

“Bold Access to God”

Heb. 4:14-16

- INTRO. - The passage we are examining this morning focuses on Jesus Christ as our great High Priest. Now, I don't know what you think of, when you think of a high priest, but I imagine there are a lot of people today who would have an interesting concept of that.
- Beginning in this passage we move into something that is highly dependent upon religious language from the OT. For many people today, the concept of the high priesthood (and things like the mercy seat, etc.) are very unfamiliar.
- A lot of people today would connect the idea of a high priest with a movie or a video game. They might envision a mythical figure with a long white robe, staff in hand, and adorned with an aura of mystical light.
- For Christians (who have been in the church for a while) they may vaguely remember that the high priest wore a blue robe and an ephod and a breastplate. One who is especially knowledgeable might even remember the Urim and Thummim (which consisted of sacred lots that were used to determine God's will).
- Well, it is important for us to understand the role of high priest, because this is a theme that will dominate most of the rest of this book. And let me just say (at this point) that the most important thing you need to understand about Jesus as our high priest is that He brought about full and open access to God. *That* is the main emphasis of this introductory passage (we will be looking at today).
- And this is a very important passage in this book. You could say it is the “hinge” of the entire book. One Bible scholar said, “It is difficult to overstate the importance of 4:14-16 in understanding the organization of the book.”
- It serves as the conclusion to the message of the first part of the sermon, and the introduction of the rest of it – therefore some have called it “an overlapping transition.”
- It is the departure point for the consideration of Christ as our high priest – and that is a vitally important theological motif that extends *at least* until 10:25.
- Although it might appear (at first) as if these three verses are brief (and somewhat unadorned), they really serve as a crystallization of the main message of the book – a snapshot of the sermon.
- Whereas much of this sermon has been directed to those who have come short of committing to Christ, it appears that this passage is aimed at those

who have made a profession of faith but may be wavering a bit.

- And whereas the message up to this point has been somewhat negative in tone, it now becomes much more positive. Rather than focusing on what will happen if someone *misses* the salvation of God, it moves into what is available to those who have embraced that salvation. Our great High Priest has provided, *not only* salvation itself, but every spiritual benefit that goes with it.
- He is a merciful high priest, and He is ready to help us in every circumstance. In fact, Jesus as our merciful high priest has already been introduced in this book.
- In 1:3 He was introduced as the One who has made purification for our sins. In 2:17 He is called “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”
- In 3:1 He is referred to as “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” So we have seen allusions to this concept, but *here* we begin to see it being developed in more detail.
- Now, our outline is a little different this morning. Rather than having three or four main points, we will see two main points, but the last one will have two sub-points. But the first thing we see, is that:

I. WE HAVE A SUPREME HIGH PRIEST (v. 14)

- That’s in v. 14. Look at it with me, “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 that this is addressed to those who have made a “confession” (or profession of faith) and the exhortation is, to hold fast to that confession (in light of our great high priest).
- But let’s think through the details of this verse. Look at the first phrase: “Since then we have...” (Stop right there.) Nine times in the next few chapters, the author of Hebrews will emphasize what we “have” as believers in Jesus Christ.
- This is speaking of a present reality for every true believer. We “have” (right now) a great high priest. We have One who has promised to help us in our time of need.
- Now, why is He called a *great* (or supreme) high priest? As we have already seen, a primary goal of this author is to show that Jesus is greater than any other.
- He is greater than the former revelation. He is greater than angels. He is greater than Moses. *Now*, He is greater than any priest – in fact, any *high*

priest. And what we have to keep in mind, is that (in the OT) the position of the high priest was preeminent. He was the one who oversaw the entire ritual worship of God, and functioned as the primary representative between the nation and Yahweh.

