

Hebrews 4:14-16 Jesus is our compassionate High Priest! February 28, 2018

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Grace and peace from God our Father are ours to sustain us through all temptations through Christ.

We continue our reading from the book to the Hebrews 4:14-16

These are Your words heavenly Father. Give us confidence to call on Christ at all times. Your Word is truth.

Dear Friends in Christ, our Great High Priest,

In the Passion story we remember how Jesus stood trial before Israel's high priest. In His trial, the high priest had a total disregard for the law. Judging from him, we could think that all high priests were bad or evil men. Yet, God established the high priest's office for good. There were men like Zadok, who served King David and Jehoiada who rescued young King Joash from being murdered. But like so many other types in the Old Testament, even good high priests needed someone better. Their office pointed to Christ.

Jesus Is Our Compassionate High Priest

First, He can sympathize with us in our weakness. Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who had been called by the Holy Spirit to faith in Jesus and had freely professed Christ as the Savior. But confronted by the Romans who worshiped many gods and Jews who denounced Jesus as a fraud, these Christians were being tempted to deny the faith, renounce Jesus as Lord, and return to Judaism.

Like Simon Peter who was tempted in the courtyard of the high priest to deny knowing Christ, the Hebrew Christians were tempted to reject the Christian faith as if it was less than the Jewish faith. Hebrews was written to show that Christians have the greatest High Priest who relates to us. God could have chosen angels to make the annual sacrifice for the people's sins. But he chose a man who could understand people. It states, "*We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*" (v.15)

The world and our sinful weakness can tempt us to doubt or disobey God, to have no love for others or think only of ourselves. Jesus was tempted with selfish thoughts in the desert. Also, we are tempted to argue or disrespect our family. Jesus knows those temptations. He grew up in a family. When we suffer pain or loss we are tempted to blame God! Our Great High Priest knows suffering. He suffered for 40 days in the wilderness and especially during the last hours of His life. Our friends can tempt us to turn away from God. Jesus was tempted by Peter to turn away from the cross and take another way.

At times in life God has us give special care to people. Does it seem too heavy a burden to carry? Do obstacles ever seem too big or the way too rough? Jesus knows how it feels. In Gethsemane, he pleaded with his Father to let the cup of pain pass from him. Are we tempted to replace the things of God with the things of the world? Jesus understands. Satan offered him all the riches of the world if He would only leave His heavenly Father and worship Satan. Are we troubled that people are mocking us for our stand for the truth? Jesus knows how it feels. They mocked Him when He called Himself the Christ, God's Son. Because Jesus is human, "*He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant or are going astray, since he himself was subject to weakness.*" (Hebrews 5:2) Now it's true that Jesus is different from us. He never sinned. Yet having faced temptations, He is able to deal gently with us who do sin.

Think how gently the Savior dealt with Peter. He looked at Peter after he denied Him. Most people would look away in disgust. He didn't dismiss His cowardly friend. His look told Peter: "I saw and I heard." He didn't ignore Peter's sin. He confronted him! But He let Peter know that his sin did not stop His love. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28)

He was saying that Peter's denial was another burden that Jesus would carry to the cross and paid for it by His death. And so it is when we go astray or deny our Savior with our lips or our lives, Jesus confronts us. He calls us to repent! He shows us our sins to make us long for His forgiveness. He never drives away those who come to Him. He wants us to say with King David: *"I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' And you forgave the guilt of my sin."* (Psalm 32:5)

Temptations to turn away from Christ come from every direction in life. But we have a Great High Priest who can sympathize with our weakness. But **second**, He's also a Great High Priest **who is able to strengthen us in our weakness**. Hebrews tells us that Jesus ascended into heaven and urges us to come boldly and confidently to *"God's throne of grace so that we might receive mercy and obtain grace to help us in our time of need."* (v.16) Our Great High Priest is our mighty King on His awesome throne. Consider Queen Esther. Her Jewish people were about to be killed. They pleaded with her to go before the throne of the king to ask for mercy. If he was not pleased to see her before his throne, she would have died instantly. But, the king extended his royal scepter and granted her request.

Jesus is ruling in heaven not to hurt us as sinners but to offer us His grace. He is using His mighty power to defend us instead of to condemn us. Our Savior is like someone who once suffered an injury in sports. He understands when He sees someone else get injured. But in Jesus' case, He doesn't just feel sorry. He can help. Go to him boldly! Be confident in His grace to help us in time of need. When we face temptation, we can go to our Great High Priest for help and strength. This was what Peter forgot to do. Jesus had told him in the garden, *"Watch and pray,"* so you won't be overtaken and fall into sin. But, Peter fell asleep. It was only by God's grace that he was restored to faith in Christ. Later Peter wrote, *"Cast all your anxiety on him because He cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7). The Savior taught us to pray: *"Lead us not into temptation."* Let's remember Luther's explanation: *"God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory."*

When we are reluctant to speak about Jesus, let us pray with King David in *Psalm 51:15*: *"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."* When we feel spiritually weak, let us pray *Psalm 50:15*: *"Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."* When life's fears and anxieties make us feel like we are in the deep waters over our heads, let us pray *Psalm 130:1, 2*: *"Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."*

But it is not only by the power of prayer that our Great High Priest strengthens us in our weakness. It is also the power of his Word. *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7). Jesus used God's Word when He was tempted by Satan. St. Paul urged the soldiers of Christ to *"take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* (Ephesians 6:17) Draw on the power of your Great High Priest. We know that it is not if, but when we are tempted to deny the Lord and deny our faith like Peter. We need to remember our Great High Priest. He is compassionate. He gave His life to save us so that we can come boldly and confidently to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Amen.