

**Sermon Transcript**  
**08.24.2025**  
**Hebrews 4:14-16**

***\*\*\*This is a working manuscript and is not an exact transcription of the sermon. Actual audio content may differ slightly from these notes.\*\*\****

- Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. We'll be in chapter 4. If you're using the pew Bible, it will be on page 943.
- As we begin, how many of you have ever been to the UK? How many have been to Buckingham?
- One of my favorite parts of the royal experience is watching the King's Guard. I love videos of people trying to make them laugh. These guys wearing silly bright red uniforms with oversized fluffy hats, trained to not even blink, much less crack a smile. I particularly love when some sightseer crosses the line & the guards have to remind them that they're actual guards with actual authority by screaming & pointing a weapon at them. I guess I'm sadistic because it always cracks me up when a soldier threatens to shoot an obnoxious tourist.
- So imagine you're visiting and you walk up to these guards and ask to see the king. How do you think they would react? What are the chances you're getting in?
- Not very high. Unless that is, you're Michael Fagan. He's the guy who not once but twice broke into Buckingham Palace back in the summer of 1982.
- Looking at the place, you'd think it would be a challenge, but not really. He wasn't Ethan Hunt, he wasn't Danny Ocean, he didn't have an elaborate scheme and a team of accomplices, he just hopped the fence and climbed in through an unlocked window.
- He breaks in, wanders around eating cheese and crackers and drinks a half-bottle of wine, sits on the throne and then leaves. Literally, exactly what I would have done. Since it was so easy, a month later he's bored one night so he breaks in again and this time makes it to the Queen's bedroom, opens her curtains, wakes her up, and has a brief conversation with her.
- What makes this story even crazier is that it technically wasn't against the law to break into Buckingham, so he couldn't be charged with a crime. It was such an outrageous act, that no one had ever thought to write a law against breaking into the Queen's bedroom.
- You'd have to be insane to even try it, at least that's what they assumed since Fagan was committed to a mental health facility.
- But, let's assume you aren't crazy. And for whatever reason, the guards decide to let you in. They usher you down the halls & you realize you don't really know anything about royal protocol. Exactly how & when should you bow or curtsy? Should you attempt an English accent and, if so, what if you sound like a Cockney character out of a Dickens novel? Can you ask for a photo or autograph? And you're definitely regretting your decision to wear shorts & crocs & a Princess Di or Charles in Charge t-shirt.
- Anyway, I would imagine the whole experience would be rather intimidating.

- Even if you couldn't care less about British culture or the royal family, the gravitas of the office and the palace and all of that would still be rather overwhelming.
- Which makes what we read in Hebrews 4, all the more fascinating. The setting isn't Buckingham, but the highest of heavens. And the king isn't Charles, but the Lord Jesus Christ. And the throne isn't the Coronation Chair at Westminster or the Chair of State in Parliament or the ceremonial throne in Buckingham, but the very throne of God.
- And yet the author tells us to draw near. To come forward. And not only that, but to do so with boldness, confident that we will find mercy, grace, and help.
- How can we be so sure? How can we be so certain that we'll be received? Because of the sufficiency & supremacy of Christ as we'll see this morning.
- So let's draw near in prayer. Self, others, me.

***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. (Hebrews 4:14)***

- If you've been tracking along with us, we're in our 14<sup>th</sup> sermon in the book of Hebrews. We've seen that the first-century audience is primarily composed of Jewish Christians who are facing some degree of persecution and are thus tempted to leave the church, to renounce their faith and Christ, and to return to the seeming safety of the synagogue.
- So the author writes to encourage them to hold fast & draw near rather than drift & fall away.
- He does so by systematically showing Christ's supremacy to the Mosaic Covenant and the law. Christ is greater than the angels in chapters 1 & 2. Greater than Moses in chapter 3. He gives a better rest than Joshua in chapter 4. And he's a better priest offering a better sacrifice in accordance with a better covenant built on better promises as we'll see in chapters 5-10.
- As we've said many times before. The supremacy of Christ is the theme and presupposition of the entire book. Quite simply, Christ is better. Those three words are the key to understanding Hebrews. Christ is better than the shadows of the OT and He's better than the mirage of sin.
- We'll see that same argument in the passage today. Since we have such a great high priest, we should therefore hold fast our confession. Because Christ is greater, we should remain steadfast.
- But before we walk through the individual trees of the passage, let's look at the forest. To do that, I want to make you aware of a parallel passage in chapter 10. It says this:
  - *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but*

*encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*  
(Hebrews 10:19–25)

- Notice all the similarities between this paragraph & what we're reading at the end of chapter 4. For instance,
  - both passages commend confidence.
  - And both talk about entering the holy places by going through something: the curtain in chapter 10 and the heavens in chapter 4.
  - Both passages mention a great priest
  - And both commend drawing near
  - And holding fast our confession.
- Many of you may be familiar with the rhetorical literary device that the author is using. What do we call this bookending method? We call it an *inclusio*, like the English word inclusion without the *n* on the end. An *inclusio* is a framing technique that repeats words or phrases at the beginning and end of a section in order to highlight and emphasize the enclosed content.
- In other words, our paragraph in chapter 4 and the one in chapter 10 are bookends such that everything in between, all of chapters 5-10 are somehow explained by these two paragraphs.
- So what is between the two? Well, an extended exposition of Christ's priestly ministry and sacrifice and thus an extended look at our qualifications to draw near.
- Look at how often the idea of Christ's high priesthood comes up in these chapters:
  - *For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."* (Hebrews 5:1–6)
  - *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.* (Hebrews 6:19–20)
  - *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* (Hebrews 7:26)
  - *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...* (Hebrews 8:1)
  - *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)...* (Hebrews 9:11)

- *And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:11–14)*
- We'll explore this in depth over the next months, but as you can already see by this 30,000 foot flyover, the high priesthood and sacrifice of Christ is the dominant theme of the book of Hebrews. What makes this particularly striking is that nowhere else in the NT is Christ explicitly called a high priest. The rest of the NT assumes it, but only Hebrews really pulls back the veil so to speak and explores the subject.
- And as high priest, Christ has offered a sacrifice. And since He is both God and man and He is perfect and blameless, therefore His sacrifice is of infinite and inestimable worth. In short, it is perfectly sufficient and efficient. Mission accomplished. Tetelestai, it is finished. Therefore, we are completely and perfectly forgiven and sanctified. And therefore, we should draw near rather than drift. That's the message of the book.
- Earlier in chapter 4, we saw the call to fear. In Hebrews 4:1 the author commands us to be afraid...but what kind of fear? Not the servile fear that leads you to run from God and hide like Adam and Eve, but filial fear, the kind of fear that draws near and holds fast. That's what the author is commending in chapter 4.
- As an illustration of this, think back to the book of Esther. If you remember the story, Esther is Jewish, but she's married to the Persian king. At one point in the narrative, she needs to talk to the king. The problem, in her words, as we read in Esther 4:11 is that:
  - *All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live... (Esther 4:11)*
- This was the law of the Persians. No one had the right to approach the king without being called. To draw near was to die. And how much more is that the case with the holy God? After all, when Isaiah sees a vision of this holy God in chapter 6 of his book, he cries out, woe is me for I am unclean and when Israel is in the wilderness at Sinai, God says that anyone who touches the mountain will die.
- So how in the world can we draw near to this holy and exalted God? And do so with confidence at that?
- Chapters 5-10 answer that question. We do so because of the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ's sacrificial priestly ministry.
- You see, there are two dangers that this passage helps us to avoid. First, that we are paralyzed by the fear and shame. We allow our vision of the holiness of God to keep us from drawing near. We remain on the fringes. We remain in the outer court, like Israel in the wilderness, we fear drawing near the sacred mountain lest we be consumed.
- On the other hand, the second danger is that we come, we draw near, but we do so on the wrong basis. We do so on the basis of our own merits and virtue. We do so because we think that we're good enough or smart enough or whatever.

