

We near the end of March. Many college and university students are going through crunch time. Due dates for papers approach. Final exams loom in the horizon. And term projects require completion. Such projects can be difficult. I have watched my son working through a 3 part term project. Part A required 6 weeks of sustained work. Part B took 4 weeks. Part C will take another 4 weeks.

These projects, papers or major exams can take up a lot of spare time on our minds. They can show up in your dreams or constantly hang over whatever else you're doing. You have that nagging thought in the back of your mind – "I need to get back to work on that project."

Some of you have major projects at work that take up much time for a long time. If you work in construction, you might be part of a 1 year project or longer. Researchers spend months on their work before coming to a final conclusion.

Then there are those other pieces of our lives that require much longer time commitments. If you get married, it's not a two week project. We sign up for hopefully a 50 year relationship or longer. If you have kids, you're not looking at a 4 month project. You are suddenly responsible for this little human being. You remain their parent for as long as you live.

Now in any longer term project or relationship, we will experience various degrees of enthusiasm and motivation for it. Sometimes, we're very motivated. Other times, we may experience. In those times we need inspiration and help to keep going. They can happen when someone comes along to remind us of the big picture. Or they can offer help to move things forward. When that happens our enthusiasm and motivation can return with great force.

This needs to happen in our Christian walk. When we become Christians, we have entered into the longest project or relationship in our lives. It will go on for eternity. The vast majority of it will be lived in Christ's presence in the new heaven and earth. But until then, we face the ups and downs of persevering in the Christian life. Thankfully, we don't have to hope that someone will come along to inspire us. We don't have to wonder if we will receive help to carry on.

In Jesus, we receive both. We receive motivation to keep going and ongoing help along the way. Today's main idea goes like this. **Since Jesus is our great high priest, in Him, we have all we need.** But that may seem a little strange. Why would Jesus as a Great High Priest help us today? What even is a high priest? Why is Jesus a Great one? That's what we will look at in a short but powerful section of Hebrews. I pray you will gain motivation for your Christian walk today

because of the strong foundation of Jesus Christ. I also pray you will receive courage because of the ever present help of God in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV)

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. ¹⁵ For 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. 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.

Last week, we looked at Hebrews 4:1-13. The passage ended with statement “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” It reveals the reality that God sees everything all the time. So now in verse 14, the writer exhorts his readers to respond to this. In light of the fact that we are not hidden from God’s sight, we must consider that we have this great high priest. He already mentioned Jesus as high priest back in Hebrews 2:17-18. He wrote, “Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

That is good news in light of the reality that we cannot hide from God’s sight. We are all exposed to God’s eyes to whom we must give account.” But we have a merciful and faithful high priest who made a sacrifice of atonement for us. He can help us. So the writer assumes we remember this. Then he says “we have a GREAT high priest.” But to understand why Jesus is a great high priest we first need to understand the high priest’s role in ancient Israel.

What role did Israel’s high priest play in the nation at the time of Christ? First – He held the highest office in the land. The High Priest held the highest position among the Israelites at that time. The Jews lived under the military occupation of Rome and its emperor. They also lived under the reign of King Herod who ruled over the province of Judea. But the High Priest held the highest position in the eyes of the people. Second – He was the mediator between God and the people. He oversaw the ritual worship of God at the temple in Jerusalem. The high priest was a hereditary role. It was like the monarchy over the United Kingdom and Canada. Ordinary Joe could not walk up and take the high priest’s job. You had to be from a high priestly family. Once you got into that role, it was usually for life kind of like a king or queen. The High Priest functioned as the main representative between the people and the Lord. Though he shared a number of duties with other priests, one was reserved for him alone.

Third role – He went into the most Holy Place once a year. That involved going into the Most Holy Place of the temple once a year on the day of Atonement. The Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies as some refer to it) was the inner most room of the temple in Jerusalem. A large curtain or veil separated it from the main area of the temple. God would descend to the Most Holy Place. So the priests would come into the Holy Place (or general area) to pray and offer incense before the Lord. The Lord would be in the Most Holy Place behind the curtain. But on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would pass through the big curtain and go into the Most Holy Place. He specifically prayed for the Lord to accept the sacrifices offered that day as atonement for the nation's sin. This was such a risky endeavor because of God's holiness that they tied a rope around his ankle. If he died in the Lord's presence, no one else could go into the Holy of Holies to drag him out.

