

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Teaching Plan
March 16, 2013
Hebrews 4:14-16
“The Perfect High Priest”

Memory Verse

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16, NIV

The Big Idea:

Sermon Scripture: *Approach the Throne: Part 1 – Jesus Makes Us Confident* (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-16

Sunday School Title: *“The Perfect High Priest”*

ESS: As the perfect High Priest, Jesus allows us to approach God’s throne with confidence to receive the grace, mercy, and help we need but don’t deserve.

REVIEW: Last week, we talked about the importance of the sword of God’s Word. How has God’s Word played a role in your life over the past week?

This week, we will discuss how and why Jesus offers us grace, mercy, and help right when we need it.

Describe a time in your life when you needed help in a major way. Did anyone show up and come through to help you?

Today, we’ll focus on Hebrews 4:14-16, which are the final verses of this chapter. Looking back over Hebrews chapters 3 & 4, we’ve been encouraged to learn from the Israelites mistakes so that we may enter God’s rest and avoid His judgment and wrath. The last few verses (v. 14-16) focus on the positive aspects of entering God’s rest and having a personal relationship with Jesus. So get ready to be encouraged to walk with unwavering hope and live with confidence!

READ Hebrews 4:14-16

1. Israel’s Imperfect History

Have you ever wondered why God planned such a long history (2,000 years!) with Israel before sending His Son into the world to die for our sins? One reason is that Israel’s history provides us today with a context to help us understand and appreciate Jesus. If you ignore the Old Testament, it’s possible to see Jesus as just a good teacher, life coach, or religious martyr. But when you place Jesus within the context established by the Old Testament, we see Him as the perfect fulfillment of the imperfect priests of the past. This is why the writer of Hebrews quotes so many Old Testament verses and often alludes to the history of the Israelites. Not only would the original Jewish readers identify with this, but today’s Christians also benefit. The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of past imperfections. He is supreme to everyone and everything, and He is the eternal reality here to replace the shadows of the Old Testament. Without Israel’s imperfect history, it would be difficult for us to understand and appreciate Jesus as our Savior and High Priest.

Israel’s imperfect history recorded in the Old Testament provides us with a context for Jesus. Consider a personal example: what trials in your life help you better appreciate your blessings? (For example, in my own life, Jackson’s health challenges at birth have really taught me to appreciate the miracle of a healthy baby.)

2. Israel’s Inadequate High Priest

READ Hebrews 5:1-3

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had a High Priest that served as a go-between, representing them before God. The High Priest offered gifts and sacrifices to God on the people’s behalf. The sacrifices required the loss of life (an animal) and the shedding of blood.

I remember as a child thinking that the Old Testament sacrifices were so barbaric and horrible. But I knew deep down that God must have had a reason for it all. The Bible says, “there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood.” Why do you think God established the Old Testament sacrifice system this way, requiring the shedding of blood?

As we also see in Hebrews 5:1-3, the Israelites’ High Priest was himself a man and a sinner, so he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins, too. This meant that his access to God was limited by his own sin. It also meant that he would one day die and have to be replaced. He could never guarantee an ongoing presence with God to intervene for the people. So there are obvious imperfections and inadequacies in the Old Testament system. But this is the point of the whole history of Israel – all that was imperfect, inadequate or incomplete points to something greater – SOMEONE greater, perfect, and complete.

3. Jesus: The Perfect High Priest

READ Hebrews 4:14-15

In our focus verses today, we are told several key things about Jesus. These key points illuminate Jesus as the perfect and complete fulfillment of the previously imperfect priesthood.

A. Alive

Jesus is alive. He lived, died on the cross, and rose again, never to die again. Unlike other high priests of Israel’s history, Jesus lives forever and will serve as our High Priest now and for eternity. He needs not be replaced – NOT EVER.

B. With God

Hebrews 4:14 tells us that Jesus has passed through the Heavens and is now in the presence of God. The Israelite High Priests had to perform special duties and enter a specific place once every year to be in God’s presence. Jesus, our High Priest doesn’t have to enter a temple once a year and go behind a special curtain to be in God’s presence. He’s already there, every day! He’s sitting right next to God the Father, interceding on our behalf every second of every day!

C. Son of God

Israelite High Priests were human men chosen for a divine duty. In contrast, Jesus is God in flesh, the creator of the Universe. The Son of God appointed himself to be our go-between. Unlike the priests of the past that entered God’s presence with the blood of bulls and goats, Jesus enjoys God’s presence through the sacrifice of His own precious and perfect blood.

D. Sinless

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was sinless. Just as the Israelite High Priests offered perfect, unblemished animals for sacrifice on their own behalf and for the people, so too Jesus offered his own sinless life as a sacrifice on our behalf. And because His blood was the ultimate sacrifice, no further sacrifices are needed. His is enough!

E. Sympathetic

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that because Jesus was tempted just as we are, he is sympathetic to our human struggles. At this point, some scoff and say that Jesus can’t truly understand and appreciate our struggles because He was never truly tempted. Some think that Jesus, as God in the flesh, never really felt an inclination towards sin.

Here is C.S. Lewis’ response to such an objection:

“Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. But Christ –He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, so he is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. He is the only complete realist.”

Jesus can sympathize with our temptations, our pain, and our trials because He endured them, too. During His childhood, adulthood and ministry, Jesus had opportunities to lie, steal, covet, disobey his parents, get

revenge, lust, complain, and more! Isn't it comforting that we have a High Priest who understands our day to day challenges? He's been there, done that, and gotten the t-shirt.

How do the imperfections and shortcomings of the Israelite High Priests of the Old Testament help us to truly appreciate Jesus as our High Priest? What do the inadequacies of the Old Testament system highlight about Jesus?

