

Introduction:

- A. My friend Jack died suddenly this week. One of the things I thought about was this: thank God, he died loyal to Jesus. I've wondered all my life if I would do that. No Bible character unsettles me more than Samson whose weakness, rather than his strength, became the story of his life. When I was about 35 a dear friend and a pastor disqualified himself from ministry because of dreadful sin. And I trembled. *If it could happen to him*, I thought, *it can happen to me*. I pictured myself in the ill-fated Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg, marching into the guns. I became very fatalistic. I looked at my fallen pastoral brothers, men as good and called as I, and I began to think, "It is only a matter of time. My sin will be the death of me, too. I may get a few steps farther, but it seems like we will all go down." It was a desperate feeling for a young pastor.
- B. When I say things like that to people they tend to think I'm too hard on myself. Turn in your Bibles to **Heb. 4:12-13**. If you've been here the last couple Sundays you'll remember that the author here is warning those who have responded to the good news of Jesus that they must not harden their hearts like the Israelites did when God saved them out of Egypt. Because if we harden our hearts by not trusting God day by day and by letting sin deceive us we will, like Israel, die in the wilderness. We will not enter into God's Rest.

These verses take us to God's judgment seat. The Word of God, which offered salvation, also speaks when it is squandered. **Vv.12-13...**

1. There will come a time when God speaks and no secrets are safe, no sin can hide, no faithless attitudes can lay low in our hearts.
2. There will come a time when "we must give account" for our hard hearts. It isn't just an accounting of our sin, but of sin when we had welcomed salvation and then abandoned it, of faithlessness when we *knew* the God-blessed life lay forever before us. That is what we will have to give account for.

- C. What are we going to do?! We're going to read the next verse: **4:14**, "*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*" **If we do not understand and avail ourselves of Jesus ministry as our High Priest we will not be safe on the day we must "give account" of ourselves to God.**
- D. Before we look at just what Jesus does for us let's look at what this passage tells us about him as a high priest. There are two main things. The first is this:

I. WE HAVE IN JESUS THE HIGH PRIEST APPOINTED BY GOD

- A. *Illus.*: If you were arrested and the police told you that they had you dead-to-rights on about 100 crimes, all on camera, you'd better get yourself a good lawyer. A high priest is kind of like a great lawyer. He represents us before the God, to whom we must give account. Having read what God knows in **vv.12-13** and knowing the penalty, we dare not waltz into his presence and pretend we don't have a problem. We have, after all, disobeyed him, distrusted him, and ignored him. And truth be told, we feel the inclination to do those things every day. **That's why we need a high priest.**
- B. And the high priest we need must himself be acceptable to God. **Heb. 5:1** says, "*Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*" **V.4** adds, "*And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.*" Long before Jesus was born, God said that the Messiah, the King he anointed to rule over his people, would be his own Son and that he would be a unique, everlasting priest. **Vv.5-6...**
1. We saw in 1:2-3 what it means that Jesus is God's Son... That is who God appointed to represent us!
 2. As to his being a priest, Hebrews will have much more to say about that, but the main point here is that he is a priest *forever* since he is of a different order of priests.

C. The difference between a priest and a lawyer is that a lawyer tries to prove your innocence, or at least to plead for leniency based on your regret or reputation. **A high priest assumes you are guilty as sin! He comes to bring a sacrifice sufficient to satisfy the righteous Judge.** Jesus, our High Priest, approaches God with his own blood—the blood of the sacrificed Lamb—as full and enduring payment for our sins. There’s no question of our guilt but as **Heb. 1:3** says, he provides “*purification for sins.*”

So when Satan, the cosmic tattle-tale, accuses us of our sin before God—*Lee did it again! He was selfish and unkind just like he always is. You have to do something. You can’t let him get away with this!*—Jesus, as High Priest, points to his blood shed for me and all is well.

*“I need no other argument.
I need no other plea.
It is enough that Jesus died,
and that he died for me.”*

So we have the High Priest, Jesus Son of God, whom God appointed and who serves God and us in heaven, and will serve there forever. The High Priest has another requirement. **4:15; 15:2...**

II. WE HAVE IN JESUS THE HIGH PRIEST ABLE TO EMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES

A. We are blessed with a High Priest who has felt the burden of human weaknesses and been tempted like we are. We point to this verse as a reminder that Jesus felt the same human burdens that we all do, but the particular focus is that he felt the pressure—the temptation—to sin. We think that things like grief, sickness, nasty people, unsatisfied dreams, heartbreaking relationships are the hardest things in life. But from a biblical point of view, the hardest thing is not falling to the temptations to doubt and disobey God in the midst of such things. That is the hardest thing. That’s why the emphasis here is on how Jesus withstood temptation.

4:15 says our High Priest “*has been tempted in every way, just as we are.*” And you might think, *Wait. Was he tempted to take drugs or indulge in pornography? How was he tempted to give up on a marriage or to cut corners on his taxes?* Those are just the approaches of temptation. **All temptations are lies about God or his Word.** A thousand different circumstances can carry the lie that says God isn’t really good, or that God won’t do what he says, or that the home he’s promised us is better than all we’ve left behind. And Jesus faced all those lies in the devil’s most soul-crushing attacks. There is no lie you will ever face that Jesus did not face.

