

# Grace to help in time of need

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, if we could turn, please, to our Bibles, to the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 4. It's on page 1003. We are continuing this series in Hebrews.

I'm reading this evening from 4.14 to 5.10. Let's go to Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 14.

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, drawn here to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this, he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins, just as he does for those of the people.

[ 1 : 22 ] And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, You are my son.

Today I have begotten you. As he also says in another place, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at Hebrews 4.

That's on page 1002 and 1003. And we'll have a moment of prayer. Father, as we draw near to you, we pray that you will most graciously draw near to us, that you will open your word to our hearts and minds, and that you will open our hearts and minds to your word.

[ 3 : 02 ] In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. A pagan writer sometime in the first century said the Christians were atheists.

The reason he said this was because they didn't have any of the kind of things that a religion needed. They didn't have a temple. They didn't have sacrifices. They didn't really worship God at all.

After all, they didn't worship Jupiter and Apollo and the other gods. And they didn't have priests. And therefore, they must be atheists.

Now, that's not the only remark of that kind. In the 17th century, King Charles I sent Archbishop Laud up here to Scotland to impose what was called Laud's liturgy.

Laud was not impressed. The weather, unsurprisingly, was appalling. The buildings, he said, were dark, dismal, and gloomy.

[ 4 : 11 ] Well, there are many still of these kind of buildings around, as we're only too well aware. Indeed, he writes, the benighted people appear to have no religion at all.

Once again, looking for externals. One of the dreadfully unfortunate things about that ham-fisted way that both the king and the archbishop went about their job was the undying suspicions owed in the Scottish church for the glorious language of Cranmer's prayer book.

That was one very, really unfortunate consequence of it. But this is a fallen world. So, our author is saying, we do have all these things.

We do have a sacrifice, a once-for-all sacrifice, to which nothing can be added and which can never be repeated. We do have a temple, but it's not made with hands.

The temple in heaven, after all, the earthly temple, is only a copy of the things in heaven. And above all, we do have a priest. We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

[ 5 : 24 ] And this is going to become the dominant note in the rest of the letter. Each of the writers deal with the Lord Jesus Christ in different ways. But no one so fully and so powerfully deals with the high priesthood of Jesus as the author of Hebrews.

He's just given a warning note that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, warning us, as we saw last week, not to fail to enter rest.

The note now becomes mainly one of encouragement, although there is warning. And, of course, we need both of these, don't we? In any ministry, in any experience, we need both warning and encouragement.

If we have an overdose of relentless negatives, we're going to feel we're never going to make it, aren't we? On the other hand, if we have nothing but encouragement and affirmation, we're going to become complacent.

And it seems to be rather obvious that among the Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was written, both moods were very much in evidence.

[ 6 : 35 ] There were those who were complacent, those who were holding on loosely to the doctrines of the faith, and there were those who were totally discouraged. Now, the answer to both, says our author, is the great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

Now, priests have two qualifications, and these run through this passage. For any priest, particularly for the high priest, the first is he must be called by God.

You don't volunteer to be the high priest. That's one of the things that happens when things go bad. All sorts of unsuitable people begin to push themselves forward and volunteer.

We're all aware of that. That's why somebody said, never ask for volunteers. But at one time, apparently, the former president of America, Bill Clinton, was having a discussion with Bill Hybels, the churchman, and they were discussing who had the most difficult job.

And Clinton said to Hybels, you have a far more difficult job than me, Bill. He said, why? Because they have to work with volunteers. Those of you who are volunteers, please do not take this person.

[ 7 : 49 ] But the point is, the high priest has to be called. And at one time in ancient Israel, when Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, he made the priesthood into a job.

Anybody who wanted could be a priest, could apply for it. And this apparently happened, as I was once talking to a Christian from Sweden, who said that in some parts, at least, of Sweden, the job is advertised in the paper.

Well, it may say something vague, like you've got to have some religious kind of consciousness, but simply a job to be applied for, like any other job. No, he has to be called.

And the other thing is, there has to be true sympathy, an open heart, and a listening ear. And that's what our title is today. Taken from the passage itself, it's always quite a good place to find titles, isn't it?

No one can say you're twisting the passage if you find the title from the passage. Verse 16 of chapter 4, grace to help in time of need.

