

Hebrews



**Promises
Faithfully
Kept**

Hebrews 4.14-16 (ESV)

**Our High Priest is a Faithful
CHAP (pt. 1)**

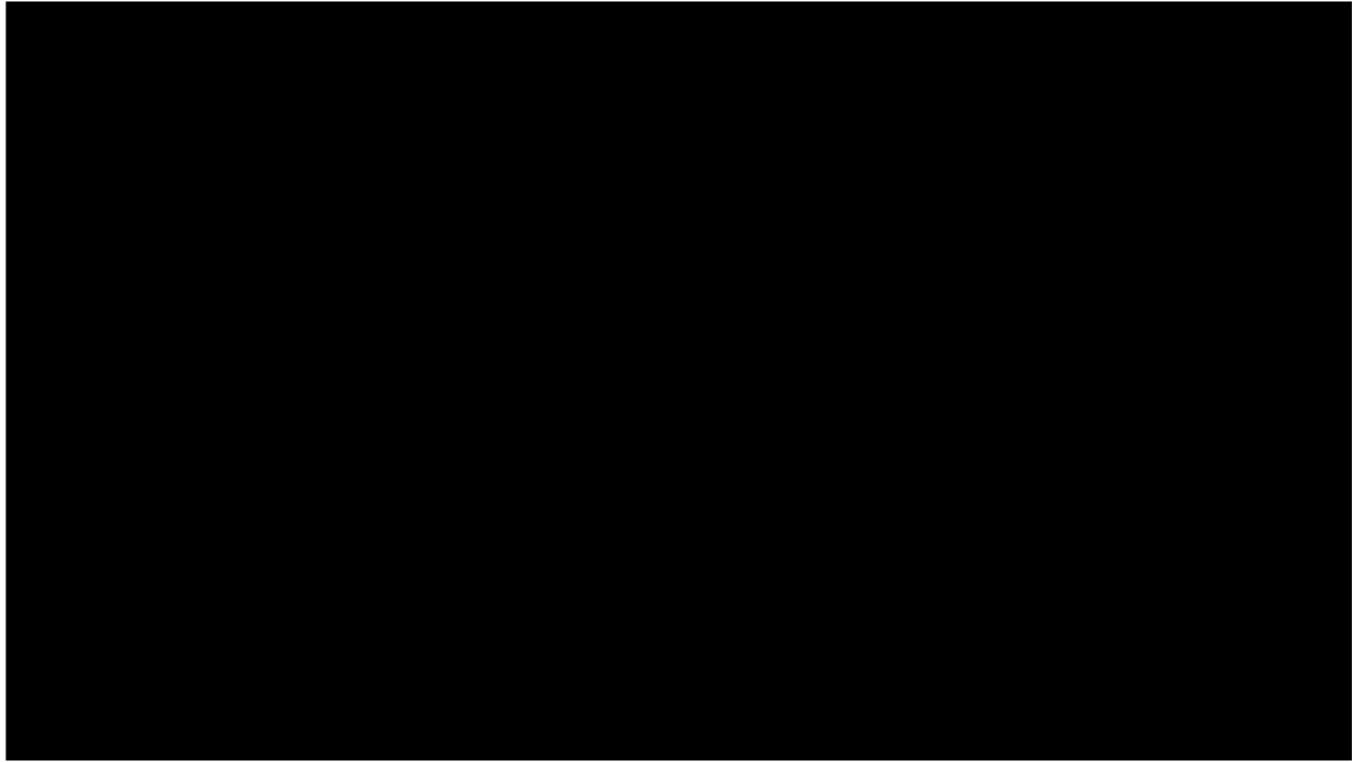
14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

**15 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.**

**16 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.**

But we often settle for an existence that is wrapped up around us and what enjoyment we can get from it. Instead of seeing living as the opportunity to know and relate to God, we often treat it as a game.



Pray

We have been exposed as weak and in need of help.

