might “**TASTE DEATH**” for us as a human being – to take away our **SINS**.

And last week we saw that Christ took on a human nature so that He might **DESTROY** the Devil – and **DELIVER us from the FEAR of DEATH**.

And TODAY we see that Christ took on a human nature so that He we can **receive HELP in our time of NEED**.

Notice God gives us THREE ENTICEMENTS to encourage us to draw near for HELP.

FIRST, God tells us WHERE to seek help.

SECOND, God tells us WHY to seek help.

THIRD, God tells us WHEN to seek help.

MP1: WHERE seek help? (16)

Notice FIRST, God tells us WHERE to seek help.

We must seek HELP in our AFFLICTIONS at **GOD’S THRONE**.

Look again at **verse 16**.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the THRONE OF GRACE, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Notice God tells us WHERE we are to SEEK HELP as His people: **HIS THRONE**.

You may ask whether this is CHRIST’S THRONE or GOD the FATHER’S THRONE.

We are told a few chapters earlier that Jesus Christ surely has a THRONE.

But it appears clear here that this is GOD’S THRONE – because Jesus isn’t being described here as KING – but as our HIGH PRIEST. Christ is being

described here in His role of a priest – which means He is acting ON BEHALF of men in relation to GOD.

So God is telling us as Christ's people to DRAW NEAR to His THRONE. And notice specifically God tells us something SPECIFIC about His THRONE for Christ's people.

It is a “...throne of GRACE.”

That means it is a place where Christ's people receive GRACE from God.

In WHAT SENSE do we receive GRACE?

Yes, surely we receive GRACE in the forgiveness of sins.

This is an allusion to the MERCY-SEAT on the Ark of the Covenant in the Jewish Temple. As many of you know, the ARK was in the holiest place in the Temple. On top of the Ark was the THRONE or SEAT of GOD – where God's special PRESENCE was with His people. It was called the MERCY-SEAT. It was here that God's people received MERCY of God – and it represented the GRACE of GOD that would come in Jesus Christ.

Christ came into the world to offer the TRUE sacrifice for sins – once for all. And He “...*passed through the heavens*...” (as we read here in **verse 14**) – to present the blood of the TRUE sacrifice for sins!

But in context here the writer is talking about something more specific.

The writer is talking about the SPECIAL HELP we receive from God at this throne.

What is being described here is God's DESIRE to HELP –and the actual HELP He gives.

In other words, God assures us that we will RECEIVE MERCY at His THRONE – because of Christ. We will RECEIVE God's MERCY in our SUFFERING and TRIALS and AFFLICTIONS we face.

App: To SEEK God's HELP at His THRONE of GRACE – means to PRAY.

It means to CALL on GOD. It means to pour out your heart to God in your DISTRESS.

When you go to God's THRONE in your time of TROUBLE and DISTRESS – as a follower of Christ – God tells you what you will RECEIVE and what you will FIND there.

You will RECEIVE MERCY there. You will FIND GRACE to HELP there.

We are told that's what the Apostle Paul received when he was being HARASSED by the Devil and cried to God. God said (**2 Corinthians 12**):

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

That means Paul RECEIVED the MERCY needed from God. And He also received the POWER he needed from God.

God is telling us these things to ENTICE YOU to COME to Him in your DISTRESS – and KNOW BY FAITH what you will RECEIVE and FIND at His throne.

But what if your SUFFERING and your AFFLICTION are your own fault?

What if you have brought AFFLICTION on yourself?

It makes no difference. In Christ you can ALWAYS KNOW – what you will ALWAYS RECEIVE and FIND at His THRONE of GRACE. You will ALWAYS RECEIVE MERCY. And you will ALWAYS FIND GRACE to HELP!

So FIRST, God tells us WHERE to SEEK HELP in our AFFLICTION.

We should seek HELP at His THRONE – because it is a THRONE of GRACE.

MP2: WHY seek help? (14-15)

SECOND, God tells us WHY we should seek help.

We should seek HELP at God's THRONE of GRACE in our AFFLICTION – because we have GREAT HIGH PRIEST – who is SYMPATHETIC to our WEAKNESSES.

God tells us this in **verses 14-15**.

“Since then we have a GREAT HIGH PRIEST who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Notice we are told WHY we should seek HELP at God's THRONE in our AFFLICTION.

We should seek HELP there – because we have a GREAT HIGH PRIEST there.

Jesus is called a “GREAT” high priest here – because He is GREATER than all the other high priests. The writer is talking to Jewish converts – and telling them that they have NOT STOPPED having a “high priest.” They had a HIGH PRIEST now – as their ancestors in Israel had throughout history.

Only THEIR high priest was GREATER!

JESUS was their high priest – and He was GREATER than ALL the other high priests! He was GREATER – because the sacrifice He offered was GREATER.

The other high priests entered the HOLIEST PLACE of the tabernacle (or Temple) only once a year – with the blood of an animal. And the sacrifice of animals they offered could NOT ACTUALLY take away HUMAN SIN.

But Christ – the Son of God – offered HIMSELF as the SACRIFICE for SIN on the CROSS. And He “*passed through the heavens*” into the TRUE TABERNACLE – HEAVEN itself – to offer His sacrifice to TRULY take away the SINS of His people!

NOT ONLY THAT – but Jesus is the GREATER high priest in another way. He is the GREATER HIGH PRIEST who has TRUE SYMPATHY for His people.

Notice again what we are told in **verse 15**:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Notice the “*double negative*” here.

We “...**DO NOT** have a high priest who is **UNABLE** to sympathize...”

That is meant to EMPHASIZE that Jesus is the high priest who **IS ABLE TO SYMPATHIZE** with our WEAKNESSES. We have a TRULY SYMPATHETIC high priest.

We read a few verses later (**chapter 5**) that PRIESTS were appointed to “...act on behalf of men in relation to God...”

They were to “deal gently” with sinners – because they themselves were SINNERS.

In other words, they were there to HELP sinful people. They were to offer sacrifices on their behalf – and have GENUINE SYMPATHY for sinners.

But they were SINFUL men just like everyone else. Many times – even the BEST of them indulged themselves rather than serving the sheep. Many of the prophets of Israel spoke against the SIN and SELF-INDULGANCE of the PRIESTS of Israel.

And Jesus Himself spoke strong words against the PRIESTS of Israel who

“...*tied up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.*”

Instead of being SYMPATHETIC priests – many of them were evil and arrogant.

But these believers are told THEIR HIGH PRIEST – Jesus – is **GREATER!**
He is the PERFECT HIGH PRIEST – who has the HEART and AFFECTIONS for His people that a TRUE HIGH PRIEST should have! We know this because He is WITHOUT SIN!

As the GREAT HIGH PRIEST – Christ TRULY SYMPATHIZES with the WEAKNESSES of His people.

Consider the greatness of Jesus Christ here – and the GREATNESS of His SYMPATHY.

Notice we are told that Jesus was “...*WITHOUT SIN...*”

That means HE did everything RIGHT. He PERFECTLY OBEYED and SERVED the Father His whole life. He PERFECTLY OBEYED – even through SUFFERING. He NEVER caved in to temptation.

He was “*without sin*” – **YET He has a disposition of SYMPATHY toward sinners.**

That is UNUSUAL.

Usually, people who do what is RIGHT – have **LITTLE SYMPATHY** for those who don’t! Usually, HARD-WORKING, SUCCESSFUL people are the **LEAST SYMPATHETIC** people.

Illus: The HARD-WORKING person usually has little tolerance for the LAZY person.

The HARD-WORKING person says to the unemployed person:

“*Go out and get a job and work at it like I do!*”

He says:

“Why doesn’t that person go out and work like I do?!? Sure I could sit around and be lazy too – but I DON’T!”

And many times that HARD-WORKING person is right!

He may be RIGHT – but he is NOT SYMPATHETIC.

He may speak the TRUTH – but he DOES it with ANGER – not SYMPATHY.

But notice that is NOT the way Jesus Christ is.

Jesus Christ was WITHOUT SIN. He has literally DID EVERYTHING RIGHT!

YET – at the same time – He is **GENUINELY SYMPATHETIC** to SINNERS!

He TRULY SYMPATHIZES with their WEAKNESSES. He SYMPATHIZES with their **FAILURES** – and their **FEARS** – and their **WEAKNESSES**.

App: And that HELPS us as SINNERS, doesn’t it?

