

Lets open our Bibles to the book of Hebrews this morning and our text is Hebrews 4:14-16. The final verses of chapter 5. We'll also be referencing Leviticus 8 which serves as a foundation for the argument the author is making in our text this morning.

If you were here last week I wonder if you remember how pastor David showed us that the activity of God's living word is judgment. The activity of God's word is to pierce to the deepest part of us, even the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Which is an expression that may sound strange to our Western ears but would resonate with these Hebrew Christians. You see the Old Testament doesn't separate the mind from the heart. The Hebrew word "lav" which we translate heart was the seat of thought, not emotions. As westerners we think of thoughts originating in our mind, but the Bible helps us see thoughts originate not in our reason, but from our inner person. This deepest reach of your soul is exactly the depth to which God's word pierces. And the author says the word not only pierces to this depth but exposes the deepest regions of our soul and God sees and knows all of it.

Yet, God is holy and if he exposes the depths of your heart through his word, how is this good news? In fact, the very things the living Word of God expose are the very things you so desperately want to keep covered up. If that were the end of the book, we'd be left with little hope and a lot of terror.

Why terror? Because there is stuff buried in your heart that you don't want to be exposed. There are desires, thoughts and intentions that reek of sin. Even if you are a Christian, your internal wickedness can shock you at times. Without warning vile thoughts or desires arise unannounced. Or maybe you are one who struggles with unrelenting shame...you know your wickedness and see that it rises from your wicked heart, and when you read the Bible you don't find any relief all you seem to see is more exposure that brings you more self-hatred and self-loathing.

But as we saw last week, the Lord exposes *in order to heal*, the Lord uses the two-edged sword of his word as a scalpel not a machete. But why must we be laid bare before the Lord by His Word? How could having our hearts dissected and exposed before God be good news for anyone? We know what he'll find there, and if he is perfect in holiness, *which He is*, and unstained in purity, *which He is* – what can we do? What can we say? ... dear church, we need not say anything in that moment for there is another who speaks for us... follow as I read our text...

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. 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. 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. ¹

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

Because our time is a bit shorter this morning we'll dive right into our text and consider it under 3 points which correspond to the verses.

First, The High Priest you have – Vs. 14

The author plainly states that these suffering Christians have a priest. Now the weight of that assurance might land lightly on you, and if it does it may be because you don't know what a high priest is or why it matters. It may be that the only thing that comes to your mind is Roman Catholic theology where each parish is led by a local priest because that is often what is portrayed as "Christian" by Hollywood. Yet, we believe that the Scriptures expose The Roman Catholic priesthood along with other religions which require earthly priests as anti-gospel and a twisting of Scripture. If someone has told you that you need a priest not named Jesus they have gone directly against what the Bible states here and in 1 Timothy, where Paul writes, "*⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*"²

That verse helps us get at what the priesthood was given to Israel for, ***a priest is a mediator***. The author of Hebrews writing to Jewish people who had converted to Christianity is appealing to their understanding of the Old Testament while pointing them again to Christ. Though we might have some confusion or a lack of knowledge about priesthood, the first readers of this letter would not. They would be very familiar with the background to the priesthood of Israel because Leviticus would have been read and taught to them from a very early age.

Leviticus 8 outlines the consecrations service of Aaron Moses' brother who would be the first recognized priest for God's people. Listen to the beginning of Leviticus 8,

8 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. ³ And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting." ⁴ And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 4:14–16.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 2:5–6.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Le 8:1–4.

This is the introduction to the service where Moses would use these animals, the bread, the anointing oil in the process of setting Aaron and His sons apart as priests for God's people. The priest was to be set apart from the people, why? Because he was to be the mediator between God's people. Put simply, under the Old Covenant to enter the presence of God required sacrifice to atone for one's sin. God is holy, we are not, therefore, to enter into God's presence and not die because of sin, something else had to pay the price for sin in the place of the sinner, that's you and me. Forgiveness for sin has always required satisfaction of the penalty, which since Genesis 1-2 has been death.

So, the priesthood was given to God's people in order to ensure the presence of God with His people. Through the priest atonement for sin was made by sacrifice and God's merciful presence with the people was assured. If you read the rest of Leviticus, you see the process of consecrating Aaron and his sons, before the congregation of Israel, to the role of priest.

The real drama picks up in Leviticus 9 where the test of whether these first priests would be acceptable was known through whether the Lord accepted their sacrifices, which in mercy and grace the Lord did, confirming Aaron as the high priest along with his sons as priests for God's people.

