

Lent 1

Hebrews 4:14-16 – Who Boldly Goes Where No One Has Gone Before?

February 20-22, 2009 by: Pastor Benjamin Wessel

*Hebrews 4:14-16* <sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup>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.

**Introduction** – The popular television series Star Trek focused on the adventures of the crew of a space traveling vessel called the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. The mission that crew embarked on was to seek out new life and new civilizations, not unlike the explorers of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries here in the Americas. The crew of the Enterprise was supposed to boldly go where no one had gone before. The excitement built with each new episode, as fans waited to see what new strange planets they visited and what new strange creatures the crew would meet and whether or not they would be friend or foe. Star Trek, of course, is fantasy. It is the product of people who have very big imaginations.

The Bible tells us about what could be considered a bold adventure, not by a crew on a ship, but by one man. It tells us of the work of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. (Of course, unlike the fantasy worlds that are talked about in Star Trek, you can go visit Nazareth and walk around in the area where Jesus lived.) On Jesus' mission, he represented us, the people that he lovingly created at the beginning of time. He boldly went to places where we were not able to go. He went to those places so that we could follow him to that place where he came from. Jesus came to boldly enter heaven as our Great High Priest, so that we can boldly approach God's throne of grace.

### **Who Boldly Goes Where No One Has Gone Before? Christ did and so do we.**

#### **I. Our Great High Priest boldly went through the heavens**

What is a high priest? When God established the nation of Israel at the time of Moses, he made certain people priests. The priests were the religious leaders of the people. Among the people of Israel, the priests were descended from one family within the tribe of Levi, the family of Aaron, the brother of Moses. The priests were specially designated to represent the people before God. They were responsible for presenting to God the sacrifices that people brought to the temple, sacrifices that God used as a picture of his mercy. Some people were punished immediately for their great sins of disobedience against God, as we heard about in the account of Achan. But according to the laws God established, people who felt sorrow over their sins would often bring a sacrifice to present to God, confessing their sin. The death of the sacrificial animal was a symbol of God removing the guilt from the sinful human being and punishing a substitute in place of that person.

One significant sacrifice was held once a year on the day we know as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day and that day only, the *high* priest would enter into the innermost part of the temple with a sacrifice of goat's blood, the death of the goat serving as a picture of punishment for the sins of the entire nation. The blood was sprinkled on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The cover was called the Mercy Seat. On that day, the Lord proclaimed to the entire nation that he is a God of mercy and forgives wickedness and sins, because of the death of the people's substitute.

The sacrifices God commanded for his people were a picture of the work of Jesus the Son of God, our substitute. One time and one time only, he entered into the presence of God with a sacrifice that was a substitute for every single human being. Although he was the High Priest who offered the sacrifice, he was also the sacrifice. The animals that had been offered by the people of Israel had to be the best of the best if they were to be offered to God as a sacrifice. What type of sacrifice was Jesus? He also was the best of the best, wasn't he? He is, "*one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*"

That's good news for a couple of reasons. Although we do consider Jesus to be in a class by himself, in a very real way, he is in the same class as we are. He understands our struggles. He understands what it feels like to be attacked on every side. He understands human weakness. He is just like us because temptation came at him like an assault of soldiers with big and little guns and seemingly no escape route. Temptation came at him like a blazing fire with all the exits seemingly blocked. Temptation came at him like a defensive line barreling down on a quarterback. Have you been there? So has Jesus, your Great High Priest. And that is encouraging to know we have someone who can sympathize with all the temptation that is thrown at us.

It's also good news for us to know that Jesus, in a very real way is very different from us. We've often lost our struggles with temptation. We've thrown up our hands and said, "I can't stand it any more!" and crossed over the line God has put there to protect us. We've crossed over into lust and anger and self-satisfaction and thumbing our nose at all the good God wants for us.

But Jesus never did cross that line. Although tempted by the devil, Jesus pulled out his own big guns – the Word of Truth – which made all the defenses of the devil crumble, forcing the devil to regroup until he could come up with another plan which would end up just as useless as the last. Although Jesus was really tempted, he was really ready for all that the devil threw at him, from the moment of his conception to the final shout to his Father, *“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

Jesus really did boldly go where no one had gone before. No human being before or since has perfectly obeyed God. But our Great High Priest did and then he entered God’s presence with his clean record, his A++ report card, and the effect is like Jesus saying to his Father, “Lord, do not hold the people of this world accountable for their wicked thoughts, decisions, and words. Hold me accountable. Accept my death for their sins, so that their record can be sin-free.”