It was any regular day at high school for Katie Smith. It was any regular day except that everything was going wrong. She couldn't get her locker to open. She was running late for a class that would probably lock her out. She kept dropping her books, drawing stares from the other high schoolers. Or maybe they stared because Katie was now 42-years-old and had forgotten to put her clothes on before arriving at school. Katie Smith was having the same recurring nightmare.

According to Katie on her blog the cause for her dream was fear. She didn't fear being late to class or having a stuck locker when she was in high school. She was afraid as a 42-year-old of being exposed now as unprepared to care for her family and excel in her career. She was afraid of being exposed for any weakness.

At the end of last week's passage, the author of Hebrews tells us that we all have been exposed like Katie felt. We have been exposed by the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword. Normally, we quote that verse to encourage ourselves and others to see the effectiveness of God's Word in people's lives.

That verse does mean that. But it also has a very particular contextual application. The Word of God exposes your weakness and vulnerability. It exposes you like a mirror does in bright light. The ways in which you are facing temptation are revealed as such. The ways in which you are giving in to temptation are shown plain. The good desires and choices are also revealed and encouraged. Scripture is the standard bearer and the revealer of our relationship to that standard.

We are exposed by the Word of God as we are compared to the character and will of God.

Scripture is God's very Word. It is God-breathed. We can study and try to understand everything we can about the words within our copies and translations, but we cannot separate these words from God's person and character.

What is consistently revealed is that we fall short and need help in order to line up with God.

I know a friend who was constantly asking for help. He knew He was dependent. He asked for help daily from God just to take his next steps. He wanted his every word to reflect God, even in the midst of His suffering. My friend is also your friend, the friend of sinners, Jesus.

We often don't like to think that we are in need of constant help. This world trains us to think that we must be strong and independent, made of steel.

We have an escape room mentality.

This past week Kathleen Cantwell and I had the opportunity to try out some escape rooms with local high school students and administrators. At this particular business, groups were allowed to have three hints given to them, as long as everyone on the team . . . danced.

Each group eventually asked for some hints, but it was something we resisted. We didn't want the help. We wanted to prove to ourselves and others that we could figure out the puzzle, without help.

We should want to be mature and capable, but we will never grow or overcome by trying to be independent of God.

It's not just that we want to be independent. Sin produces in us a fierce resistance to anyone that reminds us of our exposure and need for help. And God by His Word constantly exposes us.

Do you remember the first movie for the Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring?



There is a scene toward the beginning in which Gandalf and Bilbo are talking about the ring of power. The ring makes those who hold onto it dependent on it and convinces them that all other people are out to take that precious power from them.

Bilbo Baggins was supposed to leave the ring for Frodo but found it was in his pocket. Then he starts rambling about how it is his right to have the ring and it is his precious and that Gandalf just wants it for himself. The ring was manipulating Bilbo into thinking that Gandalf is his enemy. His weakness had been exposed and he needed to fight against this powerful foe.

In His might and love, Gandalf responds, “Bilbo Baggins, do not mistake me for a conjurer of cheap tricks. I’m not trying to hurt you. I’m trying to help you.”

You have been exposed. You are weak and in need of help. You need to cling to God in Christ. That is the understanding the author has been wanting to make clear throughout his entire letter so far. The problem the church was facing was not that Jesus was insufficient. The problem was that they were insufficient to handle temptation introduced by suffering. And they were refusing to acknowledge it.

But instead of waiting for them to come to Jesus, the author let them know Jesus had come to them to make them strong in him.

Jesus meets you where you are at so that you can walk through where he’s been if you just look to Him.

Look to Jesus so that you hold fast to our professed faith in Him.

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Did you notice that the author now refers to the Incarnate Son by name? It is to Him and our professed faith in Him that we must cling.

If anyone confesses with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, that person will be saved. That is the initial confession. But if someone is truly saved, he must continue to hold to that belief and profession. She must continue to hold to Jesus and the gospel. But if we are to hold to Jesus, we must hold to the Jesus of Scripture and sound doctrine.

One theologian has compared the gospel to a treasure. It is the golden treasure that we dare not give up. It is our great love. It is our life. But the treasure must be contained within a treasure chest. And so he compares the treasure chest to doctrine according to Scripture.

