

Hebrews 4:14-16

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[0 : 00] Friends, there's a feast downstairs waiting for us after the service, but we have a feast first here in God's Word.

So I hope you will join with me. If you want to pull out your Bibles, you can turn the page. I think it's 1001. It's in your bulletin. It's the book of Hebrews chapter 4, which is where we'll be looking this morning.

I've been thinking a lot about people in need. I got a text message email late last night, and yes, I was still awake, late last night from some friends who were serving with the State Department over in Asia, saying that their third child seems to want to come early, but is coming slowly.

They'd been in the hospital for over 36 hours. The delivery was not progressing. They were struggling with language issues, and they asked for us to pray.

I thought, what a difficult situation to be in, in a foreign country not speaking the language of those who are caring for you in such an important time.

[1 : 36] I've been reading and thinking much about the Philippines and what people there are facing day to day.

No food, no shelter. The grief of loss of family members. If you haven't educated yourself on how terrible the situation is, you should, so that you can pray, so that you can know.

I've also been reading, this is a book by a woman named Johnny Erickson Tata. If you're not familiar with her, she is an author and speaker.

Her life story talks about how when she was 17, she suffered a spinal cord injury and was paralyzed from the neck down, and she has lived with that for 40 years.

The remarkable thing about this book is that it's not talking about that. She says, I've kind of gotten accustomed to that, and at least I've learned how to live with that.

[2 : 41] But in the last couple of years, I've started to experience debilitating pain, pain that won't go away, pain that the medicine can only dull. And then in the postscript of the book, she mentions, oh, friends, will you join with me?

I was just diagnosed with cancer. We'll hear from her later, but I've been thinking about people in need. Obviously, the things that I've mentioned are more extreme cases, but maybe you felt in need, like I have this week.

I know that this week, I have been overwhelmed by the tasks that I think I ought to get done. and simply wanting to do my work well, care for my family, walk with Jesus, and I felt completely overwhelmed and unable to do those things.

You may be facing all sorts of crises or challenges, places where you realize, I need help. Friends, whether they're big or small, that's real.

It's a real issue. And you know, I don't know if you're like me, but I don't like being there. I don't like being needy. I like to be self-sufficient. I like the American dream of the self-made man.

[4 : 06] I can pull myself up by the bootstraps. I can handle anything. I don't like to have to need someone else. It makes me feel vulnerable.

And it's confusing and bewildering. We wonder, who will help us? Is there someone out there who will? We wonder, does anyone care about the things that I'm facing that are greater than me, that are bigger than me?

And you know, the funny thing about it is that if you're a Christian, it's almost more challenging, isn't it, sometimes, when you face those times of need. Because you realize that we believe in a God who made the universe.

We believe in a God who says He's sovereign over everything. Not only that, we believe that He's a God who loves. And so when we find ourselves in a time of need, we wonder, does God really

care?

We wonder, is He really able to help us? Friends, there's good news. Our passage today points us to how we answer those questions.

[5 : 24] Points us to one who meets us in that time of need in deep and profound and wonderful ways. So if you want to read with me, we're going to look at Hebrews chapter 4, verses 14 through 16.

I'm going to read the passage together and then we'll pray. 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. 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.

Please pray with me. God, we confess this morning that we are needy and it's hard to confess that at times.

[6 : 41] Lord, we don't like it and yet it is true. So, Lord, we come to you as needy people this morning. Needy for your help, needy for your guidance, needy for your presence, most of all, needy for your salvation.

God, we pray this morning that you would help us. Help us see you and know that you are there and that you do care.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You know, as we look at this passage, I want to remind you if you have not been with us, then this will be a quick overview and if you have been with us, this will be a review of where we've been so far.

Hebrews 1-4 because this passage is kind of a hinge and all that's come before has been setting up what the writer of the Hebrews really wants to say. In some ways, the core of his argument is in chapters 5-10 and these chapters, chapters 1-4 are kind of setting up and do you remember what we've seen?

We've seen Jesus. Jesus, who is the one greater than the angels as the one who has come to finally show us what God is really like. He is a greater revelation than all the revelation that the angels have had.

