

## A FAITH WORTH HOLDING FAST – HEBREWS 4:14-16

A couple of years ago a California couple went for a hike on their property together and as they were walking along one of them noticed a rusty metal can partly buried in the ground. It didn't look like much and most people probably would have just kept walking. But, they decided to check it out since it looked like it had a lid on it. After a little digging they pried it up and discovered below it couple more. After removing the lid they discovered that this can was filled with old gold coins that were in near mint condition. Naturally they began to dig up the other cans as well, which turned out to be 5 more, all of them filled with these old gold coins. All together they discovered over 1400 gold coins in perfect condition all from the 1800s for a total value of \$10 million dollars. They were instantly wealthy...or were they?

It crossed my mind that they really weren't any wealthier the moment they found the coins than they were beforehand. The coins were theirs, part of the property they already owned. It was just in that moment they discovered the great value of what was already theirs! And I'm guessing there were some cries of exhilaration that followed.

In our text today, the author of Hebrews who recognizes that his readers are questioning the value of their faith in light of persecution and trials, is writing help them see the truly all surpassing value of what they actually have in Jesus their Great High Priest. And my hope is that the Spirit of God will do the same in us through our study of His Word today.

Let's Pray

Turn with me to **HEBREWS 4:14-16**

Before we dive into our text, let me remind you where we have been. Back in 3:1, we were urged to consider Jesus to fix our thoughts on Him. Specifically we were called to consider him as our faithful high priest. And the author began to help focus our thoughts on Jesus by showing us how much greater Jesus even is than Moses! Then from verse 7 of chapter 3 through verse 13 of chapter 4 that we covered last week, the author shifted the focus slightly to encourage the readers to hold fast their faith and strive to enter the rest that God has for us.

In our passage today, the author shifts the focus back to considering Jesus our high priest, but he does it in a way that tie's up some loose ends from the previous section and also focuses our hearts and minds on an even greater reason to hold fast our to our faith in Christ.

So with that in mind, I want to start with our passage from last week taking a brief look at verses 11-13 again.

So let's take a brief look at verses 11-13.

**READ HEBREWS 4:11-13**

God gave a call to us last week through verses 11-13 to strive to enter God's rest, that we would respond to the conviction of the Spirit through the Word of God by putting to death our sin and putting on the likeness of God through obedience for His glory. Essentially the author is encouraging us not to grow weary in doing good by directing our heart toward Christ and what is

to come. Yet, when we experience the conviction of the Spirit, we in our human nature can easily descend into a pit, and reading verse 13 from that perspective can feel paralyzing when we recognize that we will all need to give an account before God. For any of us, reading those words can stir up the guilt of all our many glaring failures. Not only that the author recognize—as our passage today will reveal—that as we strive to enter that rest we will continue to fall short feeling all the more of the weight of this ever expanding dump filled with our sin which in and of ourselves we can't possibly clean up! I believe the author intentionally leads us to this place because as one commentator says, "The more desperate [our] situation is before an all-seeing God, the more wonderful is His provision for [our] needs!" And it is in seeing the all surpassing value of Christ, that we are compelled to hold fast to our faith because it is a faith that so worth holding on to!

Specifically what the Spirit of God directs our hearts to in verses 14-16 is this: **Hold fast your faith and draw near for grace, because Jesus is your Great High Priest!** This is what we will see in our text today.

So with that in mind follow along with me as I read Hebrews 4:14-16

### **READ HEBREWS 4:14-16.**

Again the big idea here the big encouragement from this text is this: "**Hold fast your faith and draw near for grace because Jesus is your Great High Priest.**"

Now we are going to walk through each these points in our big idea, but for ease of following the logic of text, we are going to start with the last first. **So the order goes more like this: 1. Because Jesus is our Great High Priest. 2. Hold fast to your faith and 3. Draw near for grace.**

### **BECAUSE JESUS IS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST**

Verse 14 starts out saying, "Since then we have a great high priest." The Jewish readers would have understood very well the concept of a high priest and the line of them going all the way back to Aaron, the brother of Moses.

We could spend a lot of time delving deep into this, but the author is going to do just that over the next 5 chapters. That being the case, we will start with just a general overview.

Once a year the high priest would go into the presence of God into a place in the temple called the Holy of Holies. He was the only one who was allowed to enter that place and only once a year. When he went he would bring with him the blood of a young spotless goat and sprinkle the blood on the top of the Ark of the Covenant, also called the mercy seat. He did this as means of covering over all the sins of God's people including his own.

Really the big point of this was to reveal to Israel—and to us all—that we have a desperate need for someone to remove our guilt before God and we cannot do it ourselves. There was always only one who could. Only one! All looked to that one person to lead them to be at peace with God. However, that one had to continue to go near once every year of his life, because the atonement he brought could not truly cover over all their sin. In reality, this was just a seed that God was planting into the hearts of His people to prepare them for the one who is **THE GREAT** high priest.

