

1) Temptation is Crushed by Christ's Obedience

Hebrews 4:14-16 • 2022-03-06 • Lent series "Crushed"



Have you heard the way the news commentators are evaluating the different leadership styles of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine? I can't claim to be following the news too closely. However, you can't help but hear the repeated commentary contrasting the two leaders. On the one hand, the Russian president often sits at the far end of his very long table. He is trying to portray himself as separate from his commanding officers and subordinates. You don't see him anywhere near the troops who must wage war on foot. News commentators point out that it is easy for a ruler to send troops to war when you are distant from the battle. On the other hand, you see the president of Ukraine dressed like the soldiers around him. He is there at the battlefield with them and all the people he serves. He doesn't try to separate himself with a long table but is actually presenting himself more like the legendary King Arthur with his knights at a round table. News commentators can't help but point out this striking contrast between two different leaders. It's clear which one most people favor.

What type of picture do you have of our Lord, Jesus? Maybe some view him as the type of ruler who is so far above you that he doesn't have any care of what it is like to be at the battlefield. But others see him as the type of ruler who knows what the battle is like, who has spent time with the dying, and who stoops down to the level of the lowly. Today we'll be looking at the comforting way we can picture Jesus. He is both far exalted above us and yet he stooped down far below us to fight not just with us, but for us. We'll see in Hebrews chapter 4 that Jesus is just the kind of man anyone would want as their champion, their representative, and their king.

The writer to the Hebrews is urging God's people, "Hold on to our confession." It's like he is saying, "Christians, don't be embarrassed of Jesus. Fly your flag. Let people know who you belong to. Let the world hear about what you believe. Don't let go of your creeds and your clear teachings."

People's perception of their leader can fluctuate. I heard a news journalist recently remarking on the sudden popularity of President Zelensky of Ukraine. He wasn't always as popular in Ukraine as he is now. An interview from just two months ago asked a Ukrainian woman how much she respected and trusted her president. In response she just laughed. Her estimation of him was so poor that all she could do was laugh at the question. Today most Ukrainians are reportedly backing him up. But it wasn't always the case. Feelings can fluctuate for leaders.

What about your confession of Jesus as the Christ? Are there times when it maybe isn't so strong, and you aren't as proud as you could be for belonging to his kingdom? Instead of holding to Christ, your confession of him weakens. There are parts of his Word you don't want to share. There are times when you don't feel like making it known you follow Christ as your King. If someone were to interview you and ask what you thought of Christ, how would your response look? What if they were to interview your boldness in confessing him to strangers? What if they were to interview the level of support you give to mission work? What if they were to examine your pride in Jesus by seeing how eager you are to see his kingdom grow? What if they evaluated your support of your King by seeing how many times you gave into the temptation of the one who is the illegitimate prince of this world, the devil?

There are, of course, times when we might be tempted to just let our confession of the Christ slide. When the times of trouble come, we don't hold tightly to our sword, but our knees wobble and we grow weak. We might begin to treat our confession of the Christ lightly. We let people despise and dismiss the truth about Jesus. We don't hold on firmly.

But the writer says you can be proud! "We have a great high priest." Notice the title for Jesus isn't just commander or fighter or even just ruler. It is "high priest." That means he serves as our advocate. A priest's job is to step in between the people and their God and to represent them. In the Old Testament the priests would enter the most holy place in the temple and offer up the sprinkling of blood on behalf of the sins of the people. Only he was invited to enter and to make the offering. Only he could be their appointed defense and come before God asking for mercy. When the people recognized their weakness and stumbling in sin, they would approach their priest to offer sacrifice for them.

But brothers and sisters in Jesus, we have an even greater high priest than any who ever came into the temple in Jerusalem. We have Jesus. He did more than just enter a symbol of God's throne in the temple. Jesus has entered the very throne room of God to offer up his payment. He offered more than the blood of goats, bulls, and lambs. He shed his own blood for us. And to act as our representative before the Father he ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of his Father. Jesus is the man who serves as our go-between. And Jesus is not just an ordinary man. He is God's Son. That's what we confess! We confess that no other person will do. Only Jesus, our great high priest.

And we really do need a high priest. He has to be more than a champion and commander because we were born in the enemy camp. And with every evil act of betrayal, we show that we turn from our king. We have lost the battle and turned aside from him by our sin. We need someone to speak in our defense and plead our case before the king.