[8 : 05] And in fact, he is the one whom God will make all of his enemies a footstool as he sits enthroned in the heaven. This glorious picture of a great Jesus over all.

He's greater than Moses if you remember. We've seen that he's a greater representative of God's people. He's a greater leader of God's people. And then we see in chapter 2 how this great Jesus has condescended for a moment to identify with us in our humanity.

He has come down and took on flesh and blood for us so that he might do for us the very thing that we most need to die a death that we deserved so that we might live by faith in him.

And then chapter 3 picks up these grand themes again and says, so we have this great Jesus. And do you know what else he's done? He's created for us a Sabbath rest.

He's given us in our salvation a rest from striving for God to accept us as we are. Striving to try to prove ourselves that we're good enough in the world that our lives are worth something by what we do.

[9 : 22] We have rest from that because we have acceptance in Christ. We have not only that but we have real peace to know that our lives are held in the hands of a sovereign one who has brought us into his kingdom that cannot be shaken and cannot be moved.

And interlaced in all of these exalted pictures of Jesus have been these warnings. Don't lose sight of it. Don't drift away from it. Don't neglect it.

Consider him. Don't harden your hearts against this exalted Jesus and all that he's done. And here in this passage in this hinge passage he picks up a particular theme the theme that Jesus is our high priest.

And if you have your Bibles look with me back in chapters 2 and 3 because we've seen this twice already. He's laced it in there. 2.17 He says Therefore he that is Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make a propitiation that is a sacrifice that takes away wrath a propitiation for the sins of the people.

And then in 3.1 he picks it up again Therefore holy brothers you who share in the heavenly calling consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession.

[10:51] And he just kind of laced that vocabulary in there without doing very much with it. And now at the end of chapter 4 he's picking up that theme and he's launching us and what we'll see is 5 and 6 is all about the nature of his priesthood and 7 or 5, 6, 7 yeah 6, 7, 8 anyway sorry as we keep going between 5 and 10 we'll get both the nature of his priesthood and the work of his priesthood for us.

But since we're not going to preach the whole next five chapters today let me give you a summary what does it mean what does it mean that Jesus is our high priest well this there are a few things there are lots of things you can spend five chapters on it good heavens but there are a few things that he points out here now that are very important the first thing is that he is a high priest who has gone into the heavens and what does that mean what does that picture mean well I think what the writer of Hebrews is doing is he's picking up a picture from the Old Testament in the Old Testament there was a temple and that temple had had sections and the the further you went into the temple from the courtyard of the Gentiles to the courtyard of the Jews to inside the temple in the holy place to the most holy place you were drawing nearer and nearer and nearer to the presence of God among his people but there were fewer and fewer people who could go there and the high priest in fact according to Leviticus 16 was the one who would go into the very the most holy place the holy of holies once a year only once and he would go in with a sacrifice for his own sin and he would go in for a sacrifice for the people of God and what the writer of Hebrews is saying is do you remember all this imagery some of you may be not familiar with it but this picture is this one who could go all the way in to the very place where the glory of God dwelt among his people and what the writer of Hebrews is saying is

Jesus has done that for us in a heavenly way not on the earthly temple with the blood of goats and sheep and doves not with the goats of animals did he go in but he went this is the argument that will come he went into a heavenly temple into the very presence of God himself if you don't believe me Hebrews 1.8 says this now the point in what we are saying is this we have such a high priest one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven so that's where he's gone to and then 9.24 says this Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands which are copies of true things but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf and so when he holds up this picture of Jesus the high priest he's saying this is the one who can take us into the very presence of God himself this is the one who can get us in there and if you're reading this for the first time and you're going okay he says we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens okay who is that he clarifies it he says it's Jesus

Jesus Jesus the name of the one the name that means the one who saves Jesus the man who was born of Mary and yet also the son of God and again he will unpack all of the significance of these names but what he's saying is this high priest is uniquely situated to do this unique work of restoring access to God for his people so that's the first thing we learn about Jesus as a high priest this morning is that he's gone into the heavens and he's made a way for us we will see later in Hebrews in chapter 12 it will describe Jesus as the author of our faith in many of our translations but this author also means the one who is initiated or even the champion the one who has gone before us so that he might bring us in his train in his victorious train behind us he has made the way through and he is bringing us with him secondly in verse 15 the writer of Hebrews says

