

# Hebrews 4:14-16 “Draw Near the Throne of Grace”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! We are going to hear that same invitation from God's Word this morning. It's a beautiful, amazing, hope-filled passage.

Hebrews chapter 4 verses 14 through 16. Remember as you turn there in your Bibles that you are dealing with and holding in your hands something so powerful.

Living and active Word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword that pierces to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow to expose the thoughts and intentions of your heart.

Maybe even some you didn't know were there. He's going to show you this morning. This is His Word. Hebrews 4 at verse 14.

[ 1 : 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.

Let's go to Him together now. Father, we are here to acknowledge that that's who we are, those who stand in need of You.

Oh, Father, for so many reasons. We hardly know how to count them or name them. And yet You promise that we can come and that this morning again we will find mercy and grace.

[ 2 : 23 ] And so would You use Your Word by Your Spirit to meet with us now. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The verses that we just read together begin a long section of Hebrews that talks about Jesus as the great high priest greater than any other.

So we're going to be revisiting that theme. Okay, get used to that. I think at the beginning of it, it's worth asking something that you may think when you hear that.

You may be thinking, why would I need a priest? It's a good question. A priest is someone who represents you before God.

Who stands in God's presence on your behalf. And perhaps then in our ruggedly individualistic culture, some might think, oh, well, then no bother.

I'll stand up for myself. You know, I don't really need a representative. God and I are cool. I mean, we're fine. Well, remember some of what the old covenant people of God would have been unable to forget.

[ 3 : 50 ] Even though we were made for close relationship with God, he is holy, holy, holy, as we sang earlier.

He is totally other and above us. In fact, the Bible says he dwells in unapproachable light.

But try to approach and you'll find out. You'll find out God is a consuming fire. Flashes of lightning and peals of thunder.

They'd witnessed it. These people of God had seen it happen. For most of the Old Testament, access to God personally was by one man, once a year, with a rope tied around his ankle in case you needed to drag his body back out.

Ever since Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden and it was guarded by flaming swords to keep them out. Access to God is much more like a no trespassing sign.

[ 4 : 59 ] Beware of God on the fence, right? The first people reading Hebrews knew that they needed someone to represent them before God.

They wouldn't dare to have come on their own. They needed someone to bring a sacrifice on their behalf, to speak for them before the judge. Watch enough people get burned and you might want someone to stand in for you too.

Would you really want to put your record of mixed motives and inconsistent performance, up and down, living, before a perfectly holy, righteous, just God?

Just take your chances, see how it goes. Your life is on the line. He said, eternity. Do you really want to represent yourself? Or would you like a priest?

And you may say, oh, pastor, but you're not any better than I am. No, that's exactly right. I'm not a priest. Not like that. I need one too.

[ 6 : 17 ] We all do. And the writer to the Hebrews says, you have one. You have a great high priest.

It's not hypothetical. It's not potential. Maybe one day, someday you might get. It's relational reality. If you have trusted Jesus by faith.

If you have claimed him as your substitute, as your representative before God. We have a great high priest. Let's just stop there.

Before I go on, let me just ask you. Do you? Do you? Do you? Do you have a great high priest?

Do you have Jesus as priest? I didn't say, do you identify as a Christian? I didn't say, do you go to church sometimes?

[ 7 : 19 ] I didn't say, do you feel like you deserve good representation before God? Listen, this is a case where if you do not have a representative, one will not be assigned to you by heaven.

You will stand on your own before the judgment seat of God, before his holy throne. You say, but what if I can't afford good legal representation to speak well for me?

Listen, there's good news. The best in the business is absolutely free. You just claim him as yours. You just get to look him up and pick him and he's yours.

If you haven't personally asked Jesus to represent you before God, you can do that today. And if you're not sure you want to yet, I'd invite you to keep listening.

I hope you will. Keep listening. God's going to tell us why Jesus is the best option. The one I need, the one you need. What kind of priest do we have in Jesus?

[ 8 : 33 ] Well, he's unstoppable. Jesus is a great high priest in ways that we are going to unpack over several chapters in Hebrews.

This is only the start, but the first thing we're told here is that he has passed through the heavens.

This refers to Jesus' ascension from earth back to his father's glory.

Most high priests, they would pass through a curtain in the temple into the holy of holies where God dwells on earth.

But this is different. Jesus passed through the heavens to stand in the very presence, the high and holy throne room of God.

That room where there's no trespassing, right? No human goes before God's awesome glory. But Jesus has security clearance, high level access to God himself.