We need him because the battlefield is too much for us. It may not seem like you are in a battlefield every day, but spiritually you really are. The devil seeks to conquer and destroy us all. His temptations have led people into terrible loss. He tempts men to wonder, "Is God holding back his love from me?" And the first man and every other man has fallen into the devil's trap and stumbled into the pit of sin. They covet, lust, self-medicate by abusing substances, and commit loveless acts. They fail to be there when they are needed. Men, what temptations have revealed your weakness in the battle? The enemy tempted the first woman so that she also questioned God's love. "Is God holding back his love from me?" And every other woman has fallen under the devil's schemes and lies. Many women often buy the lie that the only thing the world will care about is their outward appearance. A lie perpetuated by the devil and by the men he holds in his army. Many women are convinced or forced to use their body as a way to manipulate others. But the devil is manipulating us all. Women, what temptations have revealed your weakness in the battle?

All of us have fallen on the battlefield against the devil. He won against our parents, and he has won against us. Leaders lie to gain power. They lose the battle against evil. Pastors patronize. They lose the battle for the truth. Parents give up parenting. Over and over our weakness is revealed. The battles are lost.

What can we do in our weakness and with our losses? "Hold onto our confession." The writer to the Hebrews is encouraging second-generation believers to hold onto the truths that were passed onto them from the generation that knew Jesus. Thousands of years ago the truth echoed on the pages of Scripture. It continued to be confessed by all those who looked to Jesus as their champion, their representative, their king. 500 years ago, that confession echoed clearly in the Reformation, "Hold on to our confession of Jesus." You have our confession because it was shared with those who faced the battle before you. You are urged to hold onto that same confession of Jesus.

What made those before us want to hold firmly onto the confession of Christ? Jesus isn't just some ruler sitting across the long table ordering us to march to our doom. It is true that he sits in glory at his father's right hand. But he is able to sympathize with us. That's because he has been to the frontline of the battle and seen it all. He has faced the same evils, the same attacks, the same temptations. We read about how the devil tempted him in the wilderness. Jesus knows what it is like to be tempted to turn aside from the goodness of God to a lie. Were you ever tempted to covet, to lust, to lazy idleness, to selfish indulgence, to abandon the law of God? So was Jesus. "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.*" Jesus was a priest who lived among his people. In true human flesh he became just like us. He was born. He lived in a lowly town with a humble family. And when he began his work as our champion, he faced the enemy one-on-one.

But he wasn't like other leaders who marshal their troops and send them into battle for him. His fighting was more like what we read earlier this morning. Recall what David did when all the army of Israel was cowering in fear. He stepped in where others could not. There was the champion, Goliath. None could face him. But if someone did face him and win, they could win on behalf of all the people. That's what David did. The Lord won the day through his chosen champion, David. And with David all of the kingdom won the day. David became their champion. That's what Jesus did as our champion. All the temptations he faced meant he was stepping in to fight our battle for us.

And Jesus won! And he was our champion in the fight. "*(Jesus) has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.*" The devil could not cause him to stumble and fall. Jesus was different from us all in one important aspect -he did not sin. The sinless Son of God won our victory!

And we can't lose focus of the title given to Jesus here. He is more than a sinless champion. He is our priest. He came to step in and intercede on our behalf. As our champion he lived for us. As our priest he died for us. The sinless Jesus offered up himself as the sacrifice. And by that great sacrifice he gave the payment for all our sins. In the same way that a defense lawyer, a judge, and an insurance adjuster all get to decide on your behalf, our great high priest has made us guilt free, liability free, by his great payment. The case is settled. You paid nothing; your priest paid it all.

Finally, Jesus rose again to live as our priest and our king. But he isn't the kind of king we need to fear. We can approach his throne with confidence. You can imagine that if you tried to approach the president of our nation, you'd have the secret service tackle you. Then they'd drag you off asking, "What were you thinking? You can't just walk right up to the president like that!" It was just like that in the ancient world with kings. Everyone had to have permission to approach the king. And when they did, they did with great fear and uncertainty of the outcome.

But we can approach the throne of God with full confidence. It is called "the throne of grace." Flowing out from the throne of our king is his mercy. Recall that temptation which popped in your mind when I asked you what temptation you lost to recently? There is grace at the throne of God. His free forgiveness is there for your sin. You don't have to wonder, "Will my king accept my plea, after all the times I have failed?" You can be confident he will. He is your great high priest and your king. Approach his throne of grace knowing you will receive mercy and will find grace.

What type of picture do you have of our Lord, Jesus? Hold onto your confession of the one who crushed temptation by his work. Your champion, Jesus, defeated the devil in your stead. Your great high priest, Jesus offered up the payment for your sin. And our king, Jesus, sits on the throne to offer grace upon grace.