Jesus is a high priest who is able to sympathize with us in our weakness it says he was tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin this is a part of his humanity as he took on flesh and blood that he would experience the weakness of humanity our human frailty our need for food and clothing and sleep our lack of knowledge about all things everywhere Jesus submitted himself to taking on human flesh so that he might sympathize with us in our weakness it says that he was tempted in every way just as we are I want to think about that for a few minutes this morning what does it mean that he was tempted James tells us that a temptation is like a juicy worm on a hook that is pulled in front of the trout hiding in the fish hiding in the weeds and that meal that is coming by looks so enticing so desirable so juicy that we bite and we fall into sin when we take hold of that which we ought not to do and it pulls us away that is what temptation biblically that is what the dynamic of temptation is there is something out there and it looks good but it is not and when we act on it when we respond to it we sin and Jesus says the writer of

[17 : 21] Hebrews says that Jesus felt the power of the temptation like we did yet he never bit how is that possible I'm wondering if some of you are thinking that I know I thought that as I've studied this past how is it possible that Jesus knows the things that I'm tempted by he's never seen an Oreo cookie how is it possible that he could be tempted as we are well it's one of the reasons why we read Matthew 4 this morning because when we look back at the story of Jesus temptation in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry do you remember what happened after 40 days of fasting Satan showed up and here the Son of God having just been baptized having just had this divine acclamation of this is my son listen to him this is the one whom I've sent right after that he goes off in the wilderness and Satan comes and what he does is he says if you're the

Son of God why don't you use that for your own good rather than submitting to God and his plan for you why don't you choose something that looks really good in fact it might even be something that you think God has promised you but you're going to accomplish it outside of God's plan for you the question when temptation faces us fundamentally is usually this do we trust God or do we do it ourselves wasn't this the very temptation that came that Satan brought first into the Garden of Eden at the beginning did God really say this do you think he really has your good at heart no do it yourself take hold of that fruit become like God yourself friends this is the very core of temptation and Jesus faced it much greater than we did because a temptation is a temptation only when it has actual attractiveness to us

Jesus probably isn't tempted by an Oreo cookie even if he saw one it just wouldn't be a temptation for him to find his solace and his comfort and his hope in an Oreo cookie okay but Satan came and he tempted him with the things that Jesus cared about the most the things that were dearest to his heart and by analogy a temptation is only as powerful when it has the force to potentially move you somewhere so if you're a beach ball on the beach and a wave comes in it doesn't take a very big wave to knock that beach ball across the beach does it but once you've been blown by that wave once you've been pushed you've given in you've succumbed to the force of the temptation and it no longer now there's no longer temptation you've just been overcome by it but imagine if you were a soccer ball and then a bowling ball the waves have to get bigger don't they to actually have the power to move you

Jesus is the rock of Gibraltar imagine the waves it would take to have the power to potentially move him when it says that he was tempted in every way as we are we must recognize that Jesus was tempted at a profound level that we will never experience to not trust God and to do it his own way so Jesus does know our temptations he knows when you're angry at your kids because they're not doing what you've asked them to do and you've lost sight of trusting God's plan for you and your patient correction discipline instruction of your children he actually knows when pornography seems like a pretty good way to find comfort and solace in your loneliness and in your desire when you don't trust

God to provide for you you don't trust God to meet you in intimacy he understands when faithfulness to Christ seems to hinder your career path your way up the ladder he understands the power of the temptation to not trust God that following him will actually result in good he understands the temptation to be silent about your faith because you long to be accepted by your school friends by your boss at work by the academy when you don't trust that God will protect and provide for his own when they are faithful to him he understands the temptation to be a workaholic to burn the midnight oil and the 6am oil and the noon oil and the 3pm oil and the 6pm oil and all the oil you've got the oil that your friends have too because you're desperate to succeed desperate to get ahead whether it's getting into that college or getting that promotion or getting that fellowship whatever it is not trusting that

