

Confident in Christ

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[0 : 00] Would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together again in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 14 through 16.

! 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. 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. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? My dad has worked on radio for longer than I've been alive, and one benefit of my dad's job was that he would get free tickets and backstage passes to concerts and sporting events.

I got to meet two of my childhood heroes because of that. I got to walk on the field at Kauffman Stadium, Royal Stadium, while the team was taking batting practice, and I got my picture taken with future Hall of Famer George Brett, who didn't give me an autograph.

[1 : 39] Something that I've forgiven but obviously haven't forgotten. When the WWE, then WWF came to town, I got to go backstage and meet one of my favorite wrestlers, Bret the Hitman Hart, who did give me an autograph.

At these events, my dad would give someone his name and the door to the backstage area would open. The velvet rope would be unclipped, and we entered a place that few had access to. I walked through those doors. I passed through those ropes with confidence. I was my dad's guest. I was my father's son, and because of that, I was permitted to go where I otherwise wouldn't have been allowed.

In our passage today, the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reveals how Jesus has provided direct access to the throne of God for those who believe in him.

Jesus not only opens the way to God's throne, but he invites us to approach confidently. Our confidence does not come from who we are or what we've accomplished, but from who Jesus is and in what he has done as our great high priest.

[3 : 01] For the Jewish audience of Hebrews, this message, these verses in Hebrews chapter 4 of unhindered access to God and his throne would have been both startling and shocking for them to hear.

When the writer describes Jesus as our high priest and refers to the throne room of God, it would have immediately brought to their minds images of the temple, particularly the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant that was within that sacred space.

The Holy of Holies was the innermost sacred area of the ancient tabernacle of Moses and then later the temple in Jerusalem.

It was constructed as a perfect cube. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Israel's special relationship with God. The Ark of the Covenant, the cover of it, was called the Mercy Seat. It was called a seat because this sacred place was considered God's throne. And once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest and only the high priest was permitted access to enter that small chamber and burn incense and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant.

[4 : 30] In doing so, the high priest atoned for his sin and for the sins of his people who he was there to intercede for. To access the Holy of Holies, the high priest passed through a veil, a massive 60-foot-high, 30-foot-wide curtain that was about four inches thick.

The Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant, the veil, the high priest, all central elements of the temple powerfully illustrated both the accessibility and inaccessibility of God.

Only the high priest and only once a year was permitted to enter God's earthly throne room to atone for his sins and for those of the people.

This arrangement vividly demonstrated God's holiness and his intolerance of sin. Ultimately, all of these elements find their true significance in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Matthew's Gospel records an amazing thing that happened as soon as Jesus died on the cross. Matthew 27, 50-51 says, The 60-foot-by-30-foot, 4-inch-thick veil was torn from the top to the bottom.

[6 : 14] No man could do that. It was a supernatural event done by the power of God to make a very important point in announcement of a new and awesome truth.

Jesus' death on the cross meant humanity now had access to God like they'd never had before. The Old Testament system was made obsolete as the new covenant was ratified in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

No longer would God's people depend on priests to perform a sacrifice for them once a year and year after year on their behalf. The writer of Hebrews will eventually make this connection in chapter 10, but let's look at it now.

Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19 through 22. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The once, for all time sacrifice of Jesus Christ did away with the necessity of yearly sacrifices, which could never fully take sin away.

[7 : 40] The need for a high priest to intercede on behalf of God's people is no longer necessary either, because in Jesus Christ, we have a superior high priest.

In Christ, we have access to the throne room of God and can enter confidently, receiving grace from God in our time of need.

The holy of holies, the very presence of God, is now open to all who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ. And so the main idea from this text, the main idea for this morning's sermon, is that you can confidently approach God's throne of grace through Jesus, your high priest.

You can confidently approach God's throne of grace through Jesus, your high priest. The writer of Hebrews has focused on the consequences of rejecting the great salvation God provided in Jesus Christ.

He's been urging those in his audience who are tempted to drift away from the confession that they once made about Jesus because of the persecution that they were facing for being identified with him.

[8 : 52] He's used scripture, particularly Psalm 95, to remind his audience of the consequences that their ancestors faced in the wilderness when they rejected God's promise to give them the promised land.