We live in a timeframe of rampant sinfulness dressed in the clothing of individual choice. We have been trained through constant media to assume that whatever we choose for ourselves is true for ourselves, regardless of if it is contradictory or destructive. And we are to fight fiercely against anyone who would infringe upon our individual versions of truth.

While this charade today is often played out in public about sexual practices, the heart of the issue is in the realm of beliefs. You do you. You find your own truth is what the world tells us. But only as long as that version of truth lines up with the world's current desired outcome, which has even changed since yesterday.

We need to line up with the truth of the gospel and Christ AND the truths that support and uphold that good news.

In 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, we are told David was leading a worship procession back toward Jerusalem. At the heart of the concert and parade was the ark of the covenant, which represented the very presence of God. Everything was supposed to be great and wonderful, but the day ended in mourning and death.

You see, David was right to have the people celebrate the presence of God in their midst. But David had disregarded God's teaching about how to approach Him and His presence. Anytime the ark was to be moved it was to be put on poles and transported carefully and respectfully. The people were to revere the holiness of God and not touch it. Instead, the ark was placed on an oxen cart. So when it hit a bump in the road, the ark started to slide off. A man named Uzzah thought he would help God out by keeping the ark from falling off the cart. Uzzah immediately fell down dead.

David did not think the holiness of God mattered when celebrating being in the presence of God. But you cannot be in the presence of God without holding to the holiness of God. We cannot hold to the gospel if we give up the teachings that are essential to the gospel. We cannot give up the practices that express the gospel. We cannot disregard God and His Word.

As we take in and practice what we find in Scripture, we can also get help from faithful confessions of the past.

We can look to past confessions of faith as encouragements and helps to see what the church has consistently proclaimed as part of our profession. (NOBTS BAPTIST CONFESSIONS) They do not replace God's Word nor are they placed on the same level as God's Word. They are aids to help us, given by churches in the past to better understand and see what they believed about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, beliefs they were often willing to die over as part of how they clung close to Christ.

But those were their confessions. Will we hold to our professed faith?

For us to hold to faith today, we must look to Christ in prayer, seeking God for help. Yes, it is important for us to have discussions about what we believe and why. Yes, we should bring the gospel and Scripture to bear upon every ethical decision and consideration. Yes, we must put the effort in to make sure we are humbly confronting sinful claims from within and from without.

But the posture we must start with and persist in is one of prayerful dependence upon God, coming to Him by means of the Son.

Our High Priest is faithful and compassionate.

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We have a high priest.

The author of Hebrews has been using the Sinai Covenant, the wilderness generation, and leaders of God's people as examples for us. He has been pointing to how Jesus is greater than the past leaders and how they were supposed to be pointing to Him. The wilderness generation was supposed to be the people of God but did not believe and trust YHWH; the author showed how they were to be a negative example to us.

Will we follow our leader differently than how they followed theirs? Now he comes to the example of the Temple or tabernacle and the High Priest who alone could come into the holies of holies at the heart of that structure, where God's presence dwelt above the mercy seat.

That tabernacle structure was intended to point us beyond the physical structure to the reality of God's heavenly throne room.

We needed someone who could enter into the very presence of God. We needed someone who could actually make it possible for us to enter as well.

Jesus is that High Priest.

And He has already entered through the curtain in a way that keeps the pathway open to us.

When Jesus died on the cross, the physical curtain in the physical temple was torn in two. When Jesus died and rose again, he made the way for us to have access to

God.

But remember the story of David and Uzzah. Being in the presence of God is only good news if His holiness is not a threat to you. Jesus alone has satisfied the wrath of God. If you look to Him by faith, you get grace and mercy. If you reject Him, you are exposed to God's terrible wrath.

The curtain will remain open. There is no going back.

You see, the Son of God has become like us in every way, but He is also still distinct from us. He has and will always be found faithful to God and to His people. When the author brings up Jesus as a faithful high priest, he does so in contrast to the question of whether we will be found faithful.

