

Confidence In Our Great High Priest

Chapter 4 has been warning us to be on guard and to strive for salvation through Jesus Christ. I pray, my beloved, that when we hear of events in Scripture and as the writer has used the Hebrews in the wilderness, as an example, observing a whole generation fell because of unbelief. The writer does want the Hebrews converted to Christianity nor does he want us to point our fingers at these wondering Jews and say something like, “God and Moses were so clear, why did they not listen and obey?” I pray when we read of events like these in the Bible, we are affected by them and as it teaches us and we mull them over to ask, why we, having the complete Word of God often act the same way. As we consider our sins, we should also be amazed by the grace of God and the sacrifice of His Son. We, like the Hebrews, have sinned in defiance and by our unbelief and by our weakness. The question that should be in our minds is, “Why has not God passed righteous judgment on us as He did on the Hebrews?”

At times, we who are saved, when our faith is weak, may even find ourselves a little like those who heard Peter preach at Pentecost. Reading from Acts, chapter 2, beginning at verse 36, “ ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore **know for certain** that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ ³⁷ Now when they heard this **they were cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘**Brothers, what shall we do?**’ ³⁸ And Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ ” We have and continue at times, to let doubts creep into our minds but then the

scriptures make clear salvation begins with us coming before a holy God and repenting of our sin and believing in Jesus, as God, as our Lord and as our Savior.

The writer of Hebrews in this passage now presents us with the way of escaping God's wrath and a way to enter into His rest, a way to receive His mercy and grace and that path is only through Jesus the Son. The theme of unbelief and judgment that began at the beginning of chapter 4, is now overpowered by a new theme. The way to enter heaven is through the sacrifice of our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

For everyone who, at times, has found themselves doubting and fearful and for everyone who has trembled when hearing of God's wrath - behold, there is a Way provided for us. The Way is Jesus. As Jesus said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** (John 14:6) Clearly, Jesus, God the Son, the Living God of the Bible, is the only Way to be reconciled back to God!

This morning's the theme or the doctrine or truth of God the writer is teaching is; ***We are called boldly to enter into God's presence, to receive mercy and find grace through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest!***

Opening Prayer

Made Like His Brothers (v. 14)

The theme of Jesus our Great High Priest has been on the writer's mind as he wrote in chapters 1, 2 and 3. Our passage this morning relates directly back to chapter 2, verses 17 and 18, **"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the**

service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ **For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**” It is amazing; we are saved by His grace!

As we remember the battle that those of the early church as they fought against the Judaizers who had turned their relationship with God into man-made religion, a system of works and who always taught that their way was superior. The Apostles of the church of Christ were constantly reminding these young churches that Jesus came to save people by grace. Often even Jews who were convinced that Christianity was the New Covenant, they believed it was not valid unless the elements of Judaism was brought in an obeyed. There are churches who still believe this to this very day. The writer is teaching they need to let go of the Old and hold fast to the New Covenant or gospel taught by Christ. Reading verse 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.”** I can hear the Jews rejecting Christianity outright or those trying to embracing the New Covenant while holding fast to the Old, saying, *You Christians do not have a temple, you don't have a sacrificial system, you do not have the feasts and traditions of the forefathers, and you do not even have a high priest. Why would we leave the established religious system of Abraham, Moses, David and our fathers to become a Christian.* The Book of Hebrews comes along and says, *Children of Abraham, the followers of Jesus Christ have a sacrificial system, we have a temple, we have a feast, and we not only have a High Priest, we have the Great High Priest. We have literally the Priest of priests, for He passed through the heavens to come to earth with the Father's plan for salvation and passed through the heavens to sit at God the Father's right hand. Furthermore, our temple is living and no longer is made of stone. We are not only spiritual children of Abraham but also by faith we are*

brothers of the Great High Priest who paid the only sacrifice that is eternal, the one sacrifice that covers all transgressions for all time.

Passed Through The Heavens (v. 14)

Jesus is great because **He is the priest who passed through the heavens** and not as an earthly high priest who has passed through the veil of the temple. Jesus as our Great High Priest, rather than entering through the second veil of the temple that led the high priest into the Holy of Holies and into God's symbolic presence, Jesus left God the Father and entered through the heavens to earth and then again back into God's very presence. Here the writer compares Jesus' ascension and His going through the clouds to the Jewish priest who went through the veil. When the priest passed through the veil, he saw the symbolic presence of God but when Jesus passed through the heavens, as God the Son, He sat down next to God the Father and they are God; they are One.

