**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (12): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Jesus, Our Great High Priest”**

**Hebrews 4:14-16**

**March 24, 2024**

The all-pervasive theme of Hebrews is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we saw in the introductory verses, He is God’s full and final revelation, far surpassing the revelation given through the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3). He is also greater than the angels, who were involved in giving the Law at Mt. Sinai (1:4-2:18); and He is greater than Moses, Israel’s national hero (3:1-4:13).

In the verses before us today, our author now turns to the superiority of Jesus over Aaron, and all the high priests of Aaron’s lineage (4:14-16). As we have already seen, Jesus is “*a merciful and faithful high priest*” (2:17). But now He is presented as “*a great high priest*” (4:16), a title which no Old Testament priest could ever assume.

On the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), the high priests offered sacrifices outside the Tabernacle or Temple. Then they passed through the veil and entered the inner tent or sanctuary to intercede for the people on the basis of the offerings they had made. But Jesus has “*passed through the heavens*,” having already accomplished his sacrificial offering for sin, once for all.

It's precisely because of the superiority of Christ’s heavenly priesthood that our author issues two important exhortations: **(a.)** “*Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*” (v. 14 b); **(b.)** “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*” (v. 16). These are two of the most important exhortations in the entire epistle, and for good reason.

No matter where we are on our pilgrimage, all of us are in need. All of us have stress and some degree of trauma. All of us face obstacles, and setbacks, and financial hardships, and emotional heartaches. All of us have physical pain, and some live with crippling fear and anxiety. Many of us find ourselves in relationships that are harmful and abusive, and we all suffer painful loss. These are just a few of the many burdens in life that we often bear.

But it doesn’t really matter what our problem may be. What matters is that we *know* we have a great need *and* that we can turn to the only person and place where genuine help can be found. That is precisely what these verses instruct us to do! Each of these exhortations is based upon a profound spiritual truth about Jesus, our Great High Priest.

**A. The First Exhortation (v. 14):** “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*.” The word that’s translated “since” could easily be translated “because.” So, it’s *“because*” Jesus is our great high priest that we are urged to “*hold firmly to the faith we profess*.” But what accounts for the greatness of this high priest? Why is Jesus the high priest *par excellence*?

To begin with, when Jesus left His disciples and ascended to the Father, He “*passed through the heavens*” into a heavenly sanctuary. With His work of atonement accomplished, He is now seated at the right hand of God (1:3). But Aaron and his successors took the blood of atonement through the veil into the earthly sanctuary, once every year. Jesus’ greatness is also measured by the names our author has assigned to Him. He is both “*Jesus*” (the Son of Mary) and also the “*Son of God*” (God’s incarnate Son). Since He is both truly man and truly God, He alone is qualified to bridge the gap between sinful man and a holy God. (A perfect priest *is* the perfect go-between.)

Because we have such a great high priest, the logical exhortation then follows: “*Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*” (v. 14b). Once again, we see our author’s repeated emphasis on the need for persevering faith (as in 2:1; 3:6, 14; 4:11). Here, the high priestly ministry of Jesus becomes another powerful incentive for continuance in the faith.

**Q.** Why? **A.** Because of what we’ve just been told in the previous two verses (vv. 12-13). The sobering thought of our complete exposure “*before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account*” might cause some to be fearful of God’s judgment. So our author says in effect, “There’s no need to be fearful. Jesus, the Son of God has passed through the heavens and has taken His seat at the right hand of God to intercede on our behalf. He is our advocate, our defense attorney. Therefore, he says, don’t give up hope. Don’t abandon your confidence in Christ; “*Let us hold firmly to the faith we possess*.”

His heavenly priesthood, however, has not changed his capacity for sympathizing with us in all of the dangers and sorrows and trials which we experience in life. For as we have seen, in order to “*become a merciful and faithful high priest*” the Son of God had to become like us, “*fully human in every way*” (2:17). This leads to the second profound truth about Jesus, our Great High Priest, which is the basis for the exhortation that follows.

