

Advent 3

Series: Where Is God When It Hurts

This Installment: His Grace in Our Suffering

12/13/09

(Hebrews 4:14-5:2; 1 Corinthians 10:13)

© Curtis Crenshaw 2009

Introduction

WHO STARTED CHRISTMAS?

Recently I heard a story on the radio of a woman who was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and after hours of hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids.

She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season time of the year. Overwhelming pressure to go to every party, every housewarming, taste all the holiday food and treats, getting that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list, making sure we don't forget anyone on our card list, and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card.

His Grace in Our Suffering / 2

Finally the elevator doors opened, and there was already a crowd in the car. She pushed her way into the elevator and dragged her two kids in with her and all the bags of stuff. When the doors closed she couldn't take it anymore and stated, "**Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up, and shot.**"

From the back of the car everyone heard a quiet calm voice respond, "Don't worry, we already crucified him." For the rest of the trip down the elevator it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

Don't forget this year to keep the One who started this whole Christmas thing in your every thought, deed, purchase, and word. If we all did it, just think of how different this whole world would be.

Our passage for today:

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.

¹ For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness (Hebrews 4:14-5:2).

His Grace in Our Suffering / 3

This passage in Hebrews is deep doctrine of the Christian faith and especially of the person and work of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God. Some people say that doctrine divides. We have just confessed the Nicene Creed. Does that divide? Yes, doctrine divides, but it also unites. It is designed to do both. At the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 when the holy fathers gathered at the first ecumenical council, the four gospels were placed on the throne. The Creed that came from that holy synod was designed to unite the orthodox in the one, holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church as she confessed the one true faith, but the Council also proclaimed anathemas against the heretics to exclude them. Yes, doctrine divides, but it also unites. Such is the nature of truth in any area of life, even in math (2 times 2 is 4, but not 5).

So here in this passage we have the great truth of the Incarnation and how it divides and unites the orthodox around the true faith. Some say it's stupid, some say it's just plain weird, some want a miracle before they will believe it, others say we're all incarnations (Oprah Winfrey).

Notice how this passage begins: "**Jesus**, the **Son of God**." Here we have a clear reference to the human Jesus, the son of Mary, the one who walked the streets of Jerusalem, who ate food, who slept, who worked in His step-father's carpenter shop, and who was called by His mother, "Jesus," to come to dinner.

Next to that statement we have "**Son of God**," meaning that He was the Son of God the Father, the same unchangeable God from all eternity (Hebrews 13:8), further meant that He was **both** man and God in one person. The mystery of the incarnation never ceases to amaze me, which is why I

His Grace in Our Suffering / 4

have hundreds of books in my library on the person and work of the Son of God, called Jesus in His humanity, called the Son of God in His deity, and called Christ in regard to both.

It is in this office as Jesus the High Priest that He passed into the heaven itself on our behalf, and now is not only our exalted High Priest, but also the sympathetic one who understands the sins and problems we go through. He understands because He has been through the same, though successfully, but with compassion for our situation.

No one knows what basic training is like unless one has been there, unless one has heard the screaming sergeants, done the pushups, has run the miles, has entered the tear gas house and chlorine gas house, and have machine guns shot over our heads in training for the real thing. Who can possibly understand that?

Who would I rather receive advice from regarding basic training, my uncle who never had military experience or my grandfather who had 12 years of military service? Jesus entered our basic training, as it were, and experienced all that we do, but He gives more than advice. By His Holy Spirit He gives us internal grace to persevere and to adjust.

I. He Was Tempted in the Same Points as Us (v. 15)

In verse 15, we see that we have a High Priest who has experienced all that we have. He can identify with us, for He has been through all the trials we have, “yet without sin,” which does not mean He will be angry if we fail, but indicates

His Grace in Our Suffering / 5

that He understands the stress and strain of temptations, and that He is able to deliver us. From these passages in Hebrews, we see that He not only once for all delivers us from the penalty of sin, death, but also daily delivers us from the power of sin.

An Olympic champion truly understands the rigors of training to win, and can enter into the pains and sufferings to make it to the gold circle. So Jesus . . .

From first to last he was being put to the test, whether by enticements to self-concern, popular acclaim, and ambition for power when assailed by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1ff), or by the taunt hurled at him even as he hung in agony on the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40ff). Were the recipients of this letter [to the Hebrews] being tempted to lapse into apostasy (6:4ff; 10:29ff)? Their high priest knew this temptation too, for relentlessly, in the wilderness and at Gethsemane and Calvary and even through the lips of Simon Peter, who had acknowledged him to be "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Satan tempted him to abandon his mission by turning aside from the shame and scandal of the cross (Matt. 16:16, 21-23). To have succumbed to these inducements would have been the sabotage of our salvation and a failure of trust and obedience on his part—in other words, an act of apostasy. His whole life on earth was one of testing and proving . . . (Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 172).

Yet we read that our Lord went through His temptation "without sin," which perfection He uses as grace for us. In other words, it is not just His death that saves us but also His

His Grace in Our Suffering / 6

life of obedience. The grace that was manifested in His life is also given to us so that the expression “without sin” means that we receive His daily victory. We fail in our temptations; He did not, and His “did not” becomes our “did.” His victory in temptation becomes our victory, and when we sin, His righteousness becomes our righteousness so that we are faultless to stand before the throne. We are *in Him*, and what He is and has becomes ours.

II. Therefore, We Can Boldly Seek His Grace (v. 16)

In the news lately was this headline:

Not on the guest list: Couple crashes state dinner at White House in spite of heavy security

The Secret Service is looking into the matter, but they let this secret couple into the inner most sanctuary.

