

Heb. 4:14-16 Jesus the Great High Priest

As we take the communion today, our text gives us a beautiful opportunity to consider Jesus as our great high priest. Our author gives two exhortations: 1) Let us hold fast our confession and 2) Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace. And the motivation for doing these things is the person and work of our great high priest. This means our ability to continue down the road to heaven in this life as a Christian upon the person and work of Christ. As we saw last week, “apart from Him, we can do nothing.” He is our source of life and our ability to do ANYTHING good comes from Him and his great power that works in us. As we eat and drink of physical elements and they nourish our bodies, so are we dependent upon Christ who nourishes gives us eternal life and helps us now. With this in mind, I will have two parts to the sermon. 1) We hold fast our confession as we consider the superiority of Christ’s position as high priest; and 2) We draw near with confidence to the throne of grace as we consider the Christ’s humiliation as high priest.

1. We hold fast our confession as we consider the superiority of Christ’s position as high priest. The text is best translated as “*Hold fast your profession*” (v. 14). Before looking at our motivation for “holding fast,” let me briefly define what it means to “hold fast our profession.” We’ve seen this already in 3:1: “**Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.**” And we will see it again in 10:23: “**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**” For the great majority of us, we are here today, gathering, singing, praying, reading and preaching the Bible because we have made a confession. We call Jesus Lord! We have come to believe what the Bible says about Him is true. We believe “**God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life**” (John 3:16). And I would also say that it not simply a confession of the mouth. It is not that someone merely repeats words about Christ. To confess him means also that our lives prove our confession. We do not recite empty words about Christ. Rom. 10:9 says, “**If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**” Here, Paul ties the heart with the confession. In other words, to make such a confession is to believe what the Bible says about Him AND to love him from the heart. And that which follows such a confession is obedience to the One we love.

In our context, those Hebrews who had left Judaism behind and following Christ. They were being persecuted by the Jewish community and Paul was urging them to “hold fast” their confession. “Hold on to the rope” you have climbed up and don’t let go, or you will fall. The same exhortation is for us. Press on brothers and sisters. Life is hard. It is full of troubles. There is sickness and heartache and all kinds of issues we face as sinful men and women in this world. There are persecutions and many difficulties that accompany our confession. But, press on! As Heb. 2:1 says, “**Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it . . .**” And in 2:3: “**Do not neglect such a great salvation . . .**” This warning is for us.

And the author does not leave us without help in this regard! He says, “**Look to your great high priest.**” “Look at WHO HE is and WHAT HE has done, how GREAT He is as our priest!” In

this way we remember the superiority of Christ's position. And it isn't merely being our priest that makes him great. Jesus is superior because He is divine. Our text says He is the "**Son of God**" (v. 14). And, He is not the Son by adoption as we are. He is the heir of all things (1:2). Through Him the world was created (1:2). He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and upholds the universe by the word of his power (1:3). Today He sits at the right hand of the majesty on high (1:3). He is the preeminent Lord (1:6). All the angels worship Him (1:6). He sits on heaven's throne (1:8). His years have no end (1:12). He is greater than Moses (3:1-6). He is greater than Joshua (4:6-10). He does not merely lead us unto an earthly land, but into heaven, the very throne room of God. This is the one whom we confess!

V. 14 also says that "**He has gone through the heavens.**" Think about the high priest under Mosaic Law. This man had the highest position in Israel. For once a year he would enter the outer court of the temple. Then he would pass through the holy place. Finally, he would pass through the curtain into the Holy of Holies, and stand in the "presence" of God. But, this was only ONCE a year. And, it was only for a moment. Then, he would leave until the coming year. But, Jesus has "*passed through the heavens.*" Now, the Jews often separated heaven into levels, even as Paul said he was "called up into the 3rd heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). But the point here is that Jesus has passed to the highest of places to the very throne room of God, where He sits forever in the position of greatest superiority as our great high priest.

Just yesterday I was reading in my QT and I thought about all the ways God's priests led his people year after year in the OT. I thought of Noah as he led his family into the Ark. I thought of Abraham as he led his "growing" family in the land of Caanan. I read particularly of Moses as he led the people out of Egypt. And they came to the Red Sea. And as Egypt's armies pursued, God opened the sea and Moses led them through the midst of the waters to safety. In the dessert he would continue to lead them for 40 years. And then Joshua led them into the promised land of Canaan. God rose up kings including Solomon and David, men who led God's people. I think of all the high priests under Mosaic Law that led God's people, particularly on the Day of Atonement, entering the holy of holies.

