

Our Great High Priest, Part 1

Hebrews 4:14-16

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 7, 2022

Every Sunday morning when I drive a church, I go down several massive hills. And on one of them there is always a lady on the side of the road, cleaning up the trash, and I often think, “Why does she do that? Is her hope in cleaning up the garbage?” Nothing wrong with cleaning up trash. That's fine. But I'll tell you what, it won't clean up, it won't clean up your evil heart. Only one way to clean up your evil heart is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Some people put their hope in politics, there are elections are all around, and some think, “If we put this guy in office, it'll fix all our problems.” No, it won't. It might make it better for a little while. But eventually you're going to sin again. It happens every time they put their hope and things like education, if we just teach the kids a certain thing, that'll fix the problem, all these things, but our hope is not in that, our hope is in Jesus Christ. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, the book of Hebrews.

If you would open up to this wonderful book of Hebrews. And we could call this the most Jewish book in the New Testament. It contains more allusions to the Old Testament than almost any other book, The Old Testament is quoted more than 60 times in this book comes to about five times per chapter. You see it all over the place for this reason, because it was written to reach the Jews and show them that what they have in Christ is so much better than anything they had before. Richard just illustrated that very well for the children. What they have in Jesus is better than the temple and the tabernacle and the altar; He is better than the law and the covenants and ceremonies. He is better than the priesthood. He is better than the offering sacrifices, all that stuff. And with that in mind, he makes another comparison to the Old Testament you need to see this morning, it's going to set the stage for a lot that we're going to talk about in this letter. If you were to read Hebrews chapter four with me, it says this:

Therefore, let us fear if while the promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed, we have had good news preached to us just as they also. But the word they heard did not profit them because it was not united by faith and those who heard, for we who have believed entered that rest, just as He also said, as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Although his works were finished from the foundation of the world, for he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again, in this passage, they shall not enter my rest. Therefore, since it remains for son to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience. He again fixes a certain day today, saying through David, after so long a time, just as has been said before, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has answered his rest has himself also rested from His works, as God did from his. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest so that no one will fall through following the same example of disobedience. For or the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

As you read that, you come to the end and you see that a key word here is the word *high priest*, because that's how the author rounds off the chapter after talking about Israel's sin and how they were banned from entering the promised land because they did not believe the Word of God. The author now tells you how you can enter into it and how you can be saved. And that is by trusting in Christ because He is your high priest. That's how the whole chapter comes together. And just to say a few words about this, as you're thinking about this chapter, and what he's actually saying in the whole context of it, let me ask you a question. What's the worst sin in the Bible? Have you ever thought about that? I asked you that because that was the job of a High Priest, to deal with sin. So what's the worst sin you think you could probably bring before the High Priest? I think most of us would say murder, wouldn't we? I think if we would think about the worst thing you could do and bring to a high priest, it would be the issue of taking another man's life. I can't think of anything worse than that. I got an alert on my phone recently that said, watch out for a guy in Langley, because he had just killed someone and he might do it again. And my first thought was, that is awful. Man, how could anybody murder somebody? He took the life of someone's father, brother or son, he killed someone's friend or neighbor. That is the worst sin in my mind at times. On the other hand, if someone were to ask you the question of what the worst sin is, you might be tempted to say adultery. That's a horrible one to have the sin of having sex outside of marriage, because how many homes have been torn apart over that one? And how many marriages have been ruined because someone ran off with another man's wife? It's been devastating in this society. You might be tempted to say another sin like pride, that was the oldest sin in the Bible, potentially. That's what Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. You could say the sin of hatred or blasphemy or idolatry. There's a lot of things we could put in here. But let me just say, I think there's one sin we need to put in here because it's found in this chapter. And it's so subtle, you often don't think about it. That's a sin of unbelief.

If you were to ask the question, what's the worst sin a high priest would have to deal with in the Bible, you could make the argument that it's the sin of unbelief. The act of hearing the Word of God and rejecting it, listening to the Bible, and refusing to do what it says. I mean, you murder somebody when God says, "You shall not murder" and you don't believe it. You don't obey. You commit adultery when God says, "Do not commit adultery" and you do the same thing. It all goes back to this issue, which is what you see in this chapter. This is how it comes together. If you look at the beginning of verse one, it says this in Hebrews chapter four, "Therefore, let us fear if while a promise remains of entering His rest any one of you may seem to come short of it." In other words, this is what Israel did in the wilderness, they came right up to the promised land and fell short of it. Why? Because verse two says, if you look in your Bibles, they didn't believe it. They heard the word of God but they rejected it. They listened to what it said but they turned it away. Verse six says they disobeyed as well which is even stronger, because it means they heard the word of God and sinned. They listened and went out and just did the opposite. Verse seven says they hardened their hearts, which means they took their fingers and put them in their ears and went like this. Verse 11, says they disobeyed again, which is a different word, because it means they became stubborn and obstinate and bullheaded. So as a result, the Lord said, that's enough, you're not coming into the promised land because of your hard hearts, which is a very discouraging thing to read. So in order to end on a positive note, the author wraps it up this way. At the end of the chapter, in verse 14, he says that even if you've