The news has covered this story in great detail. They could not enter Obama’s presence unless properly invited, on the proper list, and the proper protocol observed. One just does not enter a superior’s presence with boldness and confidence, unless one has a standing invitation with the proper identification and acceptance.

We have that proper protocol, approved by the highest ranking person in the Universe, the human Jesus, the divine Son of God, and we are on the proper list, the lamb’s book of life! Thus we not only enter His presence but do so boldly because our relationship with Him is personal, dare I say

His Grace in Our Suffering / 7

cozy, close friends and even relatives, members of the same family, for we have had the same background!

So since Jesus was tempted in all points like us yet without sin, that makes Him the perfect—quite literally—High Priest. The standing invitation to enter His presence behind the veil, His righteousness by which He was tempted in all points like us but without sin, demonstrates that He is qualified to be the unique High Priest. Therefore, we enter the holy of holies where God dwells with confidence, not in ourselves, but in Christ.

I had a Roman Catholic priest in Vietnam say that we Protestants were arrogant because we actually believed we were saved and going to heaven, which to him was nothing but unrighteous audacity. My response was that our confidence was in Christ, not in ourselves, that if we relied on our merit, we would also be trembling with fear.

Therefore, when we are having a rough time with temptations, we can go to Christ who not only understands, but also will give us grace through His Holy Spirit to help us overcome. But this overcoming is not just individual prayer, though it is that, but especially corporate worship in which we approach the throne together, for later Hebrews will speak of receiving this grace in corporate worship:

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast

His Grace in Our Suffering / 8

the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:19-25).

It is the most amazing thing to me that when Christians enter trials one of the first things they do is forsake corporate, liturgical worship, which means they intensify their trials with no solution.

III. Therefore, He Has Compassion on Us Ignorant Folk (v. 5:2)

He can have compassion [deal gently] with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness (Heb. 5:2).

Notice several things here. First, He “has compassion” or “deals gently” with us. When we sin, assuming we confess it and are willing to overcome it, He does not condemn us, but understands by exercising forgiveness, compassion, an accepting attitude toward us.

Likewise, when we or others we know go through trials, we must be like Him and show compassion. This does not mean to overlook sin, but it does mean not to condemn when others need grace. For example, if a woman has had an abortion and is grieved about it, we should show His compassion to her.

His Grace in Our Suffering / 9

Second, He deals in compassion with the “ignorant,” those who committed wrong without at first knowing it, but came to know it later. Paul said he was shown mercy

although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13).

Third, we can expect compassion from Jesus “since he himself is also subject to weakness.” Again, this is not the weakness of being a fellow sinner but of being a fellow sufferer in trials and temptations.

Moreover, notice how Jesus is held up as the one we can approach, for He has compassion because He understand us. We are never to pray to saints for help, for they are sinners in the same position as we are, in need of help themselves. It is idolatry to pray to anyone but God. Also, the idea that we go to God through Christ but to Christ through Mary because she is compassionate, being a mother and understanding, and thus she can allegedly get Her Son’s attention, is not supported anywhere in the Bible. In fact, it is denied right here, for Christ alone is our faithful High Priest because He alone is qualified. He was the sinless one, which meant He was the perfect sacrifice, and He was (is) the compassionate one, having been in our shoes. He is the only one qualified, for He was identified with us and with God the Father, bridging the gap from God to man in Himself because He was (is) God and man in one person. Like us, He understands us, and is identified with our weaknesses. Like God the Father, He understands Him and is identified with Him as the one and only God. Mary cannot hold a candle to the

His Grace in Our Suffering / 10

Savior. She herself called God her savior (Luke 1:46-47), though she was no doubt a wonderful person.

He is not only necessary as the Savior, but He is sufficient. He sympathizes with our weaknesses because **it was precisely our weaknesses He embraced**, though without sin.

Who would you like to have help you through a mine field, one who had been there and had a leg blown off, or One who always made it through without a single mistake? Jesus knows the stress of life with its mine fields, but He is the only one who came through life without a single mistake, without a single sin, which means He knows how to deliver us. He does this not as a cheer leader on the side lines, but by giving us His grace through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Then when we fail, He does not condemn, but forgives as the great High Priest, who was not only the sacrificer but also the sacrifice. The perfect righteousness that He imputes to us when we first come to Him is also daily the imparted righteousness that gives us grace to live ever more for Him.

Conclusion

My grandmother wrote these words in a commentary she gave me on Hebrews, but she could not give me grace directly, for she was a sinner, in need of grace herself. Because Christ was not a sinner, therefore He is able to give me grace to overcome temptation. Here are her words to me, written on August 25th, 1968, when I was home on leave from Vietnam:

This book takes you into the “holiest of all,” deep, spiritual and filled with such blessings that only He who is spiritual can fathom the depths herein. May this book

His Grace in Our Suffering / 11

along with your Bible, "God's Holy Word," enlighten you by the working of the Holy Spirit, that you may feel His very presence. Love in our Savior's name. Mee-Maw.

She could lead me to the Savior, but only He can give me the access to enter the "holiest of all," by His grace, by His blood, and by His perfect obedience, which merit He passes to me daily, through His Holy Spirit. Thus, we have joy in our trials, knowing the outcome. We have hope in our hurts because He is bringing us to glory, and we have grace in our sufferings because our great High Priest, who understands us, bids us come to Him to receive by His Holy Spirit daily help to overcome.

AMEN.