

## THE GREAT REFUGE

***“Let us therefore come with confidence (freely) to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace for a timely help”*** (Hebrews 4:16) (Author’s Translation).

We have a Priest; a High Priest; a Great High Priest. So come to Him. He knows you; he understands you; he understands your situation. He has been there, in one way or another. Moreover He invites you to come; moreover He has the power to help. So come to Him confidently, freely; come to Him expecting His help; come to Him trusting that whatever happens He is with you and working on your behalf.

**“But what if I haven’t been a very good person? I’ve made mistakes; I don’t always control my flesh; I’m not sure I always do what He wants!”**

Come to Him anyway. He did not sin, but He understands the sinner. The feelings of the sinner came to Him, in fact, when God *“laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6). David (who ought to know), said in Psalm 103—*“He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”* If God really wanted to mete out penalties on the basis of sins, we would all be doomed. Jeremiah said, *“It is of His mercy that we are not consumed”* (Lamentations 3:22). If you let your worthiness be the measure of your coming you will never come. If there is something out of order in your life, the Lord will let you know. Don’t go on “fishing trips.” You might dredge up things better left buried. David also said in Psalm 103, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”* God certainly doesn’t save up all the charges against you, and then bring them up when you need His help. That is a common human trait, but unworthy of God.

**Let Us Come With Confidence.** The Greek word—*Parresía*—means boldly in the sense of freely or confidently, not boldly in the sense of brashly, or demandingly. There are those who talk about claiming the promises in the sense of demanding that God keep His word. The attitude is, “You said it, God; you have to keep your word.” God doesn’t **have** to do **anything**. That kind of boldness has nothing to do with this word in Hebrews 4. The Biblical concept of the human’s to God is rather in humility Jesus illustrated the correct attitude in the story of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18). The Pharisee came boldly, extolling his virtues before God; the Publican would not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, but plead for mercy. The appropriate position before God is neither demanding nor groveling, but honestly recognizing one’s unworthiness and asking for God’s mercy and help.

**The Throne of Grace.** Not the throne of judgment nor the throne of despotism—the throne of grace. But what is grace? The Bible sings the refrain of grace and mercy over and over through the pentateuch and the prophets and the poets. Even the law was given in the context of grace. In the author’s commentary on John, concerning the story of the cripple at Bethesda (ch. 5), he discusses the words grace and mercy at length. The following thoughts were originally given there. (For a fuller discussion one may obtain the commentary). God’s law had come with grace and mercy. In ages past, on Mount Sinai, as

Moses presented to God the hewn stones on which he would inscribe his changeless will, God responded with a great hymn of mercy. *“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin...”* (Exodus 34:5-7). Even in the age of law, prior to the coming of Jesus, mercy is a constantly recurring theme. In the Hebrew text (the language of the Old Testament) the word is *chesed*. It means “mercy” in the sense of “kindness.” It is the outward expression of the inward attitude of compassion. In the King James version of the Bible, the word *chesed* is also translated by “pity,” “lovingkindness,” “favor,” and “goodness.” The word, with these various translations, occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament. The companion word to “mercy,” is “grace.” These two words often occur together. The Hebrew word is *chanan*, and refers more to the **inner attitude** of compassion or benevolence, than to the **outward act** of compassion. The word, with its derivatives occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament. It is the root of the name, John, which is really “*Yochanan*” and means “*Yahweh* is gracious.” It is a most significant name for the prophet who came to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. The word “grace,” as it is used in both Old and New Testaments, really signifies, “the free-flow of divine benevolence or compassion.” The common definition—“the unmerited favor of God”—misses the true flavor of the word. To define it thus is like giving someone a gift and then making sure that they understand how little they really deserve it. It is understood, of course, that a gift is a gift, and is not based upon anything that the receiver has done to earn it. It is not in keeping with the spirit of giving, however, to emphasize that point. Jesus never made an issue of this with the people to whom He ministered. The Greek word, *dorean*, frequently used in referring to Jesus’s ministry, emphasizes the free-flowing nature of His gifts. In all the miracles which Jesus performed we do not find any reference to the unworthiness of the recipient of His grace. The cripple at Bethesda was no exception.

So the throne of grace here in Hebrews 4 is truly a refuge of grace and mercy and not a place of privilege for the “pious God has never expressed confidence in the human capacity for perfection. Even as Christians, with spirits possessed by Christ, the flesh still—like James’ description of the tongue—is an “unruly vessel.” It is monstrous to give the impression (as many do) that God’s assistance for His beleaguered earthlings is based on one’s goodness or performance. Some would-be “expounders” of the scriptures, have used a verse in Isaiah (59:1) to support their thesis of piety and prayer. But to use the verse thus, violates all the rules of sound Bible interpretation (hermeneutics). The context is all important. Here, in Isaiah 59:1 the following verses are obviously addressed to Israel. The sins described are so heinous as to go quite beyond the simple frailties of the flesh. To use the passage as a description of wayward sinners is to utterly trivialize, the egregious apostasy and idolatry of Israel as well as to lay upon Christians grievous charges in keeping with the perfidious “accuser of the brethren.” There is no truth to the idea that God’s heart is closed to sinners. If we think we will ever be other than “sinners saved by grace,” we are laboring under an unfortunate, if not dangerous illusion.

So come to the throne of grace—to the Great Refuge. Come freely and confidently. Come humbly with your fears and failures and follies. Come expectantly, knowing that your Father is there to provide for you a “timely help.”

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