

Jesus: The Great High Priest He Boldly Went Where No Man Had Gone Before

**Bro. Ricky Cunningham
Hebrews 4:14-16**

If you have your Bibles go ahead and be opening to the book of Hebrews. It's good to be with you this morning. I am trusting that preaching is like riding a bike because it's been a while since I've done this and I hope it all comes back to me. I am so excited to be here this morning and get to look at this passage of Scripture in the book of Hebrews. Some of you know this about me but when I study I usually study late at night and I have to have a little noise which is usually provided by the television. Normally I don't watch what is on because it's just a noise for me but through these years I kind of became a fan of a series on television and I loved how it always began. Sometimes I would get so into it I would lay my Bible down and quit studying for about an hour until that particular episode was over. This show opened like this, "Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." There is a little Trekkie in me. Then, all of a sudden, I would get so excited I'd lay my Bible down because I was going to go with them where no man had ever gone before and it was amazing.

This morning I'm not going to show a rerun of Star Trek but we are going to open our Bibles to Hebrews chapter 4 and look at verses 14 through 16. We are going to title this message, "Jesus: The Great High Priest" but we are also going to subtitle it, "He Boldly Went Where No Man Had Gone Before."

Scripture

Hebrews 4:14-16 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. 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.

I personally believe that we're in a transition moment in the sermon that is being preached by a Jewish preacher to a Jewish congregation somewhere in or near the city of Rome during a time when the Roman government is beginning to persecute Christians but not Jews. In the first part of his sermon he has been telling us Jesus is- as Kory said- the GOAT. He is greater than the angels and he's even greater than Moses. He is the GOAT. After reminding us with 13 verses that salvation is not something that we do but it is actually a rest, we are now going to switch in this part of the sermon from the person of Jesus to the priesthood of Jesus. Salvation is coming to that place where we rest in what God has done for us and we cease to trust in what we do for him, and now he is going to transition to tell us why that rest is possible... "Since then we have a great high priest." Now if I'm remembering correctly this is the first time in Scripture the word "great" as an adjective has been attached to a high priest. Wow! "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." Now I want to be honest with you, because of how long I've studied the Bible and because of how long I've been a Christian, when I read this passage afresh my first reaction is this- "WOW! WOW! WOW!" Not one wow and not two wows but three wows! Our great high priest has passed through the heavens! But you have to remember this was first preached to a Jewish congregation. Please make sure you understand this...when the congregation assembles not everybody who is in the assembly are of the assembly. There were many people in this congregation who thought they were in but weren't really in. Because of the persecution that was getting ready to come upon the church, many of them were going to start thinking about going back to what they previously believed in, and that was the law of Moses and the sacrificial offering that was made on the Day of Atonement to make them right with God. So to that group, they would not have said, "wow," but they would have said, "what?!"

See, he is drawing on an imagery here and the imagery was of the high priest who one time a year at a specific moment went into the presence of

God called the Holy of Holies and made a sacrifice for the sins of the people that never dealt with what they had really done but rather just rolled their sins forward. So here was their picture—the high priest passed through that wall of the outer courtyard into that outer courtyard and he would come to the brazen laver and the brazen altar, and after doing what he would do in all of his priestly regalia, he would then go into the Holy Place. He would pass through the door of the Holy Place into the Holy Place and there would be the table of showbread and the candlestick, and he would then be facing that veil. Behind that veil was the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. At each end of the Ark of the Covenant there was a cherubim with his arms stretched out guarding the presence of God. This time for the high priest came with a little fear. He's now going to go where only he can go one time a year and he has to get in there and get done what he's supposed to do. He has to sprinkle the blood on the altar and get out as quickly as he can because he's going to be in the presence of the Shekinah glory cloud of God. God who is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. He has put his hands on the animal and transferred his sins to that animal and made a sacrifice for his sins as well as the sins of all the people, and now he's bringing that sacrifice into the altar. Just in case he's not right with God and God strikes him dead in his presence, they have a rope tied around his ankle because nobody else can go in there if he dies, if God kills him. There is a priest in the Holy Place that is going to be listening but he can't see what God is going to do once that veil closes, so they put bells in the hem of the priest's robe so that while he's doing what he's doing the priest in the Holy Place can hear the noise.