- So should we draw near? Absolutely. But on what basis? Not our own goodness, not by our own works, but by grace through faith in Christ. By confidence not in ourselves, but in Christ, in His life, and death, and resurrection. Not by virtue of the promises we make, but the promises that He has made.
- With all that in mind as a bit of an extended introduction, let's look at our passage in detail.
- You may recall that the author has already hinted at Christ's priestly office in chapter 3.
  - *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession...* (Hebrews 3:1)
- So now he returns to that and begins to really expound what that entails. Not only is he a high priest, but a great high priest. The adjective great could be functioning there to distinguish Jesus from all the other high priests who had ever lived. He is the true and better high priest. The great high priest. Just as an aside, this is interesting because in Hebrew, the phrase high priest is literally great priest. So you might say Christ is the great great priest. He's the GOAT.
- And as a demonstration of His greatness, He has passed through the heavens.
- Now, to understand this, you need to know about the work of Jewish high priests. They were the ones who would offer the annual yom kippur day of atonement sacrifice. To do so, they would enter the most holy place which was covered by a veil.
- So the author is playing on that imagery. You may recall that when Christ died the veil in the temple was torn, symbolizing that the way has been opened and Christ's death was effective.
- We'll see him pick up this imagery in chapter 9 where he writes:
  - *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.* (Hebrews 9:24)
- In other words, the temple is a picture, a type. It represents a reality greater than itself. The true goal wasn't that each and every believer could enter the most holy place in the temple, but rather that we would enter into God's very presence in the heavens.
- Jewish high priests could enter into a representation of God's presence, but Christ has entered into the fulfillment of that representation. They entered the type, Christ the anti-type. Or to use language we'll see later in Hebrews, they entered the shadows, but Christ entered the substance.
- Now, notice that heavens in plural. I think that's because in ancient cosmology, the word for heavens carried a number of connotations. In Greek, the word Ouranos from which we get the word Uranus. Ouranos was used in multiple ways. It was used to refer to what we would call the sky, that which is inhabited by birds and clouds. It was also used to refer to what we call outer space, that which is inhabited by the moon and stars and the Guardians of the Galaxy. And it was used to refer to what we call heaven, that which is inhabited by God Himself.
- You may recall that Paul says that he had a vision where he was caught up to the "third" heaven. I think that's what he means. First heaven is sky. Second is outer space. Third is what we call heaven, the dwelling place of God.

- So, by saying that Christ passed through the heavens, the author means that Christ entered into the very presence of God. Not the symbolic presence of God represented by the most holy place in the temple that Jewish high priests entered, but rather the actual presence of God.
- In other words, Christ's superior sacrifice provides superior access. Again, think back to the idea Buckingham palace. Suppose you bought a visitor pass. I don't know what you would see on that tour, but I would imagine that certain places would be off limits. But now imagine that Prince William or King Charles himself is guiding you. That's an all access pass. No door is locked. No place is forbidden.
- That's the access that Christ has provided. OT high priests provided a degree of access, but it was always limited and restricted because, as we'll see, the blood of bulls and goats couldn't actually atone. They were a placeholder, a symbol of something greater and Christ is that something greater. So Christ has unlocked the doors, swung them wide open, torn down the curtains, and beckons us to come, not to some symbolic representation of God's presence, but to the very presence of God.
- So, therefore, we are to hold fast our confession. Bear in mind the alternative, the danger that the author has mentioned a number of times. The danger of drifting, falling away, giving up or giving in. As the book says over and over, Christ not only provides EFFECTIVE access to forgiveness and atonement and life and joy, but He provides EXCLUSIVE access to those. There is no other way into God's presence than through Christ. So turning from Christ is turning from God and turning from hope and life and joy. As the book will go on to say, not only is the Mosaic covenant inferior in every way to the new covenant in Christ, but it has been rendered altogether obsolete.
- To try to find forgiveness through the Mosaic covenant today is about as effective as trying to contact a friend by telegram or play a cassette tape in your Tesla. It isn't only inefficient, its impossible. That's what trying to enter God's presence apart from Christ is like.
- So rather than renounce our confession, we should hold fast. But what is our confession? Well, in context, its the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, He is Lord. He is our high priest. Christ is better.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 15.

***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. (Hebrews 4:15)***

- The past few years, there has been uproar over some commercials with the message "He gets us" juxtaposed on images of Christ among prostitutes, immigrants, minorities, homosexuals, etc. The power of those images is that there is a shred of truth. Christ did associate with the ostracized & marginalized of 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel. He did upend cultural conventions. He does get us.
- But one of the critiques of these commercials is that they subtly suggest that Christ's getting us is devoid of any judgment or call to repentance. Its mere toleration and niceness. And this betrays the biblical picture whereby Christ eats with sinners and tax

collectors, but also calls them to repentance. He forgives, but also says, go and sin no more.