So there are 3 key points to remember about the high priest's role at the time of Jesus. 1 - He held the highest office in the eyes of the people. 2 - He served as mediator between the Lord and the people. 3 - He passed through the curtain once a year to meet with God in the Most Holy Place. With this in mind we are ready to consider the author's statement "Since then, we have a GREAT high priest.

Why is Jesus a GREAT high priest? He gives us several reasons. First, He is great because **He has passed through the heavens.** Verse 14: Since then we have a great high priest "who has passed through the heavens." This means Jesus went through the heavens or skies back to the presence of God. This happened at the Ascension of Christ. Jesus went to God's throne room and sat down at His right side. So think about the contrast with Israel's high priest. He got to pass through the curtain once a year to be in God's presence. Jesus passed through the heavens once for all too continually exist in God's presence. Jesus is the great high priest because He passed through the heavens, not just the curtain.

Second, Jesus is the great high priest because He is **Jesus, the Son of God.** Now if you have grown up in the church or followed Christ a long time, the Son of God title might not seem like a big deal. But consider this title in light of the earlier part of this letter. Remember the very beginning? Hebrews 1, verse 2 – "In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Now think of all the contrasts right there with the human high priest. The high priest inherited the position of high priest for a few years based on his family heritage. The Son

inherited all things - God created the high priest just like any other human. The Son created the world, including the high priests - The high priest mediated between God and the people. The Son is God who became one of the people - The high priest lived on the earth for the short time of his lifespan. The Son upholds the universe by the power of His Word - The high priest repeatedly offered sacrifices for his own sins and the nation. The Son offered 1 sacrifice for the purification for sins and then sat down at God's right hand. You get the picture. Jesus is the greater High Priest because He is the Son of God, not just son of human from a priestly family.

Third, Jesus is the great high priest because **He sympathizes with our weaknesses**. Certainly, the human high priest could sympathize with the weaknesses of fellow humans. But he did not know what it was like to be God. Jesus knew what it is like to be God because He is God. But did He know what it was like to be human? Was he too far removed from us to know what it's like to be us? Yet we know from the Gospels that Jesus experienced human suffering and weakness. We will see this next week in Hebrews 5:2 "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." Or the famous passage from Isaiah 53:3 states "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." So Jesus knows what it is like to be human. He knows what it is like to experience weakness. One commentator writes "the experience of sufferings and trials he endured during his humiliation equipped him with empathy so that he is able to support the covenant people in their sufferings and temptations."

Not only did Jesus experience weakness. The fourth reason Jesus is the great high priest is **He was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin**. Now all the high priests experienced temptation and they gave in to sins. As a human, Jesus felt the full force of temptation, yet never gave in. The temptations he faced were real, inviting him to sin. Satan tempted Jesus in the desert at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Yet Jesus faced temptation throughout His life. In fact the author states He was tempted "in every respect as we are," or "in every way, just as we are." Yet we might think that can't be true because He didn't face the temptations we have today – like things on the internet or the pressures of modern culture.

However, Jesus faced temptations that we will never face. For us, when we give into temptation, the temptation goes away. Jesus never gave into temptation. So he always faced it in increasing measure. One commentator writes "The person who goes through life more tempted than anyone else is the one who never succumbs." Or CS Lewis who wrote:

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. . . . Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. . . . A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. . . . We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.” So Jesus is a greater high priest because he was tempted in every way, yet did not sin.

So with all of this in mind, we now have a greater understanding of why Jesus is the Great High Priest. He passed through the heavens and permanently resides in the Father’s presence. He is the Son of God. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way as we are yet did not sin.