Since then we have a great high priest who passed through the veil? No! He passed through the heavens. Wow! Please know what's happening here. The Jewish people based their thought of the heavens on that picture of the high priest passing through the courtyard, passing through the Holy Place, and then passing into the Holy of Holies. They constructed the universe as a three-storied universe, three heavens. The first heaven is where the birds fly and it's the air we breathe. We call this the atmosphere and we know it's about seven miles deep. Then once you pass through that heaven- if you could- then there is a second heaven and it's called space, the final frontier, but not to a Jew. Star Trek missed it here but this is where the planets are. This is where the sun is. This is where the constellations are. When you're travelling down here, we travel by miles

per hour or the speed of sound, but out there is the speed of light and there are things millions of not miles but lightyears away from us. Then there is the third heaven. Remember Paul said he went there spiritually...that is where God is. So Jesus passed through the plural heavens. Wouldn't you have loved to be there for the first ascension service? He's just talking to you and then all of a sudden there he goes. All of a sudden he's now in the second heaven where the demonic beings are and he passes right on through. Then he goes into the presence of God.

He had left God's presence earlier. So I say this, not to sound disrespectful—but as someone who loves science a little bit, loves space exploration, and loves Star Trek—we call this reentry. One of my favorites moves is called Apollo 13. Have any of you seen it? It gets really dangerous when they are going to reenter the atmosphere. Have any of you thought about this before? This is reentry for Jesus. When he left roughly 33 years earlier, he left as the second person of the triune Godhead, the Son of God, but when he went back he did not go back as who he had been when he left. He left fully God, but when he went back he was fully man and fully God at the same time. Wow! He who had always been who he was remained who he was but became who he had never been, a man. When he got back to heaven, he's now standing in the literal Holy of Holies. He's in the presence of God. No rope on his leg and no bells on his robe. Do you know what I think the Father said to him? *Fully God, Fully man, have a seat...*and Jesus took his seat. Now there was no seat in the Holy of Holies on earth because there was never a sacrifice that could be made by a high priest that would once and for all deal with sin. Jesus Christ, our great high priest, did what no high priest had ever done before—he went into the presence of God and he sat down. Yes, sat down! Are you listening to me? He sat down as a man.

See, there are some of you who believe he just took upon a body, used that body, and then discarded that body and went back to heaven. No, he became a man just like you and just like me and because of his love for us and God's plan for us, you have to understand this, he will forever and ever, throughout all of eternity, be not just God but the God-man. He went where no man had gone before and is still there in the literal presence of God and he is seated. When he took that seat, God was declaring that it's finished. What is finished? Your salvation and my salvation. Christ is resting

from what he did in providing salvation for us because he completely finished our salvation on the cross. He took a seat and he is resting. That is why last week Chris had a difficult passage but he brought home the point that our salvation is not what we do for God but it's what God has done for us. We are what? Resting in Christ. Salvation is a rest! Wow! It's because of the finished work of Christ. I don't know about you but I've been there before... I've done it, finished a project that Memish had given me. I finished it, couldn't wait for her to come home, and I'm in the chair resting. Now when she comes in and sees me in the chair, she knows I'm resting. She wants to know when I'm going to get out of the chair and go back in and finish. I'm just waiting, and then I get to say, "I'm not getting out of this chair." She says, "What?" I say, "Sweetie, I'm resting, not to take a break from what I was trying to do, but because I finished what you told me to do." When Jesus took that seat, he wasn't resting and then going to go back after he got the energy to go do what he needed to do, he took a seat because he finished our salvation once for all and IT IS DONE! Glory to God!

"Since then we have a great high priest... let us hold fast our confession." See, there were some people in the crowd who were thinking about going back to Judaism. I mean, you could go back to Judaism, make that sacrifice, have that priest, come under the law of Moses, and the Roman government wouldn't persecute you, but if you stayed in the true church you were going to be persecuted. It was going to get tough... *Man, we thought we got into this because we were going to go to heaven and heaven is going to be great, but...* Can I be honest with you? Getting there sometimes isn't great.

