

**The Benefits of Knowing Christ**

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-16

Code: 80-122

Having completed our study of Titus about to launch our study of 2 Corinthians when I return from Russia and the Ukraine, we find ourselves in a little respite here, not studying a specific book but rather gathering some glimpses of the sufficiency of Christ. We live in such a troubled world. Here we are at the pinnacle of technological advancement, here we are at the pinnacle of educational achievement and the world is more troubled maybe than it has ever been. It almost seems as if we are cycling back to some kind of primitive paganism where we wind up killing and maiming each other. It seems as though we are able to take all of these tremendous inventions that we have that can make us comfortable and none of them has any application to the heart and the soul and the mind so that there is dissatisfaction, unfulfillment, pain and sorrow at a level of life that certainly I've never seen.

All of this kind of discontent and dissatisfaction and unfulfillment, disillusionment has a way of even spilling into the church. And we pick up the kind of jaded emptiness of the world around us and we too try to fill our life with passing things and creature comforts. And when we do reach those inevitable hours of life that are filled with pain and hurt and confusion and trouble, we listen to the siren calls of the world and pursue solutions that have been concocted by men, somehow losing focus on the one who alone is the source of all of our sufficiency, namely Jesus Christ. And so we've tried in these few messages to call ourselves back to that relationship with Jesus Christ which is at the heart of everything. We don't want to be Ephesian Christians who have left our first love. We don't want to be more concerned about our theology or more concerned about our style or more concerned about our formulas than we do about our Savior. And so, we try to just draw your attention to the fact that everything you need, everything I need for every issue of life is found in Jesus Christ. And if the relationship with Christ that He wants in your life is cultivated properly, you will find in Him the resource for everything.

Sure it's a troubled world, sure it's difficult. There is tremendous amount of pain in human relationships. Marriages are being systematically devastated and the things that devastate worldly marriages crowd their way into the church and devastate Christian ones. There is tremendous tension and difficulty in the parenting process as parents try to control children who are exposed to a kind of peer pressure that not only is not well understood by parents but certainly is the antithesis of what parents would desire their children to follow. Break down within the home is all around us. There is a tolerance for wickedness and sin and evil and normalization of the grossest kind of sin that we're all shocked by. And the troubled world leaves us with deep pain and we could wish for a

simpler life and we all want to run away to some postcard place, find ourselves in some picket-fenced cottage in a tranquil environment where we don't have to face what we have to face. But it isn't that way in our world and there isn't any way out. But we don't need to be troubled and we don't need to be distressed and we don't need to lose the joy of life if we cultivate the relationship provided for us in Christ. He is not just the one who saved us in the past, He longs to be that resource and that sufficient friend for all our life.

Coming to grips with that over the last couple of times I've preached, we looked at Ephesians. This morning I want to come back to the same theme only I invite you to turn in your Bible to the fourth chapter of Hebrews. Turn to Hebrews chapter 4.

There are three verses that I would call to your attention at the end of the chapter that will just help us this morning refocus in the brief time that we have to refocus on the essential benefit that is ours in an intimate relationship with Christ. Hebrews 4:14, "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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

This...this is a statement that is so rich with truth I hope if the Lord is gracious to me this morning to just plant a portion of it in our hearts. The writer of the book of Hebrews is saying in Christ you find everything you need. He is calling here to some Jews who apparently are convinced in their mind that Jesus is the Messiah and is the very source of God's grace and provision. At least they have made some confession of that indicated at the end of verse 14. And he says to them, whatever confession of the truthfulness of Christ, whatever profession you have made of understanding the sacrifice of Christ, whatever affirmation you have made of your faith, hold on to it. Don't let go of it because it is a right thing. It is putting you in the place you need to be because we do have a great High Priest. Don't go back. Don't let go. Don't be like those people described as rocky ground in Matthew chapter 13 who have a little apparent life for a little while but when tribulation comes they wither and die because there was no real root. Don't be like those people described by the weedy soil who seem to respond and there is a profession of some kind and a confession of some kind but the love of riches, the deceitfulness of it and the cares of this world have choked out that original confession. He says don't do that. Don't get all the way up to Christ, don't understand the gospel and affirm the reality of who Christ is and then let go.

And his urging here is from the positive side, not the negative side. He's been dealing with the negative side. And earlier in the chapter he was telling them you better hold on to Christ for the sake of forgiveness, you better hold on to Christ for the sake of avoiding the wrath of God, avoiding the judgment of God, escaping hell. There is a negative side. You better hold on to Christ because if you don't you will perish for God is a judge and verse 13, there is no creature hidden from His sight. And

everything is laid bare before Him. He is going to judge righteously. He has even mentioned God's wrath in this chapter.

