

August 1, 2021 by Steve Brandon



Do You Need Mercy and Grace?

Hebrews 4:14-16

- 1. We have a High Priest (verse 14).**
- 2. He is able to sympathize with us (verse 15).**
- 3. He gives mercy and grace (verse 16).**

It's good to be back from vacation and see you all this morning. We had a wonderful time in California, visiting Yvonne's folks. All of our children were able to come and join us as well. We spent some days in Yosemite, being in awe of God's majestic creation. We spent a day in Sacramento with some dear, dear friends. We spent some time in the Redwoods at Muir Woods. On our return trip, we were able to visit with SR's in-laws in Colorado. All in all, I believe that we come back rested and rejuvenated.

Regarding my preaching schedule over the next few weeks, we will return to the book of Acts in a few weeks. Before then, I want to preach a few messages to help us and encourage us. This morning, I want for us to look at Hebrews 4:14-16. During my vacation, I was thinking a lot about his passage. In fact, it's one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible. In fact, I remember in seminary, in a homiletics class, where you learn about preaching and give some sample sermons to your fellow classmates, I chose this passage as one to preach from.

It's one of my favorite texts in all the Bible, as it give some great, practical help for how to live the Christian life.

Whenever I come to this passage, I'm always struck by how much help we need in our lives. Our family came home from vacation this past week, only to find our air conditioner not working. We would turn it on, and it would only buzz. We needed help. So, I texted Garth. He was able to come to our house after work. And a new capacitor later, our air conditioner was up and going.

Sometimes, you can be on the helping end. Yesterday, I received a call from my sister-in-law. She was having some problems with her computer. When it booted up, she couldn't log in. So, she called me. And as a former I. T. Professional, I was very glad to help. Soon after speaking her on the phone, we soon connected by FaceTime. And she showed me what was happening. She couldn't log in, because the place to login was filled in. Eventually, we got into the computer in Safe Mode. And we opened up a text editor, which soon began filling up with "+" signs. And so, we determined that something was wrong with her "+" key. So, after pressing the key a few times, turning the computer upside down, giving it some light taps, whatever was under the key making the connection fell out, and her computer began working again.

This goes on all the time. Whether it's Andy, who needs a deck built, and many men have been willing to lend him a hand. Whether it's Kat, needing a ride to Idaho, and the Geaschel family moving her out there. This is the way the world works. We need each other. We need each other's help.

Now, when it comes to the spiritual realm, the same is true: we need help.

First of all, of course, we need help to be saved. We cannot save ourselves. We are lost in our sin. We are under the wrath of God. And the only way out is Jesus Christ. He did what we could not do for ourselves. He paid for our sins upon the cross. His death means that that we might escape the punishment that our sins deserve! by simply trusting in him.

When we believe in him, we receive forgiveness of our sins. As Paul said to the church in Psidian Antioch, "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Though faith in Jesus Christ, our sins can be forgiven! This is the gospel.

Again, it's not because we have earned our salvation, or merited it in any way. Nor is it that we did our part, and Jesus helped with the rest. No, Jesus paid it all upon the cross. Jesus did what we could not do for ourselves. "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). That's us! Ungodly before Christ.

And through faith in him, we are forgiven and made right with God. Perhaps there are some of you here this morning who aren't right with God, because you haven't believed in Jesus. I exhort you to believe. Believe in the wonderful Savior that I will tell you about today.

Now, believing in Jesus is where our Christian lives begin. at the cross of Christ. But this is just a beginning. After our salvation comes our progress in sanctification. the growth of walking daily with Jesus. We need help to be sanctified. See, when you believe in Jesus, you being a long walk towards eternity.

John Bunyan pictured it well. In his classic, "Pilgrim's Progress." Bunyan described the Christian life metaphorically as a man walking along a path from his home, "The City of Destruction" to his destination, "The Celestial City.

Along the way this Pilgrim is met with some joys and some sorrows. He meets friends, like Faithful and Hopeful, who encourage him along the way. He also meets adversaries, like Formalist and Hypocrisy, who try to draw him off the path. He faces depression in the Slough of Despond, and questions his faith in Doubting Castle. Yet, through it all, the Lord is faithful to bring him along to the Celestial City. This is a great picture of our Christian lives.