The author does not share all this as an FYI – For your information. There realities about Jesus can make a difference in our lives today. The writer wants his readers to respond to what he has revealed about Christ. We find 2 exhortations to action in these verses. So **how do we respond to Jesus, the great high priest?**

Verse 14 contain the first one. “Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **Exhortation 1 - Hold firmly to the faith.** Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Here we see the recurring call to perseverance in Hebrews. The author exhort us to grasp or grab tightly to our faith. We can do this because Jesus gives us a rock solid foundation to hold fast to our faith. Consider the greatness of your high priest. He far surpasses any earthly high priest and any other force or power in the universe. So use this reality to hold firmly to the faith.

This foundation is not smoke and mirrors. It is not a sales pitch that tries to sell us something that will not live up to its promise. It is not some inspirational, fictional story that we are supposed to use for motivation.

This foundation of the resurrected Jesus Christ, our great high priest, is based on historical fact, eyewitness testimony and evidence. It has stood the test of time and criticism. It has endured through the worst and best moments of the church. We can stake our lives and hope on someone certain. Jesus the great high priest.

Verse 16 contains the second exhortation. “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.” Here is the promise of help. Since Jesus has opened up the way for us to enter God’s presence - **Exhortation 2 – Draw near to God and His throne of grace with confidence in prayer.** Now think about how this contrasts with the earthly High Priest drawing near to God in the temple. He did that

once a year only after sacrifices had been offered. He did it fearfully with a rope tied around his ankle lest he die in God's presence. He pleaded for grace and mercy but may not have received it because of his own or the nation's unfaithfulness.

We can draw near to God any time. We can draw near with confidence because Jesus paved the way for us to go in. His righteousness is our basis for entry. And we can be sure that we approach a throne of grace. The writer reminds his readers of what we receive there. "We receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We don't have to wait for the Day of Atonement. We can draw near to God any time we are in need.

So think about how Jesus the great high priest provides all we need for life. First, He provides this rock solid foundation of Himself on which we can build our lives and faith. Then He provides constant access to the throne of grace whenever we have need. But I don't want you to think that all I'm saying is "In Jesus you have all you need so don't worry and be happy!"

Does Jesus provide what we need in life's hardest situations? What about when health problems come or we find our path blocked, or our personal security is threatened or we lose a family member. Do we have all we need when our health fails? Certainly health problems create serious needs in our lives. We think our greatest need is restoration of health. But God may instead provide for the need of strength to go forward despite health problems. The Lord has used many who have health problems for His great purposes. I think of Fanny Crosby who suffered an eye accident in childhood that eventually led to her near blindness. Yet she wrote many great hymns of the faith. Joni Eareckson Tada who had a diving accident at the age of 17. It left her a quadriplegic – yet she has helped millions with her writing, painting and ministry to those with disabilities and their families around the world.

How does Jesus help us when our path is blocked? We believe our greatest need is removal of the obstacle. But Jesus may instead address our need for redirection to another path. I think of my own life. I went to university and got a degree in Commerce. Yet when I graduated, each commerce path I attempted did not work out for 2 years. Eventually the Lord directed me to seminary and the ministry. Here I am by His grace. If you see a door closed in your life right now, maybe God is redirecting you to another path according to His will.

Or think about our need for personal security. We place very high value on safety and security. Yet instead of providing personal security, God may instead provide courage to go forward in spite of the threat to our personal security.

Think of the apostle Paul who endured great personal threat and danger to carry out the gospel ministry to the Gentiles.

Think of missionaries who have died on the field for the sake of the gospel. Yet through their deaths, the gospel spread.

Of course we all need our loved ones with us. But what happens when that need is not met and our loved one dies. Many of you have lost loved ones – parents; friends; spouses; other relatives, even children. Do we really have all we need in Jesus the great high priest, through the tragic death of a loved one?

I don't know what that's like. Yes, I have lost both of my parents. But they passed away after long lives of great faith. I am talking about those who have tragically lost a spouse to an accident or early death. Or those who have lost a child. One such person is a man named Kevin Harris.

He hosts a podcast I listen to occasionally called Reasonable Faith. Early in 2016, he did not return to his usual spot as host of the podcast. Soon the ministry announced that Kevin and his wife had lost their 18 year old son Tanner in a motorcycle accident.

