The Throne of Grace

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[0:00] We can turn to the passage read, the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 4, reading at verse 14. 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.
We've got a good many commentaries on the epistle to the Hebrews. Probably because it's a book that is of interest to myself and many Christians.
One of these books, I think, has the title, Our Man in Heaven. And the title, I suppose, is something that many Christian believers draw attention to.
[1:24] The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is now in glory. He is at the right hand of God, as this passage reminds us.

But he is not there as a disembodied spirit. He is there as a glorified human. The God-man. But a glorified God-man.
One of the Scottish divines of old who pointed out that one of the most wonderful things, as far as he was concerned, was that the dust of the ground was sat upon the throne of the universe.
Maybe you don't agree with such a sentiment. But nothing is clearer from God's word than this, that the Lord Jesus Christ is not resident in any shape or form in a grave.
He is risen from the dead. The grave is empty. He now resides in heaven.
[2:48] He is risen and glorified, as someone put it, at the right hand of the majesty on high. And he is there to represent his people.

The children of God, his church here on earth. Not saying that's the only role that he has, but certainly he has that representative role as the great high priest of his people.
Now, this letter, this epistle was written, I believe, for the main part to Jews, converted Jews. People who were formerly worshippers of God through the medium of the Jewish religion.
And many of them were converted to Christianity. And they are encouraged in this epistle to see the glories that accompany the New Testament era.
And one of their trials, one of their problems was that they were so taken up with their own former form of religion that was so heavily dependent upon their own activity and their own involvement in the sacrificial system in the various types and shadows that pointed forward to Christ.
[4:20] And yet they took their comfort from their involvement in the type and the shadow. And the role of the apostle in this letter is to point to the Lord Jesus Christ as the one in whom these types and shadows have been fulfilled.

He is a crucified and yet a glorified saviour. He experienced the shame of the cross, but now he enjoys the honour of someone who has been exalted to the right hand of God.
He is there, according to this epistle, as the great high priest of his people. Now, I want us this evening to think of the encouragement that God's people are given in this passage to remember that fact and to be encouraged to approach God because they have this confidence that there is one who pleads their cause in his presence.
The writer Tom Evans suggests that Jesus, the Son of God, as he knows him, is Jesus, the man who has in his humanity the capacity to minister to his people here in this world.
He is able to minister to them because he can feel the things that they feel and understand them and understand them in a way that his humanity allows him to.

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[6:29] But as God, he not only understands what his people are going through, he is able to put right what is wrong.

Or as Evans puts it, he is able to fix what makes us feel the way we feel. In this passage, we see that he is described to us as someone who has compassion.
Not one of us should doubt that. Not one of us should wonder at the ability that he has to show compassion to his people here in this world.
Someone has written the following. It is Jesus' separateness from and sensitivity to sin that actually increases his ability to sympathize with us.
He understands what we are struggling with. Now, I wonder if you believe that. I have had a discussion with plenty of Christians who question the words of this passage that we have read concerning the testing of Christ, the temptations of Christ.
[7:45] How could Christ truly experience temptation? If on one hand he is described to us in the scripture as the holy, harmless, undefiled, sinless, son of God, someone who has no knowledge of sin experientially, how can he know what it is to be tempted?

Because their understanding of temptation is entirely from the point of view of someone who has been tempted by way of sin and succumbed to it.
And that's their understanding. Perhaps it's your understanding of how sin is and how temptation is in the experience of people in the world.
But that's not temptation in the sense that Christ experienced it. When you see his temptations in the wilderness, for example, he was tempted by the devil.
He was tempted as a person who was hungry to eat food supplied by his own doing.
[9:08] Now, the temptation was not in eating, but in the manner in which he was at the devil's prompting to supply it.

But I want us to look at what we have here this evening and look at the encouragement that the apostle gives to the Christian to come when they are in need to the place where need can be met.
And the encouragement that is given to come to that very place comes from the knowledge that we have of the person to whom we come.
We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one in every respect who has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
He understands our weaknesses. He understands our temptation. And the fact that that is stated clearly to us in this way is something we need to take on board.
[10:24] And he is saying this to everybody. He is saying this to anybody. Come one, come all, come to this place with your burning need of succor or encouragement or support or a word in season as you find it supplied.

This is where you are to come. So there are three things I want to emphasize, as is emphasized by the apostle here.
He says to us that we are to come with confidence. The authorized version, I think, says we are to come with boldness.
We are to come with confidence. Secondly, we are told where we are to come to. We are to come to a throne of grace.
And thirdly, what we are to expect when we do come there. We can expect grace.
[11:30] We can expect mercy and grace to help in time of need. These words we quote often. These words we often have in our mouth when we come before God in prayer.

