

## 28 February – the 2nd Sunday in Lent

### JESUS: THE MAN OF SYMPATHY (Hebrews 4:12-16)

#### 1 Jesus in Heaven

Christians believe that after Jesus' resurrection, he ascended to heaven, where he is to this day. We might well ask, 'What is he doing there now?' Today's passage provides an answer to this.

#### 2 Help from the past

A Christian who wrote in 1651, Thomas Goodwin, entitled his book *The HEART of CHRIST in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*, and his burden in writing was to convince disheartened believers that even though Christ is now in heaven, he is just as open and tender in his embrace of sinners and sufferers as ever he was on earth. In other words, the risen Lord alive in heaven today is no less approachable or less compassionate than he was when he walked on earth. (p.43-44)

He suggests that if we were to take our two hands and place them on the chest of the risen Jesus, Heb 4:15 would enable us to feel his heartbeat: we would feel the '*vigorous strength of Christ's deepest affections and longings.*' (p.43)

#### 3 How can Heb 4:14-16 help us to see this?

Verses 14 and 16 tell us to be faithful in what we believe ('Let us hold fast our confession', v.14) and be confident in fellowship with God ('Let us then with confidence draw near', v.16). We might describe v.15 as the ANCHOR of these verses, the other two drawing out its implications.

The burden of this anchor is **Jesus Christ's sheer solidarity with his people** (p.46). We perhaps find it easier to believe Jesus is with us when our lives are straightforward. This verse says the opposite – it is in our WEAKNESSES that Jesus sympathises with us.

#### 4 What is Jesus' sympathy?

It is a '*depth of felt solidarity*'. '*In our pain, Jesus is pained; in our suffering, he feels the suffering as his own even though it isn't ... His is a love that cannot be held back when he sees his people in pain.*' (p.46)

We are being taken deep into the heart of Jesus in these verses, showing us 'the unrestrained *witness* of Jesus' concerning believers.

#### 5 But WHY is Jesus so close to his people in their pain?

v.15 tells us that he has been tempted or tested in every way as we are; so the difficult path we are on is one he has travelled on himself.

***'It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he is with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease.'*** (p.47).

#### 6 Jesus' challenges in his life on earth

Jesus knew what it was to be shamed, embarrassed, misunderstood, falsely accused, tortured and killed. He knows what it was to be lonely, not least when his friends abandoned him when he needed them the most. '*Had he lived today, every last Twitter follower and Facebook friend would have unfriended him when he turned 33 – he who will never unfriend us.*' (p.47)

#### 7 Two important phrases

It might help us to appreciate the significance of Heb 4:15 by focussing on the phrases '**in every respect**' and '**yet without sin**'. All our weaknesses – even our very lives – are tainted with sin. But

Jesus was 'holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners' (Heb 7:26-27). Yet *'that enticing temptation, that sore trial, that bewildering perplexity – he has been there. Indeed, his utter purity suggests that he has felt these pains more acutely than we sinners ever could.'* (p.48)

## 8 Help for us today

How can that help us in our lives when we are 'going through the mill', when we can't sort out our emotions, when we feel let down, when we don't understand what is happening to us? These verses tell us that in all our lives' messes, *'We have a friend who knows exactly what such testing feels like, and sits close to us, embraces us. With us. Solidarity.'* (p.48)

***'We are never alone. That sorrow that feels so isolating, so unique, was endured by him in the past and is now shouldered by him in the present ... Our difficulties draw out a depth of feeling in Christ beyond what we know.'*** (pp.48-49)

## 9 Go to Jesus with all your sorrow and burdens

So this pure and holy one gives us his heart. *'Not only can he alone pull us out of the hole of sin; he alone desires to climb in and bear our burdens ... he "co-suffers" with us.'* (p.49)

**So if you are a believer, you have a Friend** – *'a Friend who, in your sorrows, will never lob down a pep talk from heaven. He cannot bear to hold himself at a distance. Nothing can hold him back, His heart is too bound up with yours.'* (p.50)

### **The Message paraphrase of Heb 4:14-16**

Now that we know what we have – Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God – let's not let it slip through our fingers. We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all – all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

## Discussion Questions

1. How has life been for you in the past week?  
How has the present Covid crisis made you feel?  
What struggles come to your mind?
2. In the gospels, what occasions can you think of when Jesus went through the sort of difficulties that we go through?  
Or occasions when he experienced the same joys as us?
3. In what ways do you think Jesus suffered when he was tempted?  
(See Heb 2:18)
4. What comfort in your struggles comes from Jesus' being tested in similar ways to what you are?
5. How would you define Jesus' ability to sympathise?
6. Do you think Jesus' sinlessness makes him more or less able to sympathise with our experiences of testing/temptation?
7. Read Luke 4:1-13. What can we learn from Jesus about the way we should act when we are tempted? (You might like to look also at James 4:7.)
8. In what ways do you want Jesus to help you in future struggles?  
What do you need to enable you to trust him in these?

These studies are based on the book *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund.