

The Advocate  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
3/18/18  
John Song

Welcome. In many ways, I kind of feel like we should just pray, say *amen*, and leave. I mean, it was just great to be led by Dr. Koch and Randy Pendleton as they were leading us through the singing of and the proclamation of the Gospel, as Christ is our great High Priest. But, sadly, there's a sermon that needs to be preached, so we're going to have to go into that. So if it's your first time here, my name is John Song. I'm the pastor of youth ministries here at Columbia Pres. And we want to welcome you to our Sunday service. We would also like at this time to dismiss our children ages four to first grade who are participating in children's worship. The rest of you, you are stuck with me. We are getting to continue our series on the Book of Hebrews. And as we transition now to passages which speak about Christ as the better Moses for the nation of Israel, talking about that Sabbath rest that we long to enter into, as Pastor Randy Lovelace preached last week—we now move into a transition of three verses, which transitions from this idea of Christ as the better Moses to now Christ as the better Aaron or the great high priest. So please turn or tap your Bibles with me to Hebrews 4, and we will look at verses 14 to 16. Hebrews 4:14-16. This is the reading of God's Word.

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. 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. 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. [ESV]

This is the Word of the Lord. Would you join me in prayer?

Father, we come before you not because we are somehow owed your presence or even owed your grace and mercy. We come before your Holy Word because we have a great high priest who has gone before us. He is perfectly able, perfectly sinless, perfectly compassionate to let us boldly approach you here today. So we pray that in our exploration of your Word, you would enable us to see your Son clearly, in a way that calls our whole lives to be set towards the glory of your great name. And that the Holy Spirit would guide us to see our desperate need for Christ in all things. And it is in that great name, our advocate, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, we pray all these things. Amen.

Well, forty-eight years ago, an experiment was being held in the world of television. There was a station that sought for a nonprofit network that would provide programming that would be for children to learn and grow, providing shows that would challenge their intellect as well as provide them entertaining options that were different from other forms of media that parents would find objectionable. And that station would be known as PBS, the Public Broadcasting Station, which today has reached the hearts of many of us here in this room, and for many of us continues on through the legacy of even our own children in providing them educational programming. But did you know that forty-eight years ago, this idea almost never happened?

You see, in 1969, Public Broadcasting needed funding from the Senate Subcommittee on Communications. They were in danger of losing their funding of \$22 million, which is, today's equivalent, about \$150 million, that they needed to remain in operations due to the rising costs of the Vietnam War. And the man that they needed to appeal to was Senator John O. Pastore. He was a hardened Rhode Island, northeastern lawyer who served as an assistant state attorney general. This guy never lost an election. And he was inclined to cut funding from PBS, save for six minutes that PBS was granted to make an

appeal to the floor of the senate to advocate for the justification of their existence. Now, needless to say here, PBS needed an advocate. So who could they turn to?

Now, many of you know who this person is. See, at the time, they had this one person. He was a relatively unknown man. His name was Fred Rogers, an Ivy League dropout who worked for them doing children's shows that involved puppets and teaching kids not to be afraid of getting a haircut. So in six minutes, you have Mr. Rogers, as he was called. And he didn't talk about budgetary process. He didn't talk about the ins and outs of the stability and the structure of PBS. Instead, he talked to this hardened attorney state general of the senate about the value of media to be able to help the mental health of children, by showing them something beautiful and loving rather than showing them something harmful and hateful. He talked about the importance of sharing one's feelings and how to make those feelings mentionable and manageable. He read a poem, which describes the heart of a child who's able to control their negative emotions and believe in themselves. And in those six minutes, the heart of this toughened senator changed to the point where he said, "I'm a pretty hard person, Mr. Rogers, but you know what? You have your \$22 million." I mean, who can say no to Mr. Rogers, right?

The advocate makes all the difference in the moment when you stand in front of a judge who holds your fate. The advocate speaks for you. He stands in your place to represent you. And it can either lead to one of two things, depending on the strength of your advocate—conviction or compassion; judgment or grace. Our text today in Hebrews 4:14-16 talks about another advocate, a better advocate for the people of God. And that is indeed good news for us here. You might remember what Pastor Randy was talking about last week. These verses that Pastor Randy read last week to us, it might leave us with a sense of dread or impending doom. I mean, look at the verses, if you just look at a couple of the verses that we had read last week: "strive to enter rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience," verse 11. Or, "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of the soul and the spirit," verse 12. Or, "No creature is hidden from God's sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom one must give an account," verse 13.

You see, one doesn't walk away hearing these verses with just a sense of good old feelings inside. One leaves with the great sense of, *How am I going to stand before this judge and not be condemned? How am I going to stand before this judge and not be unscathed?* One is left wondering if the sermon of Hebrews were to stop before verse 14, how could we ever possibly be right before the people of God? Who is the advocate who is able to save us?

Now, for the Jewish community that would originally be hearing this sermon, they would be thinking of their advocate not like a lawyer or a defendant or even a public media figure—but rather, their advocate would be what they knew in their culture as a priest. Now, we'll be talking a lot about the priesthood in the upcoming weeks, and I don't want to take away the thunder from P.D. or Randy as we explore and unpack more of what the high priest is going to be like. But just know that the priesthood back in the Old Testament played a very different role than the priesthood of today.

Now, the high priest in particular, the one that is advocated for here in verse 14, was a role that required two very important relationships. One, a vertical relationship. This was a vertical relationship between a man and God. The high priest was the voice to communicate God's law to God's people. This is why the high priest needed to have a special degree of holiness. No physical contact with the dead. They could not touch the dead. They could not leave the sanctuary precincts. They had to wear special clothing, vestments. And they could not even grow out their own hair. It was to show how set apart the high priest was from the people of God.

But two, not only did they have a vertical responsibility and a relationship—they also had a horizontal responsibility and relationship as one who represented the people of God to God. This is why any sin of the high priest was immediately carried over to represent the guilt of all the people. I mean, talk about the weight of responsibility. And they even had special requirements for special sacrifices that

needed to be made if the high priest disobeyed God's law. So these two connections, this vertical connection and this horizontal connection, is why the writer of Hebrews is proclaiming to show that Christ is the great high priest. Because Christ is the fulfillment of both of these paradigms.

Now, he's talked about this before, the writer of Hebrews. In chapter 2 verse 17, Jesus is the high priest who, if we remember, is one of us. He relates to us. But in chapter 4 verse 14, it talks about this other side. He is the Son of God who has passed through the heavens. Both the divinity of Christ and the humanity of Christ—fully man, fully God—is able to make this Jesus, the high priest who is perfectly able. This is our advocate who is able to do all that the high priests before could not do—both in atonement and representation of God's will to his people. And like our good friend Mr. Rogers, the character of the advocate and his being effectual to receive mercy on behalf of the people, only the person of Christ who can do any of this.

This is why in the end of verse 14 he talks about holding fast to the confession. This is the confession we need to hold onto now more than ever. Not just Jesus Christ as a thought, but the person of Jesus Christ both in his divinity and his humanity. He is the advocate who is able to do what we cannot. He is the one who makes us clean. He is the one who gives us access and privilege where we have no rights whatsoever.

Now, at this point, there might be a question that you might be asking yourself as we read this passage. In verse 15, it talks about Christ sympathizes in our weakness. And some of you might be thinking to yourself and wondering to yourself, *How can Christ truly understand me? He's sinless. How can Christ be the one to sympathize in my weakness if he has never experienced the pain, the regret of committing sin?* I mean, doesn't this make Christ something less than human? Doesn't this make Christ something less than the humanity that you and I experience each day? I mean this is, after all, why we don't resonate with things that are perfect.