I wonder if you can see that the office of priest in the Bible is a testimony to God's grace as much as it is His wrath. He could have withheld forgiveness and mercy and he would be justified in His judgment of all humanity, but God is not like that. He gave his people priests who could by the means of sacrifice obtain forgiveness for the guilty people.

But what does that Old Testament priesthood have to do with these Christians, and what does it have to do with any of us... "everything" – you see the reality of sin is still present, you are not perfect, you actually aren't even a good person, neither am I – if we were good people we wouldn't need Jesus, we wouldn't need a priest at all – we could enter God's presence without worry or a care.

But what the Scripture exposes, and what you and I actually know deep in your heart is that we are broken, you have sinned against others, and others have sinned against you and when you let yourself dwell on those realities the darkness of despair and hopelessness well up and threaten to choke the very air out of your lungs.

But dear sinner, listen to me, you have a great High Priest! And your priest is better than Aaron and better than any earth made priest you have a Great High Priest! Jesus the son of God! That's your priest.

Yes, we are great sinners, but we have a great savior in Christ, do you hear that this morning? Listen you can run from your sin, you can run to pleasure, or drugs or food or

immorality or entertainment to numb the pain, but you and I know as soon as that self-medication wears off you are back in what John Bunyan called the dungeon of the Giant whose name is “Despair.” But let me urge you to take your despair to God because you take it to a great High Priest whose name is Jesus who is the son of God.

And look how the author says our priest has passed through the heavens. That little phrase captures what we read in Acts 1 where we read, “*⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*” ⁴ But what happened next, this we know from Hebrews Ch. 1, “*³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*”⁵

It is interesting to note is that the only New Testament book where Jesus is called a priest is the book of Hebrews and the priest you have is none other than God the Son who came, taking on flesh in order to bear your penalty in his death on the cross, this same Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to the Father where he intercedes as the perfect and final priest for every sinner who repents and believes in Him. And the author says because this is your priest, to hold fast your confession. He exhorts his readers and us to not abandon our faith, to not turn away from Christ because we would forfeit our priest.

No, the author speaks to these Christians who are tempted to go back to an old way of life, specifically to go back to Judaism, to not throw away the priest they have, but to lean even harder upon the Lord Jesus. The author ties the believer’s possession of Jesus as their high priest to their actions of holding on to their confession. The confession they are to hold to and we are to hold is our belief in the gospel. Its as if he is saying to them and to us “you have a great High priest, cling to Him, don’t throw that away – to throw away Christ is to throw away hope.”

The author of Hebrews goes directly at a temptation many of us face when we suffer. We are tempted when we face adversity, when we suffer to give doubt a key to the master room of our mental house. Paul Tripp in his book on suffering outlines a number of traps that many sufferers fall into...One trap is “the doubt trap” – he calls this unhealthy doubt ***the doubt of judgement***, he writes, “*This form of doubt is the result of concluding that, because of our circumstances, God is not good and therefore not worthy of our trust. It’s to bring God into the court of our judgment and determine that he is unfaithful, unloving, or*

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ac 1:9–11.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 1:2–4.

uncaring in some way. The minute your functional theology tells you that God is not good, it's very hard to hold on to the confessional theology that declares He is.... Perhaps you should ask yourself ... What has my suffering done to my theology? What has it done to the way I view God and his presence, his promises and his power? Do I still believe that God is the definition of what is loving, good, wise, and true ?”⁶

Brothers and sisters when we are in pain the evil one whispers to us the same question he said in the beginning, “did God really say?” He twists our pain to be proof that God doesn’t love us, and seeks to use the sufferings of this life to sink our faith – but let us hold fast our confession, let us cling all the more tightly to Jesus and say with confidence – no Jesus died and rose again – “so my only hope in life and death is that I am not my own but I belong, body and soul, both in life and death to God and to my Savior Jesus Christ.”⁷

We can hold fast our confession because we have a priest, Jesus the Son of God who is the perfect mediator between God and us, who intercedes for us, who prays for us, whose own blood purchased eternal life for us.

If you aren’t a Christian here this morning, we are so glad you are here this morning, and we’d have you know that this is the gospel message. You can, in Jesus Christ, find forgiveness and mercy. You can have a real savior who gives real salvation through his death and resurrection. Jesus gives hope to the hopeless by being their great High Priest. If you have questions about what that means you can see me after the service or talk to the person who invited, you. We’d love to help you.

The author then turns to state another gloriously positive truth in by explaining the priest we don’t have...that’s point #2

The High Priest you don’t have – Vs. 15

Look again at vs. 15, “*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.*”⁸

Now that sentence breaks some rules for us in English and can be a brain bender of sorts. The fact that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses said another way is ***we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness.*** That’s what the author is saying.