- In Hebrews 4:15, we see that Christ was able to show genuine sympathy, but not at the expense of truth. He sympathizes with our weaknesses, but remained without sin.
- This corresponds to an ongoing conversation in evangelicalism over the past couple of years regarding the differences between empathy & sympathy. At the end of the day, I don't care much about which word you use, but I do care about the connotations of those words. Sometimes empathy is used in a way that suggests that we enter into the pain of others w/out judgment. We immerse ourselves in the suffering of others without remaining tethered to the truth.
- So, to love the homosexual, you must affirm his or her desires and behavior. To love the woman seeking an abortion, you must uphold her reproductive rights. To love your child, you must affirm his desire to change genders. Its a love without judgment, a love without critique, but thus a love without power, in short, a love which isn't love.
- Our sympathy should always remain tethered to the truth. We speak the truth in love. But love is always in need of biblical definition for Satan is always attempting to create his own substitute virtues. He give biblical words unbiblical definitions such that virtues become vice.
- But here in our passage, we see that Christ's sympathy doesn't devolve into untethered empathy. He doesn't dismiss our sin, He doesn't ignore our sin, but neither does He tolerate it or coddle it. He dies for it.
- Back in chapter 2, we read a similar passage.
  - *Therefore he 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 propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* (Hebrews 2:17-18)
- Notice the phrase in every respect. We see that again in our passage today. He was made like us in every respect. As we talked about then, that means that He shared fully in our humanity. Whatever it means to be human, Christ took that on. You may recall the ancient Christological saying, whatever was not assumed was not redeemed. In other words, Christ had to be fully human in order to redeem us fully. If there remained one part of our being: body, soul, spirit, mind, will, etc. that Christ didn't assume, then that part of us isn't redeemed and sanctified. Because our depravity is total, therefore our redemption must be total which means that the incarnation must be total.
- So He became like us in every respect. And then in our passage today, we see that He was tempted as we are in every respect. Now, some qualification is in order here as it was in chap 2.
- In ch 2, we talked about how Him being made like us in every respect doesn't mean that He took on every single individual characteristic of every single human. He didn't become a red head for the gingers & a southpaw for the lefties & a woman for the women & near sighted for the myopic
- We talked about the difference between essential & accidental properties. When we say that He was made like us in every respect, we mean essential properties. Those

things that are essential to be human. Humans come in all shapes, colors, and sizes, but Christ didn't take on every single shape, color, and size. He took on whatever was essential to the general category of humanity.

- And I think we need to make the same distinction here in chapter 4 in regards his temptation. By saying that He was tempted in every respect as we are, that doesn't mean that He personally experienced same sex attraction or gender dysphoria or the allure of pornography or that He experienced temptation in the exact same way as us.
- Our temptation is often internal, we're enticed by fleshly desires. As James says, each person is tempted and lured by his own desire. That is why in context he says that God cannot be tempted by evil. Christ was never tempted by internal wicked desires, what theologians since Augustine have called concupiscence. Christ was not tempted by fleshly desires because Christ didn't have any unrighteous desires. But He was tempted. It's just that His temptation was external.
- But that doesn't make it less intense. In fact, one could argue that Christ's temptation was much more intense because it never let up because He never gave in to the temptation.
- As an illustration, think back to playing on monkey bars as a kid & doing a dead hang. The longer you hang, the more pain you experience. But eventually you let go and the pain stops. Well, Christ never let go. So, rather than experience less intense temptation, He experienced more.
- And thus He can sympathize with our weakness. He knows the limitations of humanity. We are not omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. We hunger and thirst and tire.
- The complaint of nearly everyone who has ever suffered is this: woe is me. No one understands. No one knows what it's like to go thru what I'm going through. No one has been in my situation.
- Well, this passage says, that isn't true. Christ can sympathize because He's faced temptation. But unlike you and me, He never once compromised, never once capitulated. Never once gave in to the pressure. Never untethered himself from what is true and right and good.
- He never entertained a wicked thought, never uttered a defiling word, never did a depraved deed. He always did what was just and pure and wise and blameless.
- In short, Christ was impeccable, without blemish or blame or guilt or stain or sin. This is fundamental to his role as our high priest and Passover lamb for if He was blemished, He couldn't offer a sufficient sacrifice.
- Christ's sinlessness is implied all throughout Scripture, but we see it explicitly in places like
  - *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (1 Peter 2:22)*
  - *You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. (1 John 3:5)*
  - *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. (Hebrews 7:26)*



