

## Boldly Approaching the Throne of Grace

The writer of the *Book of Hebrews* tells us in Hebrews 4:14-16 [RSV], **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 have not 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.***

What a great High Priest we have in Jesus! He understands our experiences, and He knows what it is like to live in a human body. He positioned Himself to go through the same kind of temptations we do, but He did not give in to them. He knows that the tempter lies in wait for us, and He knows we need His mercy and His strength. We still fall short even when we have the best intentions to do what is right.

The New Testament writers want us to understand this about Jesus Christ. As God, He created the world and He sustains it. But as a man, He was born into humble surroundings, dependent upon the loving care of Mary and Joseph. Though in Him are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, He "learned" and "grew" just as all of us do. We find Him hungry after His 40-day fast and asleep on the little couch in His disciples' fishing boat after the exhausting days of ministry. Though as God He possesses the attribute of omnipresence, He walked throughout Judea and sailed with His disciples in their boat, of necessity crossing by foot from village to village on the rough terrain that characterized Palestine. Though we declare that He has no needs, as a Man He felt the loneliness of betrayal, the anguish of rejection, and the grief of His friend's death.

So our text can declare, **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses."** As One Who sympathizes He *shares the complete experience of humanity*. It is not a psychological sympathy as we might sometime refer to. For instance, when we hear the reports of a devastating earthquake in some part of the world and the suffering those people are enduring, we might psychologically sympathize with them. By this we ache in heart and even shed tears for what they are enduring. *But we do not sympathize with them experientially*. It is in this way that our writer speaks of the sympathies of Jesus Christ. *He knows the human experience*. He knows how weak we are, for He experienced that weakness. He knows how we can suffer, because He experienced that same suffering. He knows how we can be wronged and abused and misunderstood, because all of those things were His experience.

When you appeal to Jesus Christ in your struggles, you are not talking to one that knows nothing of what you are going through. Yes, by His great omniscience, He certainly knows every detail of our lives (Hebrews 4:13), but He

knows in yet another way: through experience. We cry out to Him in our pain, expressing the difficulties we have in enduring. We are not speaking a foreign experience to Him! He knows our weaknesses.

But the writer takes this a step farther. Because while all of us have the normal limitations of human weakness, the biggest struggle in our perseverance is the temptation to sin. It is not lack of energy that usually gets us, but the presence of sin's allurements. It is the trouble of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13) that concerns us. Hear the declaration that we have **"One Who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."** How sympathetic is our great High Priest? He understands temptation, not just from a psychological, investigative sense, but experientially.

The word **"temptation"** is the common term for testing, trying, or tempting. *The temptation itself is not sin.* It is giving into it as a fish biting the lure that snares us with sin. The writer's use of the perfect passive participle implies the thoroughness and completion of temptation and the abiding results of our Lord's success in conquering it. Quite commonly, we have some who object to this as any comfort. Their assertion is that since Jesus did not sin, then He does not really know how temptation feels. But just the opposite is true. C.S. Lewis explained this clearly in *Mere Christianity*:

*"A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only Man Who never yielded to temptation, is also the only Man Who knows to the full what temptation means – the only complete realist."*

Temptation was very real to our Lord. The Devil has not wasted his time *personally* assaulting any of us for 40-intensive days. Yet he did our Lord; and in every case Jesus Christ resisted the Devil's ploys. How extensive was the temptation of Christ? He was **"tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."** Does this mean that every detailed, individual sin we face he faced? No, but it does mean that there is no category of sin, no type of sin that we face that our Lord did not successfully endure. He does not roll his eyes at your pain or cluck his tongue at your struggle with sin. You have One in Heaven Who truly *understands* and *sympathizes* with you in every weakness and temptation. So draw near to Him with your burdened heart as you struggle on the journey.

