

Hebrews 4:14

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 4, reading at verse 14.

Hebrews 4 and verse 14. There, of course, we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, Son of God, who is so old firmly to the faith we profess.

Now, one great pressure on the pulpit today is the pleasure to be contemporary.

A world which, in its strict meaning, signifies that which lives or exists at the same time as ourselves.

And it's hard to know, in fact, how we could not be contemporary by such a definition, because whatever occupies the same time frame is contemporary with ourselves.

[1 : 14] But suppose we ask, well, what is contemporary? What might that mean to deal with current issues, with issues relevant to our own time and to our own place?

Or to refer to topics and views and books and programs which are up to date and state of the art and so on?

And then you ask, well, where does Christ fit into this kind of thinking? If we are contemporary, if we are contemporary, what then happens to preaching Christ?

Which, after all, is a preacher's commission, privilege and responsibility. And then you realize that Christ is contemporary.

Christ is our contemporary. Christ is alive. And Christ who reigns. And Christ who one day, perhaps soon, will return to this world.

[2 : 23] And so whatever our time or place, Christ is always our contemporary. One meaning of the word omnipresent is that God is equally near and equally distant from every point in the universe.

And one meaning of God's eternity is that God is equally near and far from every moment of time. And Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is in that sense our contemporary, as He is of all generations.

Equally near to and equally far from every moment of time. He is in every moment of our time. And that's why, coming tonight, before what is to our extent a young audience and very much concerned with the contemporary, I still want to come back to this age-old thing, the person of the Lord Jesus. Because Christ is our contemporary. And this Christ who is our contemporary is the great foundation of our faith.

[3 : 58] And the great staple component of our message. And in fact, this text brings before us that core profession which remains as believers, that we have a great high priest.

Now this epistle is full of exhortations, as is indeed in this chapter itself. And it's always calling us to lifestyles which are consonant with the faith we profess.

But those exhortations to practical living and to practical discipleship are always based upon this great truth, that we have a great high priest.

Wherever we go, this must be what we cling to. This is our testimony. This is our confession. This is our gospel.

This is our message for the world. We have a great high priest. And I want for a moment to explore this particular thing with you in the context of the message of this verse and the following verses.

[5 : 25] In what sense is Christ our contemporary? In what sense is he great? He is great first of all because he is the Son of God.

We have a great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God. In many ways, that's an remarkable combination.

Because Jesus of Joshua was the name of a historical person. Jesus of Nazareth. Who lived at a certain time, in a certain place, who had father, mother, brother, sister, friend's relations.

And yet, that historical Christ was and is the Son of God. And that's largely why he is such a great high priest.

We saw some of this in the Gaelic service this afternoon. God so loved that he gave his only Son, his one and only Son.

[6 : 38] And we saw that part of the glory of that was that there is a monumental difference between what someone makes and what someone begets or gives birth to.

There may be a great artist who creates some artifact that's a work of genius. It may be, as I said, to Paul's Cathedral.

It may be the smile of the Mona Lisa. It may be some great sculpture like the Grandelos David. And in these, as Milton said, we have a precious lifeblood of a master spirit.

So much intelligence, so much imagination, so much dexterity poured into those great creations, those great works of art.

And yet, they're cold. And they're lifeless. They don't speak. They don't feel. They don't think.

[8 : 01] They don't initiate action. They have no imagination themselves. You never hold them accountable for any particular activity.

You wouldn't praise them. You wouldn't blame them. Because they're sub-personal. But your child, your children, to whom you give birth, whom you forget, whom you beget, and in them, there is your nature.

In them, there is your blood. In them, there is your life. In them, there is what you are. And that's the fundamental meaning in the Bible of this great concept of Jesus as the Son of God.

That in Him, there is the very nature of God. The very nature of God the Father. The ancient church said that God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, were one and the same in being.

One and the same in substance. One and the same in essence. One and the same in nature. Of course, we have this great wonder that these persons are one and the same being.

[9 : 27] And yet, within that one being, this distinction, those distinctions which mean that the one loves the other. And the one is with and beside and towards the other.