This is a glorious statement of contrast, vs.14 shows us a high priest who is exalted in the heavens, ascended to the right hand of the Father on high, and the author anticipates what this might create in our hearts. If Jesus is high and exalted, if He has ascended, if He is the

⁶ Paul David Tripp, *Suffering*, pg. 92-97

⁷ <http://newcitycatechism.com/new-city-catechism/#1>

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 4:15.

Son of God – how can that comfort me here in the midst of the day to day reality of life in a fallen world. How does and exalted savior have anything to do with my fight to trust God in the details of my life?

The author knows where our hearts will go and he removes the distance that we might be tempted to feel by hearing that our great high priest has passed through the heavens, and he reminds us that our exalted high priest is near to His people, so near that he sympathizes with our weakness.

But what does that mean? What does it mean that Jesus’s sympathizes with our weaknesses? Well it isn’t that Jesus strolls into the heavenly Hallmark store looking for the perfect card to say, “yeah, you are really weak, I’m sorry” – that would not offer any real comfort to you would it? No! So what does it mean...

The puritan John Owen unpacks Jesus sympathy so helpfully by explaining that the sympathy of Christ includes three things:

First, Concern – *“This word **sympathize** includes a concern in the troubles, sufferings, or evils of others, so that the two people are united.”*⁹ Jesus sympathy is his genuine concern for you because he is united to you by faith. He is your priest who is not indifferent, no your high priest sympathizes with you he is genuinely concerned for you and and with you in your troubles because he is your priest.

Second Jesus’ sympathy *“also includes the idea of an ability to relieve those who are suffering.”*¹⁰ It is a kindness to have someone share our hurts, but what we often long for is someone who can relieve us in our suffering. This Jesus can do and does in his sympathy with us.

Now this does not mean that Jesus will remove every trial, suffering, illness, or pain in our life. This isn’t a sympathy that relieves us of every adversity. No Jesus’ sympathy is the relief He gives during our suffering, in the midst of our trials, in the midst of our pain. The relief our Lord gives is better than temporary reprieve it is eternal security in Him. The relief Jesus’ sympathy gives to us is the relief of the gospel, that whatever troubles we face we can never lose the permanence of our savior.

Third, Jesus’ sympathy includes what Owen calls, *“a collection of affections”* - which he explains as *“emotions moved by other people’s sufferings”*¹¹ – We don’t get many glimpses of Jesus emotional life, and yet the ones we have are so vivid, and though we won’t turn there John 11 captures Jesus sympathy for sufferers in the death of Lazarus. It has long

⁹ John Owen, [Hebrews](#), Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 105.

¹⁰ John Owen, [Hebrews](#), Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 105.

¹¹ John Owen, [Hebrews](#), Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 106.

been a joke to quote the verse “Jesus wept” as a punchline to a bad joke about Scripture memory or your favorite verse – but the weeping of Jesus was triggered by the wailing of those he loved, by the broken hearts of Mary and Martha. Jesus wept in sympathy with those he loved ***even knowing he was about to end their tears by raising Lazarus from the dead.***

Oh brother and sister in Christ, you do not have a distant high priest, you do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with your hurt and pain – no you have a high priest who is able to sympathize with you He feels with you, He is concerned for you and he brings the relief that only the eternal son of God can bring.

And the author goes further to explain how this can be, how can Jesus the exalted one experience sympathy with fallen humans, who are guilty and exposed as sinners...because he took on flesh. The incarnation of the Son of God is such a precious doctrine. Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us as the apostle John wrote. And the author of Hebrews connects the humanity of Christ to his ability to sympathize with us.

Jesus endured temptation, the sympathy of Christ flows not only from His heavenly love, but from his earthly life. Jesus took on flesh was born of the virgin Mary and walked this earth enduring hostility, pain, loss, hunger, temptation and ultimately death. He can sympathize with you because there is never a point in your life where you can look at Jesus and say, “you don’t know what this is like”

Some years back a pastor friend helped me see this vividly when I was struggling. I was lamenting being falsely accused and misrepresented by someone I had trusted, and he simply explained that I had received a gift, because now I could go to Jesus in prayer and know that Jesus understood exactly the pain I was dealing with. I could identify even more with my Great High Priest. Because Jesus had repeatedly been falsely accused and misrepresented. In that moment I needed a sympathetic High priest, but it was even better that my high priest knew what I was going through.

