

## Hebrews

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish

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Hebrews 4:14-16

Vs. 14

- Here, we come to the central theme of the book of Hebrews: Jesus Christ is our great and perfect high priest. This is the theological high point of the sermon. The purpose of the high priest is to stand in the gap between God and humanity. The high priest is to provide the voice for God to speak to His people while at the same time leading people into the very presence of God. The perfect high priest must know the mind of God and the mind of the people. This is who the preacher proclaims Christ to be.
- This verse begins the pronouncement by pointing to the ultimate deity of Jesus. Unlike the Roman emperors who designated themselves as gods, Jesus' deity is innate. No earthly authority conferred His deity, nor was there anything circumstantial or external. Jesus is the Son of God because that is simply who He is and who He was from before He was born.
- That Jesus "passed through the heavens" may mean a couple of things, either the heavens of the skies or the perhaps the presence of God. Perhaps the poet Christina Rossetti was on the right path in her poem/Christmas Carol, "In the Bleak Midwinter", when she opined of Jesus that, "Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain...". Perhaps, when in the Father's perfect time He was ready to send His Son, heaven itself could not contain Jesus another moment.
- This is our confession, our core belief, that Jesus Christ, not the emperor or any other person, nor any other created thing, is our God and has supreme priority in our life. In times of trial, testing, temptation, and trouble, the preacher admonishes us to "hold fast" to this confession, as it will take us to where we need to be, to where we long to be.

Vs. 15

- Here the preacher uses a double negative to say something positively wonderful about Jesus. Again, part of the trouble people were having connecting to God was the idea that God was too distant, too holy, too unreachable for people to truly know Him. But here is the Son of God, acting as our great and perfect high priest who truly knows *US*. He does in fact sympathize with our

weaknesses. As the carpenter's son from Nazareth, He has been through everything we have been through: all the hard times, all the temptations, and yet He did not sin. And because He did not sin, He maintained His pure relationship with the Father and was the sacrificial lamb without blemish, worthy of sacrifice for our sin.

- That Jesus faced all we have or will face says more on further thought. We face temptations and hard times and so often we just give up, sometimes quickly. We never hang in the fight long enough to really experience the devil's worst attacks. Satan throws a few flaming arrows and we fold like a cheap suit. But not Jesus. He took everything Satan had to throw at Him and was still standing. He was tempted far worse than we will ever experience. William Barclay suggests we think in terms of pain. Some people have no pain tolerance, others much greater. But there is a pain level at which the human body cannot process and we pass out. We all fail, but not Jesus. It is true that He was tempted in all the things we are tempted in, but it is also true that no one has ever been tested, tempted as He was.

Vs. 16

- So where does this leave us? What is it to us that Jesus triumphed over the very worst? Christ invites us to follow Him, our high priest, to the very seat of the throne of God. And what will you find there? Condemnation? No. The only ones condemned are those who choose to remain outside, who reject Jesus' invitation to follow Him, thus they condemn themselves. But for those who follow they will find that Jesus' experience living as flesh and blood has left sympathy waiting for them at the foot of the throne. Still today people hold to the ancient views of God, either the old Jewish idea that God is too distant, so distant as to be unknowable, or one of the more common Greek views where either God is completely without feeling for us or is completely detached. But here in Jesus Christ we have a God who is waiting for us with grace, who is sympathetic to our pain and suffering. When we come following Jesus to the throne of God we find mercy, not condemnation; we find love, not hate; we find acceptance, not rejection.
- And we find a God who is able and willing to help. He offers us that amazing grace of His that gives us all we need to meet every challenge. Whatever road we find ourselves on, Jesus has already been there and knows just what we need.
- Jesus is the perfect high priest because He is perfectly God and perfectly human. Because He has lived as flesh and blood He can give us sympathy, mercy and power. He stands in the gap between Heaven and Earth so that He may bring God to us and bring us to God.