4. Us: The Undeserving Recipients

READ Hebrews 4:16

Jesus, the Son of God, is our High Priest. He is alive forevermore, constantly interceding to the Father on our behalf. And if that's not enough to bolster your hope, hold on! There's more! In Hebrews 4:16, we're invited to approach the throne of grace with confidence. The image here is to not only enter God's throne room, but to come right up to the foot of the throne without hesitation or worry. Normally, approaching any sovereign's throne would be unthinkable without an appointment, an escort, and the king's invitation. And to come right up close to the foot of the throne? This shows a rare familiarity and even disrespect that could be punishable by death. But not in the case of the Christian. We are personally invited to enter God's throne room and come right up to the throne. God's throne is one of judgment, but since Jesus has covered it with His blood, it is a throne of grace for the approaching believer.

And why would we approach God's throne? To receive the grace, mercy, and help He offers. Let's define these terms:

MERCY: not getting what you deserve (Jesus took the punishment we deserved. We stand uncondemned.)

GRACE: getting what you could never deserve (God's gifts of blessings, eternal life, strength, hope, etc)

HELP: supernatural assistance right when we need it most

So as a Christian, we can approach God's throne with confidence because Jesus took our punishment and offered us forgiveness. At God's throne, we find the help and blessings we need but don't deserve. For this reason, we can hold tightly to the faith we possess, walk with unwavering hope, and live with confidence.

CONCLUSION: As the perfect High Priest, Jesus allows us to approach God's throne with confidence to receive the grace, mercy, and help we need but don't deserve.

APPLY

When was the last time you drew near to God's throne to receive grace, mercy, and help? Do you find yourself trying to fill in the gaps and supply resources and answers on your own, without God? Take time this week to humbly admit your weaknesses and glorify God as the true source of grace, mercy, and help.

Do you live a life of hope and confidence, or is your life characterized by fear, doubt, and disappointment? Take heart! We can live with hope and confidence because Jesus is our High Priest! Study and memorize Hebrews 4:14-16 this week. Pray that God restores your hope in Him and provides you with the confidence you need to point others towards Him.

RESOURCE: Sermon by John Piper, "Draw Near to the Throne of Grace with Confidence." September 15, 1996. Available online at www.desiringgod.org

STUDY NOTES:

(These are for your personal study. This is NOT the lesson.)

Study Guide by David Guzik, 2001. Available online: www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest: The idea that Jesus is our **High Priest** has been mentioned before (Hebrews 2:17 and Hebrews 3:1). But now the writer to the Hebrews will develop the idea more extensively.

Seeing then: The writer to the Hebrews wants to call attention to the specific, unique character of Jesus as our **High**

Priest. No other High Priest was called **great**. No other **High Priest ... passed through the heavens**. No other **High Priest** is the **Son of God**.

Let us hold fast our confession: Knowing that we have a **High Priest**, and know how unique and glorious He is, is wonderful. It is even greater to know that He has **passed through the heavens**, that He has ascended into heaven, and now ministers there on our behalf is even greater. Both of these things should encourage us to **hold fast our confession**.

We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize: Though His deity has been documented (Hebrews 1:4-14), His compassionate humanity has also been demonstrated (Hebrews 2:5-18). It means that there is a Jesus, God the Son, enthroned in heaven, our **High Priest**, can **sympathize with our weaknesses**.

To the Greeks, the primary attribute of God was *apatheia*, the essential inability to feel anything at all. Jesus isn't like that. He knows, He feels what we go through. The ancient Greek word for **sympathize** literally means "to suffer along with."

What makes the difference is that Jesus added humanity to His deity, and came and lived among us as a man. When you have been there, it makes all the difference. We might hear of some tragedy at a high school, and feel a measure of sorrow. But it is nothing like the pain we would feel if it were the high school we attended.

But was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin: Jesus knows what it is like to be **tempted** and to battle against sin, though He was never stained by sin. "His sinlessness was, at least in part, an earned sinlessness as he gained victory after victory in the constant battle with temptation that life in this world entails." (Morris)

Sometimes we think that because Jesus is God, He could never know temptation the way we do. In part, this is true: Jesus faced temptation much more severely than we ever have or ever will. The Sinless One knows temptation in a way we don't, because only the one who never gives into temptation knows the full strength of temptation. It is true that Jesus never faced temptation in an *inner* sense the way we do, because there was never a sinful nature pulling Him to sin from the *inside*. But He knew the strength and fury of *external* temptation in a way, and to a degree, that we can never know. He knows what we go through; He has faced worse.

Let us therefore come boldly: Because we have a High Priest who is both omnipotent and compassionate, we can **come boldly** to His throne. Discouraging us from this access is a central strategy of Satan. The devil sometimes wants us to consider Jesus as unapproachable- perhaps encouraging us to come by Mary or the saints instead of Jesus. Sometimes the devil wants us to think of Jesus as being powerless to help, not as one who sits on a throne in heaven.

The throne of grace: The throne of God is a **throne of grace**. When we come, we may **obtain mercy** (this is *not getting* what we deserve) **and find grace** (this is *getting* what we don't deserve) in our **time of need**.

Rabbis taught that God had two thrones, one of mercy, and one of judgment. They said this because they knew that God was both merciful and just, but how could these two attributes of God be reconciled? Perhaps God had two thrones, displaying the two aspects of His character. On one throne He would show His judgment, and on the other His mercy. But here, in light of the finished work of Jesus, we see mercy and judgment reconciled into one **throne of grace**. Remember that grace does not ignore God's justice; it operates in fulfillment of God's justice, in light of the cross.

Find grace to help in time of need: Thankfully, God provides **help** in our time of need. No request is too small, because He wants us to *be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer ... let your requests be made known to God*. (Philippians 4:6)