done that, as of today, there is hope for you for this reason, “Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.” In other words, whereas Israel could not get into the promised land due to their mistakes, and while the door was closed because of their unbelief, it is still open to you. You can still be saved because of Christ.

This term *high priest* is going to be repeated a lot in the book of Hebrews, because it refers to the one who served as a mediator between God and man. This is the one who formed a bridge between them and Yahweh so that when Israel sinned against the Lord, as a nation, they could go to the High Priest and he could make it right. The way it worked is that in the Old Covenant, there was God, the high priests, and then the people, because he served as a meeting point between the two parties. We don't really have this today as Gentiles. But Israel, they understood they were too sinful to come to God on their own. So they had to have someone to stand in the gap and that was this guy. And his role every year was to take one big sacrifice for them on the Day of Atonement, he would take a bull or a goat, kill him, go into the temple, pass the veil, walk into the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God was, and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice there to demonstrate their sin had been paid for as a nation. And that's what Christ has done for you. That's what He accomplished on the cross.

I read somewhere this week that there were 78 high priests, from the time of Solomon's temple and to the time of Herod's Temple was destroyed, because they had to keep offering the sacrifice year after year after year. Death after death after death, it was a never-ending thing for them. Because as soon as one high priest died, another one had to take his place and go back through the temple, kill the sacrifice go past the veil, the whole thing all over again, this passage says Jesus didn't have to do that; he offered one sacrifice one offering one death. And that was it. That was all it took. Because it was perfect in every way.

We're going to walk through all this passage together. But if you want to look, verse 14 says that He passed through the heavens to do this, which means that He didn't just pass through the curtain after He died. And He didn't just go into the Holy of Holies, He passed through Heaven itself to show you that you can do that too. You can come into God's presence as well, if you put your trust in His name. The high priest of Israel was a very physical thing. It was a physical demonstration. But Christ's work has been spiritual for us. Verse 16 says He brought us to the throne of grace as well, because through His death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two and the veil was broken, so that ordinary people could come to the throne. And to add to that, it's not a throne of judgment in this passage, notice this, it's a throne of grace. And it's not a throne of wrath and punishment and anger, which is what you deserve. It's a throne of mercy. You don't want to come to a throne of judgment, let me promise you that. But the point is that all of this occurs in the context of Israel's unbelief. That's the setting for the chapter, because the author is warning you not to do that here. And the reason he does this is because it's so common for religious people to act this way. And it's so common for them to show up in church and hear the Word of God and reject it, which is why you don't see him warning you against the sin of murder here. And that's why you don't see him warning you in the book of Hebrews against the sin of adultery, because we're way too nice for that. But I'll tell you we're not too nice to do, we're not too nice to come into this room and close our ears when we hear the word of God. We're not too polite to sit in the pews and open up our Bibles and shut it all out. Let me tell you something, if you've been doing that this morning, the author's telling you that there's still hope for you. There's a high priest even for those who are hard hearted, if you will soften your heart and believe.

Which is what we're going to talk about this morning. We will look at four aspects of Jesus' high priesthood in this passage. So if you're taking notes, that's our outline for today. And the first one, we're just going to just get

these from the actual text. And so the first one is that he has passed through the heavens. This means that He has passed into the presence of God, and going into the one place that we're all trying to get to, and that is heaven. Does anybody want to go to heaven this morning? Did you come to church for any other reason? I hope you didn't. We all want to get there. Well, this is how you'll do it.