- He was the only one who could enter into the Holy of holies. So every high priest in Israel was “great” in this sense – but Jesus was even greater (for a number of reasons).
- First of all, no earthly high priest ever “passed through the heavens” (as it says here). No earthly priest was “without sin” (as it says in v. 15). And (in fact) the author of Hebrews is going to use several chapters to delineate why He is greater than any other high priest.
- We’re going to see (over the next few chapters) that He was appointed by an oath from God, that His priesthood is eternal, that He made a superior sacrifice, that His sacrifice was presented in the heavenly tabernacle (rather than the earthly one), that He is the inaugurator of a better covenant, and that His sacrifice was made once for all time.
- And rather than being from the earthly line of Aaron, He is the eternal Son of God. Verse 14 makes that clear. That title (by the way) combines His human and divine names. This shows that He is the perfect Mediator between God and man.
- Remember what Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:5? He said, “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus...” He is a *great* high priest because He is the one and only perfect Mediator between God and men.
- But (going back to v. 14) notice the phrase, “passed through the heavens.” If you have the KJV it says “passed into the heavens” but that is a bad translation.
- If you understand the historical context (here) the picture is quite clear. The idea is that of passing from the outside into the inside. The high priest would pass from the altar on the outside, *through* the holy place, and ultimately *into* the holy of holies.
- But in the case of Jesus, He passed “through the heavens.” He passed through the created heavens into the presence of God. He passed through the *first* heaven (the atmosphere), then through the *second* heaven (outer space), and He entered into the *third* heaven (the dwelling place of God). Paul talked about this third heaven in 2 Cor. 12:2.
- But, unlike the earthly high priests, He went into the “holiest of all Holies!” He went to the very throne of God. Having made atonement for all sins for all time, He sat down at the right hand of the Father.

- Now, John MacArthur gives an extensive explanation of this in his commentary. Under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies – and *then* only once a year (on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur) – and under very *strict* guidelines.
- He had to make the sacrifice in a certain way and sprinkle the blood a certain way – and since he himself was a sinner, he had to make a sacrifice for his own sin before he could offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people.
- And his time in the Holy of Holies was very limited. He could *not* loiter in any way. He had to go in and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat and exit as quickly as he could.
- In fact, the OT tells us that he wore bells on his robe, and that was for the purpose of being able to pull him out of there if God struck him dead. If the priests (outside) no longer heard the bells, they would know what had happened.
- And (as MacArthur explains), “to enter the Holy of Holies, the priest had to pass through three areas of the Tabernacle or Temple. He took the blood and went through the door into the outer court, through another door into the Holy Place, and then through the veil into the Holy of Holies.”
- This, of course, is where we get the correlation of Jesus passing through the heavens. But unlike the earthly high priest (who had to get out of there quickly), Jesus offered a one-time (perfect) sacrifice and sat down at the right hand of God the Father.
- We will later see where Jesus is pictured as entering “through the veil” into the heavenly sanctuary. This is clearly what the author of Hebrews has in mind here.
- But think about how this contrasts with the earthly priests. There was no furniture in the earthly Temple because the work of the priests were never done. The sacrifices were offered day after day after day – literally thousands of sacrifices – and *none* of them could *fully* atone for sin.
- But Jesus was the perfect High Priest and He made the perfect sacrifice for sin, and therefore He could take His seat at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly Tabernacle. We’re going to read later (in 9:12), “...through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”
- We will clearly see (over the next few chapters) that Jesus is the *great* (supreme) high priest because He alone made a perfect, once for all sacrifice for sin.

- And in light of that, notice what v. 14 says we must do: "...let us hold fast our confession." In *this* case I like the way it is rendered by the NIV, "...let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."
- The Greek word for "hold fast" is "krateo." It means, "to hold on and *not* let go." This verb is used 47 times in the NT.
- It describes the human side of salvation. True believers always hold fast to the faith – while God (ultimately) holds believers fast. God is the One who keeps us saved, but we are still to hold fast to the faith. (Pause) So we have a *supreme* high priest – but secondly:

II. WE HAVE A SYMPATHETIC HIGH PRIEST (vv. 15-16)

- In vv. 15-16 we find the emphasis on the sympathy of our High Priest in regard to our humanity. We have already been told (in ch. 2) that He is a "merciful high priest." *Here* we are told He is a *sympathetic* High Priest.
- We were told that "He had to be made like His brethren in all things" and that "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" because "He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered."