Luke 18:1 Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray all the time and never give up. 2 He said, "In a city there was a judge who didn't fear God or respect people. 3 In that city there was also a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while the judge refused. But later, he told himself, 'I don't fear God or respect people, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice. Otherwise, she will keep coming and wear me out.'"

6 Then the Lord added, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says. 7 Won't God grant his chosen people justice when they cry out to him day and night? Is he slow to help them? 8 I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Jesus is the faithful high priest by whom we should come day and night to God by prayer.

Jesus will be found faithful, even if we are not. Still, He is compassionate toward us. He may condescend to us, but he does not look down upon us. Jesus is your compassionate High Priest.

You can trust Him with your weakness and vulnerability. He has credibility with us because He let himself be weak and vulnerable like us. He made the sacrifice for us. He recognizes what it's like to be in our shoes. Well, Jesus wore sandals not shoes. He wore footwear intended to protect his feet, right? He didn't have to wear modern shoes to know what it is to wear protective supports for His feet.

Jesus may not face the particular forms of temptation we face today, but he faced all of them in essence. When the Son of God took on humanity, he took on our human vulnerability. You have been exposed and found wanting. When the Word of God was read by Him and around Him, it revealed Him as faithful in all ways.

Jesus faced temptation. While those temptations may not have offered the same avenue of expression as you and I are offered today, they all started with the same heart issues people have been dealing with for thousands of years.

All sins are an active rejection of God. And all the various kinds of sins that are available to you today were available to Jesus then.

We often equate temptation with desire. Scripture sees temptation as opportunities made available to sin. Desire to rebel against God's character/Word is sin and the beginning of more failure to live according to God's standard. Temptation is the offer to choose what appears to be easier or quicker or feel better than suffering in obedience to God. Temptation is an atTEMPT to get someone to do something (wrong).

Jesus shows compassion in His offer to help you. He knows what it is like to be told that disobedience is tasty. Jesus's compassion for we who are tempted is credible and emboldening. It is credible because he has suffered the temptations we have had presented to us. It is emboldening because He overcame them all.

People sometimes try to change the meaning of this Scripture in v. 15. Some don't want to think Jesus could possibly have sinned. They don't want to think of Jesus as suffering in that way.

-Feeling : isolated, doubtful, lonely, rejected, hurt, angry, misunderstood, or overwhelmed? Jesus can relate to you. You don't have to blow up, yell at the dog, give into peer pressure, view pornography, commit fornication, erase your memory with drinking or drugs, steal funds, lie to you parents or boss or government. You don't have to do any of those things just because you feel the strong emotional pressure to cave. Jesus did not and so you don't have to either.

You're also not supposed to try to hold it all in and overcome the sins yourself. That will only destroy you from the inside.

Some people don't want to believe that Jesus was capable of sinning but NEVER did. Because that would expose them as a failure in comparison.

We are in the vulnerable situation we are in because of sin and our history of giving into it. Is there really someone who never sinned even though it was possible for him to do so? Yes!

And that is good news, not bad.

The text is very clear. As fully human, He could have sinned. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He offered to Jesus a way of getting public approval without having to suffer on the cross.

Jesus could have sinned. But Jesus never would sin.

You see, we mess up on how we approach the question about Jesus's ability to sin or not because we mess up on we view God. As the God-man, Jesus could have sinned but never would. We mess up by not seeing God as personal. We are tempted to think of Him as a cosmic machine, just keeping the cogs of creation moving, or as an invisible device, responding with set programming.

How could God ever sin if He is just a machine? How could we ever relate to Him and Him to us? But that's we treat Him when we refuse to see that everything we do is to be done in relationship to Him. What parent would ever be okay with a child using the benefits of that parent's provision but never relating personally to the parent? But in our sinful self-focus, we often treat God that way. In those times of delusion, don't want to consider God as personal.

God has feelings. God responds. God speaks. God sees. God knows. God is not a block of wood or a machine.