Brothers and Sisters, he knows what your going through too. You can go to him with the weight of your sorrows, your loss, your tears and know that Your high priest knows your pain

And even beyond your pain you are wrapped up in his perfection...that’s what the statement “yet without sin” means. It’s one thing to commiserate with others to sympathize as weak sinners together, this Jesus cannot do. He cannot commiserate about sinful rebellion and failure because he was tempted yet without sin...but that’s what makes Jesus sympathy so overwhelmingly wonderful...because he has every right to look down at you, to point out your failures, to be repulsed by you because he is not like you in sin. He never sinned...but what glorious grace that when your sin is exposed by the Word

of God your Great High priest sympathizes with your weakness and wraps you in His perfection.

The eyes of your savior are filled with love for you, his embrace is the embrace of nail scarred hands, his grip is the grip of grace that doesn't recoil at your sin but holds you that much tighter. His perfection doesn't push Him away from us, no as our priest he gives his perfect righteousness to us as we come to Him in faith.

We don't deserve such rich sympathy, yet we have it in our great High priest who understands our pains and our failures and with priceless grace covers our sin in his own blood...which is the basis for the final call for action in this text and our third point.

The High Priest who helps you – Vs. 16

Look again at our final 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.”* (Heb 4:16) — The Hebrew Christians were in a time of need and they were beginning to think the help they needed would be found in going back to their former way of life, to a dead priesthood...but that wasn't what they needed...they needed to go back to Christ to God's throne of grace where help in the time of need is found. There was no help to be found in the old ways, there was help at the throne of grace through Jesus the great high priest.

This can happen to us too can't it. We can become beat down and burned out and assume that it would be easier to give up Jesus and go back to some former way of living. But weary Christian that is the way of death, there is no easier life there, there is no better life back in your former days apart from Jesus... No Christ has come as your great high priest and though following Jesus be painful and hard the life he promises here and now and for all eternity is a life he sustains with mercy and grace to help in your time of need.

The Christians this letter was addressed to were in a time of need a time of persecution, a time of trial and the remedy was not abandoning their Great High priest, but going to Him for help in their time of need. This is true for us too, we will experience times of need, we all need grace and here we are promised by God to find it.

A plain truth from this verse is that each of us will have to face our frailty at one point or another, we are not invincible, we are not indestructible – every one of us will find ourselves in a time of need, every one of us needs help – and how devastating would it be if we realize our frailty and God was indifferent or unwilling to help us.

Imagine if the agnostic is right, there may be a God, but we have no guarantee that he is good or will help humans in times of need – there may be a God but we have no guarantee that He will show mercy or grace to people who need it. To live as an agnostic is to face

our need and find the heavens closed to our pleas for help...oh my friend if that is you I hope you hear this good news, there is God who has made you in His very own image and if you would turn to Him He gives grace to those who know their need of Him.

Brother or Sister in Christ, are you in danger of forgetting this invitation to approach God's throne of grace with confidence that the Lord will grant the very grace you need – how long have we labored with hearts heavy, weakened by our sin and refused to return to the throne of grace? We need to remember our Lord who said, *"³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*¹² Your Great High Priest said that, you can go to the throne of grace with that promise in hand, assured that Jesus will not cast you out, but promises to help you in your time of need.

We aren't told what kind of help God will give, but we know this, it will be mercy and grace. We aren't told that the Lord will change our circumstances or even that He will help us in the way we want Him to, but that doesn't mean He will not help. The Lord will give exactly what you need to enable you to trust Him and follow Him until He brings you home. It may be that the pain you endure, the trial that you are facing, the struggle you are in will be the very means of your perseverance.

It isn't accidental that the place we find the grace we need to help us is at the very throne of grace. And church the only reason God's throne is a throne of grace for us is because we have a great High Priest named Jesus. The throne of God is a throne of grace for those who have trusted in Christ. Because the blood of Christ grants us access into the presence of God, but what kind of access...the same access as Christ has because we are united to Him. This is what we saw hinted at earlier when the author wrote, *"⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope."*¹³ Apart from Christ you have no right to enter God's presence, to ask for help, to plead for mercy or expect grace BUT if you are in Christ you have every right to approach God's throne, to enter his presence, to ask for help, to plead for mercy to expect grace because you draw near on His merits not yours.

This is why the author says we can go to the throne with confidence. This isn't arrogance or selfish conceit; no this is confidence in another. This is confidence that is given to us by Christ. We confidently approach the throne because the one who is the Lamb upon the throne says you can come.

What guarantee do you have that God will be merciful and gracious to you when you need him?

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 6:37.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 3:5–6.

You need only look to the bloody cross and the empty tomb, there is your promise that God will never abandon you, there is the promise that whatever help you truly need from God you will receive. It may not be in the way you want, or in what you think you need...no dear Christian it will be better than what you want, better than what you think because at the throne of grace you get Christ your great High Priest who helps his children in their time of need...go to Him...

Lets pray