

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

2080 West Grand Boulevard
Detroit, Michigan 48208
Pastor Nathan Johnson, D.D., Senior Pastor

Pastor's Bible Study

Holding On To God's Best

A Study of the Epistle of Hebrews

Study Number 10

February 21, 2012

One of the tactics of Satan is distraction. Satan seeks to distract us from the truth of what we have in Jesus Christ. He knows that if we lose our spiritual grip on what we possess, we are doomed to succumb to despair. Once we start to despair, we tend to be dismayed. We tend to contemplate the viability of things we have all ready marked as discard. We find ourselves rummaging through the trash pile of spurious ideologies. The writer of Hebrews is seeking to encourage his audience to not allow their adverse circumstances or the alluring negative words of their detractors cause them to loosen their spiritual grip on Jesus. We too must hear this message and not allow what is ours through Jesus Christ to slip away from us due to a relaxing of our faith.

Hebrews

4:14-16

(ESV)

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For 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. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ¹

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The Alternative to Giving Up: Hold On To Jesus

1. **Because of what, where, and who He is** : 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.”
 - a. **What He is: Our Great High Priest**
 - i. The writer immediately establishes the present reality that the believer has. The believer right now has a “great high priest.” We are not hoping “to have”, but “we have” right now in our present experience this relationship with Jesus. The verb “have” is a present active participle, this suggests that this “having” is first contemporaneous, second, it is based on the action of the subject, and third, it is without broken continuity. Simply put, “we have” and we will continue to have Jesus as our great high priest.
 - ii. When the Hebrew ear would have heard the phrase “great high priest,” they would have heard “great, great priest.” This is because the term “high priest” meant great priest. The writer is placing before his audience the surpassing ministry of Jesus as “high priest.” The detractors were suggesting that these Hebrew Christians return to relying on the Levitical system of priest. If Jesus is the “great, great priest”, then to return would be to give up the superior for the inferior.
 - b. **Where He is: “ passed through the heavens”**
 - i. Jesus not only ascended into the heavens, but he transcended the heavens. Jesus is above, beyond what we can see. He is over and independent of our situations. We often limit the power of Jesus to what we can see with our physical eyes. However, the truth of the matter is that Jesus has transcended far beyond what we can see, understand, and figure out.
 - ii. The perfect tense of this phrase means that this “passing through” is a completed action. Though complete this action has contemporary consequences. We are privileged to in our present reality to reap the continued benefits of this transcendence.
 - iii. The work of the high priest is to mediate on our behalf before God. The best the priest of the Levitical system could do was to enter the earthly temple and offer perennial sacrifices for us. Jesus himself made the once and for all

sacrifice and now brokers forgiveness for us not on earth but in the very presence of God.

c. Who He is: “Jesus, the Son of God”

i. There is to be no confusion about who this great high priest is. This is Jesus, the Son of God. This designation consist of two titles of our Lord.

1. The first title being “Jesus.” When we use the name “Jesus,” we are drawing attention to His humanity. “Jesus” is the son of Mary. This is the name that speaks of the incarnation. Jesus is the name for God wrapped in human flesh. This is the name that his earthly family called him. The people of Palestine would have seen this Jesus walk the dusty streets. The name Jesus also calls to our attention the salvific purpose of His presence on earth. The angel that appeared to Mary told her to call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. The sounding of the name of Jesus should bring thoughts of the redemptive power of God. There truly is something about the name “Jesus.”