And if you look in verse 12, he says,

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

As you read the passage here, he talks about judgment, God judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and he goes straight to Jesus' high priesthood. And the reason he does this is to give you another image from Israel's history. Again, he's talking to the Jews here. So he's talking about Jewish things earlier. In chapter three, he mentioned Moses and the promised land and chapter four. Later on, he's going to talk about Abraham and Melchizedek. He'll talk about the Heavenly Jerusalem and all these things. But here, he's talking about the high priest, which refers to the man who was responsible for leading all spiritual life in Israel. And this is something we aren't very familiar with. So I do want to explain this a little bit. But it was so important to the Jews that they had a whole hierarchical system for the priest that was pretty detailed. It takes a lot of time to work through it when you're reading the Old Testament. But it does show a lot about what this is saying here. So for example, at the bottom of the ladder of their hierarchy, I want to talk to you about this. You had the Levites. They were the caretakers of the temple. They were a tribe in Israel set aside to be the custodians. Numbers eight, verse 14, says, "Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine to serve in the tabernacle." In other words, they were the ones to help take care of that they were the keepers of the gate, so to speak, it was their job to clean it, wash it, repair it whenever it needed be. And it was their role to scrub it, rinse it and fix it whenever it sprung a leak and maintain it and look after it. Some have even said the Levites could have been policemen in the temple. They were in charge of keeping order so that when Jesus was arrested, He might have been arrested by a group of Levites among other people. The numbers vary on them, but it's been estimated that there were about 10,000 of them in the first century because as you can imagine, it took a lot of work to do what they did, they were divided into 24 groups, because some were responsible for guarding the temple, others were responsible for other things. And moving up the ladder here, the next step in the hierarchy was the priests are the ordinary priests, the average run of the mill men who are responsible for making the sacrifices. Exodus 40, verse 15, says, "You shall anoint Aaron and his sons that they may minister as priests unto Me, and their anointing will qualify them for a perpetual priesthood through all generations." In other words, not anyone could be a priest. It wasn't a job you could take on yourself, you had to be a son of Aaron. Otherwise, there were terrible consequences. If you tried to usurp that there are stories of men in the Bible, like Uzziah being struck with leprosy because he tried to take on the role of a priest and making sacrifice. Saul did that as well and had gotten a lot of trouble for it. Because the priests are the only ones who could kill the animals and bring them before the Lord. Some scholars estimate that there were 18,000 priests at the time of this book, they were divided into 24 categories as well. So someone handled one angle of sacrifice, while someone handled another, some would kill and slice and cut up the animals, others would take care of removing the bodies, which would have been a pretty grisly thing to do. One author said that there was something like 200,000 lambs that would be killed on the

Passover. Imagine trying to remove all those bodies, priests would do that. They would work two weeks out of the year while they would work another job the rest of the time.

This leads to another category in this hierarchy, and that's the chief priests, which is not a biblical category. And this is where you see the Jews adding things to the Bible. But the third stage was the high priest's family. By the time you get to the New Testament, some high priests are not the descendants of Aaron, and take it in on themselves, because they went to the Romans and bribed them for it. These were the chief priests. They bribed them, took it on, and shared it with their kids. And since there was no biblical title they could give to them, they just call them chiefs. So if you ever read the word chief priests in the New Testament, you should say, "Boo," they're not supposed to be there.

Moving up even higher than that is the final group and that is the high priest. He's the one on top of the whole system. Leviticus 21 Verse 10, says, "Say to the sons of Aaron, that there should be one priest who is highest among his brothers on whom the anointing oil has been poured," which means among all the 1000s of priests, there will be one who would be highest among them, one who would stand out, and that would be Aaron's oldest son. As the oldest member of his family, he wouldn't come to the temple two weeks out of the year and he wouldn't just handle one aspect of the sacrifices, he would oversee all of them. Because it's his job to make sure it all ran smoothly. And he would also take the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, take a bull or a goat, sacrifice it, come into the presence of God and offer it there. Which was a special thing, because that was the only time anyone went past the Holy of Holies. It was the only time of the year a priest or anybody could go past the curtain into the presence of God. And verse 14 talks about this specifically, when it says, with all this background behind it, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest."

Now, there's a lot that can be said about this. And frankly, I thought about spending an entire sermon on it. But if you notice, he calls Jesus our Great High Priest. In other words, it wasn't enough to say He was a priest. He's our high priest. And it's not enough to say that Christ is your high priest, He's a *great* high priest, He stands head and shoulders above everyone else. He also calls him the Son of God here. "Therefore, since we have this great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God," which shows you why He's greater, because if the other high priests were Aaron's son, Jesus is God's Son. And if the other ones had a human as a father, Jesus has Yahweh Himself. Son of God is also capitalized in your Bible, because that's his title. So before he's a priest, this is what He is, He's the second member of the Trinity. And as such, this is what He can do, He can pass through the heavens for you.

