

Text: Heb. 4:14-16

Title: "We have a Great High Priest"

Time: 11/23/2014 pm

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to that part of the Book of Hebrews that begins to speak of Christ as our Great High Priest. The idea was introduced in 3:1, where we learned that Jesus Christ is both the Apostle (like Moses) of our profession, and the High Priest (like Aaron) of our profession. He is better than both Moses and Aaron, and for that reason, we should not go back to Judaism or any other religion void of the true Christ. We should instead hold fast (v. 14).

One of the keys to holding fast is the power of God's Word (vv. 12-13). We spoke of the importance of God's Word last week. This week's passage tells us of the importance of prayer to holding fast. Our Apostle Christ gives us God's Word (1:1-2), and our High Priest Christ hears our prayers (4:16).

But before we begin to plunge into the glory of what it means for Christ to be our great high priest and to hear our prayers, I want us to start by pausing on two little words emphasized in the passage before us: "we have." Adolf Saphir helped me to appreciate the significance of these two words in a way that I had not appreciated before:

"Jesus belongs to the sinner. From His infancy in Bethlehem's manger to the garden of Gethsemane, and from His agony on the cross to His ascension high above all heavens, He belongs to us poor, guilty and helpless sinners, who trust in Him. He is altogether ours. He came to seek and to save us who were lost. His obedience, His life of sorrow and love, His prayers and tears, His sacrifice on the cross,

His resurrection, all is ours, because we are the wayward and helpless sheep who went astray, and whom He found.

“And in the heavenly glory He is ours, and His love, sympathy, faithfulness and power, give unto us in our need and misery, all things which pertain unto life and godliness. It is with us sinners that the glorified Savior is now constantly occupied. We are His thought, His care, His work, and –oh that it were so more abundantly! – His joy, His garden, His reward. In Jesus God is ours. In the ocean of His love, in the fullness of infinite covenant-grace, we can rejoice. The God with whom we have to do seeth and knoweth all things; He is a consuming fire – and yet is He our God, Father, Savior, indwelling Spirit; His throne is the throne of grace; nay, our very life is hid with Christ in God; we are in the bosom of Jesus, who is in the bosom of the Father. Hold fast, brother, and come boldly. Amen.”

The title of the message tonight is “We have a Great High Priest.” We are going to learn much in the weeks ahead about the wonder of this tremendous possession of ours, but tonight we just want to organize our thoughts from these verses around two points: (1) our Priest is great and high; (2) the great and high One is our Priest.

#### I. Our Priest is great and high (v. 14).

Illustration: I have had the privilege of seeing some beautiful mountains. There are, of course, the Appalachian Mountains here in the East that include the White Mountains, the Adirondack Mountains, the Catskill Mountains, the Alleghany Mountains, the Cumberland Mountains, the Smokey Mountains, and the Ozarks. I have traveled through these mountains most of my life, and I always enjoyed their majestic beauty doing so.

Then there was the day I first laid my eyes on the Rocky Mountains. That gave me a whole new understanding of what the word *mountain* means. I have also had the privilege of seeing the Alps in Switzerland. All my life I had grown up calling mere hills *mountains*. The great impressive difference of the Rockies and the Alps was, of course, their height.

Application: In Jesus Christ we not only have a priest, we have a Great and High Priest. As our author introduces us to this ministry of our Lord, he emphasizes this greatness and height in a way that ought to make a great impression upon us, kind of like a kid from the East seeing the Rockies for the very first time. Note what is said here about the greatness and the height of Christ our Priest:

1. He is passed through the heavens (v. 14). This is a reference to Christ's passing into the very presence of God in our behalf. Whereas the human priest could go into the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), our priest has passed into the very presence of His holy heavenly Father and there ministers to our need as sinners for atonement with a holy God. The author will revisit this theme throughout his description of our Great High Priest (6:19-20; 7:26; 9:11-12, 24; 10:12).

Charles Wesley understood the significance of this great truth—that Christ our priest is passed through the heavens into the very presence of the Father for our atonement: “Five bleeding wounds He bears received at Calvary/They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me./Forgive him, oh forgive, they cry! Forgive him, oh forgive, they cry! Nor let that ransomed sinner die.” [“Arise, My Soul, Arise”] The greatness and height of our Priest means that He has passed through the heavens.

2. He is the Son of God (v. 14). The Sonship of Christ already has factored significantly into the author's description of his superiority to Moses as the Apostle of our profession (3:5-6). And now we will find that the Sonship of Christ is a great advantage in His ministry to us as our Priest (5:5, 8, 7:3, 28). God's Son, the only-begotten Son, the well-pleasing Son, the obedient Son, the sacrificed and risen Son, is our representative in heaven. Abraham and Isaac are a picture of this (11:17-19). God actually did with His Son what he asked Abraham to picture only. That our Priest is that Son makes Him a great and high priest indeed.