2. The title “the Son of God” gives us greater specificity of who this Jesus is. This Jesus is the Son of God. He is not only human but deity. The Jesus we are to hold on to is more than a character of history who excelled in moral, ethical teachings, this Jesus is the Son of God. The name Jesus was a common name of that day, but the Jesus we are talking about is no common Jesus. He is God’s Son. There was no need for a paternity test, God declared it. God said this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. This Father/Son relationship denotes proximity. The Jesus we are to hold on to is the Son of God which gives him an intimate adjacent proximity to God. We have Jesus, the Son of God as our great high priest. There is no one closer. In fact, Jesus said it like this, the Father and I are one. It would not make good sense to let go of Jesus who has this proximity to God and seek out the supposed benefits of some distance contact.

d. We are encouraged to “hold fast to our confession.”

i. The reality of what, where and who Jesus is should cause us to get a grip on our confession. We have already confessed Jesus. Don’t let tribulations trigger a change of what comes out of your mouth concerning what you believe about Jesus. If your words from your mouth changes about Jesus, it serves as evidence that your heart has changed about Him. The word “confession “ is a

translation of the Greek word *homologia*. *Homologia* means to speak the same thing. It means to agree with. When we confess Jesus, we are saying that we agree with what God has said about Jesus. We confess that what we believe about Jesus is the same as what God has said. Our confession does not add to or diminish from the truths concerning Jesus, the son of God as revealed in the scripture. We must say publicly that this is my story and we are sticking with it.

2. **Because of what He knows about us:** " ¹⁵For 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."

a. His acquaintance with us

i. Because Jesus was totally human, He is acquainted with "our weaknesses." He possesses up close and personal familiarity with us. The Greek word translated "weaknesses" is *astheneia*. *Astheneia* basically means without strength. Jesus is aware of our incapacities. This knowledge about our "weaknesses" is not without its effect upon Jesus. The text states that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." The word "sympathize" means to feel with, to have compassion. People may sometimes know what you are going through but they often don't share your pain. They many times have no reference point. Jesus however, has a reference point. The hymn writer says it like this: "Jesus knows all about our struggles.." We never have to wonder whether Jesus understands what we are going through, how we feel about, and our inability to handle the situation. Jesus knows.

b. His antithesis with us

i. Even though Jesus identifies with us in becoming human, His response to the challenges of human life brings forth an antithesis. The response Jesus is a contrast to natural propensity of man. The scripture states that he is "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." The primary meaning of the word "tempted" is "test." We must realize that the temptation is not the problem, it is our response to the temptation. We must also realize that we cannot claim any uniqueness of our temptation with the intention of excluding Jesus from the experience. We attempt to claim this uniqueness to justify our response. When the writer writes "in every respect," he is leaving no temptation, no testing out of the equation. Now the antithesis is found in these three words: "yet without sin."

ii. Sin is anything that is outside of the Father's will. Sin is operating as if there is no standard of right and wrong, other than the defined model we have created for ourselves. Sin seeks to argue the question not so much of the sovereign power of God, but the sovereign authority of God over one's life. Sin is always a possibility, better yet a certainty when we become our own self-enthroned authority over our lives. This is essence of subjectivism. Subjectivism seeks to filter everything through the filter of personal feelings, thoughts and biases. The problem with the filter of subjectivism is that it filters out any and all that is too grand, too holy, too righteous and too transcendent for the self-enthroned authority. Jesus, in spite of being tempted in every respect as we are, never took a subjective view of His temptations or His options to respond. He chose to never operate outside of the will of His Father. He was committed to doing things not His way but His Father's way. Jesus had the power to deviate from the Father's plan, but He did not, he stuck with the plan. Unlike the high priest of the Levitical order who had to make sacrifice for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people, Jesus had no sins to sacrifice for except ours. It just does not make sense to let go of a sinless mediator (one who has never offended the court of heaven) to regress to mediators who had sinned (those who have a record of offensive behavior). (You and I will never reach sinless perfection on this side, but we surely can practice a sin less occupation.)