[ 9 : 46 ] He is seated at his right hand in his majesty in glory. That's the representative that you have in Jesus.

It's like the difference between Jesus and the other priests would be like the difference between saying, you have seen the resolute desk that the president sits behind.

But you've actually only been beside a copy in a presidential library instead of having stood in the White House's oval office in front of the desk with the president of the United States sitting behind it and speaking directly to you.

That's the difference. Jesus has passed not into the copy of God's throne room, but into the throne room itself.

I'm going to keep showing you this picture that I've showed you multiple times before because I think that we all struggle to believe that we have this kind of access to God.

[ 10 : 58 ] That is the actual resolute desk. With underneath it, someone, no one was allowed to stop from going to it.

Right under the nose of the POTUS, JFK himself, and this little guy just keeps walking in there. Who is it? That's John Jr., right?

Unstoppable. With unlimited access to the president. Why? You know why? Because he's his son. See, Jesus' access to the Father is not merely unstoppable. It is unparalleled because he is the one and only son of God.

Look at that. Jesus, his human name, the son of God, highlighting his divine standing.

[12:02] Jesus is alive today in glorified flesh and blood before the throne of heaven. And because he is the son of God, you can be absolutely certain that he will never be kicked out.

He will never have his access denied. That is a great priest to have in your corner, isn't it? The next verse highlights one more thing that makes Jesus a great high priest for us.

He's understanding. Double negative for emphasis here. Not a high priest who's unable to relate, to sympathize.

No, that's not who Jesus is. But one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Now, some object. Jesus hasn't faced the temptations associated with being a woman. With being a married man.

[13:14] With being a 21st century American in a digital world. That's a fair point. It's not saying here that he has personally endured every specific situation that you might find yourself in.

But rather, that he has personally experienced and then understands all the ways that people are tempted. In other words, you could think about it like the three classic forms of temptation that Satan uses.

Starting with Adam and Eve. And then when he tempts Jesus. And then us. The lust of the flesh. Right? Eat the apple. It tastes good.

Or Jesus, turn that stone to bread. You're hungry. The second one is the lust of the eyes. It looked pleasing, didn't the fruit.

It looked pleasing. Or Jesus, come here and look at all the kingdoms of the world. They could be yours. The pride of life.

[14:30] They saw the fruit and they thought, I could gain wisdom. We could be like God. Or Jesus, throw yourself down and angels will come and catch you and it'll prove your position, your divine status.

See that the same types of temptations that we face. I mean, just think of all of the ways just being human and experiencing this world tempts us to sin.

What kinds of things do you face all the time? Jesus has faced grief, hunger, thirst, pain, sickness, betrayal, hatred.

All of which tempt us to turn from God to think only of ourselves. To pursue our own path to comfort, to pleasure, to success.

Jesus, specifically in the garden, is tempted this way to insist on his own way, to prioritize his own will and what he wants. Jesus was tempted from an early age to disrespect his parents.

[15:47] You ever felt that? Jesus was unjustly accused. So he was tempted to respond vengefully and selfishly to avoid suffering.

Jesus has lived in a friend group with relational tension. Jesus has dealt with family dynamics and sibling rivalry.

He's faced rejection even from people he loved. Listen, he knows, doesn't he? He understands. He gets us, as the ad campaign points out.

He's faced temptation. He's faced temptation. And yet, he was without sin. Which doesn't mean it was easier for him.

What does that mean about temptation? It actually means he faced temptation longer and deeper than those of us who give in. Doesn't it? It also means there's hope, thankfully.

[16:53] He could deal with all of those struggles and still never sin? Yes. He's stronger than the enemy that's attacking me and tempting me?

Yes, he is. But you mean, but he still doesn't think that I'm ridiculous for struggling and that this is really hard? He doesn't want to shame me for failing?

He doesn't want to run me off for being so weak? Yes, it's true. He's like that. This is the high priest that we need, isn't it? One who understands and yet loves.

Well, that's who we have. We don't have to dream about the possibility. That's the high priest we have. Praise the Lord, right?

Trust him now. You can have this great high priest. He can be yours too. And so the writer says, there are two things.

[17:53] For anyone who has this great high priest that must be different in your life as a result. Two things in the first one we already covered last week, so you're off easy.

Hold fast to Jesus. Remember that? Verse 14. Let us hold fast our confession. We let go of our resumes. We cling to Jesus' record and we rest in him. Specifically here, don't drift from him by changing what you believe about him. You've said he's the perfect messenger from God, the radiance of God's glory, the human, divine, great high priest. Well, he is. He really will save you. Hold fast to the one who holds fast to you. Oh, that's the exhortation. And that sounds great. [18:57] And we like that message. But I think for many of us in our lives, practically, we tend to stop there oftentimes, don't we?