[24 : 11] God will enable you to do work sufficient for his plan for your life and that the outcome of your work is his gracious gift to you so Jesus does sympathize he feels as we do in our weakness friends he feels it most because we know Greg will unpack this much more but he will feel it most when he comes on his knees before the father in the garden of Gethsemane says father is there another way is there another way to accomplish your plan but not my will but yours be done he sees the temptation and you know he asks for freedom from the suffering and the consequences he says God if there's another way please but at the end he says your will be done

I will trust you and so he is able to give us strength in our time of need not to turn away but to turn to him because I don't know what your neediness is this morning I don't know what your challenges are this morning and I can't say I understand but I know who does and therefore therefore the writer

of Hebrews goes on and he says there are two things that we ought to do in light of this first of all we are to hold fast to our confession remember in the context of the book the Hebrews were surrounded or in some kind of context where people were tempted to turn away to say Jesus isn't the way to God he isn't the Savior there's another way to do it because following Jesus was going to be really costly for them it might have been martyrdom and so the writer says let us hold fast to our confession hold fast to our confession this Jesus is Lord this Jesus is the Son of God this Jesus is the exact representation of his likeness and the radiance of his glory this Jesus has made satisfaction for our sins and has sat down at the right hand of the Father this Jesus is our captain our Lord our hope our champion that is what we confess the Puritan John Owen says that this confession of our faith has two parts one is the submission of our heart it makes us ask the question is there anything this morning that you have not bowed to the rulership of Christ in your life is there something that you are prizing something you are cherishing something you are loving more than

Christ himself is it a relationship is it a career it is is it being thought well of by others is it food is it being cool whatever it is is there something there that you have not yet submitted to Christ is there some area of your life where you are not willing to say he is the Lord he is my champion and my captain and I will allow him to lead me in this is there a part of your life where you are trying to be God rather than submitting to him the second part John Owen says is that it is not only the submission of our hearts but it is the profession of our lips this might be a good litmus test do the people around you know that you follow

Jesus now look we can be obnoxious about that let's not be that is just a pain it is really annoying that is not helpful but gosh they ought to know that Jesus is your hope they ought to know that Jesus is your life they ought to know that following him and serving him and worshipping him is what your whole life is about and in fact it is him that you go to daily for help because you need him so desperately friends let us loose our lips to speak of him I told you I'd come back to Johnny I'm going to read to you a paragraph in her book I want you to look like I want you to see what it looks like for her to hold fast to her confession of faith in the face of the trials she's facing she says yes I pray that my pain might be removed that it might cease but more so I pray for the strength to bear it for the grace to benefit from it and the devotion to offer it up to

[29 : 41] God as a sacrifice of praise my strength in prayer these days is scant I'll confess that so for all the concentration I can muster in prayer I must not dissipate it in seeking physical blessings only rather I must spend a good portion of it seeking spiritual growth and praying for Christ's kingdom to go forth into this dark world for such prayers are a way for me to know God and to know him deeper higher richer wider and fuller much fuller than if I comfortably cruised through life in my wheelchair she's continued to look to Jesus and she believes that he is the one who can help her and so she confesses that she does ask for help she asks that her circumstances might change but that is not her ultimate goal her ultimate goal is to trust in and exalt this one that she serves the second exhortation is in verse 16 of our passage this morning look with me again 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 friends remember in the temple only one man could go into the holy of holies only one man could go once a year and he went trembling because he knew he had sin on his hands and that he had to make an offering in fact they tied a rope around him because if he went in and the offering was not acceptable to God he would die and no one could go in to get him so they pulled him out with a rope there's no record that that ever happened but they tied a rope around his ankle so they could pull his body out if the glory of God fell upon him in judgment in that and now because we have a great high priest who has gone before us who has made a way for us now we can approach not the mercy seat that needs to be covered with blood that has been satisfied by Christ and stick around for the next couple of months and you'll see how rich and true that is as we explore that but it's a throne of grace and we go before the God of the universe and he's saying I am here to give you grace that is undeserved favor help mercy that is why I'm here and friends certainly this refers to the mercy and grace of salvation that Christ died for sinners like you and me and rose from the dead so that we might be forgiven of that sin and receive the grace of new life and forgiveness in Christ but I actually think that here the picture is much more of receiving daily mercy the mercies that Lamentations 3 talks about the mercies that are new every morning to his people great is your faithfulness oh God and the grace that is spoken of here is the grace not the grace in which we stand in our justification although that's true but the grace that Paul speaks of in 2nd