Now, if you look in your Bibles, the word heavens is plural, right? That's not a typo. Again, he's writing to the Jews so he is giving a Jewish illustration here, because the Jews thought there were three levels of heaven. Firstly, they believed there was the first heaven which refer to the atmosphere or the sky, things you could see with your naked eye. Then they had the second heaven, which referred to outer space or the galaxy, the things you could see with the telescope. And then the Jews had the third heaven, which refers to the presence of God where He sits on the throne. And the author of Hebrews says, "Here, this is where Jesus passes after He died on the cross, not the veil, not the curtain, He went through Heaven itself and eternity. Up, up, up, up up, which is what no regular priest could do. In fact, the term *heavens* here shows you the utter unreachable presence of God. This is how hard God is to get to if you can't go to the first heavens or the sky on your own, and you can't go to the second heavens or outer space. There's no way you can get to the third one, right? It's unfathomable. You're too sinful, you're too weak. You're too human. Jesus could. In fact, the verse says that He passed there. And that's a Greek tense known as the perfect tense, which means he passed there completely. It's not like Jesus is passing back and forth, like you

see in the Roman Catholic Church with the Mass. It's not like he's running to and fro every time the priest offers the bread and the wine and does Transubstantiation because He doesn't need to. The work of salvation is done now, it's finished. Isaac Watts had a good thought on this, when he said in one of his hymns, "With joy meditate, the grace of our high priest above, His heart is made of tenderness, His bowels, they melt with love, touch with a sympathy within, He knows our feeble frame. He knows what sore temptations mean, for He has felt the same. For the one who came to die for us gives grace for every hour, to save, forgive, and pardon us with His almighty power, for our High Priest has been crucified once and for all. With such a mighty sacrifice, it will never be recalled."

And the application here in the passage and why I went through all this an introduction earlier is because the point here is that if you feel convicted by your hypocrisy, like the Jews did, and if you feel embarrassed by your unbelief, and your apathy, and coming to church and not caring and all that type of thing, there's one thing you can do for it. And that is to trust in this high priest. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God," it says, "Let us hold fast our confession." That last phrase is The application, this is the call to action: hold fast. That refers to the act of clinging to something so tightly that it makes your knuckles turn white, not so you can be saved, but because you are saved. Not so you can earn your way to heaven because it's been earned by another and you see it and you believe it and you trust in it. So you'll never let it go. I don't know if you've ever seen a child being carried up a hill by their father after they've been hurt. But if you have, it's a good illustration of this, because when they do that, they hold fast to their father. They don't do that because their grip is going to save them. That's silly. The father is saving them. And they don't do that because it's going to somehow increase their chances of making it up the hill if they hold on tight, it's not. They do it because they believe. They do it because they trust their father. And in fact, the tighter they hold, the better. And the firmer the grip, the firmer the faith. It's the same way here. This passage is encouraging you to do that. Because unbelief is so subtle. It's such an easy thing to get into. So He's given you a reason not to look Israel, they blew it. They blew it over and over and over again. But their high priest was like this, your high priest is like that, you have no excuse. We have something so much better.

This is why he's going to repeat this idea over and over again. Because in chapter two, verse one, he tells you to pay much closer attention to Christ, instead of getting distracted, instead of getting pulled away by other things. And in chapter three, verse eight, he tells you not to harden your hearts, or grow apathetic. In chapter three, verse 12, he says to take care. And for verse 11, he says, to be diligent, instead of being lazy and saying, oh boy, here's another church service. Oh, boy, I can't wait for it to be over. In chapter six, verse one, he says to press on to maturity. In chapter 12, verse 15, he tells you to not come short of it like Esau did, because we all had the heart of any saltiness, amen. We all have a soul that is as black as his. So you have to constantly be reminded to put your eyes on Christ. This means when the times are good, and you need to hold fast to Christ. And when the times are bad, you need to hold fast to Christ. When you go through days of sunshine, you need to do it. And when you go through days of rain, you need to do it. When you're struggling with sin, you hold on to Him. When you're struggling with sickness, you hold on to Him. Anything you do, you hold on to Christ, you get up tomorrow morning, you go to work, hold on to Christ. Get up tomorrow, deal with those kids who are grouchy and mean and they say mine, mine, mine 1000 times you hold on to Christ. When you're old, you do it, when you're young, you do it.

On the one hand, you can never lose your salvation. We've said that many times in this series. But on the other hand, if you're saved, then you will persevere. I was wrestling this all week, why would he talk about our high

priest at the end of all this information about unbelief, and this is the conclusion I came to: unbelief is a sin and hypocrisy is a sin. That hurts the worst. Because it's one thing to lust. It's another thing to do it while calling yourself a Christian, and then that takes it to another level. That's a whole other place. It's one thing to hate someone, it's another thing to hate them in church, holding a Bible in your hand, having a gold cross around your neck. It's one thing to lie, it's another thing to lie while you're in a Bible study. So the author is putting this in here to remind you, even when you do that, Jesus will forgive you if you call on His name. He won't forgive you if you don't. He won't save you if you tell a lie and hate someone and you never turn away from it. But He will save you if you do because He is your high priest, your great high priest.

