

Hebrews 4:14-16 (New International Version)

Jesus the Great High Priest

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens,^[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Do you ever feel like giving up in your Christian walk? We see our own failures and wonder, “What’s the use? God can’t love somebody like me.” We note how many don’t believe in the Lord and we like what they seem to have. We also see many who claim to believe but don’t seem too excited about it. Is their faith real? We start to feel alone and conclude that it’s not worth the struggle to live as a child of God.

The original readers of this epistle were ready to give up. They were facing persecution and with it the temptation to leave Christianity and return to Judaism. “Stop such thinking!” the text calls out. Don’t quit but

TRUST YOUR HIGH PRIEST

- I. Because He’s Jesus the Son of God
- II. Who helps us in temptation
- III. Who saved us from sin

The unnamed writer to these Jewish Christians urged them to trust their high priest because He’s Jesus the Son of God. Using the name “Jesus” pointed to the fact that He was true man. Jesus was the name Mary’s son was given at birth, just as the angel Gabriel had instructed both her and Joseph in his stunning communication with each of them. Yes, Jesus took on human flesh and blood. He became one of us.

He then lived in the kind of experiences we have as He grew up, learned daily skills and lessons, and reached manhood.

At the same time He was true God. He was the Son from all eternity. He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the divine being, neither younger nor less than the Father. The Son always existed in that divine relationship.

The whole concept boggles our minds. How can someone always exist? Doesn’t somebody else have to produce you? How do the divine and human natures of Jesus fit together—things like knowing all things and yet having to go to school to learn? These puzzles affirm that He is greater than us and move us to trust our high priest, who is great in His person.

II.

That unique Jesus the Son of God is the one who helps us in temptation. He did so by defeating Satan for us. We saw samples of that victory in today’s Gospel reading. The temptations Jesus faced there in the desert were real. After going forty days without food, He was truly hungry. Who wouldn’t be? Why not turn some stones into bread? He had the power and a definite need. After all, God wants us to care for our bodies. Bowing down to Satan would be a much easier way to glory than obtaining it through the cross. That display of trusting by jumping off the temple would attract attention and bring glory to God, wouldn’t it? You might have thought something along those lines. Do something flashy and miraculous. People will have to believe in God then, right?

You heard the repeated refrain from Jesus' lips: "It is written." Written where? In His Word. Jesus used the Bible and that settled the issue. Once what He cited was to balance what Satan had taken out of its setting to imply a different meaning than what God intended. (Yes, the devil can quote the Bible also.) He directly refuted where Satan tried to contradict the Lord. He reminded of higher truths. The point is, the Word of God has power. It is God's Word. It defeats the devil every time. No, Jesus' archenemy didn't give up, but he had to stop each attempt and move on to something else. Did you note the end of Luke's account? "He left him until an opportune time."

So Jesus faced many other efforts by Satan to lure Him into sin. In childhood He would have been tempted to disobey and disrespect His parents and teachers. When the nasty Pharisees and other opponents tried to cause trouble it would have been easy to respond with a smart aleck putdown, get angry, or poke fun of them in a personal way. When the crowd was amazed at His insight as a twelve-year-old in the temple, He could have puffed up with pride. Whatever you and I face, Jesus did, too, and He defeated them in the same way: by knowing and using the Word of God. He did it every single time. He never sinned even once as the text noted: "(He) has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin." He did that for us. He was our substitute in keeping the law. We receive the credit for what He did and thus appear holy in God's sight.

Jesus helps us in temptation by strengthening us. The text noted He can sympathize with us. He understands what we have to deal with. He's not someone aloof, off in an ivory tower knowing nothing about life in the real world. He truly can say, "Been there," although He wouldn't continue, "...done that" when it comes to committing sins. He also knows how to meet our challenges.

You and I have weaknesses and the devil is adept at exploiting them. Jesus knows how to counteract his onslaught. The Word has the same power when we use it. That's divine power since it is God's Word. Almighty power flows through that Word as we use it. You and I can defeat the devil with the Word. That is why firm grounding in its truths is so important, including memorizing passages. They solidify your response when tempted. You don't have to stammer, "Um, I sorta recall hearing something about that before. I'll have to check it out." You can readily reply firmly and decisively, "It is written." Yes, our high priest provides what we need. He is deserving of the description "great".