Corinthians 12 the grace that says my grace is sufficient for you my power is made perfect in your weakness in your current situation of need when you are suffering when you are facing trial and hardship when it feels like the water level is rising and you can't swim and you don't know how to keep your head above water my grace is sufficient for you and this is the mercy and the grace that he gives us this is what he offers what does that look like practically well notice how wonderfully the writer of the Hebrews weaves this together look ahead go read Hebrews 11 this afternoon and see what kind of help God gives to his people sometimes he gives miraculous instantaneous deliverance sometimes he gives strength to endure trial for a season sometimes he gives them hope and strength to endure until martyrdom and death looking ahead to a city whose builder and maker is God looking to a heavenly home that's not here on earth and never will be and the help that God gives can be any of this and the grace that he gives can be any of these things friends we talk about these grand and lofty things

Jesus the high priest who's entered into a heavenly temple and so we have mercy and grace to help us and maybe like you maybe like me you struggle sometimes to think what kind of help is that really some of that probably comes from our cultural expectation that life should be easy and simple and comfortable and when it's not we just think that help means fixing it so that our life becomes simple and easy and comfortable friends that's not God's plan for you I promise you it's not God's plan is much greater and much more glorious than that and he will give great aid and great comfort and great help and there are times when he practically steps in and shows his glory by overcoming the fallenness of this world and the fallenness of your own life and his mercy and grace can be delivering you from patterns of sin it can be providing in miraculous ways to free you from a terrible situation it can be healing you of a disease and freeing you but friends it's not only that it's also to know that his plan for your life is a greater thing than your comfort and ease and deliverance in this world because you know what you may live as comfortable and easy as you will but you will still die and you will still face judgment before God and you will not be freed from the effects of sin in your life and in fact

God brings these things into our lives often to refine us to deepen our faith I can't tell you the hope that we found I can't speak to the comfort that it's been and it's a battle it's a battle to believe that Jesus is able to help us but that has been the great comfort this week is to know that he is my high priest and that he is able to help me today to believe in him and in believing in him to experience his love to know his hope to have faith that he will enable me to live today for him and believing in him and clinging to him he is able to give me joy today and friends

I'll tell you I'd rather have that than just comfort and distance from God just comfort and ease but no depth in my relationship with him I go to him because I know he understands I go to him because I know he cares I go to him because I know he is able to help Christ has come and as a great high priest he has taken it for us so that we can go to him in time of need at the cross when Jesus could have saved himself he didn't when he could have saved himself from the worst suffering that has ever happened in this world he didn't he submitted himself to God and he trusted him and he endured the cross for our sake he took on the weakness of incarnation for us he took on the suffering of the cross for us he has gone through death to open up a new and living way for us he has shown us that he does care because it was love that drove him to do that for us and he has shown us that he is able because he is raised from the dead and he has passed into the heavens he has sat down at the right hand of God and he has made this way by his sacrifice so that we might go to that throne of grace and find help in time of need he is our champion and he is our help let's pray

[39 : 41] God we pray this morning that you would help us Lord in our need Lord would you help us to turn not from you but to you Lord when things are hard and we are bewildered may we not shake our fist at you but Lord run into your arms knowing that you do know and you do care and you are able to help us Jesus we praise you for your love for us that endured so much on our behalf for this to be true we pray these things in Jesus name amen as the music team comes forward we're going to sing before the throne of

God above before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea a great high priest it's like the only praise song in the whole lexicon that talks about the high priesthood of Jesus well probably not the only one but the great high priest whose name is love whoever lives and pleads for me so let's stand and sing this together