And as a result of that rejection, they were shut out from it and from entering God's rest. The earthly promised land and the rest of God ultimately pointed to and found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

He is the promised one. Some of the original recipients of this letter were thus in danger of something much more catastrophic than their ancestors.

They were in danger of being shut out of God's eternal kingdom for rejecting his one and only son, Jesus Christ. In chapter 4, verses 12 through 13, the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers of what God's word is and what God's word does.

And he does so in a negative sense, comparing it to a sword. It strikes, it severs, it separates what is true from what is false. It exposes sin and the true intentions of our hearts.

[10 : 09] You can fool everyone with your confession of Jesus, but God knows the truth and his word will reveal it. He will reveal it.

In verses 14 through 16, the writer's focus shifts from the negative side of rejecting the gospel to the positive side of receiving and believing the gospel. God's great salvation through Jesus Christ doesn't only keep us from being shut out of heaven.

It not only saves us from eternal separation from God in hell, it brings spiritual life. It provides us access to God the Father right now.

Even if there were no hell to be saved from, knowing Jesus personally would be reason enough to come to him because coming into a living relationship with him is the greatest experience a person can have.

To walk in fellowship with Jesus, to know your creator, to have the Holy Spirit indwell you, to have his word to teach you, to guide you, to warn you and encourage you, and to know that he loves you is an amazing thing, even if there was no hell for us to escape from.

[11 : 26] In Jesus Christ, you have the ability to confidently go where no person is able to go in and of themselves. You have access to the throne room of God where you will receive help in your time of need.

You don't have to face his wrath because you've received his grace. Do you believe that?

Sometimes people see God as a father who lacks grace and mercy.

They view themselves as the black sheep of the family, the problem child, the one who never gets it right and always seems to mess up. And so they don't go to God and help during their time of need because they think there will be no mercy and there will be no grace for them.

That somehow they've used up all of those resources and that there couldn't possibly be more mercy and grace for God to show to them. Some people don't go to God in time of need because they don't want to admit that they need help.

They don't want to feel like a charity case. They think they can do enough good to cover up the bad. They think they need to clean themselves up first before they approach God.

[12 : 46] Sort of like how a person will diligently brush and floss their teeth before seeing the dentist who is just going to clean their teeth for them anyway.

You know it's bad, but maybe you can make it less bad. Sometimes people think they need another intercessor. They need someone else to go to God for them and put in a good word on their behalf to him.

Friend, you have the best intercessor in Jesus Christ. And in Jesus, you don't need another intercessor. He is your great high priest who shed his own blood to atone for your sins and who lives today to make intercession for you.

You don't need a priest. You don't need a pastor or any other person living or dead to give you access to God's throne of grace. You have it in Jesus. And so you can confidently approach God's throne of grace in your time of weakness, in your time of temptation, or any other time.

But if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus, if you aren't saved, then I tell you this in love, you cannot approach God confidently because your sins have not been forgiven and your access is denied.

[14 : 05] But God has given you this day and it's not too late for you. God has ordained this day for you to hear his word and receive his grace and his mercy, his salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, his son.

And I pray that today is the day of your salvation. In his word today, God tells you to approach his throne with confidence through Jesus, his superior high priest, our superior high priest.

Our passage today shares three truths about Jesus as our high priest to give us confidence to approach God's throne of grace in our time of need.

The first truth from verse 14, be confident in your confession of Jesus. Be confident in your confession of Jesus. Verse 14 again says, Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God.

Again, on the day of atonement, Israel's high priest had to pass through three doorways or three portals. First, he bore the blood of the sacrificial lamb who gave its life as a substitute to atone for the people's sins.

[15 : 21] He took that blood into the outer court of the temple. Next, second, he entered another doorway into the holy place. And then third, he entered through the veil to the holy of holies.

Thus, the high priest entered or had to go through a three portal entrance in coming to this thrice holy God.

And he could do it only one time a year on the day of atonement. When the writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as our great high priest who passed through the heavens, he is helping his readers connect his journey to that of their earthly high priest who passed through various sacred spaces to enter God's presence in the holy of holies, a place containing copies of heavenly realities with the journey that Jesus made passing through the heavens to enter God's full presence in heaven itself.