Jesus is great because **He has made a perfect sacrifice**. His perfect sinless life and His royal lineage and credentials made Him a lamb without spot or blemish. He sacrificed Himself for all tongues and tribes of people God calls. His sinless and perfect sacrifice takes away sin and makes Him the only Priest who can forgive people of their sins. The Old Testament sacrifice of a bull or a lamb could not take sin away but served as a temporary covering until the perfect sacrifice was made, the perfect eternal sacrifice is Jesus Christ.

Sacrifice is part of the life of a Christian. Dr. David Livingstone, a Scottish physician and missionary of the 19th century spent much of his life in Africa. Livingstone spoke of sacrifice, in an interview saying, **“People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply acknowledging a great debt we owe to our God, which**

we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny? It is emphatically no sacrifice. Rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, foregoing the common conveniences of this life--these may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing compared with the glory which shall later be revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk, when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us."

Jesus is the Great High Priest because **He is the Son of God**. Jesus is not a son of Aaron, which all earthly priests needed to be. He is not the high priest elected by men. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He alone has that title and He alone is both man and God.

Jesus is our Great High Priest because **His priestly work is finished on earth and continues in heaven**. The Old Testament sacrificial system was a machine - it that ran every day; day in and day out. Non-stop were sacrifices made. The priest was more along the lines of a butcher in a slaughter house. The priest who performed the sacrifices did not have as a goal to bring people closer to God, but to provide a temporary covering of sin. The priest sacrificed animal after animal and at the end of the priest's day, a second shift came in and continued. The priests would go home and wash the blood off, go to bed, and get up and do it all over again. Day after day the machine of animal sacrifices ran at the temple. Jesus makes His perfect sacrifice and sits down next to the Father because the work is finished. No more will Jesus get bloody from a sacrifice and He will not be put on the cross over and over. It is finished!

The writer then concludes this section by writing that we should not doubt or waver with respect to the gospel. Unbelief should not be named among those who have such a Great High Priest - **let us hold fast our confession**. What we have believed and affirmed in the past, we can be confident of for the present and future.

Able To Sympathize (v. 15)

Some people get caught up in an unending argument when they come to this text. Reading verse 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.”** I think the reason this is so, is because they do not understand the person of Christ. They invariably ask the question, *“Could Jesus have sinned?”* The quick answer to that question is, Jesus absolutely could not have sinned. The salvation of God’s children was never in doubt. Jesus was sent with a mission from the Father. Jesus is the Son of man but He is also divine as the Son of God. To think that Jesus could fail is to think God is not sovereign or that His eternal decree depends upon something other than Himself. The Jews and many today think they can control or contribute to their salvation by their works. However, just like Jesus told Zacchaeus and He continues through the millenniums telling all people who seek and believe in Him, **“Today salvation has come to this house ... ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** (Luke 19:9-10) If we are to understand verse 15 correctly and not get sidetracked, we must see together that the writer has in mind that our Great High Priest is all powerful and glorious as He is - He is also able to sympathize with our weaknesses and our temptations because He was at times weak and tried and tempted. To make the meaning of verse 15 understood, is to know that the word **“tempted”** may also be translated as **“tested”**. It is not that since Jesus could not sin then He really was not tempted. The test was given to Jesus is the same test given to us. The same test that Adam and

Eve failed. In order for Jesus to qualify as our Redeemer, in order for Jesus to be the perfect eternal sacrifice, He had to take the same test of temptation. He is the only person who passed this test perfectly. The second Adam, as Paul calls Jesus, succeeded where the first Adam failed.

Jesus knows what it is like to be weak and tired and He knows what it is like to live a life that was constantly tested by the evil one and those under his influence – no person has ever been tested as Jesus was and He never failed. So, this sympathy Jesus gives, this grace is a godly sympathy and grace, and is based on a human understanding. Jesus does not just know how we feel - but He understands how we feel because He experienced it and in sympathy toward us. Because of Jesus' love and sympathy towards those who believe in faith, He sends us help. Our Great High Priest can not only make a perfect sacrifice for us but can come to our rescue on a daily basis. Jesus did not return to heaven to let us fend for ourselves, He sent us help. Jesus does this by sending us what we need the most to fight the daily temptations and struggles we face. Jesus sends His children the Holy Spirit to indwell them and empower them. Jesus was clear, ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-17) So, we understand, the Triune God, is active in our lives and coming to our aid on a daily basis. In Romans, Paul taught that the Holy “Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27) Our Great High Priest sends God the Holy Spirit to help those who have placed their

faith and trust in Him. The Jewish High Priest was not God and did not have a direct connection to God and relied on tradition instead of relationship. On-the-other-hand Christ's gift to His children is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that we are strengthened when weak and He enables us to withstand temptations. The Spirit is our Helper and Comforter. It is through the Spirit's work within us that we bear fruit. When we surrender our lives to Christ the God the Spirit changes us from the inside out and this change is evidenced by ²² "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:22-24) Having understood all this about our Great High Priest and our relationship with Him verse 16 brings us peace.

