

**Text:** Hebrews 4:14-16

**Title:** Be Faithful to the Faithful Great High Priest

**Homiletical Truth:** We must maintain fidelity to Jesus because of the kind of priest that He is.

**Date/Location:** November 28, 2010 at FBC; April 8, 2018 at American House

## **Introduction**

The message of the previous verses was to be diligent to enter God's salvation rest because the Word of God discerns the innermost parts of our being and God Himself sees us as an open book. God and His Word are effectively similar in this area of discernment, the message coming as it does from God. I might not have made as clearly as I could last time that verse 12 is speaking about the Word of God, and verse 13 shifts to God Himself. There is a distinction, but the difference can be lost in the great similarity of these two "x-ray machines." The bottom line is that God knows those who belong to Him, those who have entered the rest and those who are pretenders.

Verse 14 where our study begins today does not seem to be too closely connected to the previous verse. This is because from 3:6-4:13, Hebrews has been concerned to warn us, using the OT example of disobedient Israelites, that it is still possible to miss God's rest. There is no "faking it until we make it," because God and His Word will sniff out the reality that is in our heart, that is, if we are really believing in Christ or not.

Verse 14 shifts back to a previous emphasis on the Son as high priest from 2:17 and 3:1. This shift can be seen as a conclusion to the previous section that had to do with Christ's greatness compared to Moses. It can also be seen as a transition into the following chapters (5-10) that deal a lot with Jesus as High Priest.

## **I. Hold Fast our Confession, 4:14-15**

### **A. The exhortation: hold fast our confession**

1. Holding fast means to not let go, to adhere strongly. It is an ongoing thing.

For the Jewish reader, it would be especially appropriate to be reminded again and again of this because of the cultural pressure and theological doubts that he might have.

2. The confession is our statement of allegiance to Jesus Christ; it is how we are bound to him.

Examples: Hebrews 3:1, 10:23, 1 Timothy 6:12.

Here we can think about the distinction between profession and possession.

3. With this allegiance comes a responsibility of continuous fidelity.

The Christian life is not on-again-off-again-on-again. The expectation is that you will give your life to Jesus in faith, entrusting your soul's keeping and whole life into his hands. You begin to follow him with the intention of continuing to follow.

We do not expect people to hear the bare-bones "how to get saved initially" gospel and just to make a blind commitment. Like "just get them in the door" and we'll show them the rest later. That's a cult thing. We want you to see something of the scope of a new life in Christ, even if you cannot grasp all of it perfectly right away, so that you can make a fully informed and faithful

commitment. This way, you have some idea what you are leaving behind and what you are entering into.

## B. The reasons: why we should hold fast to our allegiance to Jesus

### 1. We have a great High Priest.

High priest – Two mentions of it in the book so far, at 2:17, 3:1, and now again at 4:14-15. Difference here is that we have a *great* high priest. There was no such thing in the OT; in fact this is the only passage in the Bible where the phrase is used.

What is a priest? Look to the OT for definition—Melchizedek was the first one called a priest in Gen. 14:18. Perhaps why he is significant in the book of Hebrews and Psalm 110. The next “good” mentioned of priest is in Exodus 28:1-4.

The main idea of the priesthood is to “minister to God” or “serve God” (see also Exodus 40:13). The book of Leviticus (1:2-9) starts with the duties of the priest relative to the Israelites who wanted to come and make an offering for sin or for thanksgiving. The Israelite citizen needed a priest to help him conduct the sacrifice. In effect, this meant that the priest was indispensable in the citizen’s relationship to God. The idea is that the priest is an intermediary between God and man.

The priest did not generally provide revelation from God because the prophet in the OT had that job, but the priest did have special access to God to help leaders or other Israelites with special decisions (see, for instance, Exodus 28:30). The priests and their brothers the Levites sometimes were teachers of the Law in Israel (2 Chron. 15:3).

In the OT, the priest had more affinity for man in the sense that he was himself a man. The priesthood today—that of Jesus Christ—has a close connection to both man and God since Christ is both in one person!

By the way, a pastor is not a priest. For one thing, he does not stand between you and God. He does not provide revelation, but he is supposed to teach God’s word, and can help with specific decisions you have to make or problems you have to solve.