The Jewish people believed in three different realms, which they referred to as the heavens. The first heaven or realm was the atmosphere, the sky above.

The second heaven was the outer space, the space beyond the sky where the celestial bodies, the sun, moon, and stars are. The third heaven was the spiritual dwelling place of God.

[16 : 45] On the cross, Jesus Christ shed his blood to atone for our sins. On the third day, he rose again. The Bible tells us that he appeared to his disciples and 500 of his followers at the same time.

And this took place over a 40-year span. And then he ascended to heaven. Acts chapter 1, 6 through 11 is one of the places in the Bible that record his ascension.

Let's look at that. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. When Jesus ascended, he passed through the heavens as our great high priest.

[17 : 57] Unlike earthly priests, he did not enter a man-made sanctuary or offer sacrifices for his own sins, nor did he repeat the process year after year. Instead, Jesus, the sinless Son of God in human flesh, represented himself as our intercessor directly in God's own presence in the heavenly places.

Because of his unique relationship with the Father, he remains there continually interceding for us. His intercession is effective, complete, and it's final.

Now, it is finished. We no longer need another high priest. We don't need to make another sacrifice. We don't need a physical temple to make peace with God for our sins.

The writer of Hebrews will pick up this point later in chapter 9, verses 24 through 28. Let's look at that. Verse 24.

He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

[19 : 35] If Jesus has saved you, he will never, ever stop loving you, pleading your case, and representing you before God the Father.

When the Father looks on those who have repented of their sin and have trusted in his Son in faith, he sees the righteousness of his Son surrounding them, clothing them.

And so we can be confident in Christ because he keeps us eternally secure. The implication of this comes in the second half of verse 14, where we read, let us hold fast our confession.

In Hebrews, this confession, I think specifically right here, refers back to what the writer said in chapter 3, verse 1. There he said, therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Jesus is our superior apostle. That word means sent one. He is the superior sent one of God who came to die to atone for our sins. Jesus is our great high priest who lives right now to intercede on our behalf and eternally secures our salvation.

[20 : 51] The writer of Hebrews urges his readers in this verse not to abandon this confession, particularly in the face of temptation and suffering for being identified with Jesus.

In the wilderness, Israel succumbed to the temptation to believe a negative report from 10 out of the 12 spies who were sent into the land. And they sinned in their unbelief of God and his promise to give it to them.

They did not hold fast to God during that time, and they suffered as a result of that. In contrast to that, the writer of Hebrews exhorts his audience to keep clinging to their confession of faith and remain confident in Jesus Christ.

The Royals, the Kansas City Royals, hosted the All-Star Game in 2012. At that time, I still lived in Kansas City, and I got a call from my dad that he was going to do his radio show from the All-Star event held in the convention center that was downtown.

And so I went with him. He got me in for free. I walked with him to the stage where he did his show. And on the stage with us was Raleigh Fingers, a Hall of Fame pitcher for the Oakland A's.

[22 : 06] He had the big curly mustache. Look him up later. Not now. Or not at all. I don't care. But people had all kinds of memorabilia that they brought to the table.

And Raleigh Fingers was at the front of the table, and he would sign whatever it is that they put in front of him. And then they would go to the next two people down the line who were the authenticators. These were the guys who would authenticate that Raleigh Fingers had, in fact, signed this piece of memorabilia on this day.

And they'd move down the table, and they'd see my dad, and they'd see that he was doing his show. And then as they came to the end of the line, to the end of the table, they would see me. And they would look at me with an inquisitive look.

And others said what those people thought. Who are you? Why are you here? And I just simply pointed to my dad, who was right to my right, and said, he's my dad.

My being on that stage had nothing to do with who I was, but was totally dependent upon my relationship to my father. In Christ, we are adopted by the father.

[23 : 19] In Christ, we are his children. And so, we can be confident in our confession of Jesus, who saved us, who has adopted us, and who keeps us eternally secure.

Be confident when you confess your relationship with Jesus Christ. Now, the second truth. Be confident in the compassion of Jesus.