- And now consider the significance Christ's sympathy and temptation in the historical context of the letter. The audience is facing persecution. There is tremendous pressure to recant, to apostatize. To leave the confines of the church for the seeming safety of the synagogue.
- And Christ Himself is well acquainted with the particular temptation to save yourself. When tempted in the desert by hunger or false promises, all He had to do was give in. When tempted in the garden, He could have run and hid. When tempted in the presence of Pilate, all He had to do was obfuscate and deny that He is the Messiah. When tempted on the cross, He could have appealed to His Father to send a legion of angels.
- But He didn't do any of those. He took the cup of God's wrath into His hands and held it to His lips and He drained every last drop.
- He tasted poverty, pain, hunger, thirst, exhaustion, death, loss, betrayal, heartache, slander, weakness, misunderstanding, homelessness, torture, rejection, grief, loneliness, and more.
- He held fast in the face of each temptation and that should be our example as well.
- As Peter writes in his first epistle:
  - *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21–23)*
- He gets us. But more than that. He saves us. He redeems us. He sacrifices Himself for us.
- Because He was tempted, He is able to sympathize & because He was sinless, He is able to help.
- And therefore we should draw near as we read in vs. 16.

***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. (Hebrews 4:16)***

- One of the things that marks Hebrews is this constant interchange between exposition and exhortation, the indicative and the imperative. Unlike Paul's books which generally have a few chapters devoted to the indicative, what God has done, followed by a few chapters on the imperative, what we do in response to what God has done, in contrast to that the author of Hebrews is going to move back and forth between the indicative and imperative or exposition and exhortation often within the same paragraph.
- Because of the indicative. Because we have such a high priest and because he is acquainted with our weakness and because He is able to sympathize and because He is sinless. Therefore, we should draw near. If you truly understand who Christ is, then you will quite naturally respond by drawing near, that's the implication. In other words, your failure to draw near is a failure to grasp the significance of Christ. Or to put it in

other terms, your failure to obey is always a failure to believe. Our sin is always theological in nature.

- And not only draw near, but do so with confidence.
- Remember again the story of Esther. To draw near to the king without invite was against the law, but she said:
  - *...I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.* (Esther 4:16)
- Notice that she doesn't know how it will play out. She draws near, but has no promise, no guarantee. She has a hope, but its wishful thinking which is unlike the way that the Bible uses the word hope. Look at Hebrews 11:1
  - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1)
- Biblical hope is conviction and assurance. Notice how strange that sounds in English. How can we be assured of that which we hope for? Well, because in Scripture hope isn't wishful thinking, it is certainty, its conviction, its assurance.
- Esther drew near on the basis of blind optimism. How much more should we draw near on the basis of the promises that we have? BTW, the language of promise and the better promises of the new covenant will take up quite a bit of space in chapter 6-10.
- As Hebrews 6:17-19 says:
  - *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...* (Hebrews 6:17-19)
  - *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.* (Hebrews 8:6)
- So on the basis of these promises...these promises made by God and fulfilled in Christ...on the basis of these promises, we draw near. Not with blind optimism, not with wishful thinking, but with confidence, with courage, with boldness, with expectation.
- We draw near. We draw near in prayer & in reading Scripture & by belonging to & participating in the church and in partaking of communion and in singing and in mortifying sin and so forth.
- We draw near to God Himself as He is sitting on His throne. And notice how that throne is described. It is a throne of grace.
- Typically, when the Bible describes God's throne, there is a connotation of judgment and yet here the throne is associated with grace.
  - "The throne of God is not arrayed in naked majesty to confound us, but is adorned with a new name, even that of grace...For the glory of God, when we contemplate it alone, can produce no other effect than to fill us with despair; so awful is this throne. The Apostle, then, that he might remedy our diffidence, and free our minds from all fear and trembling, adorns it with "grace," and gives it a

name which can allure us by its sweetness, as though he had said, “Since God has affixed to his throne as it were the banner of ‘grace’ and of his paternal love towards us, there is no reason why his majesty should drive us away.” (John Calvin)