This brings us to another aspect of Christ's high priesthood in this passage, and that is that He can sympathize with our weakness. The first one is that He has passed through the heavens because He has gone into the one place we're all trying to get to and that is Heaven itself. But second, He can sympathize with our weakness, which means He knows what it's like when you struggle and He can show compassion to you. Not only does He save you from sin, but He shows mercy as He does it. And if you read in verse 14, he says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession, for we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness." And that's a beautiful part of the passage here. In my grace for your day article from this week, I told you the Puritan Thomas Goodwin wrote an entire book upon this part of the verse, he spent about 300 pages explaining it. And the reason he did that is because it really struck him how different this was, from the way most of the high priests were in Israel at the time. We just talked about that a little bit in the children's lesson. But if you study the history of the high priesthood, one thing you notice is that a lot of them were not very sympathetic toward their people. They were pretty selfish men at times. For example, the first high priest was Aaron, and you remember what he did. He built a golden calf for Israel. Before he was even placed into the Office of the High priesthood, Moses went up on the mountain to receive the Word of God and Aaron was down at the bottom, creating an idol. That's not a good start to the whole thing. That's getting off on a bad foot. And then Leviticus 10 tells us that his son Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire to the Lord and Lord killed them over it. Which means things did not get better with time, they only got worse with the next generation, those guys did not actually become high priests, but they still represented the line. Then came Eleazer, who we don't know a whole lot about and Phineas, but a few generations later, you come to the name of Eli. And it says in First Samuel to verse 12, that the sons of Eli, who were in the line of the high priesthood were worthless men. They did not know the Lord, because they would steal from the people as they made offerings, they would sleep with the women who served in the tent of meeting. I don't know how you get worse than that. Then a few generations later, the Bible tells us how Abiathar, the high priest supported a coup against David. And then later on, it says the high priest found the book of the law in the days of Josiah, which means he lost the book of the law. The only way you can find it is by not knowing where it is. You get into the intertestamental times after the Old Testament, and you read the history there, and you find a guy named Januarius, who was pelted with lemons because he did not do the sacrifices the right way, was a very, very bitter experience for him, left a sour taste in his mouth. But the point is that all these guys failed at times. I mean, all the high priests in Israel's history had done things that were wrong. A lot of them were good. Many of them were bad, because they were not sympathetic to their people. Their sin made them selfish and made them hard and made them crusty.

And in contrast to that this verse says, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with us." Or in the words of one translation, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with our feeling." And the word sympathy here comes from the Greek word, *sympatheo* which is a compound word from *sym*, and *pathos*. It

means to feel something together with somebody. The idea is that when you have this sympathy, you weep with those who weep and you mourn with those who mourn because you can't help it. It just comes out of you.

I know many of you are parents in this room, and if you are, you know what this word means because when your child cries, you cry, right? I remember when my kids were learning to walk, I would freak out every time they started to fall and do this [reach out to catch them]. I didn't plan on it. I didn't wake up and say, "Okay, I need to be a good parent today and save on my medical bills. So every time my kid falls, I need to catch." It's just a knee jerk reaction. I couldn't help it. That's what this word refers to. Jesus has that kind of response to us. He does this [reaches out His hand to catch us] to help us. It's a very beautiful word. Hebrews 10 Verse 34, uses it this way, when it says that the people of this letter showed sympathy to those in prison, and that means that they acted like they were in prison with them. They cared about them so much. It seemed like they were locked up because they cared about their struggles. This passage says Christ does that with us on a spiritual level; He can sympathize with our weakness.

It actually says weaknesses, not one weakness, but weaknesses, plural, many weaknesses, several weaknesses, a whole host of weaknesses. Bring your weakness to him, He can help you. He knows what it's like. If you're hungry or tired or weak, Jesus has been there too in His flesh, in his humanity, He experienced that. If you feel beat down and downcast, Jesus felt that too. Just read the account of Him in the garden of Gethsemane and you will see a man struggling. He overcame it. But He did go through a dark time. If you feel lonely, or forsaken or abandoned, the point is Jesus gets all of that. He doesn't look at you at times when you struggle and say, "I don't see what the problem is. I'm too busy." He's never too busy. I think it's safe to say a lot of people don't come to Jesus because they don't see Him like this, do they? They avoid Him because they think He's like the old high priests who had jumped down their throat if they had a problem and beat him up.