Maybe you don't go through this process, but we live kind of like this. It's good to know that Jesus is up there in the throne room of God, that he has access, that he can represent terrible old me who could never stand on my own.

You know, I see you up there, Jesus. You're saving people. Great job. That's awesome. I'm going to stay way off over here myself, hoping that God doesn't notice me much.

You do your thing up there in the throne room. You've done so much better than I could, Jesus. Jesus, and see, see, that's not untrue, so it's really easy to think.

But it's actually far less than what it means to have Jesus as your priest. Look at verse 16. There is a life-changing.

[20:11] That's a reality that might help you one day, someday. This will help you today. Beautiful. Let us then with confidence stand far off and cheer for Jesus.

Is that what it says? Let's go back. 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.

Do you see what has happened now in Jesus? Something entirely different. God's throne, that holy throne where you would have deserved judgment, is now a throne of grace where undeserving people get what?

Good things and more good things. The place marked beware of God now says belong with God. The full, never denied access that the Son has to the throne is shared with you.

If he won't get kicked out, you won't get kicked out. You belong where Jesus does, near to his Father. In fact, calling his Father, what?

[21:24] Our Father. Child of God. Draw near. Right? Draw near. Draw near. What?

How do I do that? The word means keep coming close. Live there in his presence.

Never stop drawing near to God and his throne of grace. See, we're needy. Not just we were once upon a time. We are needy.

And when we draw near to him, we will, he says, find mercy and grace. Anybody who draws near with Jesus as his high priest finds mercy and grace.

The words in this context mean mercy for your weaknesses and your sins. Not punishment.

[22:25] Not guilt. Not shame. Forgiveness. Pardon. Mercy.

Every time. Every time that's what you get. And then grace to help in time of need. What kind of grace is that? The Bible talks about grace a lot.

This is grace to strengthen you against temptation. To meet you in your grief. To comfort you in your pain. To secure you in your doubts.

To assure you in your fears. To calm you in your anxieties. Whatever it is that you need. Right when you need it. Because he knows perfectly.

And remember what we've already learned in Hebrews. Jesus, how does he feel about you? He's not ashamed to call you brother or sister. He understands your weakness.

[23:23] Your struggle. Your hurt. And he says, not shame on you. He says there's grace made just for that. It's yours. I have purchased your access to the throne of grace.

To this God of grace. I've purchased it for you. So draw near. I mean, can you imagine if you had a friend. Maybe you don't even have a friend this good. But imagine your friend bought you a ticket to the big game.

Come with me. Got you a VIP backstage pass to the concert of your favorite band ever. Now imagine that you just said, no, I'm going to stay at home.

What? Are you kidding me? How sad. How ungrateful. See, what we must not do is despise the cross and resurrection of Jesus and treat it as though it is not enough for weak and sinful people like us.

No, no, no. Don't do that. He's warning us against that. Don't doubt this forgiveness and stay all your life kind of hiding at a distance. No. Don't live paying with guilt and shame a debt that Jesus has paid all of already.

[ 24 : 47 ] And you're just hoping to kind of maybe one day slip into heaven. But you have full access today to this God in Jesus' son.

Don't live life on your own thinking that it's all up to you to manage temptation, to come up with a new strategy, to be strong enough. When he is inviting you with him, remember, united to Christ. He's inviting you into the throne room of the one who causes Satan to flee and his demons to shudder. Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. His grace is sufficient.

And his power is made perfect exactly where you're worried it won't be, in your weakness. That power that could consume you can comfort you.

That transcendent far above and beyond you, God, is actually also imminent right here for you. His power made perfect in your weakness.

[ 25 : 51 ] Draw near. Draw near. Draw near. Don't mess up your microphone. But it's worth it. It's really a life of prayer that he's inviting us into, urging us into, isn't it?

I'm not talking about some formal kind of rote process or time where you have to go say these words. I'm talking about a warm relationship.

I want you to have this picture. Prayer isn't always sitting under your desk. You can hear me. You can hear me even when I whisper.

You hear me whether my words are beautifully organized or not. That kind of prayer. Has it been too long since you've been regularly under that desk with your Father?

Y'all, let's pray often. Joyfully. Joyfully. Desperately. And especially, the preacher here says to us, with confidence.