Back in the spring we took our family to Disney World for spring break. We had a great time but getting there wasn't great. I mean no disrespect, but we were doing really good, we had set everything just right and we got to this city in Tennessee called Chattanooga...and it was terrible. We had to get off the main road and get some little bitty roads to finally get to the other side of Chattanooga, hours later. Then we were doing really good until we came to this city in Georgia called Atlanta. We are driving in three different cars. One of us went around, one of us went through, and one of us didn't know where we went. Atlanta is a big city and I think our top speed was seven miles per hour. Can I be honest with you? I love Disney

World but there were some times where I said, "I'm turning this thing back around and I'm going home." I had to really think is this worth it?

This is why the preacher says, "hold fast." In Dexter terminology, that means get a good grip. Have any of you ever been getting ready to do something and had somebody with you (especially to your kid), so you warned them and said, "I need you to help me here but get a good grip." Here is what the writer is saying to the church—get a good grip on what you've confessed. What have you confessed? You've confessed that Jesus is Lord of the universe, but the Lord of the universe, Jesus, is your personal Lord. You've brought yourself under his lordship, you know he is sovereign and all things are caused by him or allowed by him—have you got a good grip on that yet? Then why do some of us act so surprised when what happens, happens? Guys, I'll be honest with you. Heaven is going to be glorious but getting there is not fun. Do you have a good grip? Can we just look around and realize there are some folks who thought they had a confession but they're no longer with us? Not just not with us but not anywhere, they have totally abandoned Christ's church and they have abandoned him. It could happen to any one of us in here. I know there are some of us who are uncomfortable right now because you believe only in the divine side of salvation. That's why you don't study the book of Hebrews very much. It's because it talks a lot about the human side of salvation. There are two sides of salvation—a divine side and human side. The divine side never negates, minimizes, or trivializes the human side and the human side doesn't negate, minimize, or trivialize the divine side, but grab hold here guys. There is a divine side of salvation but there is also a human side and the human side is if you confessed Jesus is your Lord, then you better get a grip. Here is what he wants us to get a grip on—we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens and he's sitting at the right hand throne of God right now making intercession for us.

Then here is what he tells us, "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." Because he is seated, I am supposed to hold fast. But he is now going to tell me two other things that make him a great high priest and what make him the GOAT. One, he's sinless. Two, he's sympathetic. I want you to watch this. He starts with his sympathetic-ness but his sympathetic-ness is based on his sinlessness. So

instead of saying Jesus is the great high priest because he's seated, sympathetic, and sinless, I'm going to say it this way—he is our great high priest because he is seated, sinless, and sympathetic. He was tempted just like you're tempted, yet without sin. Now if I can be honest here, I think some of us think the life of Christ was rigged. I think some of us think yeah, he was tempted but he couldn't have sinned if he wanted to because he was fully God and God can never sin. So that thought makes us think he's not really like us... *Yeah, he was tempted but not really, not like me!* I think that's why some of us don't depend on him. Do you know who you're depending on? You're depending on your husband, your wife, your girlfriend, or your buddy, but not Jesus because you don't think he understands. I just want to say to us, he understands. He was tempted like us yet without sin. I'm not going to get into that argument with you on could he or could he not have. I think he could have because he's fully man and Philippians chapter 2 tells me that when he left heaven he chose not to rely upon his prerogative of being God and relied totally on the prerogative of being man and faced every situation just like I do and Adam did. So he had the ability to sin or not to sin, but he didn't where Adam chose to and that brought sin into our lives.

The Bible paints a picture of Jesus when he began his ministry of fasting for 40 days and 40 nights and then being let out in the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Now I don't know about you but if I'm going to take on Satan I'm going to stock up on food. I'm going to ride my bicycle. Give me 40 days and I'm going to be ready! He went without food or drink for 40 days and 40 nights. Now, this is just my sanctified imagination but I think he did this just to give Satan a chance, because on a full belly, Satan didn't have a chance against Jesus. He was no match for him. So after a 40 day and 40 night fast, totally into God, Satan brings it on. Now, I want to be careful here because Satan has never brought it on to me personally. I always get one of his lowest privates. I'm not big enough for Satan to come at me but Jesus got Satan himself, not a private, not a lieutenant, not a colonel, not a major, and after a 40 day fast Satan came at him, concerned about him, said... *Man, you haven't eaten in 40 days and 40 nights. Why don't you just turn these rocks into bread? What would be wrong with that?* You Jesus said... *Nope, man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