And yet, in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, there is exactly the same glory. They have the same form. They have the same nature.

They have exactly the same perfections and the same attributes. And so, Jesus Christ, we see God.

We are told that God is love. That love is in the Son, no less than in the Father. Jesus Christ is not the incarnation of some love, other than the love of God.

He is the incarnation and the enfleshment of the very love of God Himself. He who has seen me, Jesus said, has seen the Father. And that's our great privilege.

[10 : 34] Our High Priest, the one who is so advocate towards the Father, is the Son of God. The one who came to conquer for us the powers of darkness, is the Son of God.

And the one who hangs on the cross of Calvary, that is the Son of God. Hear, see, on yonder tree, dies in grief and addily.

Tis the Lord, O wonder story, by whose blood has the church of God been bound, by the blood of God, the blood of the Son of God.

We're told of the Roman soldiers of Calvary, sitting down, they watched Him there.

And what a marvelous collocation of words that is. Him there. Imagine a child, spectator, at this dreadful scene, asking her mother, mommy, who is that man there?

[12 : 07] Tis the Lord, O wonder story, that here is the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me, a great high priest, a great advocate, who offers a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself, so is great as the Son of God, God.

And it's great for this reason, secondly, that He has gone through the heavens. And it's very easy to skip over these words and perhaps not quite notice their meaning.

The background to the language here is the symbolism of the Old Testament tabernacle and the temple. And the high priest, once a year, went into the most holy place, through a symbolic veil, into a symbolic sanctuary, with a symbolic sacrifice to offer a symbolic atonement.

And after just a few brief moments, having sprinkled the blood, out He came again. but our great high priest, there is nothing symbolic about Him.

He went through the real veil, into the real holy place, with a real sacrifice, and there He effected a real atonement.

[13 : 59] And the writer also wants you to know that He is still there, that He has not come out on Yom to poor.

The high priest couldn't sit in the holy place, in, sacrifice, and out. But the language here has gone, means still is, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High, stands in the center of the throne, all authority is mine in heaven and in earth.

And that at one level is a symbol of a completed salvation. Not one that meant that each year we must have a young to poor and of atonement.

No more need. One great sacrifice for sins forever. And then sits in majesty, and sovereign dominion, so that tonight he has the whole world in his hands.

We have tonight in Buckyon Palace, the Queen, who is our contemporary. We have an American president in the White House, who is our contemporary.

[15 : 48] We have a prime minister in Downing Street, who is our contemporary. And each one of these, a servant to the Lord Jesus.

They may not always know it, but there is another king, another president, another prime minister, another sovereign Lord, ageless, timeless, his kingdom universal, his kingdom having no end.

And tonight, he's got the whole world in his hands. And one day to him, every knee will bow, and one day, every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

And you know, tonight, from that throne, he is still engaged in the work of salvation. He is still keeping an eye on you, and on your enemies.

He is still there to restrain them, and there to conquer them. He is still opening hearts, and he is still present in every gathering of the church.

[17 : 11] not only tonight, is Jesus Christ our contemporary, but Jesus Christ is in this place.

He is with us, right by your elbows, right in the heart of each one of his children.

and you extraordinary people, when you file out of this church tonight, you will take your great contemporary Jesus Christ, you will take him with him wherever you go.

And tomorrow morning, as you go to work, or go to study, or do your housework, or whatever, or play, you will take, not save Christ with you, your contemporary, who never leaves you, never forsakes you.

I am with you all the days, to the end of the world. This great regnant Savior, he is the hand over all things to the church, and he is carrying out his bright signs, and working his sovereign will.

[18 : 50] And one day, this earth, this world, this universe, will bear the exact form and shape that he wants it to bear.

it will, in its every detail, be just as he wants it, and one day, it will join in one great pure and chorus of praise, to its great redeemer.

And so, he is great because he is the Son of God, he is great because he has passed or gone through the heavens. But it's great too for this reason, because he sympathizes with our weaknesses.