When I first read this, it kind of surprised me a little bit, but the more I thought about it, I realized it's almost as if the author is anticipating an objection. You would have to see what he's saying because some people would read the first line of this, which says, "Since we have a great high priest," and they would say, "I can't have that. Jesus, I'm not good enough for that. It's not for me." And they would stop. They would they would end the whole discussion at that point in the passage. To which Jesus would reply, if we're looking at this word sympathetic, he would say, "I know what you've done. I've seen it. I'm aware of your sin, because I've watched it the entire time. I'm God, but I will forgive you. If you believe I'm sympathetic." Then they would say, "Okay, well, let's explain it some more Jesus, I've got a really bad heart. Some of the things I've done are so terrible, black as coal," to which Jesus would say, I know that too because I judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. I the Lord know the secrets of it. I know what you did. But there is mercy if you'll come." Then they would say, "What about my past? Jesus, even if I fix my life now, I have 50 years of sin behind me," to which Jesus would say, "I can take care of that, too. My blood is enough to cover it." Then they would say, "Well, I can't break away." He would say, "I can." They would say, "The burden is too heavy." He would say, "Not for me." They would say, "I'm too weak." He would say, "I'm not." They would say, "I'm too tired." He would say, "Not Me, I don't have that problem." Then they would say, "Okay, Jesus, if all that's true, if you are sympathetic like this, what do I have to do to get that now?" And Christ would say the words of John six, verse 37, "For whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out." And that means if you're a great sinner, He will not cast you out. And if you have a wicked heart, He will not cast you out. If you have 50 years of sin, He will not cast you out. If you can't carry your burden, He will not cast you out, but you have to come to Him. Do that and He will be sympathetic. He will not be sympathetic with

your sin. And He is not sympathetic with your evil. But He is sympathetic when you want to break from it and repent.

Which brings us to another aspect of his high priesthood in this passage, and that is that He was tempted in all things as we are. This adds to what we have already said, but if you look in verse 15, it says, “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.” I don't know if you remember, but I've told you before that the book of Hebrews is called the riddle of the New Testament, or the most mysterious letter in it, because it has a lot of mysteries in it. And this is one of those. It says here that Jesus was tempted. That's a strange thing to think about. And then, after what we just said about Him being a High Priest who has passed through the heavens, how could a sinless man be tempted? And how could the Son of God go through this? And the answer is, well, we don't know the answer fully. You're delving into the realm of mystery here, and trying to wrap your mind around the incarnation of God where His deity and humanity meet. And anytime you do that, you're left with some element of wonder. But to explain this as best we can, it says, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One...” The term *but* there is placed as a comparison between Christ and the high priest of Israel, explaining that whereas the high priest of Israel could not sympathize with us, Jesus can. Here's why, because He was tempted. And that's a Greek word *peirazo*, which means he was tested or tried with the attacks of the enemy. It's another colorful word because this is where we get our English word *perforate* from, which means Jesus was perforated with the attacks, He was pierced or poked or prodded like a perforating machine does to a sheet of paper. As He lived among us, He was jabbed with this temptation or that one. He was troubled by this attack or that attack.

It says, “In all things,” and that word *all things* can mean a lot of different things. It could mean he was tempted in all things literally. In other words, Jesus was tempted in every little thing that we've undergone, every single individual sin He experienced and overcame it. He didn't experience it giving into it. He was tempted from the outside, He never gave in. *In all things* could mean figuratively to say He was tempted in most things we've encountered. So there's no version of sin He has not undergone to some degree. But however you look at it, the point of the passage here is that Jesus' temptations were a real thing for Him. They were an issue, but He overcame it at every point, He was tempted with loss, but He never lost it, did He? You know, the world has never seen a man like that before. He's never known a man who never had one impure thought. Jesus never had one. Not on any level. He was tempted with pride, but He was never proud. Which means every statement out of His mouth was a humble one. Every word that He said was true. He was tempted to hate but He never hated, tempted to lie, but He never lied, tempted to swear, but He never swore. He overcame all of them to show you that you can have the benefits of that if you trust in Him.

The Old Testament said the high priests had to bring an unblemished sacrifice to the Lord. He had to bring a bull or a goat without flaw, otherwise God would not have it. It had to be an unblemished offering. And your problem as a human being is that that's all you can bring to the Lord. And that is a blemished offering. You can't bring anything else to God, but a life that's full of sin. But this passage says Jesus can bring something different. He can bring a life with no sin at all. And that's where your hope is found.

