

Divine Compassion

April 29, 2018

Hebrews 4:14-16

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 we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews was written to early members of the church who were experiencing persecution and become disappointed to the point where some lost their devotion to the Lord. Does this sound familiar? Yes, it applies to us today as fading enthusiasm is also prevalent in American churches. The function of the text is to inspire faithful endurance which is necessary during tough times when there is pressure from the environment, much like today, and fatigue from within, which is also like the church of today. So, today's Scripture is another situation that applies to us today.

The author confronts the situation with exhortations to be faithful and warnings against falling away. The author also encourages the recipients to hold on to their confession of faith which contains a promise, a commitment of loyalty to Christ. When you have your public confession of faith, you confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the Savior of the world. The catalyst for this is the act of repentance which includes a promise to God to live a life of devotion. The question for the lapsed is this. Are you, or are you not, going to keep your promise, the promise that you made to the Lord upon your confession? The author lays down a foundation of fortitude that applies to individuals and the church body as a whole. The compelling argument is to keep your faith - to have enthusiasm like you had when you made your public confession. When you make that public confession of faith it is exciting! It is the most exciting time for ministry. It is exciting for you and the body of Christ. It is so exciting that the angels in heaven rejoice!

What I want to point out today is what a wonderful thing we have. The author's perspective is that we should not lapse because we have this wonderful thing. You see, no matter how bad life gets, no matter what your troubles are, no matter what the setbacks are, we have the High Priest Jesus. This is the Son of God. When facing trials you can find comfort and assurance in knowing that our high priest is able to sympathize with our problems, troubles, and weaknesses. He has been tested. Just like we are tested. Except he has been tested a whole lot worse than we ever will. And yet he is free of sin. He remained faithful. He did not lapse. He did not question his faith. He did not give in to temptation. Now we can approach the throne because your high priest understands your trials because he has been tested.

This is a great concept. It is absolutely terrific. Jesus shares our burdens. The divine Son of God shares our pain. Get this. Get this! GET THIS! You have the Son of God sharing in your pain. Too many people just don't get it. Church is never boring. Coming to worship God is a wonderful, pleasurable experience. It is a joyous celebration; an act of expressing thanks. It is our response of appreciation to God. And the joy of it all is infectious. So many times, over and over, and over again, I run into somebody that has lost their faith. They had some trial in life and gave up on God. This is because their focus is selfish. Their focus is on their pain or trial. They demand, plead, and beg God to fix it for them instead of realizing that God does not work that way. So, they get disappointed and blame God. The problem is not the trial. The problem is not with God. The problem is within the self because they don't see the glory of it all. They focus on

their pain and make demands of God instead of understanding that God does not promise a life free of trials, troubles, setbacks, and pain. What God does is promise a comforter. We can appeal our suffering to the savior who has suffered. Jesus suffered tremendously. Jesus experienced agony, suffering, and the fear of death. Jesus was subject to human weakness and temptation.

The lesson on the priesthood of Christ is a lesson that is based on Old Testament priesthood. In the Old Testament only the priest could draw near to God, offer sacrifices to God, and make intercessions for the people. The high priest was an intermediary that represented God to humanity and represented humanity to God. Now all believers can approach God. This is because the sin that separates us is removed by his atoning death. We have access to God; we can pray freely to God. Such a wonderful thing has been done for us we can't help but celebrate.

I recently read a story about a person who found out that a trusted friend said something awful about her. It ruined their friendship and made her physically ill. She confessed that she didn't know what to do and struggled with the pain all by herself. Then one day she read today's Scripture reading and it had a great impact on her because she realized that Jesus was faced with trials, temptation, and betrayal. She was comforted by the fact that Christ relates to us in our struggles. We are never alone in our problems. We get strength from the Scripture and the Holy Spirit. God did not take her pain away. God provided spiritual care. God gave her the strength to forgive and that is what took her pain away because when you forgive what changes is you.

Whatever your pain is, whatever loss or hurt we may experience, we can find comfort in our suffering savior. We give our thanks to God through praise as a joyous response in appreciation for what God has done for us. We can't help but express our thanks to God.