If we think about these ideas with respect to Jesus, we see that Jesus himself was an offering for sin (2:17, not to be repeated, 10:14); He is indispensable in our relationship to God in that he stands between us (1 Tim. 2:5).

### 2. He is in heaven.

That Jesus ‘passed through the heavens’ is not precisely clear. Both coming down in the incarnation and going back up after the resurrection at the ascension makes this statement true on both ends of his human life on this earth.

Probably in view here is that Jesus is great high priest in the heavenly temple right now. He is not visible at present, but that is because He went to a better temple (Heb. 9:24).

### 3. He is Jesus, the Son of God.

Notice progression from Son in 1:2, to God in 1:8, to Lord in 2:3 to Jesus in 2:9 to high priest in 2:17. Now all the terms are put together: “Jesus, Son of God, great High Priest.”

This speaks of his humanity (Jesus); his deity (Son of God); and his connection between man and God (high priest).

4. He knows our weaknesses.

**Transition:** The business about Christ being in heaven now may raise an objection, namely that when He is there, how can He help us here?

AH replies that “we do not have an unsympathetic High Priest.” Here’s why: he was tempted in all the ways we are. He was immersed in the sin-cursed world like we are. He held up against all the temptations that life threw— money, power, lust, hunger, tiredness, sickness, etc. He withstood the temptations through their full force. We often fall into the temptation’s sin after a short while; he took it all the way until he extinguished the temptation.

The phrase “without sin” can be taken two ways. It can mean that he did not sin in any of the temptations, which is definitely true. In fact, he could not sin given His perfect constitution. He did not have an internal sin nature (flesh) to interact with the external world of sin or the devil, so he did not in fact sin as is made clear in many Scriptures (2 Cor. 5:21, Heb 7:25, 1 Peter 2:22).

The phrase “without sin” can also mean he was tempted in all points like we are, excepting that he never personally did sin or had to deal with the multiplied tests that come after we sin. I lean to this interpretation myself. He stopped short of a complete likeness to man in the only area where He could not have that likeness, and that is in the area of sin.

The bottom line is that He experienced that kind of suffering and can thus be a merciful and faithful high priest for us (2:17-18).

The negative form of the statement answers the objection “how can Jesus be sympathetic when he is not here?!” But turning the statement around into the positive form really encourages us: “We DO HAVE a High Priest who DOES sympathize with our weaknesses!” He knows our need.

## II. Come Boldly to the Throne of Grace, 4:16

**Transition:** In light of the kind of high priest we have, One Who is sympathetic, we should go to Him for help.

A. Boldness comes from what we read earlier.

1. We cannot hide anyway, so we might as well come, 4:12-13.

2. We have a go-between so we don’t have to be afraid of coming, 4:15

We have a high priest so we don’t have to be terrified of God’s piercing vision or the discerning nature of the Word of God. We still have to *deal* with those things, but we do not have to be *terrified* by them because Jesus is our friend and sympathizer.

3. Our priest knows our weaknesses and compassionately bids us to come to his throne which dispenses and is founded upon all grace.

B. The throne of grace is God's throne.

This is where Christ is seated, at God's right hand, waiting until his enemies be made his footstool (1:13).

C. The situation is one where mercy is needed...not just initial salvation where mercy is definitely necessary, but any time in the believer's life when there is a need. God provides in His mercy a timely help.

D. The way we come is through prayer. We ask for God's mercy and grace and help, and Christ will advocate for us so that we can receive those things.

About this confidence of receiving answers to our prayers, see Matthew 21:22, Mark 11:24, Acts 10:43, 1 John 5:14-15, James 1:5-8, 5:16.

## **Conclusion**

In the book of Hebrews, we read some warnings from the negative side, and some exhortations or admonishments from the positive side.

On the sobering and more negative side, consider 2:1-4's "how shall we escape" and 3:12's "beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief" and "lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (entering his rest) in 4:1.

On the happier side, consider the verses we are looking at in this sermon—look at the great high priest that we have. What reason do we have *not* to continue to follow Him? He cares about us, was tested like we are, yet overcame those temptations and did not sin. How could we not continue to hold fast to Christ and come to him to seek help in our times of temptation?

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