If you were here with us last time we went through the verse that's right above this, where it says in verse 12, that the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two edged sword. And I told you that the word sword there refers to a two-sided sword that the Romans used because it cut both ways. No matter which way you turned

it, it would slice you. And the passage says the Word of God is like that. The Bible cuts you whichever way it turns, because it's able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That means it can open up your soul to show you what's really there. And that's a bad process; well it's a good process, but it's an uncomfortable process. Anybody ever read the Bible and you walk away feeling good about yourself? Most of the time we feel bad because it shows us our sin. But it does that for this reason, to point you to Christ, the point of your high priest, it's the next thing in the text. The idea is that as you read the Bible and it cuts you and slices you and penetrates your heart, it pushes you to Him, and as it convicts you and confronts you and challenges you, it throws you in his direction because He was tempted and all things, yet without sin. That's why you go to Him. You have sin, He doesn't.

After the sermon last week, someone sent me an email and they said that they are pretty new to our church. And they always wondered why they felt bad when they left on Sundays. But then they saw the passage about the Word of God. And they said, "The reason is because it keeps cutting me. Every time I come in here, it slices my heart." And they said, "Thank you for the ministry, keep up the good cutting." And I would add to that, "Thank you for the email, but keep running to Christ." When you are cut, you go to Him.

Which brings us to one more aspect of Jesus' high priesthood that we're going to talk about today just to review these other ones. The first one is that He passed through the heavens. Secondly, He can sympathize with your weakness. Thirdly, He's been tempted in all things as you are yet without sin, which should be an encouragement to you. It should be a relief because who hasn't been tempted today, and who hasn't been assaulted by some sin. But if you have, you can go to the one who saves us from all of them. And that leads you to one more aspect. And that is that He brings you to the throne of grace. The fourth and final aspect of Jesus' high priesthood that we're going to study here is that He brings you to the throne of grace, which means that not only does Jesus overcome sin for us, but He also makes a way for us to approach God's throne. And if you look in verse 15, it says, "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. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." As the author rounds out the chapter here, he gives you another use of the word *for*, or *therefore*, to say that in light of all he said about Jesus passing into the heavens, sympathizing with our weakness, being tempted, this is what you need to do next, you need to draw near to God. That's the whole point of all this. If you feel convicted, because the word of God is cutting you, you can draw nearer, because Christ has done all of this.

Under the Old Covenant system, this is really important too, because the high priest was the only one who could draw near to God. Like I just showed you that the whole system was set up in such a way, he was the only one who could come into His presence, because the Levites, and priests and chief priests couldn't do that. Ordinary Jews or Gentiles like you, and me, couldn't do that. Only him, but now the author says not anymore, because through Christ, you can draw near to. And the word *draw near* is translated several different ways in your Bibles. Some of your versions say, "draw near with confidence." Some say, "Draw near boldly." Some say, "draw near with assurance," but the word literally means to draw near face to face with someone. Because you come to Him this way, not this way. With your back turned. Because in light of the cross, what it says is now you don't have to run away from God anymore. You can come straight to Him. Now I've heard someone say that, to balance this out, you can come boldly to the throne of grace, but you can't come brazenly. And that's a good way to look at this. And you can come confidently to the Father through Christ, but you can't come arrogantly with your nose stuck up in the air thinking you deserve this because you don't. There's nothing in this passage that says you

deserve it. But at the same time, you can still come. This word is also in the continual tense in Greek, to say you can come to God through Christ, but you can keep coming as well. You can do it one time and draw near to the throne and you can do it over and over again. Because when you're feeling weak with something you can draw near, and when you're feeling tempted with something you can draw near and when you're feeling perforated you can draw near every single day confidently.

When he says confidently, that's put in light of what he just said about your weaknesses. No matter how weak you may feel, you can still approach God confidently. And no matter how desperate the struggle, you can call out on His name because He has provided a throne of grace for you. And that term *throne of grace* can mean the throne of accessible grace, because God's grace is accessible to you now. Through the work of Christ on the cross, the doorway to heaven has been opened. It was shut for you, when you were in your sin, it's open now because of Christ. It can also mean the throne of forgiving grace. Because God's grace has done that as well. It has forgiven your sins, not through the blood of bulls and goats and lambs, but through the one time sacrifice of Christ. It can mean the throne of sustaining grace, because God's grace sustains you now. But the idea is that however you look at it through Christ, there's nothing holding you back from the presence of God anymore if you turn away from your sin.