I want to make sure you understand this. John kind of paints temptation as coming to us in a threefold way. There is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Satan just went at Jesus with a flesh perspective, he told him he needed to feed himself. Then he tells Jesus to come with him and they go up to the top of the temple and Satan looks at Jesus and says... *Why don't you just prove who you really are? If you are the Son of God why don't you jump off this temple?* (See, Satan evidently knew he was man) *Why don't you just jump off this temple, the Bible says God will send angels and they will keep you from falling. You won't even bruise your little toe. Just show us who you are.* That is a pride thing, back me into a corner and let me show you who I really am! Jesus didn't fall for that. He didn't fall for it at all even though Satan used Scripture against him. Then you know the next one. Satan takes him to a high mountain and shows him all of the kingdoms of the world and says this to him... *Hey, I'll give all of these to you if you'll bow down and worship me.* Evidently he had the authority to give them to him. Now I want to tell you what he's doing here, and this is so attractive to us as Christians living in America. It's the path of least resistance. Let's get what we really want but we shouldn't have to suffer in the process. He was going to get the kingdoms of the world but do you know what it was going to cost him? It was going to cost him going to a cross and dying on that cross and taking the sins of humanity on him and paying our sin debt. Here Satan has offered it to him if he would just bow down and worship, but he didn't fall for it.

Now don't think this is the only time Jesus was tempted; I think he was tempted every day of his life just like you're tempted, and yet not one time did he give into sin, not one time. Because of that, he's a sympathetic high priest. Sympathy means to suffer or feel something, but to be sympathetic is another level. It means that you're compassionate because of someone's suffering and feelings and you're willing to aid them or help them. There are a lot of people who have sympathy but aren't sympathetic. He is a sympathetic high priest. Why? Because he's been where we've been...he's been tempted. Why don't we go to him more? See, we've got this wrong concept, I've learned this as a pastor. I'm over it now. I used to believe like you believe and think that to really sympathize with somebody and be sympathetic with somebody you've got to experience what they've experienced. As a young pastor, someone would have something happen to them and I would go minister to them, and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I

understand what you're going through." Then, boom, I'd have this thought—no I don't. I am going home to Celisa, I've still got Kiki and Kory, I've still got the greatest of Christ's church at Hardin. We've all been programmed to believe that unless someone has been exactly where we're at and experienced what we've experienced then we can't really know what's happening. So now, if someone is sharing something with me and another person and that person says, "Been there, done that!" All of a sudden, he turns and opens up and start sharing with the person who said they have been there and done that. And since I haven't been there and done that, evidently I can't be sympathetic, I can't help—that is a lie! Are you listening to me? Jesus Christ, in everything you experience can say "been there, been there, been there, been there, been there—didn't do it." WOO! Amen? Did you hear that? Been there, didn't do it! Been there, didn't do it! Been there, didn't do it! You're thinking I've you've lost it...no, I haven't! Are you ready for this? Jesus was where you were in that moment of temptation but you gave in to it; he didn't give into it so he went deeper. He went deeper into temptation and deeper into temptation and deeper into temptation. Do you really want to get counsel from someone who's been there and done that or been there and didn't do that? We have a great high priest who's been there, didn't do that, and he's sympathetic! He understands. And do you know what he wants you to do? He wants you to come to him. Do you know where he is? He's at the right hand throne of God, seated in the Holy of Holies. When the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and he came back out, they made sure the curtain was closed. Jesus went into the true Holy of Holies and the curtain is still open! When Jesus died his death on the cross, what happened to the veil in the temple? It was torn from top to bottom as a signification that the way into the presence of God is now open and you and I can now, because Jesus is our high priest sitting in the presence of God, come into the very presence of the throne of God with confidence! Wow!