- Here he reiterates that truth, that Christians have a High Priest with an unequalled capacity for sympathizing with them in any kind of trial or temptation.
- Because of the incarnation, (in which He became fully human), He can understand our weaknesses and help us to stand firm. In fact, there is *nothing* we experience that He cannot sympathize with. Now, there are two aspects of this. First of all:

A. He Knows Our Nature (v. 15)

- Look with me at v. 15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin."
- Although it is worded in the negative, this verse means that we *do* (indeed) have a high priest who can sympathize with our "weaknesses."
- The word for "weaknesses" is a general term that can mean anything from sickness, physical weakness, general weakness related to being human, or moral weakness.
- Here (in this context) it seems to apply specifically to our propensity to sin (because it is contrasted with Jesus who is without sin). In fact, this is another way in which Jesus is superior to all others

- He was tempted in every way we are tempted, but He alone is without sin. No one else can say that.
- The Bible makes it clear (here) that Jesus was without sin, but He can fully empathize with us because He was tempted in the same way we are in His humanity.
- He completely understands our human weaknesses because of first-hand experience. Therefore He can offer us “sympathy,” but even more than that, He can offer us “empathy.” He can fully relate to our struggles.
- You and I can be sympathetic (toward someone else), and we can even be empathetic (if we have experienced the same thing they are experiencing), but only Christ can be *perfectly* sympathetic (and empathetic) because He alone has experienced our weakness as the infinite God-man.
- By the way, that phrase, “has been tempted in all things as *we are*,” does *not* mean that He has experienced the *exact same* temptations we are faced with.
- We know (from Luke 4) that He was tempted, but His temptations were unique. For example, none of us have ever been tempted to turn stones into bread, have we? Why? Because we are *not* God. We do *not* have the ability to turn stones into bread. But Jesus did. His temptations were unique.
- On the other hand, there are temptations *we* face that He never faced (specifically). For example, was Jesus ever tempted to commit digital bank fraud? No, because there was no such thing in His day. Was He ever tempted with Internet porn? No, because there was no such thing as the Internet in His day.
- This phrase simply points to the reality of His humanity and the extent of human experience in general. Jesus experienced what it is like to be lonely, to be hungry (or thirsty), to be sad (and to grieve). He wept deeply at the tomb of Lazarus. He came to understand what it is like to be rejected. He sweat great drops of blood as He contemplated the agony of the cross.
- John MacArthur writes, “Our great High Priest *not only* is perfectly merciful and faithful but also perfectly understanding. He has an unequalled capacity for sympathizing with us in every danger, in every trial, in every situation that comes our way, because He has been through it all Himself.”
- When we are hurting in any way, our tendency is to think that no one understands. Sometimes we *even* think we are the only ones who have ever suffered like this.
- But that is *not* true. Our great High Priest has suffered *beyond* what we have ever suffered. *Not*

only was His suffering on the cross greater than anything we have ever suffered, but His temptations (as the God-man) were greater than any we have ever endured. And who could ever understand temptation greater than the One who has endured His temptations without succumbing to any of them?

- So He is (in every way) our sympathetic High Priest. He knows our pain. He understands our suffering – and He understands our *temptations* in the *midst* of that suffering.
- And (by the way) *not only* does He understand everything we experience, He is (right now) at the right hand of the Father interceding for us according to that understanding.
- Some people have the idea that God is far removed from us – that He has wound up the world and He is now letting it run – but He Himself has no interest in our lives.
- Folks, that is *not* what the Bible says about our God. He cares about everything we go through. He fully understands it and He fully sympathizes with us. He is *not* a God who is far removed from us. He is a God of empathy and compassion. But there is something else. *Not only* does He know our *nature* – secondly:

B. He Knows Our Needs (v. 16)

- Something more than sympathy is needed. We desperately need His help! And He has promised that to us. Look with me at v. 16, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”
- The One who knows us perfectly has promised to provide for us perfectly. And since the context has to do (primarily) with temptation to sin, it is good to remember what Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.”
- So our Lord knows how to help us in the midst of temptation – but surely this (also) applies broadly as well. Our merciful High Priest provides mercy and grace for *every* need we have.
- But notice, there is something we have to do. We have to *draw near* with confidence to the throne of grace. Now, people in the ancient world would have understood this concept better than we do.
- Most ancient rulers were unapproachable by the common people. If you were a normal citizen you would never have access to the king. You could never approach his throne.