The word *throne of grace* was translated by William Tyndale in the first English Version of the Bible as *seat of grace*, to tie it back to the mercy seat or the piece of furniture that sat on top of the ark in the temple, where the Holy of Holies was. I just told you, the priests would kill the animal, walk behind the veil, go into the Holy of Holies, and he would sprinkle blood on the Ark of the Covenant. And the piece that sat on top of the ark was called the mercy seat. That's the word translated *throne of grace* here. And the significance to it is that the Temple Mount was a massive structure. And once you got up there, it had several gates or courts leading up to it. It took a while to get to the presence of God just physically. And because each one of these courts said that, you could go this far, but no further. For example, they had a court of Gentiles where the Gentiles could go, and then they would stop, it was the first one you would come to. There's actually a sign above the court of Gentiles that said, "If you pass this gate as a Gentile and go further, we'll kill you." So beyond that court, you had a court of women where the Jewish women could go and no further coming into the presence of God, they had to stop at a certain point, then you had the court of men where the Jewish men could go, and then no further, and then you had a court of priests where the priests could go, and no further and then you had the veil and the Holy of Holies in the spot where the high priest could go once a year on the Day of Atonement.

But the idea was that you had to work your way through all that to get to the mercy seat. You couldn't just show up at the temple and go there. You had to walk past the gates and the courts. What the author here is saying is that through Christ, He's offering you something better, something different. You can come straight into the presence of God now. Straight to the Father, through His death on the cross. I believe a lot of people don't approach the Christian life this way anymore. I think they think that it's kind of like it was in the Old Covenant system with all the courts and gates and steps and things because some people today try to go to God through a step of works, where they sweat and strive and struggle to get to Him. They toil and labor and agonize by being a good person and keeping the commandments and following the law so they can be perfect first. It's just doing, doing, doing all the time; go, go go. And when that doesn't work, because it never does, some people go to another step, and that's a step of experience, where they try to go to God from another angle and have some emotional event like a camp, or a conference, or retreat, where the lights are down low, and the band is playing softly and the preacher lays hands on them and give them a bolt of lightning or something. Then when that doesn't work, because that only

lasts a little while until the retreat is over, they try to go to God through the step of we could call the step of sorrow and they want to weep their way to God. They try to mourn and wail and sob to the point that God would accept them if they were just sorry enough. Then when that doesn't work, they go to the step of knowledge and they want to read their way to God and study their way to God and read book after book after book. But the point is, it's just step after step after step and it all fails you in the end. None of those things in and of themselves can take you to God. Because the barrier is still there. The wall is still up between you and Him and the mercy seat because your sin hasn't been removed. You need someone to come and do that for you. And the only person that can do that is Christ. This passage says it this way, it says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And what that means is that there is grace on the throne and there's grace coming down from the throne. There is grace resting there and His grace is flowing off. Because God knows you can't get to heaven without grace, can you? So that's what He provides for you in Christ. All the grace you would ever need.

Listen, I know there are people who say they can't come to Christ because they don't think they're worthy. And I understand that. I get that. I counsel people, I hear them say it. But if you feel that way, I want to remind you one more time of the context of this passage. The Jews didn't deserve it, either. They were terrible people. They sinned against God over and over again. And yet He offers these Jews this promise in the book of Hebrews. The previous generation didn't get it in the wilderness because they spurned God's offer. But this generation can have it and so can you. This offer is for you. I know there's a lot of people who also say that they feel like they can't come, because they've been hypocrites. They've grown up in church and been phonies for so long, and they haven't believed. But that's the setting for this passage to the same audience. You can't get any more hypocritical than Israel. But the passage says Jesus will still be a high priest for you if you will believe.

Friends, God really does Hate the sin of unbelief. He can't stand it when you come into His house and play games with Him but He does offer forgiveness. In Christ, will you receive that forgiveness today? Let me pray for you that you would.

Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord, for the words of this passage and our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. There's not a man, woman or child in this room that can come to you on their own. We've all failed you more ways we can even calculate or imagine; we don't even remember all the sins we've committed against Your name. And You remember them. You've seen everyone. And yet in Your mercy and love, You've given us such a Saviour. Lord, we thank you for that today. And I pray that this passage would open our heart, our eyes to the depths and the wonders of what we have at the cross. There's no other religion in the world that can offer anything like this. The Jew,s even though they had a wonderful thing and the Old Testament, they couldn't have all this so they couldn't see all this ahead of time. The other religions don't have a high priest like this. So Lord, we thank You in humility. And Lord, I pray that these things will give us a greater love for You and appreciation. I pray You would draw some of the lost to you today, because I know there are people in this room that are holding out on coming to Christ, because they say they're weak. They're frail. Lord, would they see that they have a Saviour who can overcome all of that, if they will just come to Him? For the Christians in this room, Lord, those who are beaten and tattered and torn and worn out by all the mess they have to deal with every week. With this passage, remind them that Christ is there with them every step of the way, upholding them, the reason they hold on to their faith is because You hold on to them. Thank you, Father for such a mercy and such a kindness. When we go out now and live in light of what we've learned, may Christ be put on the throne, this throne of grace. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.