The Christian life is not an easy walk. It's filled with ups and downs. It's filled with successes and failures. The Christian life brings with it some temptations. Which sometimes are conquered, and at other times are not. The Christian life is a struggle to please the Lord, which we want to do, but will too often fail.

Paul said so well in Romans 7:14-15, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Paul is describing the Christian battle that goes on inside all of us. The good is before us, and yet, there are times, (perhaps too many times), when we fail to do what is right.

Now, the good news that I'm bringing this morning is this: we don't need to do it alone! We don't need to walk the Christian life in our own power. In other words, Jesus doesn't save us from our sins, only to leave us to live the Christian life on our own strength. No, he is there, willing to help.

And he helps in two ways. He helps by giving us mercy and granting us grace. Mercy for when we fail. And grace for the strength that we need to carry on. We see both of these things in our text this morning: Hebrews 4:14-16. So, if you haven't open your Bibles yet to Hebrews 4, I would encourage you to do so now. and follow along, as you will see my thoughts rising out of this passage of Scripture. The title of my message this morning is a question: "Do You Need Mercy and Grace?" The answer is yes, you do.

The good news this morning is this: mercy and grace are available to you, just for the asking. We will see this clearly in our text this morning. So, let us consider our passage.

Hebrews 4:14-16

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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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's my first point.

1. We have a High Priest (verse 14).

Do you need mercy from on high? Do you need grace from the Lord? We have a high priest who is ready and willing to give us grace and mercy. In fact, this is the job of a high priest.

In the Old Testament, when God established the tabernacle, and the way of worship for Israel, he established a priestly system, in which certain men, ordained as priests, would serve the role of mediator between God and people. When those in Israel sinned, they would come to the priests with animals designated for sacrifice. They would also come ready to confess their sins. The priest, in turn would hear their confession of sin, take their animals, and sacrifice them before the Lord. The promise of God was that the sins that were confessed to the priest would be forgiven (Leviticus 4:20, 31; 5:6, 10, 13).

This is the system of worship that God established. It was all to teach one huge lesson for us: when you sin, you need a sacrifice. And this was drilled into the head of every Jew from the day they were born. Offering up sacrifice for sins was a regular experience for the Jews.

And this, of course, is why you need to believe in Jesus to be saved. because Jesus is our sacrifice today for sins. As Peter said, . 1 Peter 2:24 [Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

This is why we don't need priests anymore. Because Jesus is our priest. So, when we sin, we go to Jesus.

Now, among the priests, there was the "high priest." The was the priest of priests. This is the one who was over all the priests. He was the one who made intercession for all the people of Israel. On the day of atonement, (7th month, 10th day) the high priest would go into the most holy place of the temple, and "present the bull as a sin offering for himself" (Lev. 16:11), sprinkling the blood of the bull on the front of the mercy seat with his finger (seven times).

Then, having been cleansed of his sins, then he would come out of the most holy place, and "kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people" (Lev. 16:15). and return again to the most holy place, and sprinkle the blood of the goat on the front of the mercy seat (seven times). He did this to make atonement for all the people of Israel (Leviticus 16:34).

And the argument of the writer to the Hebrews is this: Jesus is now our high priest. He says so in chapter 3 and verse 1, "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession." Our confession is the things that we believe!

In recent months, we have been going through the book of Acts. And we have seen over and over again the apostles preach the same general outline in their messages to the people.

They spoke of the life of Jesus, that he was a sinless man. They spoke of the death of Jesus, that he was crucified unjustly. They spoke about his burial, that he was actually put in the ground. They spoke about his resurrection, that Jesus raised from the dead without experiencing corruption. They spoke about his ascension into heaven, that Jesus translated into heaven, never to die again. And, they spoke about his exaltation in heaven, that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

These things, the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension, and the exaltation of Jesus. These things formed the basis of their confession. It was what they believed.

