

Hebrews 4:12-5:10
(Matthew 3:13-17)
“One Who Sympathizes with Our Weaknesses”

Introduction

When the music stops, the night is past and morning dawns, we know deep inside that our lives are slipping away, that everything we have built and loved is destined for obscurity and destruction, that we and those whose love and laughter are our greatest joy will one day soon lie in the earth.

Where is God in this? Where is his love and mercy toward this cosmos, toward these creatures he has made? Hasn't he spoken to us? Hasn't he given us his Word? Yes, but what does that word say? Listen to what the author of Hebrews writes:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (4:12-13).

How then can we possibly face life with confidence? We can fool each other. We can even fool ourselves much of the time. But how can we fool the holy One who searches our hearts in the light of his Word, who knows those things that I try to keep hidden from the gaze even of other sinners like myself? And if he is truly the only One “to whom we must give account,” how can we face life or death with anything but high anxiety?

The answer is found in the offer that the Master of the universe makes to us. He has sent us his own Son to be our great High Priest. And he has offered, not the blood of an animal, but his own perfect life in exchange for ours. Only if he stands in our place, only if he represents us before a holy God, only then can we possibly face the future with confidence.

And that, of course, is precisely why the gospel is good news and why Christianity is completely different from the other religions of the world. It is, in fact, the end of religion, the end of all our efforts to make ourselves right with God. It is God's gift to his creatures, the one gift needed to grant us proper confidence in life and in death.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven, 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

Body

1. **We can *believe* with confidence: “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” (4:14).**

The emphasis here is on Christ’s majesty, his divinity. He is all that the author declared him to be in the opening words of this work: “He is the radiance of the glory of God ...” and has made “purification for sins” (1:3). He has conquered death. If he is for us, who can be against us?

2. **We can *pray* with confidence: “Since we have a great high priest ... who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (4:15-16).**

The emphasis here is on his humanity. He has been tempted as we are tempted. He understands all that we face in our humanity, and so he stands with us, compassionately interceding on our behalf (also, see 7:25).

3. **We can *suffer* with confidence: “Since we have a great high priest ... [who] learned obedience through what he suffered” (5:8).**

This is such a dominant theme in Hebrews because the author is writing to people facing trouble and persecution in order to encourage them not to fall away from the faith. A major incentive is that Christ not only suffered as we suffer, but was “made perfect” through what he suffered. So the necessity of suffering is emphasized. If suffering was necessary for Christ’s maturing to a complete and perfect human, how much more for those of us who would be made like him!

4. **We can *obey* with confidence: “Since we have a great high priest ... [who] learned obedience through what he suffered. ... [and who] became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (5:8-9).**

Our salvation does not rest on our getting things right. Christ has won our case. We have already been saved. He is the source of salvation; we are not. So, we can live and act without fearing that if we get things wrong, all is lost. We obey, but not to earn something. We obey in grateful response to the gift he has given us.

Conclusion

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven, 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 (4:14).

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