Be confident in the compassion of Jesus. Verse 15 says, 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.

Jesus is the eternal, divine, sinless Son of God. And as such, the writer of Hebrews anticipated a response that some of the recipients of his letter might have had at this time in reading that.

They might be thinking to themselves, How can Jesus then relate to me? We needed a high priest who not only could pass through the heavens, but we needed one who came to earth.

[24 : 36] We need someone to intercede for us who has experienced what we experience. And who can take compassion on us. And this is precisely what Jesus did.

First, he sympathizes with our weakness. Jesus did not shield himself at all from the fallenness of this world.

In his incarnation, he was born in a manger. In the small town of Bethlehem, and he grew up in the boonies of Nazareth. His earthly parents were poor.

And during his three years of ministry, he was disbelieved, despised, lied about, and ultimately rejected as the Messiah.

He was beaten. He was mocked. He was crucified. Isaiah 53 foretold what Jesus would endure in his first coming 700 years before it happened.

[25 : 37] Let's look at Isaiah 53, 2 through 5. Speaking of Jesus. For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed. Jesus' earthly ministry began in the wilderness where after fasting for 40 days, he was tempted by the devil to avoid the cross.

And Jesus' earthly ministry came to an end in the garden of Gethsemane, where in anguish of what awaited him, he sweat drops of blood. Jesus knows what it's like to experience weakness.

[26 : 52] He also knows what it's like to face temptation. He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness in a moment of weakness. He was tempted in the garden for the cup of God's wrath to pass.

But he resisted and submitted to his Father's will. Jesus was tempted in every respect that we are, but never once did he permit that temptation to become sin in his heart, his thoughts, or his actions. Temptation that resists or rejects sin falls short of sin, while temptation that gives in to sin is sin.

When we are tempted and we dwell on committing that sin in our mind, imagining what it would feel

like to do it, thinking about what it could give to us, looking to that thing for fulfillment rather than obeying God, then temptation in the mind becomes a sin in the heart.

C.S. Lewis explained that Jesus' temptation to sin was greater than ours because the stakes were so high. I want to read to you what he said. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means.

That is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in.

[28 : 11] You find out the strength of the wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later.

This is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.

And Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. Jesus knew the depths and pains that we can never know because he did not sin.

And since he is so able and willing to sympathize with us, why would you go to anyone else for compassion in your time of need?

People spend a lot of time and energy trying to solicit compassion from others. Social media fuels that. People use platforms like that to put on display the reason why they deserve sympathy from other people.

[29 : 20] We have a deep desire for sympathy. Sometimes we truly need someone we can turn to who will listen to us, who will care for us, and who will understand.

But brother, sister, friend, the best person to turn to for sympathy and for compassion is Jesus Christ, who can relate to you and who has a never-ending amount of compassion to give to you. When you realize this, you are free from trying to solicit compassion for others. You don't need it from them anymore.

You have Jesus. You can be confident that in your time of need, he will have compassion on you if you are truly saved by him.

His compassion doesn't mean that the earthly consequences of your sinful actions will be removed, but he'll give you the strength to endure times of weakness. He will give you the strength in the moment of temptation to resist temptation.

[30 : 26] He will not leave you, and he will not forsake you. Be confident in his compassion. And then the third truth, be confident in the comfort of Jesus from verse 16.

Be confident in the comfort of Jesus. Verse 16 says, The Greek word translated as confidence has a long documented history in the Greek language.

It means freedom of speech or freedom to speak frankly. And if you think about it, you know this, we talk differently to different people. You talk differently to your parents than you do to your friends. You talk differently to your friends than you do somebody that you just met. You talk differently to your spouse than you do to your children. You talk differently to your best friend than you would your boss.

When I talk to my wife, my guard is completely down. She knows more about me than anybody, and amazingly, she still loves me. And I don't mean that as any offense to my mom, who I know is watching right now.

[31 : 41] You are one of those people too, mom, and I love you. But as much as they know, they don't know everything. God knows everything.

He knows everything. He knows how you're feeling. He knows why you're feeling that way. He knows what you're thinking.