Jesus did not enter a special room with the blood of a spotless animal in an earthly temple. Our High Priest, the Son of God himself, entered heaven, entered the presence of God, with his blood, shed one time for all sinners. Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, since Jesus, the Son of God, is our Great High Priest. He boldly went where no one has gone before and no one has ever gone since, because no one needs to offer another sacrifice for our sins. God is satisfied forever with the sacrifice of his Son.

## **II. We boldly approach the throne of grace**

What is the impact of this on our lives? We don’t need to make personal, individual sacrifices to pay for our daily sins. We simply trust that our High Priest made the ultimate sacrifice which effectively erases the guilt of all humanity’s hostility toward God and effectively pays for every sin of every human being that is committed every moment of every day. Every human being’s obligation to God has been fulfilled by our High Priest who represented us before the Almighty One.

The amazing impact of this on each and every one of your lives is this. We have the privilege, the right to *“approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* In other words, because Christ boldly went where no one had gone before, we now are able to boldly go where no one could go without the work of Jesus the Son of God. We have access to God in a way that defies all of our sensibilities. We can come before the throne of God, not as the lowest class citizens in the kingdom, but boldly, with confidence that comes from our faith in our High Priest. We come as a group of people with wonderful privileges.

But why should we come? Why do we need to come? Why do we boldly approach the throne of grace? So that we may receive mercy to help us in our time of need. We still live in this fallen world, where sin swirls around us and sadly within us. We strain at the tug of war with temptation, trying so hard to think and act out all the good that our faith filled hearts want to do, but so often thinking and acting out the evil that we hate to do. We need God to be merciful for the sake of our High Priest. And even when Christ gives us the victory over temptation, we are still slapped in the face every day with tragedy and horror and fear. That’s because this corrupted material world that we live in, that our bodies and souls are part of, tosses and turns and destroys, waiting for that last day when God says “Enough is enough!” And Christians and non-Christians alike suffer.

Sometimes don’t you want to say to *God*, “Enough is enough”? You long for his mercy and sometimes it seems like he is blind and not paying attention to what you need. You feel like you are sinking in quicksand and want him to pull you out and give you a break. The mercy of God may not show itself as quickly as we would like. We may lose patience with God. Pray that God will help you believe that in the most real sense, he is a God of mercy and the mercy he showed you at the cross, freeing you from hell’s curse and giving you heaven’s reward, pray that truth will feed your confidence as you approach the throne of grace. Pray that God will help you see that even in sadness and tragedy, God still loves you.

Why else do we boldly approach the throne of grace? So that we may find grace to help us in our time of need. Looking for mercy really focuses on *our need* for God to reach down and help us when we are helpless. Finding grace focuses on what *God* offers to us in our time of need. The throne of grace is certainly the place where we find God’s grace. It is not a cruel dictator that sits on this throne. It is also not an inexperienced youth who has no wisdom about how to govern our lives. It is also not a fickle ruler that constantly changes his mind and makes his decisions based on his changing mood.

The throne of grace is the seat of our Almighty God who, out of a heart full of grace gave the most perfect gift to a world of people that showed only hostility toward him. The perfect gift was the sacrifice of his only Son and the promise of eternal peace in heaven. The throne of grace is where Jesus the Son of God is also seated at the right hand of God, pleading with his Father on our behalf, to forgive us and give us help in every need.

**Conclusion** – Our Christian faith rightly emphasizes the need for humility in our lives. God’s law humbles us and reminds us how weak and how far away we are from having a perfect relationship with God. But our Christian faith also expresses a boldness that might shock some people. Through the grace of God, demonstrated in the ultimate sacrifice of our Great High Priest, we can approach God with confidence in our time of need and expect that God will help us. God may not always help us in the way that we want or plan for, but we can expect that God will help us. Be bold, Christian friends! Approach the throne of grace and ask the one seated there with his almighty power, to help you persevere through the tests and temptations of this life. It is your right and privilege as God’s people. Amen.