God will never sin because His character is holy and good and right at all times. He will choose every second in every way to uphold His glorious name. God delights in being God and living consistently with His character. So we can be confident that God will never sin.

We each can list a personal history of people who have let us down, people whose character has been insufficient. So we tell ourselves not to hope for a person who will always be true and right. But God will always do what is just and right and true and loving. And as the God-man, Jesus did just that.

And He makes that holiness of life available to us. His compassion toward us emboldens us. He reaches out His hand and calls you to come into the presence of God in your time of need. When you are tempted to sin and reject God again in your habits, you are to pray with bold earnestness.

Approach God in CONFIDENT frankness with your need for help.

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The term boldness had the societal reference to confident frankness. It referred to how friends speak to one another in private when their guard is down. In those safe environments let yourself be seen without filters. Your raw, messy, difficult emotions are all made visible and exposed. And you are okay with it because you know you are accepted. That is how we who believe in Christ are to come to God daily.

I can confidently say the times I've grown the most in likeness to Christ were times of great loss when I brought all that hurt and pain before God. I was knotted up and let Him unravel me. I was defensive like a hurt animal. I let Him make me human again. I was filled with questions and hurts. His presence was my answer and my aloe.

Here's one of the truths of the Christian life that looks like a paradox to the world. Those who try to save themselves will lose themselves. Those who accept they are lost and admit their need to God will be saved. Those who try to overcome their issues by their own strength will either fail or destroy themselves. Those who entrust their weakness to Christ will be carried through.

We are especially to come to God when we sense our great need of His help, but we need to start to realize our great need every day.

We get it wrong when we think we need JUST enough of God to help us achieve our next task, or even with a particular sin or temptation. The problem is that sin has made people utterly sinful.

Tim Keller recently said, even our most reverent repentance will be sinful. We need someone to rescue us from outside of us. We aren't to come to God for occasional help. We are to depend on Him constantly and have ourselves continually transformed into the image of the Son who never sinned.

You see, if we accept sin as normal and acceptable behavior today, tomorrow we will likely call it good. If today we refer to sin as good, then we will declare the gospel to be false. That pattern is a slope toward rejection of Christ that false believers will slip down. But true believers in Christ will consistently keep coming back for forgiveness, for cleansing of sin and its effects from our lives, and seeking help to pursue God in Christ each new day.

We are to be people who pursue Christ with our confessions and our lives, imitating the one who was tempted and yet without sin.

Don't fall for the lie that sin is sometimes necessary. We are not to do evil in order for good to come about.

John Frame rightly says there is never a true moral tragedy. Mark Liederbach refers to the same idea when he says there is never a true moral dilemma for Christians. Basically, you are able to do what is right and expected of you by God according to His Word in any and every situation, but you will only choose what is right if you have the Spirit of God in you and you act according to the wisdom God's Word.

Don't fall for the trap of thinking sin is either necessary or that it somehow brings about good.

If sin is necessary to accomplish good, then God is a liar and has set up false, contradictory standards. If sin is necessary to accomplish good, then God is a hypocritical judge. If sin is necessary to accomplish good, God misrepresents the purpose of His law and gospel. If sin is necessary to accomplish good, then God is not really God, for to be God means being completely good and never sinning. If sin is necessary to accomplish good, then either Jesus sinned and thus disqualified himself OR he is not really like us and therefore unable to die as a sacrifice for us as one of us.

As 1 Corinthians 10:13 makes clear, we are able to choose to obey God and do what is right and good in every circumstance, IF we look to God for help. Don't let the world box you into to think that your options are only sin or sin. Let God guide you by His Spirit in prayer according to His Word. If it's not clear to you now you are to move forward faithfully, reach out to a mature believer who can walk with you in prayer and understanding the Word.

Start your decision about what to do not by asking God to follow you around waiting for a problem to arise but start your days by sitting with Jesus and following Him.

You need help.

You desperately need help.

You have been exposed and found wanting.

Bring all that messiness to God by means of faith in Christ; then trust and obey.

Fear God, not this world. Follow Christ daily to the throne room of God for grace and mercy, especially in your time of need.