Now, I have to be honest with you...in the Old Testament the throne of God didn't seem so much to be a throne of grace as a throne of judgement. Do you remember when Moses was facing the presence of God? God told him to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground. Do you remember when God gave the law to Moses on the mountain top? They wouldn't even touch it! They wouldn't even go up on it. It was quaking, thundering, lightening, and dark! So you ran from God, you kept

your distance from God. Isaiah chapter 6 says God is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY and the seraphim covered their faces and covered their feet because God is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY. This is why some of us would rather run to a friend, our husband, our wife, or our mom and dad rather than run to Jesus because we view where he is as a throne of judgment. It's a throne of grace and he says come! So the preacher in Hebrews is saying let us who are holding fast to our confession, who have a good grip on what we believe is true—Jesus is the Son of God sitting at the right hand throne of God because he made a sacrifice on the cross that finished our salvation and we're at rest in him now—and on our way to him it gets rough and it gets tough, so we are going to need a little mercy and we are going to need a little grace. Do you know where we get it? We get it from him so we have to draw near with confidence.

This word "confidence" means speak your mind. I love it! The last few weeks I've had some people talking to me and have said, "Brother Ricky, here is what I said to God..." and then they would say, "Now, I know I shouldn't have told him this." Buddy, they let him have it! Do you know what I said? Now I hope you'll be proud of this (it doesn't matter anymore, I'm not lead pastor anymore, I'm just pastor of care 😊) here is what I said, "Don't feel bad a bit." They said, "What?" If you're thinking it, then say it to him. Don't pick up the phone and call him, go right to the throne and speak your mind, speak your heart. Why? Because you have this truth...he's been where you're at, and he didn't do it but he understands. Do you know what he's going to give you? Grace and mercy. Mercy and grace.

Now, I want to be honest here. I know traditionally we define mercy as God withholding from us what we deserve and grace is God bestowing upon us what we don't deserve, but I want to tweak this just a little bit. I'm not saying that's not true, but in this moment as a believer, when you've done something you shouldn't have done, or somebody did something to you that they shouldn't have done, or you're being tempted to do something you shouldn't do, you need to come to the throne. The door is open and you can come right into the presence of God knowing your high priest, the one you're going to talk to, fully understands because he's been there. Here is what he's going to give you—he's going to give you mercy. Mercy, according to Bro. Ricky, is the ability to get over it.

Some of you have done some things that truthfully have caused so much hurt that you truthfully don't deserve to get over it, but God's going to let you get over it. That is mercy. How dare we as Christians want mercy from God but not give mercy to others. There have been some people who have done some things to you, and you need to go to God so that he'll give you the ability to get over what they did to you. Don't tell me he doesn't understand; he does. They put him on a cross. Do you know what he said? "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." I've always said if there had been a reporter there interviewing those people saying, "Hey, Jesus just said you don't know what you're doing." They would have taken issue with that and said, "Yeah, we know what we're doing! He committed blasphemy!" Jesus knew they didn't really get it. Don't tell me he doesn't understand. I may not understand but he understands because he's been there and didn't do it; therefore, he can help you get over it. Some of you still aren't over what you did years ago. Come to the throne. Rest in what Christ does and he'll give you the ability to get over it. He doesn't just give you the ability to get over it, he gives you grace which is the ability to get on with it. GET ON WITH IT! Yes you blew it, yes someone sinned against you, but we don't let that sideline us and set us on the bench! We get back in the game for the glory of God because he gives us the ability to not only get over it but to also get on with it, amen!

When do we get this grace? In our time of need. If I was translating this, here is what I know this really means in Dexter terminology—you get grace and mercy 'in the nick of time.' Celisa and I know we are different from each other in one area; we both prepare for everything we do but she just prepares sooner and for longer than I start preparing. If Celisa is invited to do something she's going to start right away but spend two or three weeks being fully ready for that. Now I'm going to prepare too, I'm just going to take a couple of days or a couple of hours tops, but we're both going to be ready. Now, watch this...when I go to God about something, I like to get it at least a day or two ahead; Celisa likes to have it a couple of weeks ahead. If we're not careful, we get in that mode of, "What are we going to do!" We're not going to do anything! We're just going to rest because the mercy and grace are going to get to us in the nick of time. It's never going to be a day, a minute, or an hour late. It's always going to be in the nick of time. Our life is to bring glory to God as

we get a good grip, and we stay in his presence letting him bestow the ability to get over what has been done to us and then get on with it.

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