Then Jesus enters the stage, whom all who went before him were really just a shadow of.

Every high priest entered what was called the holy of holies which was considered to be the mere footstool of God's throne. The best the earthly priests could come to was the **footstool** of the throne. Psalm 132:7 says, "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!" And in Isaiah 66:1 God says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you build for me?" Considering that in that day feet were especially filthy and smelly, the concept of a footstool was not very much, but it was the best and only connection God's people had through their high priest. However, the connection that Jesus has is far greater. Look at verse 14 again.

Verse 14 says, "Since have a great high priest who passed through the heavens." The greatness of Jesus' high priesthood is described in part by this phrase, "through the heavens" but what does this mean? There are some who suggest there are levels of heaven that correspond to parts of the earthly temple, and a case can be made for that, but not all are convinced by that. Even if this is the case I don't think this is the focus here. When it says, Jesus passed through the heavens, the picture suggests the heavens were just something passed through on the way to something else. So where did he arrive? Consider what Hebrews 7:26 says.

"For it is indeed fitting that we should have **such a high priest** holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and [here is the key phrase] **exalted above the heavens**. What I think this is saying is that Jesus didn't just ascend into heaven, but rather He ascended to a place of exaltation above all the heavens.

Consider also Ephesians 4:10 as well which says, "He who descended [Jesus] is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things!" I think the main focus of passing through the heavens isn't what He went through, but where He arrived. Unlike all the other high priests who could only approach the lowly footstool of the throne, Jesus went through the heavens to the throne of God and sat on it!

This past fall three of my kids witnessed something in me, they had never seen before. I tend to be pretty restrained and even keeled emotionally. But after decades of disappointment year after year hanging my head identifying myself with a group called "the lovable losers" everything changed for us as Cubs fan. Our old identity died. We could no longer be called the lovable losers! Because the Chicago Cubs had gone from the depth of being one of the worst teams in baseball to standing on the throne as the champs for the first time 108 years! For us as Cubs fans there was absolutely no restraint when that finally out was recorded. I myself erupted out of my seat screaming at the top of my lungs to the shock of my 3 children with me.

As I was typing these very words up Friday morning in Big Apple Bagel, everything in me was wanting to stand up screaming and pump my fists over this...although that would have proved a little awkward. This should get us bouncing in our seats! You see who can sit on the throne but God Himself, and the author of Hebrews has been laboring to set this point up since the start of the book. The author says, "Since then we have a great high priest" and then triumphantly and passionately shouts out his name and identity: Jesus, the Son of God!

Jesus was not merely a man like the rest of the high priests that came and went He was God Himself! Consider what the author has been already taught about the Son of God:

1:2 – “He is the heir of all things” meaning, the earth and everything in it is His and one day God is going to hand this over to Him and His kingship is going to come here!

1:2 – He was the through whom God created all things and then verse 3 tells us what it means that Jesus is the Son of God beyond a shadow of doubt

1:3 – He is radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of His nature, and by His Word of His power right now He is upholding the entire universe.

Jesus’ Greatness as High Priest according to this verse 14 comes from two things: (1) Our Great High Priest is none other than God Himself! When God Himself is your own personal representative, who can stand against you! No one! This the greatest of all victories for all of humanity! (2) This brings together both the priesthood and the kingship.

In the Old Testament, the offices had to be separated because of the sinfulness of man, and they held each other in check. Our founding fathers developed our government based on this pattern. But with Jesus there is no need for the separation. And in our own context Jesus being both priest and king is somewhat akin to having the president, and the congress and the judicial branch all perfectly unified with one agenda that best fits all of our interests! In the case of Jesus, He is our own representative, He has our best interest in mind and He has all the power! If that would be a comfort for us from a political perspective in this country, how much great assurance then should we have in our souls, when the government above all governments is completely for us!

This is the reason, the author tells us and himself, “Let us hold fast to our confession!” Let us hold fast to our faith because Jesus the very Son of God is our Great High Priest.

Now the greatness of Jesus our high priest isn’t only wrapped up in His kingship and deity, but also amazingly in His humanity, which is the other side of the coin that is meant lead us to hold fast our faith in Christ.

Look at verse 15 with me:

#### **READ HEBREWS 4:15.**

We humanity are described as having a weakness, one which Jesus who as a human being understands well. The weakness is described as being susceptible to temptation. Adam and Eve even in the garden prior to the fall were susceptible to temptation, and gave into it.