So there is that reason to hold on to Christ, the fact that you will avoid wrath and you will avoid judgment and hell, destruction. But the tone starting in verse 14 moves to a positive side...hold fast that profession because of what is yours in Christ. In fact, he says down in verse 16, "Let's draw near." Keep coming closer...keep coming closer.

You know, the Apostle Paul said an amazing thing in Philippians 3. He said, "This one thing I do," that's amazing. Could you say that your life is reduced to one single irreducible minimum? If somebody approached you and said, "What's the most important thing in your life? What is your life all about?" Could you answer, "This one thing I do," or would you have to say, "Well I've got 15 deals on my list here I work my way through?" I mean, it's pretty astounding to be able to say, "In my life there is just one thing, that is the profundity and the simplicity of Christian experience...this one thing I do." What is it? I've got to know. If you're telling me that you can reduce Christian living to one thing, what is it? "I press toward the mark or the goal for the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus." Forgetting everything else. What are you talking about? "I press toward the goal which is to be like Christ." He defines it there. "I pursue Christ's likeness, that's what I do..that's all I do. Forgetting everything else I do that." I mean, I find in Him everything. And to be like Him I must know Him. So the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Look, if you've come this far and you've some kind of a confession, you've made some kind of a profession, keep coming...keep coming because this is a great High Priest. He will give you what it is your heart craves and longs for and desperately needs."

In fact, this is the main point of this whole epistle, to show what a great High Priest Jesus is. Go back to chapter 2 for a moment and look at verse 16, this is quite a statement. Hebrews 2:16 says, "Assuredly...speaking of Christ...He does not give help to angels but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham," and that would be the descendant of Abraham by faith, namely one who believes. He doesn't help angels, He helps believers. You say, "Why so?" Because holy angels don't sin, they aren't tempted, they aren't tested. They don't go through personal trial. So He doesn't have to help them, they're confirmed in eternal holiness. They don't grow in grace, they don't grow in holiness. They're already perfectly holy. And fallen angels are totally unholy and there is no redemption for them. So He doesn't help angels but He gives help to believers. He had to be made like His brethren, says verse 17, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of His people.

And then verse 18, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." So verse 16 says He helps believers, verse 18 says He comes to their aid. He's a great High Priest who helps His people.

Now what is a high priest's job? What is the task of a priest? Well simply it is to usher people into the presence of God, it is to lift up people to the throne room of God. It is to bring us to the knowledge of God. That's the priest's task, that's the priest's role. And Christ does that perfectly. He is a perfect priest. The Jew would perfectly understand the concept of priesthood. He knows that a priest is to take men to God, is to bring men into God's presence to provide some means of access to God through sacrifice. But there's never been a priest like this one, not like Jesus. There's never been anyone this great. He is called in chapter 3 a faithful High Priest. Here He is seen as a merciful High Priest. He is really a perfect High Priest because He perfectly brings together man and God.

So, he's saying, "Look, Christ is so perfect as a High Priest, He alone is able to bring you into God's presence and therein lies all the resources for everything. If you have made a confession of Christ, keep coming. If you've come to this point, keep moving, keep advancing." And I think we can extrapolate that into our Christian experience. Wherever you are in your Christian experience, keep coming...keep moving closer and closer to Christ. Whatever the dissatisfactions of life, the pain, the trauma, the difficulty, the misunderstandings, the confusion, the chaos, whatever those things that deeply disappoint you in life, where you're going to go to find the answer is not in a human resource or a human formula or human system but to Him.

The other night when I was in Montreal, a young man came to me at the beginning of the evening and he stayed on my shoulder most of the evening. And he kept pleading with me to help him with a sin in his life. First of all, it was a veiled reference to a sin and then it was a more direct mention of a sin and then it was a specific mention of a sin and then it was the mention obviously of the sin in the first person and then it was a desperation of "What am I going to do about this thing and I don't have any power over this thing and where do I go from here?" And as the evening progressed I had only one thing that I could do for him, I couldn't help him with his sin. I had to lead him to one who could. My responsibility was to be a priest, as it were, in a humble human way to try to lift him up into the presence of the one who was there to help. But somehow in his Christian experience he had been under the allusion that if you have needs that are deep and searching and unrelenting and unresolvable, you've got to find a very strong person. And he saw me as that person and I was anxious to tell him that I was far too weak to accomplish what he needed, he needed to go directly to Christ. And I bring that up only to mention how many Christians don't understand what is available to them in the cultivation of that relationship.