The truths of our text are not just to increase our knowledge of Christ, but also to help us in our experience of Him through the crucible of daily life. We must know Him as our High Priest. Unless He is the One Who has mediated the way to God, then we have no salvation. And unless we know Him as our High Priest Who sympathetically meets us in our needs, we will have grave difficulty in the journey called "the Christian life."

After speaking of a God before Whom all of us, every detail of our lives, is laid bare, we might think that we can never pray again! How can I approach the throne of One Who sees everything about me, Who knows my hypocrisies, Who knows the blackness of my heart, Who knows my inconsistencies? It is because we have One of our own *race* seated upon the throne, Who knows our weaknesses and sympathizes in our temptations, that we are implored, **"Therefore,"** because of this reality, **"let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** All of the exposition on Christ as our High Priest and our need for His assistance is glued with the **"therefore."** Because of the effectiveness of His office as our great High Priest, we are exhorted to come with boldness before Him.

A citizen in the realm of a kingdom had no right or claim to come with boldness before the throne of his emperor. To do so might imply death or certainly ejection from the emperor's presence. *But not with our King.* We are told to **"draw near with confidence."** *Drawing near* was a term that was used of priests approaching God in service. The present tense of the verb insists that this is to be our regular practice – indeed, it is our daily privilege, moment-by-moment to come before the throne of grace for the mercy we need. To come with **"confidence"** means that we come boldly or with a sense of assurance before the Lord. We are able to enter the Divine Presence by the merits of Someone else. We have a claim to the throne because our **"great High Priest"** Who knows our weaknesses and temptations, is seated there.

Notice that he calls it, not *the throne of judgment*, but **"the throne of grace."** As a **throne** this is the sphere of divine power; as a **throne of grace** it abounds in Divine favor and Divine initiative toward weak and undeserving people. All of our incapability to live the Christian life is met with the abundance of **"grace."** In **"grace"** God willingly, out of His good pleasure, for His purposes, works and provides and supplies. We do not command grace; we receive it as a gift. We do not instruct God on how to exercise grace; we just appeal and God willingly gives. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 [RSV], **8. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – 9. not because of works, lest any man should boast.**

The writer of the *Book of Hebrews* was concerned that the Jewish Christians remain steadfast in their faith. He was intent on teaching his readers that they not make the same blunder of departing from the living God as did most of their

ancestors. The author God chose to use in penning this book has used a twofold approach thus far. The first of these is to illustrate the superiority of Jesus over prophets, angels and even Moses, and his second method is to exhort the brethren (you and I) to faithfulness in view of these comparisons.

The author has also given two exhortations thus far. The first of these is found in Hebrews 2:1-4 [RSV]: **1. Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2. For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3. how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard Him, 4. while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His own will.**

The second exhortation is found in Hebrews 3:12-14 [RSV]: **12. Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end,**

So the Hebrews writer calls us to “. . . **pay the closer attention to what we have heard**” and to “. . . **exhort one another every day.**” Both of these have obvious ramifications in our Lord’s intent behind this book. Our steadfastness, our faithfulness to Christ and His Body, the Church, hinges on our adherence to His word and to one another who are in Christ.

In our text this evening we are exhorted to “**with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.**” What does this mean and why should we be doing this?

What does it mean to come to the throne of grace? What does it mean to come boldly, as some versions say, or with confidence? Why should we be so diligent in doing this? These are the questions we will seek to answer together in this text this evening.

“**The throne of grace**” is simply another way to say “the throne of God.” Psalm 89:14 [RSV] says, “**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before You.**” In other words, our God is known for all of these attributes.

“**The throne of grace**” is a new expression in the *Book of Hebrews*. It is a genitive construction in Greek which means “grace is enthroned there,” rather than “the throne rests on grace.” In short, it addresses Jesus’ attitude of grace that one finds when one comes to the throne where Jesus sits. It is here we find kindness, mercy, and grace to sustain us.