[ 8 : 53 ] Is there ever a time which is not a time of need? The old hymn says, is there trouble anywhere? We know very well there's trouble everywhere.

And we need a great high priest to help in time of need. Now, we have three snapshots, if you like, in this passage of the great high priest. First of all, his nature, kind of person he is.

Chapter 4, verses 14 to 16. As we sang a moment ago, a great high priest, our nature wears.

So two things. First of all, he has taken humanity into heaven. He has passed through the heavens. Jesus, he is still, I think it's an important thing we must never forget.

Jesus in glory is still human. He is still a man. He hasn't been reabsorbed into the Godhead, whatever that phrase could mean. He is a man in heaven.

[ 9 : 54 ] And that, of course, tells us that we will be human as well in the new creation. We will not become disembodied spirits. When we are further up and further in, I think you know who said that, in the new creation, we will be truly human.

But not, of course, the fallen, decaying humanity we are now, but the human beings that God created us to be. When God made us, he gave us the qualities, the personality, obscured very often in this world.

But in there, in the new creation, it will be truly realized. We will be truly human. And believe it or not, brothers and sisters, it is harder to imagine for some of us than others.

We'll all be beautiful. Like I said, it's harder to imagine for some than for others. But never underestimate the grace of God and the wonder of the Creator.

Now, the old high priest went into the holy place, the most sacred division of the temple, once a year, once a year only.

[ 11 : 04 ] Whereas Jesus Christ has gone into the holy place, the true holy place, once and for all. He has passed through the heavens. As I said before, we often neglect the doctrine of the ascension.

If we, and we often think about the resurrection, we often think about the coming of Jesus. Don't neglect the ascension, because the ascension is absolutely vital.

If we did not have the ascension, what happened to the risen Jesus when the 40 days were over, when he ceased to appear to his disciples? There's a black hole there. No.

Hebrews tells us, Luke is the only gospel which describes the event in Acts, and a briefer account at the end of the gospel. But here, the other Ephesians, for example, said he ascended to heaven.

And here, he has passed through the heavens. Now, the heavens, of course, so the thinking here is, well, first of all, there is the aerial heavens, if you like, in which we live, and in which the birds fly.

[ 12 : 13 ] There are the starry heavens, if you like, and then there is the heaven of heavens, the third heaven, sometimes the seventh heaven, dwelling place of God himself. So it's not just space, it is spatial, but it is to do with, it's to do with coming right into the presence of God's glory.

Jesus, the Son of God. Now, this is very practical. Because of this, says our author, verse 14, let us hold fast our confession.

Confession is equivalent to the faith once delivered to the saints, as Jude calls it, to the gospel, to the positive faith, we get in the pastoral letters. Hold on to this.

You see, the important thing about Hebrews, and I'll say this again next week, when we come to the difficult passage about falling away. As far as we can see, there is no heretical teaching troubling the Hebrews.

None of that, as there were in some of the churches. These were people who had heard the gospel over now, probably two, possibly even three generations. They didn't disbelieve it.

[ 13 : 22 ] It's just they weren't holding it very closely. It wasn't part of them. It hadn't become their, it hadn't become part of their whole being. And, our author is saying, hold on to it.

Because Jesus has gone into heaven, that means your faith is secure. So he's taken humanity into heaven. Now there, of course, immediately arises a problem.

He's in heaven. He's enthroned, far above, all might, and principality, and power, and every name that can be named, both in this world, and in the world to come, as Paul says in Ephesians.

Does that mean he no longer cares for us? Does that mean he is too great to care, too high, to be concerned? Now our author is determined, you see, this is, notice it's a double negative.

We do not have a high priest, who is unable to sympathize. You see, sympathy doesn't just mean, kind feelings. It implies, active help, as well.

[ 14 : 30 ] There's no point, in going to the throne of grace, if we're just going to be, pattern head on, so you'll feel better, in a little while. That's not what sympathy means. Sympathy means, actively helping.

Now as we all know, that help may be slow to come. There are difficult, troubling, troubling, lonely times, lonely agonies, and costly disciplines, to be endured.

But, this high priest, is not too high, not throned above, remotely high, unmoved, untouched, by human cares, as another hymn says.

No, he has, I know, I want to see, how astonishing this is. He is in every respect, tempted, as we are.