[ 27 : 06 ] Confidence. Confidence. I usually get confidence from myself. This is confidence not because of your record or your performance or your knowledge, but because you're looking at Jesus.

You're seeing him there in the throne room. You're knowing that he understands me. You're believing that he forgives me. See, Pastor Andrew Murray says when that happens, this means we should have an unhesitating assurance that nothing can hinder us from the very presence of God. That word for confidence, it's actually the freedom of speech word in Greek. You can come to him and say honestly what is on your heart because you know you need him desperately.

You can come to him for anything, big or small, or I don't even know. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace for our lives to go like this.

I'm praying right when I wake up, guide me today. I'm praying as you work, strengthen me. Praying around town, give me your eyes, Father.

[ 28 : 28 ] Praying when you wander off, forgive me. Praying for your family, give me grace and love. Praying for others, have mercy on them, Father.

They're hurting, they're sick. Praying when you're tempted, help me trust you and then obey.

Praying at meals, thank you, my provider.

And praying as you prepare to lie down to rest. Give me rest, help me sleep. Help me trust you.

Draw near all the time.

Every moment, right? I want to give you one more picture of this that I love, not just because it's from Clemson, although that helps.

The Clemson Life program is designed to give students with intellectual disabilities a college experience and to prepare them for life afterwards.

[ 29 : 32 ] But Charlie McGee, a student with Down syndrome, said he wanted a little bit more than what he was getting. He wanted the full access college experience complete with a fraternity.

A couple years ago, he became the first Clemson Life student to join a fraternity on campus, which is awesome. But I want to show you his reaction when his bid is announced, narrated by this CBS News reporter.

Thank you. I don't know how he got there. He was so excited. He ran out of his last year. He ran out of his left shoe into the arms of his new fraternity brothers.

And the story goes on to show their love for one another. And it ends with Charlie saying, something magical happens when you're accepted that fully.

When he's there with his brothers, he says, it's like my disability doesn't exist. Do you hear that?

[ 30 : 58 ] With confidence. He draws near to those who love him. That's our story with God.

Because of our great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, he so delights to give us good gifts that when we're with him, something magical happens.

It's like our weakness, our disability, our failing doesn't exist because it's so covered by his grace.

We are so fully accepted. What a great priest. Why would I miss ever this priest?

How could you not want to run out of your left shoe into the loving arms of your new heavenly

father? I want to take a few minutes to do that together as we close this morning.

[ 32 : 06 ] I don't know all of the needs in here today. I know some of them. It's enough to fill my heart.

And there are a lot more I don't know. I know there are some of you here who are hurting physically or emotionally, both.

Others are battling temptation every day. Others, you're feeling overwhelmed at the size of the decision or situation.

That you're facing. I don't know how you'd describe how you're feeling. But I'd love for all of us to draw near to the throne of grace together.

We often need one another for that. It can be hard to do this on your own. And this passage actually says, let us. The implication is this is a group activity that you're also invited into personally.

[ 33 : 12 ] So we're going to do that now. It's kind of weird for Presbyterians. I understand that. But that's the kind of family we want to be here. We want to take time to take one another to the throne of grace.

And we're going to spend a few minutes praying and singing and praying. When we stand to sing in just a minute, some of our elders and prayer team leaders are going to come down to the four corners of the sanctuary.

Where you'll be able to see them. And they're coming to pray with you. They would love to. There will be men and women in each of those places. You can come forward or back.

As I understand some of you would prefer. As we sing. You can ask for prayer when you come. For something specific. Feel free to share that.

Or you don't have to have words. You can just come and ask for prayer. And they're happy to pray.

But I figured if I was going to tell you to run out of your left shoe into the loving arms of your father.

[ 34 : 22 ] That ought to give you a chance to do it while you're right here. You can do that to be clear. This is not manipulating you. You can run into the arms of your father while you sit in a pew.

Okay? That is totally acceptable. And I hope this sanctuary is covered with empty left shoes. Here in just a minute.

Let's stand and sing together. Come boldly to the throne of grace. And you just feel free to come forward anytime you would like as we sing through this song.

There are multiple verses. And I'll give us some breaks in between. But you can come right in the midst as we sing. You can come right now to any of the four corners. Jesus, thank you.

Thank you for an invitation that does not expire. Thank you for being our great high priest.

[ 35 : 30 ] The one who meets us and our weaknesses and who strengthens us with his grace for everything. Keep meeting us.

Give us grace to extend the welcome we've received to others. They may feel your grace as well. We give you thanks in your name. Amen.

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