

Confidence in Christ – Confident before the Throne

Goldstone Church – 07-Nov-16 10:30am

Hebrews 4:14-16

Introduction

This is the penultimate look in our series looking at the first 6 chapters in the book of Hebrews, under the theme of “Confidence in Christ”. This time we’re looking at 3 verses at the end of chapter 4 that introduce the next 5 chapters; they provide much to reflect on, specifically, several key attributes and qualities of Jesus.

1. [Jesus is] **A GREAT HIGH PRIEST** (Hebrews 4:14a)

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” (Heb 4:14)

The writer of the book of Hebrews is referring to the rituals that the Priests performed in the Temple in Jerusalem. After God led His people out of Egypt, He gave a detailed description of how the Israelites were to worship; particularly, how the tribe of Levi was to be set apart as priests to serve God in His Tabernacle-tent, then later in the Temple. The priests were “go-betweens” between the people and God.

Each year one priest was chosen by God to be the High Priest. This man had extra duties, most importantly on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On that day, the High Priest took 2 goats, he would sacrifice one, and place all the sins of God’s people on the other goat. The “scapegoat” would then be led out into the desert and released, symbolising the carrying away of all the sins of the people.

The High Priest then entered the Holy of Holies to make sacrifices for the sins of the people. This was the only day that the High Priest could enter this most holy place.

By contrast, Jesus is the Great High Priest; He fulfilled every requirement. On the cross at Calvary, Jesus made atonement – He took away all the sins in a way that no animal sacrifice could ever achieve. Jesus made the way for us to enter the Holy of Holies.

2. [Jesus has] **GONE THROUGH THE HEAVENS** (Hebrews 4:14b)

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” (Heb 4:14)

This description echoes Jesus’ ascension into heaven. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he ascended into heaven, and left the sight of the disciples (Acts 1:9).

This phrase provides 2 parallel thoughts for us to consider:

- a) When Jesus left our sight and went into God’s presence, this may refer to when a High Priest left the sight of the people and he went into the Holy of Holies. Jesus went into God’s holy presence.
- b) The phrase can also refer to Jesus coming from the heavens and becoming fully man.

Both images have merit, possibly work together to emphasise that Jesus is unique – that Jesus is God.

3. [Jesus is] **THE SON OF GOD** (Hebrews 4:14c)

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.” (Heb 4:14)

The writer to the Hebrews makes it completely clear who is the Great High Priest: this is Jesus, the Son of the One True God. He is the One who has gone through the heavens. He is the One who is the Great High Priest.

4. [Jesus can] **SYMPATHISE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES** (Hebrews 4:15a)

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Heb 4:15)

As our High Priest, Jesus understands and sympathises with our weaknesses. Literally, Jesus has been affected with the same feelings that we have. When Jesus became human, He fully participated and lived our life with us; He understands and sympathises.

Jesus knows what it's like to be hungry, thirsty, dirty and cold. He knows what it feels like to be joyful, angry, sad, betrayed and frustrated. As a result, we do not need to keep Jesus away at arm's length. Instead, we can bring our life experiences to Jesus and ask for help. His response will be one of compassion and understanding, not rejection and judgement.

5. [Jesus has been] **TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY** (Hebrews 4:15b)

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Heb 4:15)

Our High Priest understands how we can get caught up in sin. Not because Jesus has also been caught up in sin, but because He has been tempted.

Straight after His baptism, Jesus was tempted by the Devil (Matthew 4:1-11). All three temptations were devious and full-on; they were the Devil's best attempts to draw Jesus into sin. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus has been tempted, just like you and me. Jesus knows the draw, and has felt the enticement that surrounds temptation.

But Jesus' response to those temptations, leads to the last description of our great High Priest.

6. [Jesus was] **WITHOUT SIN** (Hebrews 4:15c)

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.” (Heb 4:15)

The previous 2 characteristics emphasise Jesus' similarity with us, but this final characteristic emphasises Jesus' distinctiveness. Although Jesus was tempted, He did *not* sin. We can never claim to have this ability; we have all given in to temptation and have rebelled against God.

“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22b-23)

For the Jewish Christians reading this letter for the first time, these descriptions of Jesus changed everything. Jesus’ role as High Priest revolutionised what the Old Testament Temple sacrifices were all about. In the old system, a goat ran off with the sins the people placed on it. It was a powerful symbol, but still, just a symbol.

Jesus was the real thing! Up until Jesus’ death, the animal sacrifices temporarily covered over sin. But because Jesus was sinless, we are forgiven - permanently. Through Jesus, the way is now open for us to come into God’s holy presence.

CONCLUSION

These verses have some wonderful descriptions of Jesus, but what does this mean for us now?

1. As Christians, these verses provide a depth of assurance and confidence that is beyond parallel. Christians live in the certainty that Jesus is our Great High Priest. Through Jesus:
 - a. our sins are forgiven,
 - b. we have unrestricted access into God’s holy presence,
 - c. we have a personal relationship with the Son of God, and
 - d. we have the promise of eternal life – that starts now!
 - e. We have a Saviour who can sympathise and identify with everything that we are going through in our daily lives. Jesus promises to be alongside us in every step we take.

So, *“hold firmly to the faith we profess”* (Hebrews 4:14).

Christians are in a place of security. From this stronghold, we can go out into the world and share with others about our personal relationship with Jesus.

2. If you are not a Christian, then, sadly, there is an emptiness in your life that nothing will be able to satisfy; there is a loneliness in your soul that no human relationship will ever be able to satisfy. Only Jesus can fill that empty void. Only His love, grace, mercy and forgiveness will be sufficient.

Jesus stands at the entrance of your life, gently asking to be part of your life. He won’t push His way in, because that is not how to have a relationship. Instead, Jesus is gently asking for you to accept Him into your life; to fill that void and emptiness that you have struggled with for so long.

With Jesus in your life, there is a new life, a new vitality, and a new relationship - that will last for eternity.

With Jesus in our life as our Great High Priest, there is nothing that can stop us from coming into God’s holy presence -- receiving His mercy, grace, love and forgiveness.

Don’t hesitate. Through Jesus, let us come before God with confidence. He will faithfully meet us, in our time of need.

AMEN