As we wrestle, with temptation, as the, sometimes the foulest, and nastiest thoughts, come into our head, nasty pictures, on the screen, of our minds.

[ 15 : 36 ] Do you realize, what our author is saying? Our author is saying, these are not, in themselves, sinful. It is not, sinful, to be tempted.

tempted. If the son of God, who was without sin, was tempted, then temptation, is not sin, any more than, a disposition, is sin, in itself.

You know, if people have, a disposition, towards a particular, type of sexuality, that is not, a sin. The sin happens, when we give way, to these temptations.

When we say, I've got this kind of disposition, so I can do nothing about it. When we say, I'm too weak, you don't know the pressure on me. That is when the sin happens. Now, as Jesus Christ, lived our life, in the midst, of this world, with all its temptations.

Sometimes, we tend to think, of the Bible, as a kind of, primitive sort of, community, where, every life was simple, and straightforward. And indeed, sometimes, there have been some, presentations of the gospel, that have given credence to that.

[ 16 : 43 ] No, it is, it was a place, of grim, terrifying, relentless, temptation. We see, of course, it dramatized, and the temptation, in the desert, when the devil, comes to Jesus, tempting him, to all these, these kind of things.

See, we've got to hold both of it. If we simply say, he was tempted, in every way as we are. If we press that, too far, then we're likely, to end up, feeling all well.

He's not really, all that different, from me, at all. He's as weak, as I am. But notice, without, sin. In other words, he does, sympathize with us.

He does, totally, identify with us. But not, you see, if he had sinned, then, his sins, would have had to, have been forgiven.

And, who then, was going to stand, between any of us, and the anger of God? How, how was the, salvation of humanity, to be accomplished? There's a, temptation itself, is neutral.

[ 17 : 48 ] The, it's how we, respond to temptation. When, and when we struggle, our author is saying, he knows, what we're going through. Remember that, the next time we struggle.

It's terrifying, but there is someone, who has not, only reached the goal, but who is alongside, to help us. Someone, who is not, going to be, insinuating, nasty, nasty thoughts, like, if you really, were a Christian, you wouldn't be tempted, to this.

That's not the voice, of the great high priest. That's the voice, of the tempter. When Satan, tempts me, to despair, and tells me, of the guilt, within.

Of course, there's guilt within. You see, sometimes people have asked, what's the difference, between, being convicted, by the Holy Spirit, of something sinful, and being driven, to despair, by the devil's temptations?

And I think the answer is, and I think the answer is, something like this. When the devil, speaks to us, of our sins, he drives us, into the dust. He says, you'll never make it, you've blown it, no, you'll never, you'll never appear, before the Lord, at all.

[ 19 : 03 ] He doesn't want to have, anything to do, with anyone like you. Pempts us to despair. But, when the Holy Spirit, convicts us, the Holy Spirit, shows us, what to do about it.

He says, yes, there's a sin, something's got to be done, about it, and he shows us, what to do about it. Now, that is the huge difference. You see, we are all, to the very end, of our journey, going to be, harassed, by sin.

Preach of an earlier generation, Alexander McLaren, in the colourful language, of an earlier generation, says, the hounds of hell, will pursue us, to the very gates, of heaven, and leave their teeth marks, on the golden gates.

Now, that's a very vivid way, of putting it, and I say, it's not the language, of this generation, but it makes the point, very powerfully. He, goes to the throne, of grace, and because of that, we can, as Wesley says, bold, I approach, the eternal throne.

As younger, I think, it's a very arrogant, thing to sing. I don't think that now. I realise, as I get older, how sinful I am, and how I will never, approach the eternal throne, other than through Christ.

[ 20 : 18 ] Remember, he says, claim the crown, through Christ, my own. Just one other thing here, notice, it's a throne, of grace. Thrones, are normally associated, with judgment, and of course, it is a judgment seat, but, it is, a judgment seat, on which sits, the great high priest, Jesus, the one who identifies, with us, and also the son of God, the one who can rescue us.

So, his nature, the great high priest, our nature, we're battling himself, with temptation, in his earthly life, coming alongside of us, to help us, and we're driven to despair.

Now, the second thing, is his calling, chapter 5, verses 1 to 6. The calling, of the priest. And once again, remember, our author, is rather like an artist, on a palette, making the same point, in several different ways, or like a musical piece, playing the melody, for different instruments.