Now let's see how it unfolds here. First of all, he says we have a High Priest like no other because this High Priest has passed through the heavens, or into the heavens, if you will. You say, "Well what's the importance of that?" Well, the Old Testament priest would go through three areas to get into the Holy of Holies, the presence of God. He would go through the outer court, through the holy place into the Holy of Holies. He would ultimately end up in the Holy of Holies which is the place where the symbol of the presence of God was, the Ark of the Covenant and once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, after having gone through ritual cleansing and after having examined his

own heart to make sure he was pure so God didn't kill him when he got in there, he would take the blood that had been taken from the sacrifice for the sins of the people and he would go from the courtyard, the outer court, through the outer court through the holy place into the Holy of Holies and he would take the blood and he would sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat to atone for the sins of Israel. Before he could do that he had to do it for himself because he was a sinner.

And when he got in there there was no place to sit. He stood in there, did his duty and got out of there before God killed him because no sinner really has any right in the presence of God. God was only allowing this to accomplish the sacrificial ceremony. They used to put little bells on the high priest's robes because as long as the bells were tinkling they knew he was alive. If the bells stopped, they knew he was dead, they'd have to throw a rope underneath the tent and pull him out. He got on there and he did what he was going to do and he got out.

If any high priest had said, "Look, folks, it's very nice in there, I'm taking a chair, I'm going to stay there," it would have been the epitome of blasphemy and self-confidence beyond imagination. He went in and he went out.

This high priest is different. He passed through the heavens and sat down. He stayed there. He went through three heavens. You know, 2 Corinthians 12:2 talks about the third heaven. The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven, that's the clouds of heaven, that's the atmosphere around the earth. The second heaven is the stellar heaven, the stars of heaven, that part of heaven. And the third heaven is the abode of God, the heaven of heavens. So our High Priest went in His ascension through the atmosphere, through the stellar heavens and into the heaven of heavens which is the abode of God symbolically carrying with Him the satisfactory atonement that He had made and pouring it out on the heavenly Mercy Seat when He arrived. The wonder of wonders is that Jesus passed through the heavens and stayed there. So we have a High Priest like no other high priest. We have a source that is there seated permanently at the right hand of the throne of God interceding for us on the basis of a sufficient atonement.

Such ongoing intercession for us is what yields eternal life. He ever lives to make that ongoing intercession for us, says chapter 7 and verse 25. He has entered into heaven and there He is ever living, seated at the right hand of the throne making this ongoing intercession on our behalf. Chapter 8 verse 1 says, "He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens. He is now, verse 2 says, in the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man. This is the real abode of God, the heaven of heavens and He's there and He doesn't have to come out quickly, He can stay there, He is sinless, He is perfect, He has accomplished a perfect redemption. And He does stay there and He stays there at the right hand of God to make intercession for us so that never ever ever do we fall out of favor with God, do we forfeit eternal life. This is our High Priest.

If you have trials in life, and you do, struggles in life, difficulty, pain, where are you going to go? If you want direct access to God, you go to the one who sits at His right hand interceding on your behalf, the one who makes ceaseless intercession for you, the one who knows God perfectly, who knows God's will exactly, the one who knows you, the one who knows you perfectly, who knows what is best for you. You can come to me and I may know you but I don't know you like Christ knows you, you can come to me and I may have an idea about what God's will is but I'm not as sure as Christ is about it. You can come to me and I'll do my best to make your case clear to God, the best that I can render is try to articulate it, not to solve it because He and He alone has the power.

There is no earthly priesthood. There wasn't one in Israel and there isn't one in the church that can accomplish for the believer what the great high priest can accomplish. You say, "Well...but...but Jesus is God, isn't He? Yes, it says He is, look at verse 14 again, "Jesus the Son of God." "So, you know, it's nice to go to Him but after all, I'd certainly like to go to somebody who maybe kind of understands me a little. I mean going to the Son of God with my problems, I may find a bit of indifference or a lack of understanding, personal experience."

Not so, look at verse 15. "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin." He says, "Look, He is your High Priest, He is the one you want to go to, cultivate that relationship. You've made that confession, you've made that profession, now keep drawing near because He is the source, He is your Priest, He does bring you to God. No human can do what He did. No human has that constant access. No human carries on his heart your needs like Jesus does. Go to Him."

