

Encouragement To Steadfastness.

Text: Heb 4:14-16

Suggested Hymns:

485, 486, 457, 106, 260

1) The Sphere Of The High-Priestly Office

2) The Sympathy Of The High Priest

3) Boldness At The Throne

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 4:14-16, ¹⁴ *Seeing then that 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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.* ¹⁶ *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Every Australian is familiar with the system of highway markers, by means of which the Federal and State routes are identified. We can travel from one end of the country to the other and never be obliged to ask a question, if we are alert to the signs which are placed at strategic intervals.

As we read St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews, we immediately recognise unmistakable signposts, which he erected as a guide to those who would read this Epistle. He endeavoured to point out the worth of the Christian religion by comparing it, point by point, with Judaism.

In the first and second chapters the Apostle demonstrated the superiority of Christ as King over against the angels. Following through in the third chapter, he pointed out the superiority of Christ as a Prophet over against Moses. In the text before us, taken from the fourth chapter, he compares Christ the High Priest to the high priest of Israel.

St. Paul had a real purpose in mind when he pointed out the superior values of the Christian religion. Ominous clouds of persecution were gathering over the

Christians in the City of Rome. This little flock had to be conditioned for the trials which lay ahead of them.

He, therefore, voiced the “*Encouragement to Steadfastness*” found in the words of our text. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Encouragement To Steadfastness The Sphere Of The High-Priestly Office

The first note of encouragement is sounded in the sphere of Christ’s high-priestly office. He pointed out to the Hebrew Christians that they had *a great High Priest*, greater than any of the Levitical priesthood.

He is called “*a great High Priest,*” designating Christ as being the Head of all other priests. He towered head and shoulders above Aaron and above others who succeeded him in the Jewish religious system. The Jewish high priests went into the Most Holy Place of the Temple once a year, to offer the blood of the atonement.

St. Paul points out that our High Priest, *Jesus the Son of God* after offering up Himself as an expiatory sacrifice, has “*passed into the heavens,*” even now performing His High-Priestly office there, sitting at the right hand of the Father, wearing both the High-Priestly clothes and the Kingly crown.

We know from 1 John 2:1 that *if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* ² *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.* For this reason, Paul says in our text, *let us hold fast our confession.*

Do not let the conditions of time shake you in your resolve to be steadfast and faithful to this Jesus, who gave His life as a sacrifice for sin; who not only was the High Priest, but also was the “*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*”

This “*Encouragement for Steadfastness*” certainly must be voiced today, when there are so many people who are selling their souls very cheaply and forfeiting their God-given privilege of independent thinking, thinking for themselves. There are too many people who quickly and willingly yield their minds to the influence of atheistic teachers at colleges and universities and follow

the rationalistic assertions of many leaders of thought today. We might well say with the Psalmist, *“The floods of ungodly men made me afraid.”*¹

This *“Encouragement for Steadfastness”* is also in place for those who have been bearing faithful testimony to their Lord, Jesus Christ, but who are also beset with doubts and misgivings when they see the prevailing spirit of indifference, complacency, and compromise, both in the world and in the church.

To those we would say, as did Paul to Timothy, written in 2 Timothy 1:13-14, ¹³ *Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁴ *That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.*

2. Encouragement To Steadfastness The Sympathy Of The High Priest

Steadfastness is sustained by the fact that we have a High Priest who is abundantly qualified to sympathise with us in our afflictions and to whom we can turn for help and support in every trial and tribulation. He is not a high priest who simply performs the external duties of His office without entering into sympathy with the people.

Jesus is not a high priest who has never experienced trials and is cold and aloof and would keep His people at a distance; but, rather, He is a High Priest whose sympathy would attract all those who are feeble and need the encouragement of His tender love.

All of us, sooner or later, yearn for human sympathy, and when it comes, has it not been welcomed like the presence of a ministering angel? How often have we been strengthened and sustained by those who entered into our feelings, who shared our toils, helped carry our burdens, and entered into our hopes, joys, and sorrows!

The Apostle knew full well how we yearn for sympathy, for he had experienced this very thing. His heart was cheered, when he was held as a prisoner in the city of Rome, by the visits of his sympathetic friends Timothy and Onesiphorus. He asked God’s richest blessings on the latter and on his household, *for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.*²

Genuine sympathy requires that there be an identity between him who sympathises and the object of sympathy. The finer elements of sympathy are wanting unless we have passed through the same school of experience.

Appeals have come to us from across the seas, where the hungry and the starving are asking us to share our bread, crying for clothing to cover their nakedness. These appeals are coming in an ever-increasing number. The first to respond to these appeals are usually those who themselves were hungry and did not know how to clothe their bodies during difficult times.

Those who themselves have felt the bitter blast of adversity are ready to share their bread and clothe the man and woman in ragged tatters and the half-naked children resting in their arms. They will help, wherever they can, to stop malnutrition and stunted growth and save the hapless victims of war.