3. **Because of what He grants us** : ¹⁶“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- a. The work of our great high priest grants us the opportunity to draw near. We are privileged to approach the throne of grace. Because of the finished and intercessory work of Jesus, the throne of God for us has become the throne of grace rather than the throne of judgment. We come with a confidence that is predicated upon Jesus. We come with an assurance that we will not be rejected or ejected. This confidence is not because we possess some sort of human audacity, but because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The boldness also means openly and transparently. There is no need to put on the flashy, yet unimpressive clothes of pretentiousness, you can be real with God.
- b. The phrase “throne of grace” reminds us that the privilege to approach and the outcome of our approach is purely a matter of grace. In and of ourselves we don't deserve to approach God and we don't deserve to have an audience with Him and we certainly don't deserve an answer from Him. Because of Jesus we are favored with what we have not earned and have no natural rights to. It is all because of grace.

The word throne suggests the where final and authoritative decisions are made. When we go to God and He answers, we should rest in the assurance that His word is final.

- c. The phrase “draw near” denotes movement. It is movement toward the center, the throne. These Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to “draw back.” They were being led to believe that if they just stepped back, moved a little closer to the outer fringes of their belief in Jesus, things would be better for them. These Christians were encouraged to lose their sense of center. However, the writer is exhorting them to get closer to the center, the throne of grace. Far too many Christians because of the hostile consequences of failing to be politically correct have regress toward a peripheral, “away from the center” kind of faith. This is the reason why we have so many “eccentric” churches. Churches that can’t handle the pressure, so they move away from the center toward the edge of a faithless testimony. The salvific work of Jesus, the Son of God is no longer the central message. Some churches mention the name of Jesus to white-wash their real intention of legitimizing their man-made, socially acceptable agendas. This de-centering of the church has created a timid, nervous church that is always trying to find her place in society instead of boldly getting closer to God, which would grant the benefits of a favored position.
- d. The benefits of this favored position are the very things the devil does not want you to experience.
 - i. The devil wants you to step away from the benefit of “mercy.” It is the benefit of mercy that keeps you from wrapping yourself in the tattered, restricted garment of guilt. Guilt will keep you from lifting up your head and from showing your face in the place. God gives mercy to cover our mistakes. This mercy is the atoning work of the blood of Jesus.
 - ii. The enemy does wants you to draw back from God’s grace. If the enemy can’t wrap you in guilt, he will encourage you to wallow in self-pity. Self-pity will make you feel like there are no other opportunities to do better, no hope of getting beyond what you are experiencing. Grace does the unexpected. Grace, in spite of the squandered opportunities of yesterday, reaches down and picks you up, cleans you up, fixes you up, and builds you up and tells you run on anyhow.
 - iii. Satan does not want you to reap the benefit of the collaborative work of the first two benefits. This is the benefit of “help in the time of need.” The Greek word for “help” is *botheia*. The root of the word *botheia* is a nautical term which describes the frapping of a sea vessel. To frap a sea vessel is tie ropes

tightly around the vessel to prevent it from falling apart and or drifting away from the harbor by a storm surge. When we hold on to Jesus, we will reap the benefit of mercy and grace working together to keep you from falling apart and drifting away when we are in the storms of life.

- iv. The added blessing of all of this is that it happens “in the time of need.” *Eukarios* is the Greek word used here. *Eukarios* means well-timed. If you hold on to Jesus you will discover that he is never too early and never too late. Because He is perfect, His timing is perfect. He shows up right on time. “He may not come when you want, but He’s right on time.” He shows up just when we need him most . So, no matter what people may say, hold on to Jesus. No matter how hard the rains may fall, hold on to Jesus. No matter how strong the winds may blow, **hold on to Jesus.**

*I almost let go.
I felt like I just couldn't take life anymore.
My problems had me bound
Depression weighed me down.
But God held me close, so I wouldn't let go.
God's mercy kept me, so I wouldn't let go.*

*I almost gave up.
I was right at the edge of a breakthrough but couldn't see it
The devil really had me;
but Jesus came and grabbed me,
And He held me close,
So I wouldn't let go.
God's mercy kept me,
so I wouldn't let go.*

*So I'm here today because God kept me.
I'm alive today,
only because of His grace.
Oh, He Kept me,
God Kept me,
He kept me,
So I wouldn't let go.*