But how much of what lies at their heart do we actually lay hold of?
How much do we actually believe what we are encouraged to do here as being something that we ought to do, something that we can do without embarrassment, without fear, without drawing back from doing it?
Do you not think it is a very remarkable thing to be able to hear or to read of such an invitation, to come with confidence, to come with boldness?
One thing that I think affects a lot of Christian people is their own sense of sin.
[12:51] However much we are aware of what Christ has done for us, sometimes we ourselves are our worst enemies when it comes to recognising the bliss that we have as Christians.

We are all too aware of our shortcomings at times. And we are not wrong, I suppose, in recognising that we do get things wrong and that we do wrong things.

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And that we are guilty before God for not living up to our profession as Christians. And that there are many areas of our life when we feel embarrassment about our shortcomings, even in the things that we should be getting right.
But that should not keep us back from coming to God, even though it does at times.
Come, he says, because you are coming to the one who is equipped to deal with whatever it is that you're coming with.
[14:12] Whatever your need may be, whatever your fear may be, whatever it is that you feel is a burden that would forbid you from coming, these are the very things that ought to make you come because of the one to whom you are coming.

However, when we think of it in practical ways, maybe we've experienced frustration at a human level. Maybe we've had some kind of problem in our lives, in the home or in the family, some medical problem, and we've gone to seek advice and we've tried to identify what that problem is. And maybe we've been fobbed off or maybe we've been misdirected or maybe we have not felt that our true need has been identified or met in the way that we would like it to be.
Maybe we've gone to see a specialist and that specialist has not really got to grips with our problem as we have perceived it.
Maybe when we've had an issue with the local council and we've gone there with our problem and we've gone to an office and we've produced our piece of paper and said, look, this is wrong, put it right.
[15:44] And they've said, well, I can't do anything about this, they'll put you somewhere else. That's just the experience of life. Sometimes, whatever our problem may be, it may be put right instantly.

It may be we go to the right person. It may be we get the right redress. Yes, we may find what issue we have been dealt with in the manner in which we wanted to be dealt with, but not always.
But it is always the case that when we come before the Lord Jesus Christ and present our need to him, it is not because he is unable to meet that need that he does not do what we expect him to do, although that may be something.
That we feel is the case. Sometimes we have burdens, sometimes we have issues going on in our life or in the lives of loved ones.
We come to Christ with them and we make them known and we think, well, very often we think, this is the answer to our problem and this is the way we expect him to answer.
[17:00] rather than coming and presenting our need to him and surrendering all knowledge that we have or perceived knowledge that we have or yielding it entirely into his hands and say, whatever it seems good to you.

If you went to the General Assembly, for example, there are many premises that you have to make if you are presenting a petition before the General Assembly and at the end of the long list of things that you ask for, you say to the General Assembly, or whatsoever it seems good for you to do. That's words to that effect. You couch the terms of your petition in this way. You come asking for something and you say, at the end of it all, well, if the General Assembly is pleased to respond to my petition favorably, or whatever.
How much we need to come to Christ with that. Come recognizing, first of all, that he is willing to meet with us and that when we come to him, that we are willing for him to do whatever it is that he sees fit in order to meet our need.
And if we are not content to ask him to give us the light that we need upon the answer that he has given, that we may not see us fitting ourselves.
[18:45] The American, the late writer Bob Gass, one of his small booklets that used to do the rounds, he wrote the following.

I don't often agree with what he says anyway, and some of the things he says I disagree with quite strongly, but he wrote the following. As long as you see God as an auditor before whom your books never balance, or a teacher whose classes you dread and whose tests you can never pass, or as a parent who punishes you but never affirms you, you won't come boldly, you won't come confidently, you won't come with the confidence of someone who is recognizing that the passion you're coming to is able to respond.
He goes further and says, you probably won't come at all. If you already have a preconceived idea of the passion that you're going to, is either going to be unwilling or unable, or that the answer that

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you want is not an answer that will be supplied by him, or the answer that he supplies will not be the answer that you want him to supply, then you choose perhaps not to come.
That's not what's written here. We do have a high priest who is, do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
In other words, the knowledge that he has of us and our experience is such that we can come to him confident that when we do come, he knows just where we are and where we're coming from.
[20:43] Now, remember who was saying this. He is the great high priest who is able to do that. Your sympathetic mediator, your advocate, the one who is the great high priest of his people, is someone who is in a relationship with them before God and on their behalf, acting in the presence of God.