Let me ask, "*What do all of these 'priests' have in common? . . .* They lead God's people HERE on the earth. But, none of them have "passed through" the heavens! Only our GREAT high priest, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus can do this. Only the divine Son of God, the incarnate Son of man, can lead us to heaven. All the other priests were of the earth, and their bodies will return to the earth. But, the Lord Jesus conquered death and as his disciples looked on, He ascended to heaven, where He now sits. Therefore, brothers and sisters, "*Hold fast your confession.*" "*Press on!*" We aren't merely entering an ark. We aren't crossing the Red Sea. We are not making a journey to the Land of Caanan. We aren't entering the temple made with hands of men. We are going to heaven where our Lord sits now! So, I say again, "*Hold fast your confession.*" We have a great high priest, the Son of God who has passed through the heavens.

There is no one greater than the ONE we confess. Muslims profess that Mohammed is God's prophet. But, he has not passed through the heavens as high priest. Buddhists and Hindus believe in many lesser gods. But, none of them sit on heaven's throne as Lord of All, but are subject other gods and to humans in various ways. In Jesus' day many Romans confessed that Caesar was a god. Mormons confess Jesus, but not as divine, but instead as a created being. (Please pray

for us this week as two young men are coming our way on Monday night.) Brothers and sisters, men and women of this world “confess” and give allegiance to many things and even to people. But, today, **ONLY** those who confess Jesus as Lord make the true confession.

Now, we come to our 2nd exhortation.

2. Let us with confidence draw near. So far, we’ve only spoke of the GREATNESS, the SUPERIORITY of the person and position of our high priest. But if we stop there, and only consider his ascension and his position now in heaven, we would fall short of God’s revelation given to us about our great high priest. To only think of his greatness would not be enough. We would miss an essential element of the gospel. There must be more! As sinful men and women, we cannot ascend into the heavens merely because He is great! On our own, we have no confidence. When I (or any of us) consider the throne of God all we can say is what Isaiah said, “**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory! . . .**” And: “**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!**” So far today, all we’ve done is see the “king.” But, now, we continue in our text with our motivation to draw near the throne with confidence.

Look at vv. 15-16: “**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. 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.**” Here, our motivation to draw near with confidence is the work of our high priest, not in his superior position, but in his humiliation . . . which is his incarnation and his death. “**The WORD became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14). As the angel of the Lord told Joseph, “**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel**” (which means, God with us) (Matt. 1:23). Phil. 2:5-9: “**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name . . .**” 1 Tim. 2:5 “**For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**”

The humiliation of Christ completes his “greatness” as our high priest. He had to take on flesh. He had to lay down his life as a sacrifice for us, if he were to be an effective priest for us. And this is what he did. And the difference between us and him is this: Look at v. 15 “**yet without sin.**” When the OT priest went into the holy of holies, he went in as a sinful man, taking the blood of bulls and goats, which could never atone for (cover) sins. In obedience, by faith, they looked forward to God’s promise, the great high priest, the Lord Jesus. When Jesus entered the holy of holies, He Himself was the sacrifice. And God accepted it. Why? Because there was no sin! He was the “lamb of God” who takes away our sins. **ONLY** the blood of God’s lamb would be acceptable! And then, as the Son of God, He rose from the dead after three days. This is why

in Heb. 1:3-4 we read: “**after he made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.**”

This is the part of his “greatness” as high priest that affects us. Without his humiliation and death on the cross, He cannot be our priest. In order to pass through the heavens as an effective high priest, He had to come and die. This is what we remember! “***This is my body broken for you.***” And this is where our confidence comes into play. Let me ask, “*Do you think the OT high priest entered the holy of holies with confidence?*” I don’t think so! It was with fear and trembling. I believe the priests of the OT always remembered Aaron’s sons who were killed as they disobeyed God and offered “unauthorized fire” on the altar (Lev. 10). Or they remembered Uzzah the priest who died when he touched the Ark of God as it was being carried into Jerusalem. . . . They were terrified as they entered! What about us! How do we enter? It is “***with confidence.***” There is no hindrance! Because of the cross, the wrath of God has been appeased. There is no more enmity. There is no more anger. The greatest of sinners who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ can now enter with confidence. If you are in Christ today, also . . . your sins have been taken away. They are thrown as far as the east is from the west. There is NOTHING that keeps you away from the Throne of God’s grace in Christ!

Look over at Heb. 10:19-23: “**Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) . . .**” This we remember today as in the Lord’s Supper!

Finally, by way of application, we don’t merely have confidence, we also find mercy and grace in time of need! As we remember our Lord today, especially his humiliation and death, we remember that He was a man just like us. In every respect he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. And we find in Christ, our great high priest, one who understands. He knows our frame! He knows the weakness of our flesh. He knows what it is like to be hungry, to be tired, to be disappointed or let down by his friends. He knows what it is like to lose loved ones. He knows what it is like to be tempted by Satan. Today, He knows. And, he understands. And He sits on the throne of grace to help us in time of need.