We are told here that Jesus was tempted in every respect just as we are, yet without sin. I think it is easy to read this and think, “Jesus couldn’t have been tempted in every respect like us because He was never in my situation.” There is a sense in which every temptation is same. Temptation itself pushes the question before us, will we lean on our own vantage point, our own strength, our own wisdom, what seems right and good in our own eyes, or will we trust God and His ways? And the real crux of temptation is that something appears to us to be true and life giving, while God tells us, that truth and life are found in Him alone! In this sense Jesus as a man has experienced in every respect the same temptation too, so He truly understands!

I love the illustration that Kent Hughes gives us for this. He points out that if you have two pianos in the same room, and you strike a key on one piano, the same string or chord on the other piano will also start to vibrate and resound. It is called sympathetic resonance. In other words, when we are wrestling with sin, and the tension of our temptation is vibrating back on forth, it as if there is a note of sympathy in Christ our great high priest that begins to vibrate as well, where Jesus says, "I know that struggle. I get it."

Yet, I believe verse 15 tells us that Jesus experienced that struggle to an even greater degree. We have tendency to think Jesus' own temptation was somehow less because He's God right. Or we think, we have experienced temptation to the point where we break and give in, but Jesus never got to that point.

James McDonald once used an illustration of a weight lifter that I think really helps us with this. He asks the question, which weightlifter knows the fullness of he weight lifted, the one who tries and fails or the one who succeeds at lifting it above his head?

C.S. Lewis says something similar. He says, "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 the wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives into temptation simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later."

Jesus alone never sinned and as a result, He alone knows the full weight of temptation. None of us have resisted temptation to the point of sweating drops of blood like Jesus before He surrendered His will to God's will. None of us have resisted temptation for 40 days straight to such a degree that God in His mercy sent angels to minister to us! Jesus knows the full weight of temptation! And what a comfort that is to know that in those moments of wrestling, Jesus' own sympathy is awakened and resonating as one who fully understands!

This too is what as well is what makes Jesus such a Great High Priest.

### **HOLD FAST YOUR FAITH!**

Now before we move to verse 16, I want to zoom out a little on our passage.

For those of who are taking or have taken Ben Jacques class on Hermeneutics, you were probably fascinated to learn about chiasms in the Bible. For those you haven't heard that term before, a chiasm comes from the Greek letter Chi which looks just like our letter "X". The letter is basically a picture of two arrows joined together that point to the center which is what chiasms do. When authors in scripture want to emphasize something, they will sometimes structure what they say in such a way to draw attention to the center. So here is part of what the author is doing in our text:

A - *Since* (Because) we have Jesus, our Great High Priest, who is the son of God (Jesus' divine nature)

B - Let us hold fast our Confession

A' - *For* (Because) we have a high priest who was tempted in every way like us... (Jesus' humanity).

The author of Hebrews in profound wonder call us and himself to hold on to what we in our faith confess, that **Jesus is both fully God and fully man together**, which makes Him a high priest like no other, one exalted on the throne who completely understands the full extent of our struggle.

**Because Jesus is our Great High Priest, let us hold fast our faith!** What a glorious faith we confess!

### **DRAW NEAR FOR GRACE**

Now the greatness of Jesus' role as high priest and king brings still more practical benefit to us! Look with me again at verse 16

### **READ HEBREWS 4:16**

The place we are encouraged now to go to is a throne. Typically approaching a king in those days was something done with fear and trembling. We can think back to Esther who recognized that doing so could result in her death or Nehemiah who was struck with fear when he realized the king in whose presence he stood had realized he was sad. You better not bring sadness to the king. How much more fear might there be given the fact that we will all have to stand before the throne of God and given account according to verse 13 that we read earlier!

Yet, the throne of God is now called the throne of grace! Why? Because Jesus the one who is God and therefore has the right to sit on the throne is the one who also as a man fully understands our struggle with temptation and being full of compassion tells we no longer have to fear approaching God when we have failed! Rather we have every reason to go before God with confidence!

Now this doesn't mean we can come before God and say, "Hey God, listen. I know I got angry, and said some things that were really hurtful to a friend of mine, but you understand. You get it." As if we now expect Jesus to say, "Oh yeah I totally get it. It's okay, no big deal."

That kind of attitude really minimizes the cross and makes light of the suffering of our savior. The type of person the author is addressing the one who feels the weight of failure and who is longing for grace! Notice the occasion when we are encouraged to approach the throne of grace with confidence: in our time of need. The author is speaking those who are needy, who have been humbled by their sin and are hungry for grace. Perhaps you are there now. Whenever you find yourself there, know that God's Spirit right here speaks to us encouraging us to come before the throne not in fear. It's not a throne we need to avoid. It is a throne now marked by grace, and we can have absolute confidence that if we come to Him in humility confessing our sin, that He will indeed respond with grace!

**Brothers and sisters, let us hold fast to our faith and continually draw near for grace as often as we have need, because we have a great and glorious high priest!**

**Is not this a faith worth holding on to?**

Let's Pray!