

The Great High Priest
Hebrews 4:14

Ephesians 2:11-22

Romans 5:1-12

Responsive Psalm 65: 1-8

So before we start this morning, I want to ask a question. Have you been convinced that Christ is superior to everything? Well, if you have then I am sorry for, because today's lesson is a continuation of this theme, if you have not then you are the people that this Author has been writing to, going step by step taking each thing individually and proving how Christ is superior. Today, we are looking at how Christ is not only superior to the High Priest of the old Testament, but that Christ himself, is the superior High Priest. So let us start this morning by reading our passage, from verse 11 to the end of chapter 4.

So the Author of this book just got done scaring us and challenging us to be sure that our faith is real, and that we are in the rest of God. As Martin Luther said of these verses, "After terrifying us, the Apostle now comforts us, after pouring wine into our wound, he now pours in oil." The Christian who reads this letter, should at his core be challenged which is the intent of the author when he says, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience." In other words, be sure that your faith is pure and true and not just a surface act that you put on while around other Christians. Your life should reflect the same, Sunday-Saturday, you should not appear one way on Sunday, and live totally different the 6 other days. This drives to the Christian the idea, the correct idea that we are utterly unable to stand before the judgment throne of God on any of our own merits, but that being said it is not as if we go through this life in fear, or depressed for if you are of true faith, you have the holy spirit who witness to you, and we can be filled with confidence because it is not ourselves who determines if we are right with God but it is in Christ that we stand.

Now as we know, the High Priest of Israel's roll was to represent the people before God. He was the one who would administer the sacrifices, and was the only one who could enter the most holy inner chamber of the temple, but when he did he must bring blood to offer for his sin, and for the sin of the people. But in the end, the high priest was still yet, a fallible man, while sure he was called by God to fulfill that role, he himself was not pure, righteous and just but needed the blood of the sacrifices offered to make atonement just as the others. And this is Where the confidence of the Christian comes in Christ, who being the great high priest offered himself, once, and for all, not once a year like the high priests of Israel, but once, and when he was finished, returned to his place on the throne. Unlike the people of Israel who had a faulty, sinful man to represent them before God, we now have Christ who is the great high priest who stands before God on our behalf.

This is not the Authors first mention of the High priesthood of Christ, but this is rather a continuation of what he set up in chapter 2 where he says, "Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted. Therefore, Holy Brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle, and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ." Remember he was writing to them about angel worship, taking the focus away from Christ, the one in whom our salvation rests. His whole point is to realign their focus off of anything that is a distraction away from Christ, for it is only in this High priest that we can be found in the promised rest.

The verse in chapter 2, that we just read actually lays out 3 reasons why our focus should be upon Christ alone and nothing else. First is that he himself was the sacrifice for the sins of God's people, unlike how the Israelite priest had to atone over and over, year after year, Christ death and sacrifice was sufficient for all. 2nd, because he too by his own experiences knows what it is to pass through temptation and suffering is able to help us in our time and hour of need. This is not a God who has sat on his throne, disconnected with the sufferings of his people such as an earthly king may have been. Who would rule over a nation of people suffering starvation and poverty while he himself lived a lavish life. No, this king has come, left his kingdom and became one like us, has suffered as we have, in fact he has suffered even greater than we ever shall. Christ is not only aware of the sufferings and hardships of his life, but has himself endured the worst of it himself and having come through it victorious is not only able to provide encouragement, and confidence in the face of trials, but through him we may be victorious and overcome them through his grace.

3rd, as the Author says, "he has passed through the heavens" and he is securing for us the eternal rest which has been promised. His suffering proved his humanity, solidifying his identity with us as brethren. His death brought about the everlasting atoning sacrifice for God's people, and his resurrection is proof of God's approval of his atoning work, and shows his power can not be limited even in death. The knowledge of these truths should be an unfailing encouragement to us as Christians, as we walk in faith in this life, encouraging and enticing us to remain faithful, and persevere until the end despite what life may bring, having our confidence strengthened in assurance that in Jesus we have this High Priest, this advocate between us and God. That our high priest is not fallible, but is rather the infallible Son of God unique in his power, and his supremacy.