But does He understand? Yes. Verse 15, He can sympathize with our weakness because He's been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. That is a remarkable, remarkable statement.

Now, we have a High Priest in heaven, follow this thinking, interceding for us all the time who has an unequalled capacity for understanding us and sympathizing with us in every danger, every sorrow, every trial that human life could inflict. Why? Because He was exposed to all of them. And He endured triumphantly every form of testing that a man could possibly endure. In fact, you might think His battle was easier, it wasn't. It was more intense than ours. And here's why, I'll give you an illustration. We saw some power lines on this recent trip and the man who was describing these power lines said they carry 200,000 volts so you don't want to touch them or get near them. They were suspended over a river...200,000 volts. One hundred and ten volts will shock me. Two-twenty will even give me a bigger shock. I don't need 200,000. I'll feel pain at 110. Jesus didn't give in at 110, He didn't give in at 220, so He inevitably felt 200,000. So when you think about Jesus being tempted, Jesus being attacked and jolted by Satan, you have to understand that because He never gave in, the full blast and the full expression of Satanic power ran to its limit, a level of temptation we don't experience because we give in sooner.

There's a degree of pain which we can stand, right? I mean, there's a certain amount of pain I can stand and then it gets to a point where I say...that is all the pain that I can stand. I have said that several times in a dentist's chair...do something, give me another shot. There's a certain amount of pain that I can stand physically and then I stop, I exert myself only so far or if I'm in some kind of a medical situation or having some kind of doctor do something to me or cut me somewhere, there's only so much pain that I can stand.

In terms of accidents, I was talking to Patricia after her accident and I said, "Did you feel any pain?" She said, "I felt no pain, no pain at all," and yet her facial bones were all fractured, her jaw was separated and fractured, her shoulder was broken, her hand was broken, her neck was broken at C2 and C3 shattered and chips and pieces all the way down her back, her head was split wide open and she had a severe concussion. She felt nothing. Why? The body only takes so much pain and it shuts down and the concept is known as shock. You go into shock which is a mechanism that says that's all you can take. And we cave in.

In the area of temptation there's a point at which we crumble. If we don't get out of the situation immediately, it's going to crush us. But Jesus had no such crumbling point, no such shock system so that whatever Satan gave him he gave Him with full blast all the way to the limit. So when it says that He can sympathize with our weaknesses because He's been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin, what it means to say is there's no level of temptation that you have felt that He hasn't felt more. And because He never caved in He ran it all to its limit. There are agonies of pain that you don't even know that He felt. You know what it is to be lonely but you don't know what it is to be God and be separated from God. You know what it is to feel guilt but you don't know what it is to be the sinless holy Son of God and feel all the guilt of all the sins of the all the world. We collapse long before we get to the level of temptation that Jesus experienced. So when we go to Him we not only find someone sitting at the right hand of the throne of God interceding on our behalf but somebody who knows every single conceivable pain, every single possible human experience of difficulty and way beyond...way beyond.

This is new to the Jews, by the way, that God cares this much. To the Jews God was holy and God was separate and God was different and somewhat diffident. He belonged to a completely different sphere of life and being that man did. And in their minds there was no real sense in which God shared their experience. He was, in fact, incapable of it because He was God. And there were things about God and the way He operated that reinforced that like when He came down on Mount Sinai and sent fire and smoke and earthquakes in ever direction and said, "Stay away from Me."

And to the Greeks the gods were also indifferent. The Stoics said the primary attribute of deity is apathea(?), apathy, inability to feel anything...joy, sorrow, gladness, grief. And the Epicureans said the gods live in Intermundia(?) that is between the worlds. There is the spiritual world here, there's

the physical world here and the gods live in the apathea and the indifference of the Intermundia, completely detached from either reality, physical or spiritual.

Into that world comes Christianity and Christianity says that's not true, God is not indifferent. God is not in some intermittent place where He experiences nothing. God, in fact, has come into the human world in a human body and undergone every human experience short of sin. That was the truth of Christ. God has been here and God has suffered anything and everything you will ever suffer, and He knows and understands the pain of it. So when you go to the Lord Jesus Christ you not only have someone at the right hand of God interceding on your behalf but someone who fully understands.

A lot of folks try to understand. Nobody understands like Jesus, right? That's why the guy wrote the song, "No one understands like Jesus. He's a friend beyond compare. Meet Him at the throne of mercy, you will find Him waiting there."