- And even the most high-ranking officers could *not* approach the throne without permission. ILL. – Remember the account of Queen Esther? She risked her very life in approaching King Ahasuerus without permission – and she was his wife!
- But the point (here in Hebrews) is that every single believer has full access to God. His throne is a throne of grace and we can approach that throne at any time.
- An undeserving sinner can approach that throne and find saving grace through faith in Christ. Any believer at any time can approach that throne and find mercy and grace for any time of need.
- In fact, we are admonished (here) to approach that throne *boldly*. That word means “with no fear.” It means “with absolute confidence.” The children of the King never have to be afraid to approach His throne – and in Christ Jesus, that is exactly who we are.
- When we approach that throne of grace we never have to worry about being turned away. We never have to be afraid that God will shut to door on us and *not* allow us access.
- And notice, this is in the present tense, so this means that we are to continually come (over and over again) to His throne of grace. Any time we

have a need, we should immediately draw near to His throne of grace.

- And even though we are *not* as familiar with the concept of the monarchy (in our day and time), we can still grasp the general idea – the One who is on the throne has a greater ability to help us than anything else. He has the power and the authority to make a difference.
- Now, another analogy (that probably fits the context better) is the fact that (in OT times) the average worshippers could only approach the outer limits of the sanctuary. Ordinary priests could only go as far as the brazen altar. Only the high priest could ever approach the mercy seat in the holy of holies.
- But the message of Hebrews, is that the High-Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ has provided full access for all believers. This is something Israel never enjoyed – immediate, continual access to God. What an incredible truth!
- The “mercy seat” on the Ark of the Covenant is clearly connected to “the throne of grace” (here in Hebrews 4). The *type* is on earth, but the *antitype* is in heaven. One was a symbol, but the other is an absolute reality.
- The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the earthly mercy seat to provide temporary

forgiveness of sin – but the precious blood of Christ atoned for sin once for all. It turned the throne of judgment into a throne of grace for all who would repent and believe the gospel.

- And it is that throne of grace that any sinner can turn to for eternal salvation – and any believer can turn to for help in any time of need.
- And yet, the tragedy is, that *not all* of us draw near to that throne of grace when we need help. It is a strange thing – but there are some who run away rather than drawing near.
- It is amazing to me that a born-again child of God would ever run away from Him in a time of need – but that is exactly what happens many times. Some get angry with God over some perceived unfairness. Some think they need to figure out how to deal with it on their own. Some think that God doesn't really care about their situation.
- The truth of the matter is, that the sinful flesh often wants to run away from God rather than to draw near to Him. As one author put it, “Thus, we leave the church or tune out the preacher, return to old, sinful patterns of life, or simply stop meeting with God for prayer and Bible study.”
- He says, “In this fallen world the ‘gravitational’ pull downward of the world, the flesh, and the

devil at times make a move toward God seem the most unnatural action in the world.”

- But the answer is *always* to draw near in our time of need. Don't run *away* from Him – run *to* Him! His throne is a throne of mercy and grace. He knows how to help you when you need it most.
- In fact, that phrase “in time of need” literally means “well-timed help.” In other words, help right in the nick of time – before it's too late. Just at the right time He will give you aid.
- By the way, notice that this is a throne of *grace* – *not* a throne of Law. We are condemned by the law, but saved by His grace. We could *never* stand before a throne of Law with confidence, but we *can* stand before His throne of grace with confidence.
- It is *not* a throne of merit. It has nothing at all to do with good works, or earning anything, or being inherently righteous. The grace we receive is exactly that – it is unmerited favor given as an absolutely free gift from God.
- Notice, this grace is dispensed by our Great High Priest. It is *not* dispensed by Mary. Jesus Christ alone is the dispenser of grace. He alone is our merciful High Priest.
- How do you draw near to His throne of grace? You do it through fervent prayer. Just cry out to Him in

prayer and he will hear you. In fact, He is eagerly waiting for you to do that. It pleases the Lord when we acknowledge our total dependence on Him in prayer. That's why the "effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:16)

- It is because we have a great, merciful High Priest who cares about our needs, and promises to help us in those times of need. Any time we are troubled, or tried, or tempted – we can call upon Him in prayer.
- Any time we are suffering, or we are grieving, or we are distressed – we can call upon our faithful High Priest and He will help us in our time of need.
- Oh my friend, do you know this great High Priest? John MacArthur asks the question, "How can anyone reject such a High Priest, such a Savior—who not only permits us to come before His throne for grace and help, but pleads with us to come in confidence?"
- You *can* (in fact) come before Him with absolute confidence if you know Him as Savior and Lord. Where do you stand with Him today? Is He your great High Priest? He can be.
- MAKE APPEAL
- PRAYER