**B. The Second Exhortation (vv. 15-16):** “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin*. *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*.”

The humanity of the Son of God was not a masquerade. Therefore, the reality of the temptations Jesus endured follows from the reality of the human nature He assumed. And His experience of testing corresponded in every respect to ours, yet without sinning. In the words of one author,

“From first to last he was being put to the test, whether by enticements to self-concern, popular acclaim, and ambition for power when assailed by Satan in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1ff), or the temptation in the garden to draw back rather than go through the dreadful ordeal that lay before him (Mt. 26:38ff), or by the taunt hurled at him even as he hung in agony on the cross: ‘If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’ (Mt. 27:40ff)” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes).

When that Cross was approaching, Jesus referred to the inner circle of His followers as those who had continued with Him in His “temptations” (Luke 22:28, KJV). But He didn’t merely survive those severe testings, He was completely victorious over every single one of them. How? By depending on His Father in heaven and the truths of His Word (Cf. Mt. 4:4, 7, 11). In the process, He “also gained the profoundest fellow feeling for our weaknesses” (Hughes). At the same time, He demonstrated that human weakness provides the opportunity for God’s grace to be sufficient to meet our every need (2 Cor. 12:9).

This amazing spiritual truth now serves as the reason for the second, crucial exhortation: “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence . . .*” (v. 16). The word translated “then” actually means “therefore” (as seen in the NASB). “*Therefore*,” or “*because*” we have a high priest who knows what and how we feel in our battles against temptation, *let us draw near to the throne of* *grace*. Here are the important questions we should be asking at this point:

**1 Q.** Who is on this throne? **A.** God the Father, with Jesus at His right hand (1:3, 13; 8:1; 12:2). As the hymnwriter has said, “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with Thee bring!” The point is that when we need strength for our souls, we are coming to the throne of the King of Kings. And what awaits us there is not judgment or condemnation or criticism, but grace. His purposes for us are always gracious. The answer to the petitions we bring before Him are full of grace. This throne always exists to dispense grace to those who are in need.

**2 Q.** So, how often should we come to this throne? **A.** Constantly. There is never a time when He is not available to us. There is never a circumstance that makes approaching Him a bad idea. In the Old Testament Levitical system, the only person allowed into God’s presence was the high priest, and even he could only draw near to God one day of the year (the Day of Atonement). Although he represented the people, the people themselves were locked out. But here we are *all urged* to come always, and at every point of need.

**3 Q.** How, then, should we approach God? **A.** With confidence. This confidence comes from knowing that we have a great high priest who is our advocate, who knows our deepest thoughts, our worst fears, and our greatest desires. He is ready to intercede for us, having already cleansed us from all our sins (Heb. 9:24).

**4 Q.** What should we expect to find at a throne of grace? **A.** Grace, of course! But *more* than that; mercy too: “*So that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*.” In God’s *mercy*, we find His compassion, His sympathy, and His understanding. But it is God’s grace that sends “*timely help*” (NEB) for the particular need of the moment. His grace strengthens us; it sustains us; and it energizes us to press on amidst the hard struggles of life.

The problem facing the Hebrews was that instead of drawing near, they were in danger of drawing back (Cf. 10:35). In the face of ongoing opposition, they were showing signs of losing their confidence in Christ and even of turning away from their confession of faith (apostasy). Once again, in the words of Hughes, “The genuineness of the faith they have professed must be demonstrated by a confident approach to God at all times . . . The hardness of the struggle should be an inducement to the Christian to draw near to the throne of God’s grace, rather than to draw back and abandon the conflict.” Why? Because when we draw near to the throne of grace, we can be certain that we will receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need!

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.

To added affliction He addeth His mercy;

To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit; His grace has no measure.

His pow’r has no boundary known unto men.

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,

He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!

(Annie Johnson Flint)