We don't resonate with teams that are perfect. I don't know—teams that are ranked number one overall in the NCAA men's basketball. We don't resonate with those teams. We feel distant from them. We feel it's easy to criticize them. It's easy for perfection to become impersonal. We'd much rather root for the underdogs or golden retriever dogs, right? Because we relate to them much better in their weaknesses, in their failures, the fact that they don't have a shot in the world. So much so that when they win and they actually achieve something, we find ourselves—we find every way to relate to them. *Oh, I was an alum! I have a daughter who went there! I visited the campus one time! I had coffee in their coffee shop! I'm a Retriever! I'm one of them!* Right? We love sharing in these memories, because we identify with the characterization of one who is flawed. So how can Christ, then, truly relate to us? How can he really sympathize in our weakness? Can Jesus truly know what it means to be human if he had never sinned?

Sadly, this is the thought of modern scholarship of the Bible in the last eighty-some years. It even goes as far as to claim that—some orthodox scholars believe, unorthodox scholars believe, that Jesus could not save sinners if he had not actually committed sins. So how do we reconcile this? How do we deal with this? Well, let me offer this perspective. We have to ask ourselves here a deeper question. If truly the experience of sin is what it means to be human, we would agree in one sense with that, absolutely. Our sin through Adam has been imputed to us, has been given to all mankind, generation to generation. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Amen? Hallelujah, praise the Lord. Right?

But in another sense, we think about humanity as God originally created. When we think about the new creation, the heavenly reality, that all mankind will be cleansed from their sin worshipping in fellowship with God—sin isn't necessarily what defines to be human, because sin was never the original intention for the creation of mankind. This is precisely why we call it sin. This is precisely what makes it broken. This is why Christ has come. So for Christ to resist the temptation of sin his entire life, for him to never cave into the temptations, for him to endure every trial and resist it, even in suffering on the cross

to the point of physical, emotional, and spiritual torment, Jesus is faithful to the very end and endures everything for the sake of us as this great advocate, because he is what it means to be perfectly human.\

So think about this. By Jesus being sinless, it doesn't mean that Jesus is more distant from us. It means that he's more near to us, to sympathize with us. Because he has been to the darkest pits of temptation that we could never know, because we have caved in. Jesus himself takes upon the full wrath and consequence of our sin that humanity deserves, so that those who believe in him would not receive the judgement and the condemnation from the judge but rather would receive compassion because of our advocate. Jesus isn't distant from our humanity. He's more closer to our humanity than we could ever imagine. The theologian Brooke Foss Westcott puts it this way: Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain."

How can Jesus know where you've been and truly relate to you in your worst faults, your worst grievances, your own worst regrets? Because he knows your agony deeper than you know it. He knows the agony of obedience. Because he has born your wrath. Because his love extends over you. And Christ says, "I know everything that you've ever done—every disgusting thought, every guilty click of the mouse, every lie you've told, every jealous action, every selfish deed. I'll take the blame for all of it. Because I don't want you to look at your own self hopeless before this judge. I will advocate to the Father on your behalf, and he will look at my perfection and set you free." This is how Christ sympathizes with us.

Now, on this, it's worth right now to take a reflection on the difference between the idea of Jesus and the person of Jesus. Let me kind of explain this out. For example, I may know that P.D. Mayfield is the pastor of discipleship. Right? I may know that about him—the idea of P.D. Very tall man, loves hiking, looks like a more handsome Clark Kent—you know, the idea of P.D. Mayfield, right? But I may not know, truly know, P.D. as a person. I may never sympathize with him and know how wonderfully thoughtful and deep he is.

And this is kind of how we need to think about our relationship with Christ. Okay? I may know the idea of Jesus. I may know the doctrine of *communicado inhumado*, which states that the nature of Christ is true of the person of Christ. *Hypostatic union*, which talks about the unity of the fullness of his divinity and the fullness of his humanity. I may know the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. I may recite the incommunicable and incommunicable attributes of God. And I can still be condemned to a lifetime of separation. I will not be saved by the intensity of my rhetoric or the depths of my understanding, as valuable and as good as those things are for the people of God to study, to understand, and to know. But I cannot be saved—we cannot be saved—by the idea of Christ. We are only saved by the person of Christ. Do you know him? Do you know the person of Christ here today?