- And since the throne is described as a throne of grace & since God’s wrath has been satisfied by Christ & God’s love has been proven by Christ, then therefore, we can expect to find mercy, grace and help. In other words, we draw near in anticipation that we will receive whatever is needful in the moment though of course, we recognize that we don’t always know what is needful.
- As Paul writes in Rom 8, we don’t even know what to pray for as we ought. We cry out our requests, but God translates them into the right requests. God is omniscient & omnipotent & I am not. I think it would be better for me to not suffer in some way, but God’s ways are so infinitely greater than my own that He perceives the abundant goodness that will come through that suffering.
- So, yes, this passage does promise help, grace, and mercy. But we need to be careful to define those in God’s terms and not our own. That’s one of the problems with the prosperity gospel. The problem with the prosperity gospel isn’t that it promises prosperity, but that it mis-defines prosperity. For all I know, my joy and prosperity will come through poverty and adversity and not health and wealth. So can we name it and claim it that God will be gracious to us? Only insofar as we understand the full nature of God’s grace and how He wounds those whom He loves as we’ll read in Hebrews 12.
- God will help, but sometimes His help hurts.
- But we draw near. And in this, we see a fundamental difference from Israel in the wilderness. You may recall that when God spoke from Mount Sinai, Israel was forbidden to draw near.
  - *And Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’ ” And the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.” (Exodus 19:23–24)*
- God’s holiness was the veil, the curtain, separating Him from the people. But in Christ that curtain has been torn and removed, the separation has been bridged. Speaking of this, the author of Hebrews will write in chapter 12
  - *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of*

*a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:18–24)*

- Under the Mosaic covenant, proximity to the presence of God was associated with judgment, terror, and death. To draw near was to die. But now, in Christ, the presence of God is associated with grace, mercy, reverence and life. To draw near is to live.
- In the garden, as a result of the fall, man & woman were banished from God's presence. In fact, a guard with flaming sword was stationed to guarantee their exile & prevent them from returning to Eden. But now. But God. Because of Christ, the way is opened & we're welcomed back with open arms.
- So draw near. That's the application of the text.
- Which is the very opposite that many of us feel as a result of sin. Rather than drawing near in confidence, we shrink back in shame when we sin. We attempt to hide ourselves, we try to cover ourselves with fig leaves and works. We try to appease God, but in doing so we undermine the fact that He has already been pacified by Christ.
- And the irony is that we actually dishonor God and discredit Christ when we run away or hide. We render Christ's work impotent and insufficient.
- It seems pious to say that you're too dirty to come, too broken, too defiled, too unclean, too promiscuous, too gluttonous, too slothful, too arrogant, too idolatrous, too weak to draw near. You've screwed up too many times. You've broken too many promises. Bent too many rules. Broken too many hearts. Betrayed too many friends.
- That might sounds pious and humble, but really its nothing but pride.
- At the end of the day, you're saying that your unrighteousness is greater than Christ's righteousness. That you can somehow out sin God's grace. That your weakness is stronger than His strength.
- You're saying Christ isn't enough, Jesus isn't better, His work isn't finished.
- When we understand our shame in that sense, we can see how unbelievably arrogant it is.
- So when we understand, when we truly believe, when we actually grasp the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, when we genuinely believe that absolutely everything necessary for your life and godliness has been accomplished by virtue of Christ's merits, when we genuinely believe Christ when He says that it is finished and we are forgiven, fully, freely, and forever, when we comprehend, when we understand the true sense in which He gets us, then we draw near. We come.
- As He has said,
  - *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)*
- So, will you come? Will you draw near? Will you lay down your pride and lay aside your sin and hold fast to the confession that the Lord Jesus Christ, our holy high priest, is better?
- Let's pray.

### **Communion**

- Fence table

- As we prepare our hearts for communion, I just want to encourage you in light of this text to take a few minutes and think about where you might be hesitant to draw near.
- Think about places where shame is defining you. Where fear is defining you. Where you are apathetic or complacent.
- And then I want you to imagine those very sins as being laid upon and purchased by Christ.
- Think about those sins being forgiven. And then in confidence, thank God for forgiveness, and trust His power to compel you to draw near.
- Take a second.
- On the night...