These elements have found their way into the Apostles' Creed (which wasn't formed during the times of the Apostles, But represents their beliefs, that is, their confession). "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, on the third day, he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

What the writer of the Hebrews is saying is this: "Let us hold fast our confession, that we have a great high priest in heaven Jesus." And just as the high priest on earth, made intercession for all the people of Israel, so also does Jesus, the high priest of heaven, make intercession for his people. In fact, this is what he always does. "[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). In other words, it's not merely that Jesus saves us from our sins, and lets us go. No, he saves us from our sins, and keeps us to the end.

In fact, that's what the fighter verse this week says, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus will bring us to the end. Or, as the writer to the Hebrews says in the verse that we just read, "[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). That's why it's so important for us, as believers in Jesus, To "draw near" to our great high priest. Because, as we draw near, we receive the mercy and grace that we need to continue in our Christian lives.

This is a major theme of the writer to the Hebrews. He spends much of chapter 5 and all of chapter 7 putting forth the implications that Jesus is our great high priest. Thus, demonstrating how Jesus is better than all other high priests who have ever gone before him. And for the original hearers, the message was clear: there is no need to return to your Jewish high priest. Because, what we have in Jesus is far better than any other high priest.

For us, we need to embrace this. We need to think long and hard about the place of Jesus, how he sits in the heavens, at the right hand of God, making intercession for us, giving us grace and mercy as we need.

Let's move on, "Do You Need Mercy and Grace?" We have a High Priest (verse 14). He is ready and willing to give grace and mercy. Secondly, we see that ...

2. He is able to sympathize with us (verse 15).

Though Jesus is our "great high priest," and though Jesus sits in the highest place in heaven, and though Jesus has been given the name above all names, he is not above us. because, he became one of us. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things" (Hebrews 2:14). This is what we celebrate at Christmas time, when God became flesh and dwelt among us.

Jesus became like us to experience all of humanity. He experienced birth, life, death, Joys, sorrows, pain, happiness, and weakness. Jesus knows what it's like to be a frail human. And this is what gives him the ability to sympathize with us.

Hebrews 4:15

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.

This is why Jesus has a heart to give us mercy and grace, because, he knows how much we need it. And he doesn't know this in some abstract way. He knows this because he experienced it himself. In the days of his flesh, he too cried out to his father for help. A few sentences later, we read, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus knew what it was like to have nowhere else to turn, but to his heavenly father. And Jesus knows what it is like for us, when we have nowhere else to turn, to cry to him "who is able to save us" from the trials in our lives. Jesus, sympathizing with us, is very willing to give us the mercy and grace we need in our time of our need.

The story of our day is the Olympics. And the story of the Olympics is Simone Biles, the one who was expected to win all the gold medals, again, as she did in the last Olympics. Yet, she has withdrawn from her events, almost all of them. The first response of many Americans was against her. Calling her a disgrace to our country. Calling her selfish for taking up spots on the Olympic roster.

It has come out that she is currently experiencing "the twisties." Before this week, I had never heard of "the twisties." Apparently, it's "the mental block that causes gymnasts, to lose control of their bodies while midair."^[1] This is what Simone Biles has been dealing with this past week. Surely, it has something to do with incredible pressure that she has of repeating as Olympic champion. She really is in a no-win situation. If she wins, all expected it. If she loses, she will be a disappointment to many. At any rate, she feels like she just can't compete as it would be dangerous for her.

As time has worn on, there have been some former gymnasts come out and sympathize with her. Former U. S. national team member Aleah Finnegan said, "I've had the twisties since I was 11. I cannot imagine the fear of having it happen to you during competition. You have absolutely no control over your body and what it does. The more you psych yourself [out] about it, the worse it becomes." One of Biles' teammates in the 2016 Olympic Games, Laurie Hernandez said, "I've had the twisties before. Hated it so much. It's painful. It actively makes you feel like you're not the caliber of athlete that you are."^[2]

Now, I'm no expert on the twisties. I have never experienced them before. I have never experienced doing a double twisting, double flip off the high bars, while having the twisties. I don't know what it's like. But those who know what it's like have come out in great sympathy for Simone Biles.