Offers Grace And Mercy (v. 16)

The Throne of God is unlike any human throne. To approach the throne of a pagan king was to place your life in jeopardy. We can read about that kind of situation in the Book of Esther. She goes before the King uninvited and calls for her people to pray and fast. Esther tells Mordecai, ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16)

Our King is different, reading Hebrews 4:16, "**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.**" If there was ever a King in which people should cower in fear – it would be the Great High King, the King of the universe for He is all knowing and perfectly holy. To come before our King and God requires

sinlessness and perfection. As sinners we should fear this King of perfection, for as sinners, we deserve God's righteous wrath. However, God has a plan to save those created in His image; God the Son, Jesus Christ came from the heavens to earth and lived a perfect and sinless life, a life that pleased God and would bring God's grace to mankind. Jesus' death on the cross paid in full the penalty for the sins of the world. As the Apostle John wrote from Patmos, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

2) God sees us as sinless because He sees us through the perfection of Christ and we are able to approach God in His grace and have a relationship with the Living God. Amazing! Now, we can boldly come before the King and we can do so with confidence and not in fear.

Apart from the work of Christ our coming to God would be met with judgment. Because of His work, we come expecting mercy and finding grace. So, we can come before the throne of King Jesus boldly and we find mercy instead of wrath. We can come boldly and receive grace rather than judgment. King Jesus wants sinners to come to Him and receive mercy and grace. Who else but us as sinners need Christ's mercy and grace? Our boldness does not come because we are good enough to come into His presence. Not because of righteous works. Our boldness comes as a result of our confidence in our Great High Priest's sacrifice for us and our faith and the result is; we live boldly in Christ.

Christians often hurt each other unintentionally and just as God gives grace to each of us, we are to give grace to others. The command of God for believers to repent, forgive and reconcile reminds me of the conflict between 2 great men of God. "Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker both had churches in London in the

19th century. On one occasion, Parker commented on the poor condition of children admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. It was reported to Spurgeon however, that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself. Spurgeon blasted Parker the next week from the pulpit. The attack was printed in the newspapers and became the talk of the town. People flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to hear his rebuttal. 'I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an offering for the orphanage. I suggest we take a love offering here instead.' The crowd was delighted. The ushers had to empty the collection plates 3 times. Later that week there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon, he gently said, 'You know Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved; you have given me what I needed.' " My beloved, this is the grace we need to give each other. We may acquire what we so desperately need by going to Christ, kneeling before His throne repenting and believing, and the truth is, we were created to do so. As Paul gave God's words to the church in Ephesus, hear now these words for us here today, ³ "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Ephesians 1:3-10) We come to Christ and receive His wealth of grace. We come as empty, poor beggars and receive the riches that only He has to offer.

As believers, through Christ, we are in constant possession of grace. Everyday God gives us more. There are times, when through the various trials of life, we need more grace. At these times we can draw near to the Throne of Grace to find grace to help in our time of need. Whatever your situation is, Christ has grace to help. He knows what suffering is all about. He has made the only perfect sacrifice acceptable to God. He alone is the perfect High Priest. There is no One better for us to come to than our Lord. Jesus is our priestly King and He has grace to lavish upon us as we go boldly to the Throne. It is only at the Throne of the Great High Priest that we find grace.

This brings to my mind, the question, “How do we draw near to the Throne of Grace?” How do we enter into the King’s presence? Meditating on God’s Word helps our minds move from the chaos and confusion and evil of the world and brings our focus onto God. Meditating on the Word of God prepares us to enter the throne room of King Jesus through prayer, for heart felt prayer takes us through the veil and into the Holy of Holies. Not a man-made Holy of Holies but the very holy presence of the Lord. We leave this world and are in the presence of the Living God. It is in prayer that lays our heart bare before God and we receive more and more grace to help in the time of our need.

This brings us back to where we began this morning to the theme or the doctrine or truth of God the writer is teaching is; ***We are called boldly to enter into God’s presence, to receive mercy and find grace through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, The Great High Priest!*** What an amazing gift! Amen!