You can build up this great picture of the divine Christ, and this picture of the sovereign Lord, and then you feel this overwhelming sense of remoteness, because he's not like us.

For it has the Son of God in common with us, for it is one who lives at the right hand of the majesty on high, for it is he in common with us.

[20 : 20] And you know, time and again, the church has made that mistake. It has foolishly sought to protect and defend the deity of Christ by forgetting and minimizing his humanity and portraying him as a figure so transcendent and so glorious and so heavenly that no human can relate to him.

And that's why we have the paradox of having to have mediators between ourselves and Christ the mediator.

Because we put him so far away and we said he's not like us and he doesn't understand us. And you know, perhaps the greatest single point of this passage is the protest against that way of thinking.

And it's put in this great form of the double negative. We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize.

The high priests of the Old Testament, they were chosen from among the Jewish people and they were human. and they had their own weaknesses.

[21 : 52] And the people could at least feel that they sympathized with them. And the writer is saying to us, look, this high priest too has compassion on the weak and on the human and on those who are going out of the way.

Because he too has been tested. And it's been tested, tempted in every way, just like us, except that in him there was no sin.

But he was in my nature, my kind of body, and my kind of mind, my kind of senses, my kind of not knowing, my kind of feeling, my kind of imagination, and what a plague that can be.

But in all points like us, and not only so in the structures of his being, the way that he was, the way that he is, but in his experiences.

Jesus. Because when Christ became man, he didn't simply enter into some kind of static union with a thing called human nature, but he embarked upon a human history.

[23 : 28] And he has a human story. It began, we may say, with his birth. it continues to this pleasant day.

That's why he is still our contemporary in his human nature. And he remembers we are dust. And he knows our frame.

Because he was dust. And he had our frame. He had our physical constitution. and he had our mental and our emotional constitution.

And he has our frame still. He is still the dust of the earth. That dust in glorious form.

But still that dust. And he has our human mind, emotions, imagination, has them still. He is still in everything human.

[24 : 36] And he remembers when he sees us down here in the valley of the shadow of death. Will I say to you that there are things but memories for him.

That he remembers what it was like. He remembers what it was like in Nazareth. What it was like as he sat there exhausted at Jacob's well.

What it was like in Gethsemane. How frightened he was. How his imagination pondered across.

What would happen? What would they do? What would it be like? How would he cope? With the nails, with the flogging, with the nutrition?

What would it be like? Don't say to him, what do you know about being human? What do you know about pain?

[25 : 50] What do you know about temptation? What do you know about being afraid? afraid? Are wondering will you cope?

Are being disbanding? Are feeling forsaken? And what do you know about asking questions to which you get the answer asking God why?

Why? And the answer coming back. dear child, I do understand. I remember I was dust in that valley of the shadow.

I was assaulted, tempted by that same Satan as tempts you. I felt the same pain the same confusion and the same bewilderment and the same fear and the same weakness.

I know how you feel. I know the fear of death. I know the taste of death.

[27 : 16] I know what it is to be marginalized, to be on the edge, despised, this represented. I do know what it is to ask God why.

And to get no answer. He is touched with a feeling of weakness.

He is to be to be a great high priest. Jesus, the son of God.

He has gone through the heavens. He sympathizes with you in your weaknesses. And what shall we tonight do with this great fact?

for fact it is. As surely as Putin is president of Russia, Elizabeth, queen of the United Kingdom, George Bush, American president, so surely Jesus Christ is Lord and he is a great high priest.

[28 : 35] we are to do two things with it. First of all, let us hold fast our confession on us at this year.

Let us cling to the faith that we profess. Let's hold firmly to the faith we profess. Let's hold fast.

It's almost here a military concept, the standard bearer. We have a banner and on that banner these great words we have a great high priest.

And in this great Christian army every single soldier young and old boy girl man woman everyone is a standard bearer and everyone is holding this banner aloft.

But now and again there are casualties. Now and again one gives up. Now and again one tires on the struggle and flees down again some desert to the enemy.

[30 : 11] That's largely why this epistle was featured in the first place. Because there were so many deserters. forgive me in my heart upon this thing.