In a similar way, we have one who has great sympathy for us, Jesus, our great high priest. And he has sympathy for us, because he has been there. He has experienced our weaknesses. He has "been there, done that." And having been there, it's not possible for him ever not to have been there. Or, as Thomas Goodwin wrote, "God is for everlasting become a man."^[3] In other words, because Jesus has become a man, it is not possible for him ever not to have been a man. And thus, he is always (and forever) able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses.

Jesus knows what it's like to the trials and difficulties and weaknesses that we all face. Jesus knows what it's like to be tired.

- In Samaria, Jesus was wearied from his journey" from Jerusalem (John 4).
- Jesus knows what it's like to be hungry and thirsty. He said upon the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28).
- Jesus knew what it was like to experience emotion. At the death of Lazarus, he wept (John 11:35).
- Jesus knew the joy of a social celebration. He attended the wedding in Cana (John 2), even providing more wine to continue the merriment!
- Jesus knows what it's like to be little boy, begin asked by his mother to do thing that he would really, rather not do. He grew in wisdom through such instruction (Luke 2:52).
- Jesus knows what it's like to be scorned and ridiculed by others. He was despised and forsaken of men.
- Jesus knows what it is to face conflict with others. He had massive conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees, over and over again.
- Jesus knows what it is to face disappointment. Near the end of his ministry he lamented over the hardness of those in Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathered her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).
- Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted. At the beginning of his ministry, he was tempted for 40 days and 40 nights, in the wilderness by the devil, himself (Luke 4:2).

The promise to help us through temptation is the very point of Hebrews 4:15. Since Jesus was a human being, he can forever sympathize with all of our human experience.

Hebrews 4:15

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.

In other words, Jesus went through all of our experiences, and he was victorious! He never sinned in the process. And so, he can help us, because he knows what it's like. And because he can give us exactly what we need to overcome our temptations.

What Simone Biles really needed this week, was another gymnast, not merely one who can sympathize with her having had the "twisties" also. Further, Biles needed another gymnast who had competed at the highest level, for gold in the Olympic Games, facing the same pressure, who was also expected to win all the golds. Further yet, Biles needed a gymnast who was able to overcome the pressures and work through them to win another gold. Finally, Biles needed a gymnast who could give, not only some advice, but could transfer ability to overcome the "Twisties." That's what Simone Biles really needed this week. And that's what we have in Jesus.

Not only has Jesus experienced what we are experiencing, but Jesus has experienced it to the uttermost, has conquered it. And, Jesus is able to give us exactly what we need to live victoriously through the same trials. And what do we need? We need mercy and grace, which we see in our last point this morning.

We have seen that 1. We have a High Priest (verse 14). We have seen that 2. He is able to sympathize with us (verse 15). And now, we see that ...

- 1. We have a High Priest (verse 14).**
- 2. He is able to sympathize with us (verse 15).**
- 3. He gives mercy and grace (verse 16).**

Hebrews 4:16

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.

This is a call for us to pray. It's a call for us to pray "with confidence," knowing that Jesus holds all of what we need to continue our journey to eternity. Jesus is a merciful high priest, is ready to forgive us our sins. is able to pardon our transgressions. is willing to overlook our iniquities.

When we come to Jesus, he doesn't require penance of us. He doesn't shame us that we are so evil and wicked. He doesn't remind us of our sins and use it as leverage against us. No, he is merciful. He receives us just as we are. He paid the penalty for our sins. We don't have to pay for our own sins. We don't need to be "good enough" to enter into the presence of Jesus. We simply need to come.

Do you remember what you were like when Christ died for you? You were a helpless sinner, an enemy of God. That's when Jesus died for us. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus didn't wait for us to reform before he died for us. He died for us when we were ugly. He died to make us beautiful! He died to sanctify us, cleansing us by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26).