And your boldness, as you are encouraged to have it, is two-edged. You come to him. Why? On the basis of who you are?
No, you come first of all because of who he is. You come because he has asked you to come. This is words to his people, words addressed to his people, inviting them to come to him.
And you come secondly because you know that having asked you to come, you can believe that he will receive you, that he is willing to receive you, and that he is someone that will not go back upon his word.
Now, you have to ask yourself the question, when we access a throne of grace, when we come to the place that God has appointed, where we are able as Christians to bow our knees and to petition the highest court in heaven, are we persuaded that we will receive a hearing and that whatever the response to that hearing will be, will be the best for us.
[22:49] You know, sometimes we feel if we pray that our prayer is not heard, the basis of our conclusion is that God has not responded to the prayer.

Now, in that respect, it must mean that our expectation as we pray is that there must be an instant response to pray, an instant response to the prayer.
Now, when you read through the statements made by Christ, there are occasions when he teaches his people not only to pray, but to demonstrate perseverance in prayer.
The prayer of the importunate widow, the prayer of the widow who came before her master, the person was in debt.
And the picture described by Christ is not someone who is willing to come once, but to continue to come, to continue to come until that hearing is given.
[24:07] Now, when we have such an invitation as this, there is the confidence to come because of who we are coming to, you, there is the confidence to come because he has invited us to come, there is the confidence to come because of the certainty and the persuasion that we have that he will deal with us, not as we think we should be dealt with, but in the light of the wisdom that his alone is.

an American writer that I often refer to, and in many eyes he is quite a severe person, I think he died in the 60s, A.W.
Tozer, and he was quite scathing in much of what he wrote, probably with good reason, but he was reckoned to be a prophet of his own generation.
But he wrote this, and I want you to hear what he wrote. You probably won't agree with what he said, but I will state it anyway. He says, we go to church and we look bored, even when we are supposed to be singing God's praises.
We look bored because we are bored. If the truth were known, we are bored with God, but we are too pious to admit it.
[25:32] I think God would love it, if some honest soul would begin his or her prayer by admitting God, I am praying because I know I should, but the truth is I do not want to pray.

I am bored with the whole thing. Maybe you don't believe that somebody who is a Christian writer of some considerable merit, would actually accuse a Christian of being bored with God.
But the point that he is making really is this, at the heart of it anyway, is the fact that the person praying to God does not really believe that the God he is praying to is going to listen or going to answer because he's already done this emptying times before without much success.
And it can't really be the case that the God that he's praying to even in this case, the great high priest of his people, will bother to listen or bother to answer.

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Now that is the case. If Tosa was even half right, if even half of it prayers have got such a skewed view of how God responds to the prayer of his people, then there is something seriously wrong.
[27:07] Now what Jesus is saying here through the apostle is that we should have the confidence to come because we are invited to come and because the place that we are coming to, is our throne.

It is a place upon which the one sat is the son of the most high God. David Clarkson writes the following, it is your privilege, speaking to Christian, to be free.
Christ has made you welcome. Security without fearfulness, confidence without doubting, liberty, without restraint. Does that describe you?
If you are a Christian, have you got this confidence based upon the knowledge that you have that if the son of God has made you free, then you are free indeed.
need, and as a free born citizen of the kingdom of heaven, that you have the right of access to a throne of grace, to meet there with Christ who welcomes you and encourages you to come and plead his merits in order to gain a response that meets your need.
[28:31] well, where do you go? This place tells you. It tells you go to a throne of grace. It is a throne.

Most obviously it tells us that the one sitting on the throne has authority. We know this one who sits on the throne to be the king of kings, the lord of lords, and yet he is also the priest after the order of Melchizedek.
and he is able to deal with this on the basis of merits that he himself has gained.
Merits that are aroused by virtue of his finished work. He is at the right hand of God occupying this throne because God has been pleased to receive what Christ has done on behalf of his people.
there is another throne spoken of. You know that, don't you? There is a throne of judgment. He sits on that throne and one day, very soon, far sooner than any one of us gives any thought to, we will be summoned before that throne to give account to him for our actions in the flesh, good and evil.
[29:57] people. But at this point, we are encouraged to believe that this is a different throne, a throne where we are encouraged to come to receive from him as his sons, as his daughters, what we could never gain for ourselves, what we would never work for ourselves, what we would never in any way accumulate for ourselves, what he provides.