First thing about him, is he is totally human, he is appointed, from men, to act on behalf of men. Verse 1, Jesus, totally, in continuity, with Aaron, in that he was human.

As I, I mentioned a few weeks ago, that story, of the funeral, of Lord Shaftesbury, the great philanthropist, and the man, who said, of Shaftesbury, he was one of us.

[ 21 : 52 ] It's a message of Hebrews, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is one of us. He was appointed, from among us, to act, on our behalf. I mean, that, after all, is a very simple, definition of a priest, isn't it?

The priest brings, God to people, and people to God. That is what, priests were for. And the gifts, and sacrifices, are probably, a general description, of the offerings, which the high priest, over which the high priest, presided.

Now, there were many priests, in ancient Israel, who were thoroughly, disreputable, and unworthy. No worse example, than the beginning, of the book of Samuel, when Eli, Eli was not a bad man, Eli was a weak man, but his sons, were utterly, utterly vicious, disgraced their office, deliberately, deliberately, polluted the sanctuary, and deliberately, led people, away from God.

Just as there were, dreadful kings, the point is, of course, these priests failed, the kings failed, even the best, and even the best, of the priests failed, but, and even the best, of the kings.

But, verse 2 shows something, very, he can deal gently, with the ignorant, and wayward, since he himself, is beset with weakness. Now, particularly talking about, Aaron here, of course, Aaron, and the other priests, had to give sacrifices, for their sins.

[ 23 : 17 ] And, that is why, one of the titles, of Jesus, the friend, of sinners, is such a, wonderful, and, encouraging title.

He is the friend, of sinners. And, because he is the friend, of sinners, we can claim, his friendship. So, he's totally human, and he can, but he's also, totally chosen, by God.

Now, even the best, of the high priests, they said, verse 3, had to offer sacrifice, for their own sins, and they were supposed, to live godly lives, many of them, totally unworthy, like Eli's sons, but even the best, of them, were fallible.

In Leviticus 17, great day of atonement, which is a background, to so much, of this letter, Aaron goes, into the holy place, and offers, first, sacrifices, for his own sins.

But the main point, here, is the divine calling. Aaron, had this special call, called by God, just as Aaron was. Calling, if it's truly grasped, leads not to pride, but to humility.

[ 24 : 30 ] Not something, to grasp at. Remember, the great passage, in Philippians 2, though he was, in the form, of God, he did not, grasp at, his divinity, but made himself, nothing, and took the form, of a servant.

So, here, he does not, exalt himself, if he made a high priest. And once again, our author is turning, to the scriptures, two quotations, from the Psalms again.

Psalms 2, you are my son, you are the Davidic king, you are my son, this day have I begotten you. And then a theme, which is going to become, particularly prominent, later on, you are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Read back in Genesis, where Abraham, having rescued his nephew Lot, from the kings, on his way from, returning from the battle, meets Melchizedek, king of Salem, king, and Melchizedek offers him bread, and wine.

Look at that passage later, when we come to chapter 7, which deals with Melchizedek, in detail. The point about Melchizedek, is that the author says, he is like the son of God, because he is neither father, nor mother.

[ 25 : 45 ] It doesn't mean he actually, didn't literally have a father, and a mother. It means that his father, and mother are not recorded. The grace of God, even before the giving of the law, is stretching out.

So, Melchizedek comes, and offers bread, and wine, whereas the king of Sodom, offers material wealth, to Abraham. Abraham realizes, that he's not going to have, any obligations to Sodom, but he recognizes, in Melchizedek, somebody greater, than Melchizedek.

So, so you see, Jesus is called, called as a king, called as a priest. So, this is, this is the, this is the high priest, who cares for us.

I don't know, some of you may have read, that powerful novel, by Thomas Hardy, depressing novel, Tests of the Durbervilles. I used to love Thomas Hardy, when I was young, I used to teach him, as English teacher.

I remember writing, at the end of Jude the Obscure, never again. Such a depressing book. But, in Tests of the Durbervilles, Tests, through a series of, a series of incidents, partly her own fault, partly the fault of others, is eventually hanged.