So looking at verse 14 here, we see the author making distinctions between this high priest, and the others who had come before. Unlike the High Priests of Israel, who once a year would pass from the site of the people as he took the blood offering into the holy of holys in the temple, Jesus, at his Ascension passed from the sight of the apostles who were there as he entered once and for all, not into an inner chamber of an earthly temple, but but into the heavenly sanctuary where he remains to advocate before the father on our behalf. The Theologian Alcuin points out a contrast between Christ and Moses on this very point. Saying. "Moses, the leader of the people to whom a transitory rest was promised did not enter into the rest which he frequently promised the people, and neither did Aaron their high priest, but our high priest is the sponsor of a better promise, and opening the way for those who believe in him, he first entered into the rest promised to the people who belong to him." This rest was not transitory, it was not a transitional rest, but rather the finished, the eternal rest.

This great high priest is both the redeemer, and mediator, having been both the Son of Mary, and also the Son of God. Being the incarnate Son, both truly man, and truly God is alone the only one qualified to bridge the gap between us sinful mankind and our holy creator. As Westcott said, "In order to suggest the two natures of the Lord which include the assurance of sympathy and power, As divine, he is one with God, as incarnate he is one with man and as the God-man, he is able to accomplish the great work of reconciliation whereby harmony between God and man is re-established. Redemption could not be accomplished without his first becoming man, and he would not have been a worthy sacrifice without being the sinless Son of God. Can you see how illogical the idea of relying on anything else for salvation is? As the author says here, "let us hold fast our confession." For anything else is folly. To abandon our confession and faith in Christ because of a temptation to believe another gospel is not just illogical, it is death. For as we have shown this morning, the only hope that mankind has for life, the only hope that mankind has when he one day meets his maker face to face, is that this high priest will stand as his or hers advocate.

But as we now this is the very issue that Author here is writing about, he is writing to those who are in danger, who are entertaining the thoughts and ideas of abandoning his gospel for another. Which is why he has spent so much time hammering home this doctrine of the superiority of Christ in all things. Throughout this entire book, he reminds and implores his readers to stand fast, to hold to the confidence that we have in Christ. Where verse 14 points to and deals with Christ Ascension, verse 15 talks about his incarnation, his earthly experience. Verse 15” for we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. His identification with us has not ended just because he has passed through the heavens and entered into that promised rest. The glorified Lord and high priest of our confession is still Jesus, the Son of Mary. The whole purpose of his coming was in fulfillment of the prophesy of a messianic servant, one who would make our weaknesses his own. Just as Isaiah lays out, “Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God, afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon Him and by his stripes we are healed.”

So as we see, his becoming human was not just some pretense, but was necessary, and the reality of the temptations that he endured is the reality of the human nature he assumed. Christ's temptations that he endured are in every sense like the ones that we endure, as we saw when we went through the book of Mark, he was tempted on every side, even his closest followers and friends would chastise him for things that they did not fully understand. He was tempted by Satan for power, he was tempted in the garden to draw back instead of going through the suffering that he was to endure. And even the taunting he endured while he hung on the cross calling for him to prove that he was the messiah, saying “If you truly are the Son of God, come down from the cross” Even these Hebrews to whom this letter was addressed were not being tempted for anything outside of what Christ was already tempted, Satan tempted him to put aside the shame and scandal of the cross, in an attempt to distract him from his purpose, just as these Hebrews were being tempted to be distracted away from the gospel.

These Hebrews were being tempted with apostasy, If Christ had succumbed to any of the temptations that moved him away from his purpose, from his death on the cross it would have been a sabotage of our salvation. The ultimate apostasy, having turned his back upon the purpose he was sent, having turned his back on God's children he came to redeemed, having turned in back on the fulfillment of all the prophets, and promises. But as we know that is not the case, he endured to the end, he remained faithful through all temptations winning victory over them, and over death itself.