**“With confidence draw near.”** This type of expression is often used in the Old Testament. This is a “priestly expression” used to describe their approach to God. For example, in Leviticus 21:17-21 words such as **“approach” or “come near”** are used to describe the priests’ work before God. We who are children of God are to be a royal priesthood, according to 1 Peter 2:9-10 [RSV]: **9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 10. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.**

This expression denotes approaching Holy God in worship and prayer. Its use here makes clear the priestly privilege of access to God is now extended to all Christians!

As we saw in Leviticus and rest of Old Testament, only certain individuals could approach God. But since we are now in Christ, if we have been baptized into His body, then we all are privileged to draw near to God. We may confidently approach God! We can do so free of any fear, hesitation or inhibitions!

But when does the great High Priest take action to show us mercy and grace? It is **“in the time of need.”** The mercy shown and grace given may not be as you would design. At times, the mercy of the Lord is to deliver us from some grievous and dangerous situation. At other times, He leaves us there but supplies the grace to trust Him and rejoice in Him. The brethren receiving this epistle would face the crazed persecution instigated by Nero. Some of them would be tortured – but grace was given to carry them through into the presence of Christ. Some would escape torture and imprisonment, only to live long lives and face what length of days presents. For this, grace was given so that they would endure the sufferings and difficulties of life and journey to the city of our God. *Timely help* can be counted on because of our great High Priest.

Now let me add a *therefore*. Because Jesus is our great High Priest, ascended triumphantly as the God-Man and because He sympathizes with us in our weakness and temptation, and because He calls upon us to pray boldly and expect to receive timely help, **“let us hold fast our confession.”** Take hold of your confession and press on as a Christian. *Because of all Christ is and has done, you can be steadfast as a believer.* Yes, this calls for action on your part. It requires effort, discipline, and a will to stand against your own temptations. It demands that you live differently in relationship to the world. It requires that you lean upon the strong arm of Jesus Christ and that you find help through being part of His body. *And the promise is that you – as a believer – can do it through the provisions of Jesus Christ.*

Have you declared a "**confession**"? It is that public declaration that Jesus Christ is your Redeemer and Lord. Biblically, this was done in baptism. It was something that may have begun privately, but with the rest of the body of Christ, you have openly confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord, sealing it in that solemn and joyous time of baptism. You have identified yourself as one who has died with Christ, risen with Him, and now will follow after Him as a disciple. *Is this your confession?* Then "**hold fast,**" keep pressing on; you can because you "**have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens**" for you.

Approach the throne of grace with love and joy. Approach eagerly and lovingly, for God is your Father. Approach with loving gratitude for all God's goodness to you. Remember how faithful He has been to you. Approach with love burning and glowing in your heart for Jesus, for His Kingdom, and for those you pray for. Love because God loves.

Approach the throne with eager joy. You are asking for things God longs to do. He has ordained that, even though He desires to do what you ask for, normally He does not act until you pray. God is thus even gladder for you to come in prevailing prayer than you are glad for the opportunity. Your prayer time is always a joy time to the Lord.

Approach with joy because you have the privilege, instant access, and eager welcome at the throne. Approach with joy because God's throne is a throne of grace. Approach with joy because of all God's ". . . **very great and precious promises**" (2 Peter 1:4). Approach rejoicing not only for what God is able to do, but also for what you are expecting Him to do.

But there is something even greater and more amazing than access to the throne. The Bible also assures you that you actually sit down with Christ on His throne. Jesus promises, "**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**" (Revelation 3:21). But that sitting is future, after we join Him in Heaven, after the judgment seat of Christ, when He gives to us His rewards and honors.

Even now Jesus wants you to exercise an active throne life. Christ has identified with us so fully that He provides for each true follower a gracious provision beyond our asking or thinking. It would be audacious and even blasphemous for you to suggest or claim the life that I now present if God's inspired word did not clearly teach it.

Have you declared a confession of Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, Lord, and High Priest? There is mercy waiting for sinners who would confess him. And there is a bounty of divine grace awaiting every believer on the journey to the celestial city.