[ 27 : 01 ] And Hardy ends the novel, The President of the Immortals, that ended his sport, with Tests. The President of the Immortals, an uncaring, unfeeling, remote ruler, living across leagues, of super space.

We are not, in the hands, of the President of the Immortals. We are in the hands, of a great high priest, whose name is Love. And finally, thirdly, we've seen, we've seen his nature, we've seen his calling, and briefly, his saving power.

Chapter 5, verses 7 to 10. The days of his flesh, not that he's no longer human, but that this refers, particularly to the, the period of the incarnation, his earthly life.

And two things, his sufferings, were real, but temporary. He was not shielded, from pressure. Now, in many ways, it must be awful, to be her majesty, living that kind of life, in a gilded cage.

But I'm sure sometimes, when you're waiting in a queue, at an airport, or something, you're wishing you were, her majesty, or somebody like that, and could just jump, to the, the head of the queue. Jesus, in his earthly life, did not jump, to the head of the queue.

[ 28 : 18 ] He was not shielded, from everyday life. But I think, there's a particular event, referred to here, the language here, almost certainly, refers to the Garden of Gethsemane, loud cries, and tears.

This message, where the Lord Jesus Christ, faces death, and faces it, with trembling. This is amazing. Think of, the great heroes, of the faith.

People like, the Oxford martyrs, Ridley, and Letimer, for example, burn for their faith, during the reign, of Bloody Mary. And, Latimer, saying, Ridley, play up, and play the man.

And today, by God's grace, we will light, in England, a candle, that will never, be put out. Why is it, that the Lord Jesus Christ, faced with death, seemed to face it, with shrinking, and trembling?

I think, this was part, of his identification, with us, as a great high priest, one who bears, our nature. On that terrible night, he chose, to face, that experience, not, like one of the heroes, of his army, not like the Riddles, and Latimers, but like the poorest, and weakest, and most trembling, of his followers.

[ 29 : 38 ] That seems to me, to be absolutely wonderful. You don't have to be, a hero, or a heroine, to know his grace, and to know his presence, and to know his saving power.

We are told, he learned, obedience. And I think, that's, illuminated by a verse, in Romans, Romans 5, by one man's, disobedience, many were made sinners.

So by one man's, obedience, many will be made, righteous. Standing, where Adam fell, completing the work, made perfect, making the work, perfect.

As it is finished, completing, the work, the work of redemption, made perfect. And he is heard, as the son of man, because of his reverence.

Truly, truly human. Suffering, as we suffer, walking, where we walk, feeling, under the pressures, that we do. His sufferings, are real, but temporary.

[ 30 : 38 ] But, a saving power, is real, but lasting. Verse, he became, verse 9, the source, of eternal salvation.

A high priest, forever. And I think, that's fascinating. That means, even in the new creation, he'll still be a high priest. It's, you, sometimes we think, of the incarnation, as if it were, a kind of, this reputable episode, that we had to forget about.

No. In the incarnation, he is showing, the very heart of God. The heart of God, that will not only be revealed, in the rough ways, of this world, but in the glories, and wonders, of the new creation.

He will still be, a priest. And notice, he is, forever, he is being designated, after the order of Melchizedek. And, that's going to be developed, in chapter 7.

Aaron's priesthood, was, obviously, time limited. Other priests, were time limited. The historical, Melchizedek himself, was time limited. But, the one to whom, he points, is not.

[ 31 : 50 ] Designated by God, a high priest, he became, to all, or for all, who obey him. So, just as we finish, he has solidarity, in our weakness, his grace.

But also, this is going to be important, as we go on, to the next section. He helps us, to persevere, in faith, and obedience. This kind of teaching, does not make us complacent, or ought not, to make us complacent.

It shows us, that when we struggle, and we'll continue, to struggle, we can, with confidence, drawn near, to the throne of grace, that we may receive, mercy, and grace to help, in time of need.

Amen. Let's pray. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, we have already come, grace, that brought us, safe thus far.

And grace, will bring us home. Father, we praise you, for the great, high priest. Christ, great high priest, who lifts us up, when we are fallen. Great high priest, who sympathizes, with us in our weakness.

[ 33 : 03 ] And the great high priest, will one day meet, in the very heart, of the new creation, in the throne of God, with that same, mercy, and grace, as he has shown to us, in our earthly lives.

We praise him, for this. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.