He did not merely survive the severe testing that he endured but was in fact completely victorious over it, as the author says here, despite all that he endured, he did so, without sinning. This little mention here by the author has great implications into Christs victory over the temptations. For if Jesus had fallen into sin, if he had not been victorious over the temptations he would himself been in need of atonement and thus no longer could be our High Priest to advocate on our behalf, but would have been like the High Priests in the old testament who needed a sacrifice to cover their own sin. But not only would falling into temptation made his high priest hood impossible, it would have also made him unworthy to serve as God's lamb without blemish or spot making his sacrifice unacceptable. The sinlessness of Jesus, made by his victory over temptations is essential for the accomplishment of our redemption by his sacrifice of himself on the cross. This is important and central to the gospel, Jesus was not just a good teacher who was a martyr for his cause, He was the Son of God who died for the Sons of Adam so they could be reconciled back to the God who had created them. Without the duality of being both the Son of God, and a Son of Man

He could not have been an advocate for us, having not suffering as us, or if he had fallen into temptations such as us. As Philip Hughes writes, “ This sinlessness, it should be stressed, is not something passive, or a mere state of being, but rather the achievement of Christ's active victory over temptations. Indeed it is entirely synonymous with the complete obedience learned by him through all he endured, by which his perfection was established, and which fitted him to become the source of our eternal salvation.”

So, all this being true, we move into verse 16, which says, “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.” In the old testament legal system that was the practice until Christ came as we know only the high priest was allowed to enter into the holy of holies, the sanctuary of God's presence, and even then it was only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The people of Israel were not permitted to enter, they were not allowed to enter into the presence of God because of their sinfulness, and the high priest acted as a mediator between God and the people of Israel. But now, that Christ has come, and with the atonement that he has accomplished upon the cross, unlike the sacrifice of lambs and bulls offered once a year we now have access to the very presence of God, through the mediation of our high priest, Jesus Christ. This was symbolized by the large and heavy curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the people which was torn from top to bottom opening up the most holy place to all peoples, not just the high priest.

The reality of this symbolic event is exactly what the author is talking about here. Sinners are no longer commanded to keep their distance in fear and trembling of an unknown God hidden behind a veil, but are instead invited to draw near to a God who is now personally knowable. The curtain has been torn down, and the way opened through the perfect sacrifice of Christ on our behalf which was accepted by God, making our sins forgiven, and united with Christ through faith we now have free access to the very presence of God. We are now able to approach the Throne of the sovereign creator of all things, yet on the basis of the reconciliation achieved by God through his Son, it is not only the Throne of rule and judgment but also a throne of grace, which is why we may approach with confidence as the author here says, let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. He is imploring his readers who have been going further away from the faith, even moving into apostasy with such things as angel worship, to return and draw near. Those who are truly faithful will return, they will draw near to the Throne of Grace, to the God which first loved them and who accomplished for them reconciliation through his Son. The act of drawing away, and continuing in such is the act of apostate, or of one who never truly was a person of faith to begin with.

Verse 16 says exactly why we are to draw near to the throne of God, it is to find mercy and grace in a time of need. We have access through prayer, to the one who sits on the throne and rules and reigns over his creation. How much more confident should we be in our times of need knowing that we can bring all things to this sovereign merciful God? Unlike before where a mediator was needed, where only the high priest had access to the presence of God, Christ has opened the way in this new covenant in his blood for all of those who are in Christ can not only approach this throne, but are invited to do so, not with fear and trembling as a servant approaching his master, but boldly and with confidence, as children coming to their father. This is a unique reality of the Christian faith, to be granted such access to God. To be heirs as Sons and Daughters, not as servants seeking to gain the favor of the master. It is only this faith through Christ alone, that brings with it the ability for sinful creatures to cast themselves on the throne of God and receive grace and mercy.