There is great RELIEF in finding COMPASSION, isn’t there?

Many believers have been GREATLY STRENGTHENED and HELPED in their hardships – when a fellow believer shows COMPASSION.

You can find some RELIEF from your DISTRESS when someone shows compassion.

And the OPPOSITE is also true.

Finding NO SYMPATHY can ADD to a person’s PAIN.

We see this with **Job**.

Job was SUFFERING – and his wife and his friends had NO PITY. Instead, they only PILED ON the accusations. It only ADDED to his DISTRESS all the more to find NO PITY.

And **King David** said it like this (**Psalm 69**):

*“Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.*

I LOOKED FOR PITY, but there was none,
and for comforters, but **I FOUND NONE**.”

In his GREAT DISTRESS King David looked for SYMPATHY and PITY – but FOUND NONE! And it only ADDED to his PAIN.

But there is RELIEF in finding COMPASSION, isn't there?

SO the same is true with our GREAT HIGH PRIEST – JESUS.

You can find GREAT STRENGTH and COMFORT in your HARDSHIPS as a believer when you know you have the SYMPATHY of your HIGH PRIEST – JESUS!

So SECOND, God tells us WHY we should seek help.

We should seek HELP at God's THRONE of GRACE in our AFFLICTION – because we have GREAT HIGH PRIEST – who is SYMPATHETIC to our WEAKNESSES.

MP3: WHEN seek help? (16 – “*in time of need*” – Owen, 54ff)

THIRD, God tells us WHEN we should seek help.

Look again at **verse 16**.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help IN TIME OF NEED.”

Notice God tells us that BECAUSE we have Jesus as our GREAT HIGH PRIEST we will find grace to help **IN OUR TIME OF NEED.**

What this means is that there will be SPECIFIC TIMES in our lives when walking with Christ that we will need **SPECIAL NEED** – and CRY OUT for **HELP.**

YES – it's surely true that we NEED HELP CONSTANTLY as human beings. We need a CONTINUAL supply of strength and help from God.

But BESIDES that – there will be times when you are in ESPECIALLY PAINFUL and DIFFICULT **TIMES in life.**

There will be **TIMES** when it DOESN'T MATTER how much EXPERIENCE you have – or how much STRENGTH you have – or how much WISDOM or RESOLVE you have – you will simply NOT BE ABLE to go through the AFFLICTION to the glory of God without HELP!

There are VERY DIFFICULT TIMES – when you NEED the HELP that ONLY GOD can give.

In those **TIMES** you **DESPERATELY NEED** a GREAT HIGH PRIEST who can give you the **SPECIAL HELP YOU NEED** – in your TIME OF NEED!

As I mentioned earlier...there WILL BE TIMES when you are facing some DEEP PAIN – and you don't know how to keep going – let alone glorify God in it.

Your plan DOES NOT HAVE TO BE to simply “creep through it and try to SURVIVE!”

God tells you here that you have a **GREAT HIGH PRIEST** – who promises to give you “...**HELP IN YOUR TIME OF NEED.**”

Or you may face **TIMES** when God calls you to something NEW – and you face great OPPOSITION – or you are UNFIT for it – and you need HELP!

God tells you here that you have a **GREAT HIGH PRIEST** – who promises to give you “...**HELP IN YOUR TIME OF NEED.**”

Or you may face TIMES of big CHANGE. TIMES of CHANGE often bring great FEAR.

God tells you here that you have a **GREAT HIGH PRIEST** – who promises to give you “...HELP IN YOUR TIME OF NEED.”

And the WAY to obtain this HELP is through Jesus Christ at God’s throne of grace.

You go to God’s THRONE of GRACE – calling on Him in prayer – and BELIEVING these promises of your high priest, Jesus!

This is the ONLY WAY to walk through the DISTRESS and DISCOURAGEMENTS – and press forward for Christ’s glory – as a follower of Christ.

Conclusion: We face many DANGERS and much PAIN as we follow Christ in this world.

But God tells us we DO NOT walk alone – we DO NOT walk by our own strength.

God has given us a GREAT and SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST – JESUS. He is the TRULY SYMPATHETIC high priest. He is SYMPATHETIC toward the needs of His people. And because He is SYMPATHETIC – you can FIND GRACE to HELP in our time of NEED.

Let’s pray...