III.

The other key part of His work as our great high priest is that He is the one who saved us from sin. He did so by His sacrifice. Although Jesus was sinless as we noted, He went to the place of punishment, to the cross. He bore our sin, as the prophet Isaiah noted long ago, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows." He never failed but we did, repeatedly. All the times we hurt others physically or emotionally or when we failed to help those in need, the encounters when we were arrogant or impure, greedy or gossipy, you name it: the Lamb of God shouldered it for us. He suffered the consequences we deserved and endured the fierceness of the Father's anger. The pains of hell and separation from the Father's love and support tormented Him. He personally paid the price as the sacrifice in our place.

That is how He was so much greater. The Old Testament priests offered repeated sacrifices of animals. Those offerings could only picture paying for sin, but they could not remove our guilt, for animals are not sufficient to do so. As the Son of God Jesus could and did take our place. He was exactly what we needed. He set us free from sin's curse. In Him we are forgiven.

The verses before us note that Jesus "has gone through the heavens" in doing His work. Like the high priest on the special festival called the Great Day of Atonement went through the temple proper and behind the veil into the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant was, so Jesus went to God's very presence in heaven and presented His sacrifice. The Father accepted His payment. He stamped our bill "Paid in full" on Easter when Jesus returned to life.

These are the truths we review in the Lenten season as we follow our Savior. This year we have visual elements to assist us. The theme for our midweek services is "Cross Peace" and we have the artistic reminders with the pieces you receive each week and add to your display. There also is the mural in the lobby which some creative individuals have prepared. Take note of the sins written on the cross. Add your own on the paper provided and place them in the designated container to signify what you are leaving with Jesus. Then find peace and the comfort of burdens He has lifted by taking one of the rolled up passages from the bag.

The work of our high priest Jesus provides blessings for us. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." The thought of appearing before a throne can be scary as we think of a high and mighty ruler who could cast us from his presence as we approach trembling and crawling on our faces. Calling it the throne of grace points to the undeserved love that Jesus showed. He made everything right between God and us so we are not afraid to come before Him. We receive mercy. He feels pity for us and helps us in our difficulties. He gives what we need for all that we face, needs of body and soul. He does so in grace.

We experience such blessings daily. He helps us in time of need, giving exactly what meets our needs as He knows all about them. In some instances we are not sure what to ask, but He knows and provides it. Sometimes it is a dramatic rescue from great danger or a solution to immense, overwhelming problems we struggle with. Often His help is something small, almost unnoticeable, what we might term a coincidence. Yet think about it and you are reminded that God is in charge and did something marvelous for you. It struck me that way on our last full day in South Carolina earlier this month. We were returning from viewing a couple of historic sites, one from the Revolutionary War and another relating to the Confederacy. The day was overcast and along the winding road through the hills we caught up to some logging trucks traveling slowly—or at least slower than I like to drive. Jan has a knack for noticing when my eyelids get heavy and she asked, "Are you getting sleepy?" So we stopped and switched places. A bit later, the trucks turned onto another road. I probably would have zoomed ahead, glad not to be impeded any longer, especially since our economy rental car did not have cruise control. She maintained the proper pace and it was a good thing. Not much farther down the road was a police officer with his radar operating. God knew what He was doing! He saved me from a sin and a fine.

Of course, that's a rather trivial matter. We know His greater blessing. He has saved us from hell. He won heaven and its joys for us. Truly Jesus is our great high priest.

As the writer urged, "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." What else would we want to do? There is no one and nothing like Him or worth clinging to. We have the greatest in Jesus our high priest. Don't give up, no matter what is happening to you or in the world around you. Trust Jesus for your daily life, for needed guidance and blessing. Most of all, trust Him for full and free forgiveness for all sins, including weakness of faith, and for everlasting life with Him in glory.