A few weeks or months after the accident, Dr. William Lane Craig, who Kevin Harris normally interviews, changed places. Dr. Craig interviewed Kevin Harris. I want to share with you a few minutes of this interview. He asked Kevin about the accident.

KEVIN HARRIS: "Tanner was 18. He was a senior in high school. He was on a motorcycle. He was very safety-minded. He was wearing a helmet. He studied safety. But he failed to stop for a car pulling out in front of him, and he died instantly. It was in our neighborhood. My wife, Kelly heard him come by. She heard the accident. This is one of the worst parts of this. She knew immediately that this must be what it is. She heard the motorcycle passing the road out in front of the house, heard the accident, and went running down there. By the time that she got there police were already on the scene. EMT (emergency tech) came up. But he apparently died instantly. What is hard about this, Bill, and she called Kevin immediately . . . He was on an errand and came rushing home. . . . By the time he got there, emergency services were trying to revive him. They wouldn't let us then go there. Kevin comforted his wife Kelly. They were unable to revive him. The police officer came over and said "he didn't make it", Kevin says. . . . Kelly and I had to literally hold one another up. We just sank to the ground in despair. Yet the police officer on the scene – the first one on the scene – is also a part-time pastor. He immediately came up and grabbed a hold of us and began to pray for us."

“Then after sharing about encouragement and strength they received from people’s prayers, visits, cards and gifts, he talks specifically about the strength they received from God.

He says – *we weep, we cry and go through grief, but* we’ve never grieved without hope. Suddenly when it feels like the world is too bleak or this is just too hard to take (and it’s the worst thing in the world – it’s as bad as they say to lose a child), but suddenly this bubble of hope that kind of comes up from nowhere, and you feel encouraged. That has just got to be God the Holy Spirit. We have both experienced that. I think it is worse on a mother than it is on a father, as bad as it is on both of us. I have seen her sustained even though we’ve lain on the garage floor in tears wondering how we are going to make it and praying. Suddenly there will be a sense of hope that comes up.”

“It’s been over 5 years since this happened. Recently, they revisited the tragedy. Kevin shared what he has learned since. Let me reflect briefly on this five-year anniversary. First, he thanked the many who reached out and have been touched by his sharing. Secondly, the main thing He wanted to communicate is that God’s grace will get you through even the death of a child. It is a devastating thing, but I’ve witnessed firsthand how God sustains in multiple ways, and he will sustain you no matter what you’re going through. That may sound cliché but it’s a promise from God’s Word. And I want you to notice that because you are a distinct individual, God deals with you in distinct ways – ways related specifically to you and your situation. In other words, God knows exactly what you need and where and when to apply his grace. For me, it’s things like someone reaching out to me, hearing from someone I haven’t heard from in a long time, a song, a memory that comes out of nowhere, a sudden burst of creativity, or a quiet assurance that soothes my mind, mostly about what Jesus has accomplished for us by his resurrection. If God can get you through the death of your child, he can get you through anything, and he does.

I think that Kevin Harris would testify that even in life’s worst moments or experiences, it is possible to survive because of Christ. In him we truly have everything we need even when we lose a loved one. You may not go through anything as deep or traumatic as this. But whatever you face today, please hear this – “In Jesus Christ, the great high priest, we have all we need: A firm foundation for our faith; help for times of need in our lives. If you are a Christian, please put your faith upon him and come to the throne of grace with confidence to receive grace and mercy.

If you don’t know Jesus as your great high priest, that can change today. You will need to put the trust of your life onto Him. You need to confess the truth about yourself. You need forgiveness for sins; you need somebody else to pay

for your sins. You need Jesus. If you put your faith in Christ and His work for you on the cross, you will be saved. God will forgive you; He will pronounce you “not guilty forever.” He will adopt you into His family as his beloved son or daughter. You will begin the journey of having all you need in the great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God. So if you do not know Christ this way, I invite you to receive Him as your Lord now as we pray.