There’s another thing about the temptations Jesus faced. When Jesus was tempted—in the wilderness with the devil and in Gethsemane—he did not resort to supernatural help. He did not turn stones to bread or leap from the temple’s parapets into angels’ arms. He did not banish Satan. On the cross he did not call heaven’s armies to rescue him. **He took it like a man. He took temptation like a man.** And that’s why he is so sympathetic to us.

Here is Jesus facing temptation: 5:7... Do you remember what it was like for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died? Listen to **Luke 22:40-45:**

On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Jesus is tender-hearted toward you in all of life’s sorrows and struggles, but where we need his empathy most is when we are tempted to sin. And you have it. It’s at that very point you think he may be impatient with you. Fed up with your weakness. But it is never so. He knows what it is to suffer under temptation and he sides with you!

- B. There is one key difference between Jesus and us, of course: “yet he did not sin.” **That not sinning changed Jesus. 5:8-10...** The complete, perfect human being must be someone who obeys God in the depths of suffering, and Jesus did that. He thereby not only sympathizes with us in temptation but also became a perfect sacrifice for us—the Lamb of God without blemish or defect, *and* he became the perfect High Priest, chosen by God and tender-hearted toward sinners and the tempted.
- C. Back to **5:2**: *“He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.”* We are all, at times, ignorant and straying, too foolish or far away to seek the Lord as we should, spiritually gullible and easily lost. But Jesus, our High Pastor/Shepherd, deals gently with us in those times. He does not cut us off from grace. He finds ways to instruct the ignorant—the duped and dumb—in the ways of God, and he leaves the 99 to pursue the one lost sheep, and brings him or her home to great rejoicing. In this gentle dealing he is the agent of God to us.
- D. Jesus died to **save** us from our sins, but he lives now to **preserve** us from sinning and temptation.

That brings us back to the point of this passage, in 4:14:

III. “LET US HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITH WE PROFESS”

- A. What faith do we confess? We just saw it in **5:10**, that Jesus *“became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Mechizedek.”* We believe that we have eternal salvation through Christ and that he is our everlasting high priest. That’s what we hold firmly when life is hard.
- B. There’s an interesting paradox here. While we are urged to be strong in our faith—“to hold firmly to the faith we profess”—we need not hide our weaknesses, so evident in temptation. Unlike Jesus, we need never face sin or temptation alone. **V.16**: *“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

1. **“Approach God’s throne of grace with confidence.”**
 When we’ve sinned or are struggling with sin this is the very thing we are reluctant to do. Like my friend who said she almost didn’t come to church because she felt so unworthy. We all know that feeling. I feel *least* like praying when I feel *most* like sinning! But in those very moments we must approach God *confidently*—boldly. **Not because our sin is no big deal but because we have such a great high priest!**
2. **We come so that we may receive mercy.** I think the point is that we come when we’ve sinned, when we succumbed to temptation. Don’t run away. Don’t hide. Don’t give up because sin has trapped you again. Come humbly but confidently to God’s throne of grace and there, because Jesus stands in for you, you will find mercy. Yes, *again* you will find mercy.
*“My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—
 my sin, not in part but the whole,
 is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”*
*“Every debt that you ever had
 has been paid up in full. Be ye glad!”*
 But whatever you do, don’t run away when you sin.
*“Weak and wounded sinner, Lost and left to die,
 O raise your head for loving is passing by.
 Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus and live.”*
3. **We come so that we may receive grace to help us in our time of need.** I think this is when we are struggling with temptation. Do not gut this out on your own. Do not go it alone. Come to God to ask for whatever gift you need to persevere.
O God, my spirit is willing to obey you but my flesh is so weak. Help me!
Lord, I cannot stop thinking about the temptation. Please take control of my mind.
Lord, I feel like there is no way out of this temptation but I do not want to sin. Help me.

Do you remember the promise in **1 Cor. 10:13**, “*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*”

Conclusion

The only way we can “hold firmly to the faith we profess” is to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence,” –which we have because Jesus is our great High Priest, “so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Have you sinned? Come to that throne and find the healing balm of God’s mercy, his assurance that for Jesus’ sake it is well with your soul. Never, ever think your sin makes you unwelcome before your Father! Never fear coming home!

When you are tempted and bending, when you’re empty and alone and weary, Jesus will meet you. Jesus leads us straight to “God’s throne of grace.” “*Come up here to the foot of the Father’s throne,*” Jesus urges us. “*Come, don’t be afraid. This is where you belong. Right here before God. I’ll be right at your side. I’ll even pray with you. Let us ask God the Father, who loves us both, to give you mercy for your faltering faith and forgiveness for your careless steps, for whatever you’ve done to make this all worse. And let us together ask the Father, who loves us both, for grace—gifts you do not deserve and can never earn so that you might walk through this dark place on a righteous path.*” *Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus and live!*

As I told you, there was a time when I feared that failing and falling was inevitable. “Then, by the grace of God, I came across Jude 21, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy” I have clung to that verse for over twenty-five years. I am no less a danger to myself now than I was then, but that makes the verse all the more precious. He is *still* able to keep me from falling. He is *still* able to present me to the Father without fault and with great joy. How that can possibly be, I do not know, except for grace. “Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” (from *Pastoral Graces*, p.168)