All you young people let's hold fast. Yes there's a war on.

And yes there are mighty forces of darkness. Forces of great violence. And forces of great cunning.

Yes they want to destroy the kingdom of Christ. And yes they want to destroy your faith.

And they want to show that the root of the matter was never in you. Are they right?

[31 : 32] Let us hold fast our confession. testimony. I'm not very much interested in personal testimonies as to how we came to know the Lord conversion narratives.

Our testimony is not our conversion narrative. our testimony is we have a great high priest.

Hold your hands high. Shout it loud. Like the American Marine call, they shout out all those great motivating slogans.

we have a great high priest. I can't hear you louder, we have a great high priest.

The Lord's persons, let's still be saying it, perhaps in some God's forsaken place, ten years down the line, twenty years down the line, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years down the line, still saying, we have a great high priest.

[33 : 31] I heard of a man once, not educated, a man who had spent much of his life as a virtual derelict, that God saved him.

And he said, when his friends were embarrassed by zeal, he said, he saved me until never here the end of it.

Let's all fast our confession. But there's a second thing to be done, and that is this. Let us, we're told, approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Let's come with boldness to the throne. Ah, but you say, it's God's throne. How can I go to God's throne with boldness?

That great throne, that great white throne, unapproachable, how can I go near that throne?

[34 : 58] Because you have a great high priest. And you say then, well, yes, I'll go and I'll ask God few simple requests, few little things I'll ask him for.

no, it says don't do that. Not little things, because, you know, it's a great throne, it's a great, a great priest, it's a great government, with a great economy, a flourishing economy, and with infinite resources.

And you give a great advocate, a great taste, so go to the government. go there and ask for great things, because you are a great high priest.

And what then shall I ask for? Well, it says, first of all, go and ask for this, mercy, that we may receive mercy.

Tell God, Lord, I have this past, and perhaps it keeps me awake at night, my past, because sometimes God does cause our sins to parade before us.

[36 : 26] But anyway, we've all got a past. What can you do with your past? Can you go to God's throne of grace and praise your past and tell God how wonderful your past was?

No, you're not going to do that. You know better than that. What then they say to God do, just say, don't mention your past to them. Don't bring up your past.

Don't say a word about your past. Keep that out of sight, your past. love. Don't love. Don't do that.

Show the past and be bold and don't hold anything back.

But just say all I want for my past is mercy. Just cover it, Lord. Forgive it.

Block it out of your sight. You know it. I'm not hiding it. You know it. But please Lord, will you cover it. Mercy.

[37 : 34] That's the one thing anyone here can do about your past. That's the only remedy for the past. That it be covered and sometimes by the mercy of God.

It's covered from their very selves. God grant that it may often be so. God has cast our sins into the depths of the sea.

And as a wise man said that there be no fishing in these waters. Just leave it there. Lord, cover the past. Amen, because you're the great high priest.

You ask for a second thing. I want grace to help in time of need. Lord, I don't know much about the future, but I know it's going to have many times of need.

And here I stand before your great throne bowl because I have a great high priest. I have asked you already to cover my past.

[38 : 50] I want you now to provide for my future and to do so by pledging me grace to help in time of need.

I have heard that your grace is your strength made perfect in weakness.

I am weak. I am poor. I am needy. And Lord, if you have a thing called grace which is really strong and really invincible, then Lord, I need it.

And could I have it please? Could I have it every day I need it? Just when I need it?

And the quantities and the forms that I need it? When I face temptation, can I have it? When I can't create burdens, can I have it?

[40 : 08] When I am afraid, can I have it? When I am in pain, can I have it? Lord, can I have it always?

Because I have a great high priest, and I know that he died to buy for me everything that pertains to grace and salvation.

And so great and glorious Father, great and glorious though you are, I ask for all that my Savior paid for.

I ask you to cover my past, and I ask you to provide for my future by pledging to me grace to help me in time of need.

May God grant each one of us the faith to go to the great white throne with his boldness and present to him those two great requests.

[41 : 35] Thank you soian.