And what does he provide? Well, that we may receive mercy and that we may receive grace to help in time of need.
Where's the priority there for you? What do you think is most important? That you receive mercy or that you receive grace to help in time of need?
Maybe we shouldn't split here or there. There is not a Christian present who doesn't need mercy.
I've often told the story of someone who was so self-reliant that he felt that all that he needed from God on the day of judgment was that God would deal with him on the basis of his own righteousness.
Whatever that he did, whatever he perceived his actions were, as long as God dealt with him on the basis of that, he felt secure. God was he and how wrong?
[31:46] How wrong was he? Because you and I know, if we're Christians, we know that if God does not deal with us on the basis of his mercy, we're lost.

It's not because of anything that I've done or that I'm hoping to do yet, and there are some here who are very much of the mind that yet they'll have the opportunity to accumulate enough credit before God for him to say, well done, good and faithful servant.
It's a nonsense unless what God recognizes in your life is first and foremost a genuine and a wholehearted trust in the finished work of Christ Jesus.
I mentioned in the morning the divine Don Carson. He was in one of his writings speaking about something we don't like to talk about, but something we should talk about more often.
He was talking about spiritual declension. Spiritual declension not of an individual but of a nation.
And he saw it in the history of Israel.
[33:09] how Israel backslid. And this was his opinion. And it was his opinion.

The church, he said, is never more than a generation or two from apostasy and oblivion. Do you think he's too extreme in his opinion?
He stated again, the church is never more than a generation or two from apostasy and oblivion. Did he leave it at that?

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No, he said, only the grace of God is a hedge against it. only the grace of God. And that's what's true.
John Bunyan has written in a book, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. He spoke of his own personal experience, but it was grace that he was able to speak about.
[34:20] Speak about the mercy of God in Christ Jesus that ring fenced him from the potential that was in his heart to self-destruct as in the heart of every Christian believer.

Now, is that not, you would think, enough reason for us to come to this place, to this throne of grace, and plead for mercy, and grace to help in time of need?
What is your time of need? What is my time of need? Do we have one this evening? Is there any pressing need that we have that makes us think, this is where I must come?
Are we waiting for such a time? Are we thinking to ourselves, there may be yet something that will require me to come, but not yet, not now?
But that's not what the apostles say. He's saying, let us then come with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
[35:43] Oh, time of need is every time, all times. We are needy sinners in this world that is sick with sin.

And the throne that is before us reminds us that provision is made for us in Christ. He meets the needs of the poorest. He needs the meat of the weakest.
he meets the need of the most broken. He meets the need of whoever it is that has an experience of their own emptiness to meet the challenges of every day upon our lives.
one thing we have been doing in our own congregation and will be doing for a while is focusing on the prayer of God's people.
The prayer or the prayers of God's people, the need for it, the ongoing requirement for each of us as God's people to be much in prayer for ourselves, for our church, for our community, for those in our communities that know nothing of God.
[37:09] And we need to remind ourselves of that need, and we need to avail ourselves of the provision made for us. But it was written many years ago by Martin Luther, something that you and I need to remind ourselves of.

When we think of a past generation who were busy, busy, busy with all kinds of things, they were never too busy to pray, which seems ironic when you think of the opportunities that we have with our modern society that should give us more time for many things, but we're still too busy, often too busy to pray.
But Luther said this, I have so much to do today, I will not be able to do it, he said, unless I spent three hours in prayer.
Unless I spent three hours in prayer. He was so busy, and yet in order for him to fulfill his business, that's what he needed to do. Now, maybe you don't have three hours to spare.
Most definitely, I say, I don't have three hours to spare. That's the argument I would make. But maybe that's the very thing that should warn me, that that thought is itself a debilitating thought.
[38:45] When Christ says to us that we are to come with confidence, come with boldness, come to him as he is at the right hand of God, sitting on the throne with the authority and the power and the ability to do for me what no other can.

And I think there are many Christians, if you read books on prayer, they'll tell you, the more time you give to prayer, the more time you have to do for God.
the more time that you have that you didn't think that you had, which seems quite at odds with what we would expect.
Christ, through the apostle, encourages us. And isn't it good that that encouragement is to everyone? God. I've often heard that many people prayed before they came to faith.
I was encouraged as a child to pray, although looking back, these prayers were slavish, these prayers were probably empty and hollow, and very much the product of a tender conscience.
[40:20] But even so, we should not neglect a word that encourages us to come to Christ, come to a living, risen, exalted saviour, praying to him for his reception of our petitions, and for a response that he alone is able to give.

And we can do so without embarrassment, without fear, without any sense of being in the wrong place, because this place is open to all.

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Believer, even an unbeliever, because the confidence that you can put in Christ ensures that you can come to him. Let us pray.

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