J.C. Ryle in his book on holiness reflects on this concept. He says, "It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principals of Christianity." So it's a good thing. "But it is better to be acquainted with Christ himself." And this is precisely what gives the Christian the boldness which he talks about in verse 16 of our passage here today. A confidence that is compassion. A confidence that we can neither claim as our own or take pride in our own doing. This confidence is a compassion that delivers us mercy and grace, as verse 16 says, in our time of need.

Now, in verse 16, as Wayne alluded to, we are reminded of the terrifying nature of the throne of God and the unimaginable hope of the throne of God. And you've got to remember—approaching the king back in the time of the Old Testament could either mean a 50/50 reality. One, your hope is fulfilled. Great. Two, you're going to die. That's what's at stake when you approach the king. And if you recall, I mean, even in the story of Esther in Scripture—do you remember that? I mean, one of the compelling parts of the story, one of the tensions of the story, is the part that she had to appeal to the king and she knew that she stood at the mercy of the king. Either receive grace or potentially receive rejection. The tension is that

she did not know what destiny would await her. All she could do was go out in faith with humility and grace, and hope for the best.

Well, for us here in this room today, we have a greater hope that goes beyond dressing ourselves up to the best versions. Or we know that we have a better hope than just going in there and just having wishful thinking. Or going in there and saying, “You know, I’m a pretty good person. I pay my taxes. I do a good job. I’m generally kind to most people. I root for Maryland teams. I mean, I’m a good person.” Right? We have a greater hope than all of that. We have an advocate. We have an advocate who is sure and who is true. We have an advocate who would actually make us, as the Scripture says, to make us feel bold to approach the throne.

And I think for many of us here, boldness is the last thing that we feel sometimes when we approach Christ, don’t we? Or as we approach the throne. I think for many of us, we act like Marthas. If you’re familiar with the story of Mary and Martha—Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, while Martha is running around, cooking all the meals, getting the house ready, right? Just running around, likely, frantically crazy—her mind is just so stressed, so much so that she bursts out at Mary for not doing anything. I think many of us, we act like Marthas when we approach the throne of God. We’re running around trying to spin all the plates, because Jesus is here, and surely he needs us to do something. We tell ourselves we owe him something. We tell ourselves, *Well, surely Christ doesn’t just want us to rest in his work. Surely our justification is linked to our sanctification. Surely our salvation is linked the sincerity and the depth of our works to prove to God that we’re for real.* So what winds up happening—and I’m including myself in this discussion—is that we go to the throne not with boldness in our confidence in Christ, but we go to the throne beat up, weary, tired, frustrated, bitter, angry. And then we look at God and say, “Is this enough?” We enter the doors of our church often masking ourselves in good works rather than resting in what Christ has accomplished for us as our advocate, knowing that Christ is going into that throne room and making us clean.

So what does true confidence look like for us here as believers today? Christian, confidence is knowing that the battle is won even before you enter the doors of the church. Confidence is knowing that your works are never effective for your salvation, and only an outpouring of the joy that you have in Christ. Confidence is resting in the truth that you are loved beyond your wildest imagination—loved to shake even the greatest loneliness away from you. Confidence is knowing that there is more to this life than life can bring to us, because there’s the Christ who is waiting for us that we can enjoy for all eternity. Confidence is the words that say that we have an eternal hope to approach the King, because the Prince of peace is standing right beside us. Christian, do you feel confident today in your Savior? Well, if you do, then let’s just not approach the throne of grace, which Christ invites us to, but let us also approach the table of the Lord, which Christ invites his people to take a meal.