But just like we need constant showers to clean us from our daily filth, so also do we need constant mercy to help us conform to the image of Christ. You don't clean yourself up before you get into the shower! The shower itself cleans you up. So it is with Christ, even after our salvation, we don't need to clean ourselves up before we come to our high priest. He constantly cleans us up, washing us with the word.

This is what it means that Jesus is merciful. He is ready to give mercy.

Too often, we are like the prodigal son, thinking of returning to the father, after wasting his inheritance. He came with a deal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." (Luke 15:18-19). In other words, "I have messed up so badly, that I don't deserve to be your son anymore."

But the Prodigal Father was merciful to his son. Before the son could even say a word, the father, "saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The son could barely get out his deal, before his Father declared that there was to be a feast that night!

Too often, we come trying to make a deal with Jesus. We say, "If you help me here, just this one time, I promise, I will never do <such and such> again." Or, we say, "Oh, Jesus, I messed up again, please forgive me this once and I'll do <such and such> for you."

Even Martin Luther made such a deal. In his early 20's, he was studying to become a lawyer. But he was caught in a severe thunderstorm on the road to Erfurt. He feared for his life. So he cried out to Saint Anne, "Help me, Saint Anne. I will become a monk!" As a result, Luther entered the seminary and made a great impact on the world.^[4]

As much as the Lord used the deal that Martin Luther made in his life, Jesus isn't into deals. He is a merciful high priest, ready to dispense mercy! He simply wants for us to come and ask for mercy. He delights to give it, especially to those who are in need. But think we need to earn his mercy in some way. We don't. He gives it to us freely.

We often see this when it comes to church attendance. People think that they have messed up really badly, so they can't come to church, until they clean up their lives. So, people don't come to church because they think they aren't worthy. But this isn't so with Jesus. He wants for us to come to him. He wants for people to come to him for mercy. In fact, he delights for us to come. And he wants for us to be around his people. In fact, church and the people of God are often the very means through which we are strengthened to continue on!

It's right here that we see the difference between mercy and grace. Mercy is the withholding of wrath and punishment and consequences for our sin. Grace is the empowering ability to overcome our sin.

This concept comes out most clearly in 2 Corinthians 12, where Paul tells of the battle that he had with the thorn in his flesh. We don't know what this "thorn" was. It may have been a physical illness, another person, or even a demonic spirit. Whatever it was, it was painful for Paul. Three times he asked that God would remove the thorn. Three times the Lord refused to do so. Finally, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:10). That is, grace is the means through which you will be able to endure your hardships and trials.

Too often, people come to Jesus (or to church) with the perspective that they simply need to avoid God's judgment. So, they come to God just seeking mercy. "Have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!" they cry over and over. While this is good and helpful. This is how we ought to come to God (like the man in Luke 18:13). However, God doesn't want for us to remain in endless sin, always receiving mercy and never having victory over sin. Rather, he wants for us to have victory. This comes through grace, which Jesus is ready and willing to give.

Hebrews 4:16

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.

We find it from the Lord. We also find it from God's people. God's people are often the means of grace that we need to be strengthened to carry on. We see this most clearly in Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." In other words, as we refuse to speak the tearing down words, but speak the building up words, we, as God's people, can give grace to others by speaking words of encouragement into their lives.

Do you want to be the conduit of God's grace in the lives of other people? Speak words of encouragement to others. You can be the very means in the lives of others for God's grace to flow. Earlier in Hebrews, we read, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13).

This is why we need to be involved and engaged in the church. It is the people of the church who are often the very means through which we are strengthened to continue on and overcome the deceitfulness of sin.

So let us come to Jesus, seeking mercy to forgive us of our sins and grace to strengthen us to persevere.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 1, 2021 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] <https://www.latimes.com/sports/olympics/story/2021-07-28/twisties-simone-biles-gymnastics-olympics-tokyo>.

[2] <https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/en/news/what-are-the-twisties>.

[3] Thomas Goodwin, "The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth," found in The Works of Thomas Goodwin, Volume 4 (published in 1867), p. 136. The work can be accessed here: <https://archive.org/details/worksofthomasgoo04good>.

[4] You can read more about this story here: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/martin-luther.html>.