Now there's only one other question to ask. Well I'm glad He's there for me, I'm glad He has me on His heart unceasingly before God, I'm glad He's there understanding me sympathetically but there's just one more question, I appreciate His presence and I appreciate His sympathy, but what about His resources? Can He do anything about my problem?

I might say to you, "My dear friend, I know you're in debt for five million dollars and I'm going to pray for you." And I might say to you, "My friend, I know you're in debt for five million dollars and once I was in debt for a little bit of money and I know what you feel and, my friend, I'm going to pray for you and I'm going to sympathize with you but don't ask me to write a check. I don't have that." You see, I can...I can be your friend before God and I can sympathize a little bit, not like Christ, but that's where I'm done. I don't have the resource, even from a spiritual standpoint. You can come to me and say, "Pastor, would you pray for me?" And I can do that. "And do you understand what I'm going through?" And because I'm a man and because I'm human I can say yes I understand and I sympathize with your pain but I don't have in me the power or the resource to change that.

But He does, look at verse 16. "Keep coming, keep coming boldly with confidence to the throne of grace." By the way, the throne to the Jew was always a throne of judgment, a throne of fear and Christ transformed it into a throne of grace. "Come to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." He has the resources, absolutely utterly and completely He has the resources.

A wonderful story showing the sympathy of our great High Priest and His resources was related by Dr. John Wilson about Booth Tucker who was involved years ago with the Salvation Army. Wilson tells the story that Booth Tucker was preaching in Chicago and a man came up to him after his sermon and was really upset about his sermon. He was extolling the virtues of Christ. And he said to him, "You talk like that about this Jesus Christ and He's dear to you and you say He helps you and



He provides the needs of your life, but if your wife was dead like mine and your little babies were crying for their mother like mine, a mother who would never come back you wouldn't be standing up here saying what you're saying."

A few days after that Booth Tucker lost his wife in a wreck. And her body was brought to Chicago for a funeral. Booth Tucker stood up after the funeral service and looked down into the silent face of his wife and the mother of his little babies. This is what he said, I quote, "The other day when I was here a man said I couldn't say Christ was sufficient if my wife were dead and my children were crying for their mother. If that man is here I tell him that Christ is sufficient. My heart is bleeding, it is crushed, it is broken but it has a song and Christ put it there. And if that man is here I tell him that though my wife is gone and my children are motherless, Christ speaks comfort to me today."

And Wilson said the man was there. And down the aisle he came, knelt by the casket and gave his life to Christ. It's not just sympathy, it's resource we need, isn't it? Power to overcome our trials and He can provide it.

Look at verse 16, "Grace, it is a throne of grace, it is a place of mercy." Mercy looks at our misery, grace becomes the supply to overcome that misery. We hurriedly, boldly, eagerly, anxiously come to the throne because we know we'll not be spurned and won't be for us a throne of judgment because Christ is interceding on our behalf having made atonement for our sins. It won't be a throne of indifference because Christ is a sympathetic High Priest who knows exactly what we feel. And it will be a throne of grace because there He will dispense the grace we need for every issue of life.

Why is it we go so many places but to the throne? I just simply would say to you, my friend, cultivate your relationship with Jesus Christ. Whatever you may be doing in your life somehow find your way back to the words of the Apostle Paul who said, "This one thing I do, and pursue knowing Christ deeply that you may be made like Him." That you might come to experience all of His grace and His supply. He is ever ready to strengthen you. He is ever ready to comfort you, to restore you. He is prepared to receive the sin-stained heart that you bring Him and to clean it. He is ever ready to dry your tears, weeping bitterly. He is ever ready to meet that deeply-felt thorn in the flesh with the words that He gave to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you." Now you've come this far, you've made your profession, you've made your confession, keep coming and keep pursuing Christ. And again I say, the best that any minister can do is to lead you to the great High Priest who is the source of all provision.

Father, thank You for this wonderful text of Scripture we have just touched so lightly this morning. Thank You for all that is ours in Christ. Lord, help us to realize that when we are devastated by life's trials and when we find our when we find ourselves in the doldrums and in times of depression, it is because we have somehow lost touch with You, we have lost our hold on Your hand, we have left our place at the throne. Help us to know that You're there and all of life is to pursue You. May we spend

our whole life before the throne pleading for mercy and grace from a resourceful sympathetic ever-living intercessor who makes all the richness of God's treasure available to His children. And may we remember the words of James who said, "You have not because you ask not." Renew in us that first love for Christ and may we pursue Him through prayer, through the Word. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).