3. He occupies a throne (v. 16). Our Priest is the sovereign king of the universe (1:8, 8:1, 12:2). He is completely in charge. The Melchizedek picture fits because Jesus, our priest, is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace (7:2). His priestly ministry decrees that we our righteous, and it rules that we are at peace with God. This world of unrighteousness and warring against God is being used for His glory, can only go as far as He allows it to go, and will come to an end when He wants it to end (1:13, 2:8, 10:13). Because of this throne, no believer need fear earthly kings, as Moses taught us (11:27, 33). In possession of this King-Priest, we belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:28). We must, of course, serve Him acceptably with reverence and Godly fear.

Application: And so our Priest is great and high. Have you seen this to be true about Him? Do we understand His might and power as we confront this evil world, or do we tremble over our problems and fear over the difficulties of this life? Are we confident and bold in our Christian walk, or are we discouraged and down-trodden? Shall we hold fast our profession? The answer is yes only because our Priest is truly great and high. Our Priest is great and high.

## II. The great and high One is our Priest (vv. 15-16).

Illustration: Have you ever wished someone would come to you when they need help? I feel that way about my kids a good deal. I ask them how things are, and they tell me fine, and I find myself a bit disappointed. I cherish those times when a child will say, "Well, Dad, I am really struggling with something, and I need your help." I am hurt when I find that they have gone to a friend at school with a problem that I think I could help them with better than that friend could. I hope my kids feel that they can come to me with a need like that. I hope the flock of God I pastor feels that it can come to me like that.

Application: Far more importantly, the great and high One wants us to know that we can come to Him, for He is our Priest. The command of these verses is to come boldly. That is not optional; it is something God commands us to do. We must come to our Priest boldly. I like what Adolph Saphir said about coming boldly: "Boldly is not contrasted with reverently and tremblingly; boldness is not contrasted with awe and godly fear. It means literally 'saying all,' with that confidence which begets thorough honesty, frankness, full and open speech. 'Pour out your heart before Him.' Come as you are; say what you feel; ask what you need. Confess your sins, your fears, your wandering thoughts and affections." Why come? Our verses give us at least three reasons:

1. Come because Christ went through what we go through (v. 15). The word for *the feeling of our infirmity* is the word we get our English word *sympathy* from. *To sympathize is to feel together*. Christ can feel what we feel about the difficulties of life because He went through them the way we go through them, as a true human. I can only imagine that angels must have some difficulty understanding why we are as needy as we are. Jesus never has that difficulty under-

standing. We come to Him and not the angels, because Christ went through what we go through in the same human weakness and limitedness we experience.

2. Come because Christ went through what we go through without sin (v. 15).

Illustration: News reports have told us about a doctor in New York who is being treated for ebola. He was helping ebola patients in Africa, but no longer can because now he needs that help.

Application: This is how it works with sin. It is so spiritually destructive that the one who is a sinner ultimately has no ability to help other sinners. Christ went through what we go through without sin. In so doing, He earned for us a righteousness that can be imputed to our account. In the atonement, Christ not only had to die for the penalty of our sins, His passive obedience to the law, but also He had to live a sinless life to obtain a righteousness that could be imputed to our account, His active obedience. When we come to Him with our sins, He cures us completely, because He is without sin.

3. Come because Christ gives mercy and grace in time of need (v. 16).

Illustration: At times we have received good help with bad timing. You spend five hours trying to get a bolt out of a caliper bracket, and the next day your friend tells you that you should have just purchased a new caliper bracket instead. That is good help with bad timing.

Application: The help that we receive as we come to the Lord in prayer always has three characteristics. It is always

merciful – it refuses to give us what we really deserve; it is always gracious – it always freely gives us what we do not deserve and cannot earn; and it is always well-timed – it is always in the time of need. What more could we ask for? How could we not come? Why do we not come?

Conclusion: And so our author has introduced us to the Great High Priest of our profession, and he has told us to hold fast to our confession. In possession of this Priest, we have no excuse for turning back. I want to conclude our thoughts of Him with a wonderful poem Saphir offers in his commentary:

“Where high the heavenly temple stands,  
The house of God not made with hands,  
A great High Priest our nature wears,  
The Guardian of mankind appears.

“He who for men their surety stood,  
And poured on earth His precious blood,  
Pursues in heaven His mighty plan,  
The Savior and the Friend of man.

“Though now ascended up on high,  
He bends on earth a brother’s eye;  
Partaker of the human name,  
He knows the frailty of our frame.

“Our fellow-sufferer yet retains  
A fellow-feeling of our pains;  
And still remembers in the skies,  
His tears, His agonies, and cries.”

Our Priest is great and high, and the great and high One is our Priest. Let us, therefore, hold fast and come boldly.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*