He knows why you're thinking the way you're thinking. He knows everything about you. He knits you together in your mother's womb. He's given you life.

The air that you're breathing right now is His air. In Christ, we don't have to pretend to be something that we're not. Why would we? He already knows.

Why would we lie when He knows? We don't have to puff ourselves up before His eyes to make ourselves seem important to Him.

[32 : 42] We come freely. We come openly confessing our sin and seeking His help. And when we do that, what do we receive?

Well, we just read. His mercy and His grace. His mercy for our past failures and His grace for our present need.

James 4, 6-10 says, but He gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you. Now, I've shared before that there's been some things in my own life where I've just melted into the floor in prayer.

[33 : 57] Just on the ground, face in the carpet. God, I need your help. And in those moments, and there's nothing really more to the prayer than that.

God, I need your help. I need your help. Sometimes it might be just one of these verses, but I know what you say. You're my refuge.

I know that you say that you're the source of my strength. I need your help. I need you to be my source of strength right now. And in those times where I've risen to my feet, though, as far as I knew, my consequences hadn't changed at all.

My perspective of them had. God. And that's what God does. In our time of need, when we're being tempted, when we're feeling weak, that's the time to go.

That's the time to meet with our Lord, our high priest. That's the time to seek his help. And his promise is that he will provide it.

[35 : 06] If you don't know Jesus, I honestly, I don't, I couldn't imagine living in this world without knowing him.

With all the crazy things and all the crazy people who are in charge in this world, I can't imagine how you can sleep at night living in this world without the hope of Jesus Christ.

I don't know how, I cannot imagine in those times of help and those times of need when you are crushed by the results of your own sin or just living in this sinful world, how you would not have Jesus to turn to for help.

I can't understand what that would be like. And God has brought you here today. He knows you. He knows why you're hiding.

He knows why you're running. He knows the doubts. He knows, he knows you. And he's brought you here. I want you here this morning to give you this hope. To be your high priest.

[36 : 14] To atone for your sins. To give you his grace and his mercy. To give you a relationship with him now. That you would have that rest that those of us who are in Christ have.

And knowing that though the world seems to be falling apart, we know things are just falling into place. And that God is sovereign. And that Jesus will come back.

And he offers you today to come to him and be saved. For those of us who God has been gracious to save, how should we adjust to what we've heard? I think it's this.

In times of weakness and temptation, come to Jesus for help. When you feel weak, first thing, go to Jesus. When you feel tempted, first thing, go to Jesus.

Go to Jesus in your time of weakness. Go to Jesus in your time of temptation. And his promise to you from his word today is that he will help you.

[37 : 17] John chapter 1, the introduction there is one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible. And I want to read John 1, 14 through 17. We'll let God's word have the last word as he talks about the word of God, Jesus Christ.

And Jesus, the word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John bore witness about him and cried out, this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me. For from his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for you.

We're thankful again for what we've heard in your word about your work for us as our high priest. Lord, we're thankful that you emptied yourself to come to this earth that you created, fallen and cursed by sin, to live the sinless life that we could not live and to die on the cross to atone for our sins.

[38 : 42] And rising again on the third day, victorious over death, and Lord, sharing that victory with us, giving us eternal life, allowing us to enter your rest, giving us access to you, Lord, the moment we're saved from now and forever to be in your presence.

And Lord, during this life, we know that that we come to times where we feel weak. We certainly face temptation. Lord, help us to remember that in those times, the best thing to do, the first thing to do, the only thing to do is to go to you first.

And Lord, may we rest assured in the promise that we'll experience that when we do, we will find that you give mercy and that you give grace and that you do help us in our time of need.

In our time of need, Lord, in you, you do not turn us away. You don't tell us to go to somebody else. You don't ignore us. You help us in our time of need. And we thank you for that.

And so, God, I pray that we would be confident, not in ourselves, not in any other relationship that we have, but that our confidence would be in you, that we would be bold for you as we do your mission on this earth that you have called us to do until that day when you call us to go home with you and we'll no longer feel weakness and we'll no longer feel temptation.

[40 : 14] God, thank you for that truth and may we hold on to it throughout our days on this earth, giving you glory in our lives. And we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.