The greatest expressions of sublime sympathy, however, are exemplified in our great High Priest. Our text tells us that Jesus *sympathises with our weaknesses*, in other words Jesus is *“touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”* Why? Because He *was in all points tempted as we are.*

Jesus Christ did not only look down upon the fallen world from the far-distant heights of heaven, but He became our Brother, took upon Himself the form of a servant and walked in the midst of sinful men. *For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.*³ The great Physician came to live in this sin-infested world.

Jesus did not write His healing prescriptions from a remote dwelling in the skies, refusing to come in personal contact with those contaminated with sin. No, He walked here upon earth, and His healing hand was placed upon those who were brought to Him. He walked, as it were, in every ward of the world's hospitals, His own hand resting upon the fevered brows, His own eyes gazing upon the sufferers' tears.

He *sympathizes with our weaknesses*” because He, Himself, longed for sympathy. He took His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane and said to them, *“Sit here while I go and pray over there.”*⁴ What an *“Encouragement for Steadfastness”* this is for us! For He Himself knows our frame, because He Himself had this frame. Every heart-throb you feel evokes a sympathetic understanding in the bosom of the Prince of Sufferers.

This sympathy of Jesus, the Son of God, reaches down through the ages and never fails. He says, *“I know your sorrows.”* He has not forgotten us, even though He has entered into the State of Glorification.

The hymnist writes,⁵

Since Christ hath reached His glorious throne
And gifts for men obtaineth,
My heart can rest in heaven alone,
No other rest remaineth.
I long to be with Him on high;
My heart and thoughts would ever fly
To Him who is my treasure.

You, too, are embraced in this sympathetic understanding of your Lord. His sympathy takes in the whole range of human infirmities; outward troubles, inward perplexities, and unspoken griefs are not strangers to Him. No trial, no pain, no tear escapes His eyes. The Psalmist writes, ***For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.***⁶ ***For he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.***⁷ Just as He joined the heart-broken disciples on their way to Emmaus, in order to dispel their misgivings; just as He appointed a special meeting, in order to remove the doubts of Thomas, even so Jesus comes with the Word and Sacrament today to lift us up, to give us steadfastness, and to instil joy and peace which passes all human understanding.

Knowing that Jesus is on our side, we should, therefore, be encouraged to greater steadfastness and implicit faith in Him who knows our infirmities.

3. Encouragement To Steadfastness Boldness At The Throne

The third *“Encouragement for Steadfastness”* lies in the fact that we can *“come boldly unto the Throne of Grace.”* This is a beautiful expression, perhaps one of the choicest in Scripture to show the benefits of Christ’s High-Priestly office.

We might well tremble if we are asked to come to the Throne of Justice; we might be afraid to approach the Throne of Power, but we do not hesitate to come

to the Throne of Grace, because we know that the heart of our God is inclined to be gracious to us because of the merits of His only-begotten Son.

No ordinary monarch presides on this Throne; for upon it is seated a God of mercy, a God of love.

Paul himself was no stranger to the Throne of Grace and had often transacted business there with his Master. He now encourages his Hebrew friends to come with him **“boldly”** to the Throne of Grace.

This boldness at the Throne of Grace implies that we can come with frank confidence, calling out whatever weighs heavily upon our hearts. It is that boldness which Jesus encouraged in the parable of the persistent widow⁸ and rewarded in the case of the Syrophenician mother.⁹

Our chief request at the Throne of Grace must always be for mercy. He who has come to the knowledge of his sin will make the prayer for mercy the object of his chief concern. He will say with the tax-collector, **“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”**¹⁰

The person who has the deepest sense of the need for forgiveness will join the other supplicants at the Throne of Grace, crying: “Mercy, mercy!” knowing that the great God-Man, our Mediator, continually presents before His Father’s throne His own great sacrifice for sin and that ***For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.***¹¹

Knowing that we are embraced in our Father’s love and mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we can draw strength, help, and guidance for all the varying issues of life. We need God’s grace every day; to keep us from sin, to help us in our duties, and to preserve us in the day of temptation.

There are no time limits set upon the time that we may have with our God; nor must we make a special appointment to come to Him, for His ear is open to our cries and His eyes never slumber nor sleep. By day and by night, from year to year, and from generation to generation, we may come to the Throne of Grace and there find strengthening for a steadfast faith.

Let us, therefore, be steadfast and unmovable, confidently trusting in the goodness and mercy of our God. Let us renew our strength day by day, coming

to the Mercy Seat and trusting in the promise of Jesus, who said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*¹²

Yes, *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us*, Scriptures says in 2 Corinthians 1:20. What a marvellous incentive we have here to become constant supplicants at the Throne of Grace! What a joy it is to know that we have an Advocate in Court, and that He is God's own Son!

Let us therefore encourage one another in steadfast confession of Christ's name before all people, and in more constant prayers for mercy and grace. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 18:4

² 2 Timothy 1:16

³ Hebrews 2:16

⁴ Matthew 26:36

⁵ Hymn 106

⁶ Psalm 103:14

⁷ Zechariah 2:8

⁸ Luke 18:3

⁹ Mark 7:26

¹⁰ Luke 18:13

¹¹ Hebrews 10:14

¹² John 16:23