

Title: Bold I approach
Text: Hebrews 4.16
Theme: God's Throne is a throne of grace
Series: Hebrews #12
Prop Stmtt God commands us to draw near that we may know that he is merciful and so that we may experience his grace.

Read Text:

Have you ever noticed how some kids seem to see things that others miss, connect the dots and draw conclusions that belie their age? Annie Dillard strikes me as one who was like that. The American novelist relates an incident from her childhood when one cold Christmas Eve she and her family had come home from a late dinner out. Ginger ale and a plate of cookies sat on special table. Annie had taken off her winter coat and was warming herself on the heat register. Suddenly the front door opened and a person entered whom Annie never wanted to meet – Santa Claus! The family called to her, “Look who’s here! Look who’s here!” Little Annie ran upstairs. She explains that she feared Santa Claus as “an old man whom you never saw, but who nonetheless saw you. He knew when you’d been bad or good! And Annie said, “I had been bad.” Santa stood in the doorway, ringing the bell and shouting, “Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!” Santa meant no harm but Annie never came down to see him.

Later on Annie found out that this Santa was actually her neighbor Miss White, the old lady who lived across the street, who that night had dressed up as the legendary man. Miss White had never done anything to hurt Annie, in fact she had done a lot of things with her like finger painting and making her cookies. But that day, the idea that someone who knew all about her would simply appear in her house, was nothing short of terrifying.

Sigmund Freud is considered to be the father of modern psychiatry. He postulated that the reason people believe in God is not because he exists, but because people are so afraid of nature, meaning the uncontrollable forces of nature, that in order to be able to function in life without absolute terror of what may happen, humans have created a mythological God who in their minds can control the forces of nature, which gives to humans a feeling of relief. This way, they can at least be in a bargaining position with the power center. So, for example, if you want rain, or if you have too much rain and you want it to stop, you give the god some sacrifice or gift that he wants. Of course, this really has nothing to do with whether or not it rains, but at least the person derives some sense of comfort from the belief and practice. While there are some examples of this in Greek and Roman mythology and other pagan religions, Freud's theory does not hold up. Remember the reaction of the disciples to the power of Christ (in Mark 4) over the wind and the sea? When he commands nature and it obeys him, the disciples are not comforted and relieved; they are terrified to be in the presence of this power.

The disciples were not the only ones who were terrified in the presence of Christ. He was the ultimate conversation killer and party-stopper. He could see right through you. He

knew every motive behind every thought, every truth behind every word, every reason behind every expression. He was the shrink you could not fool, the judge with whom you could not bargain, the policeman you could not out-run. The world did not want this kind of King, so they killed him. And then he rose again.

We really do not know what to do with perfection – do we? The 4.0 student is resented because she destroys the curve. Kids are afraid of being rejected because they are “too good.” The hard-worker is hated because he reveals the laziness in others. The principled attorney is shunned because she won’t play politics and cut back room deals. On and on it goes. Our world hates perfection. It enjoys watching public lives imploding and revels in the details of ex-mayor, city-council member, golf-pro or whoever. We assume that everyone has their weakness and vulnerability that we can expose and exploit for our own purposes. Freud was wrong. We did not create God to give us comfort from nature; we hate that which is perfect and therefore are terrified of God as he really is, so we have created caricatures of him so that we don’t have to deal with the real him.

In the end of Revelation 6, John describes this scene in the future, “then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” It is not nature that terrifies them. It is God. And they cry to nature, to mountains and rocks to crush them because that is preferable than facing God. But it does not have to be. The very One who came to this earth, came in order to live the life that the first man, Adam was supposed to live, but who did not. Christ lived in his place. Christ lived in my place. Christ lived in your place. But his necessary and perfect living is what terrified so many and caused such great resentment that his own condemned him to die. And he died. But he died in my place. Because what they did deliberately, willingly, hatefully, intentionally and consequentially was still under the sovereign hand of God. As Peter said in Acts 7.28, they did willingly what God’s plan had predestined to take place. Though driven by resentment and terror of discovery, God ordained that Christ die in our place. In my place, condemned, he was sentenced. In my place condemned, he was hated and mocked and rejected and beaten. In my place condemned he died. Condemned not only by man, but condemned by his own Father so that the full penalty of our sin could be paid in full. In my place, condemned he stood, but, in so doing, he sealed my pardon with his blood – Hallelujah! What a Savior! The payment of our sin was accepted in full as evidenced by his resurrection. His exaltation as king and declaration as the Sovereign of the universe and the heir of all things is evidenced in his ascension and his installation at the right hand of the Father and now for me he stands, before the Father’s throne and shows his wounded hands and claims me as his own. Apart from the cross his righteousness is terrifying. But because of his love and death, his grace is absolutely overwhelming. So, he calls us. He commands us. – Come boldly with your needs.

Before we move on to chapter 5, I think that we need to stop for a time on verse 16. Chapter 5 formally begins the main point of this glorious book. From 5.1 to 10.18, it is like the Author of Hebrews pulls out a jack hammer and pounds these truths or the

glorious and joyous perfections of Christ upon us, and then pulls out a needle and sows them into our hearts. But 4.16 is like the launch pad for it. So, let's not miss what we really need the Spirit of God to massage into our souls.

1. God commands us draw near with confidence

The "then" relates back to Christ's ability to sympathize with our weaknesses. This is a point that is further developed in the next chapter. But, let me put try to plant this thought into the soil of your mind right now, with the hopes that the Spirit will water it and it will grow even during the message. When God provided you with a perfect Savior and Redeemer, he did so by providing you with a perfect helper and advocate all at the same time. What does that tell you about the heart of God for you? Are these the actions of a hunter baiting a trap in order to kill? Is this the call of a twisted and demented adult who entices and then crushes his victim? No, this command to come near is because he not only has what we need, he wants you to know it, experience it and enjoy it. But this is hard for us to grasp because we are so accustomed to people who we need to help us tell us to stop bothering them. I am convinced that when you call certain organizations, that when the recording says, "I'm sorry, all of our representatives are currently helping other customers, please stay on the line and we will be with you in the order that the call was received" that what they really mean is, "We have assigned two people that we hired yesterday from another part of the world, to handle the 1,476 daily calls that come in, who cannot understand you and you cannot understand them, which is why each call is going to take forever, but that's okay, because we know that after being on hold for 57 minutes you will hang up and not bother us anymore!"

The idea of confidence does not negate respect. A high-water mark for any attorney would be to be able to argue a case before the Supreme Court. Is that august and historical setting potentially intimidating? Absolutely! But, with respect, deference, and awareness of protocol, you go with intentionality and focus because of the responsibility that is set before you and because of the opportunity that you have. That is what confidence means. But why does God command us to come with confidence? Because you can believe him. Because of the cross. Because of where Christ is right now, and because of what Christ is doing for you, right now.

This command is in the present tense. We are to confidently draw near and to keep on drawing near, confidently. Now, what does it mean to draw near? The rest of the verse makes it clear that we draw near so that we can receive that which we need. In other words, God is commanding us to persistently and confidently come to him and ask him for what you need. Sometimes we think that we should take a break from asking God for anything and instead should only praise him. I've thought of that at times. I've wondered if my prayers are not selfish in that I keep asking God for my needs. And I've thought that it would be good, just to praise God instead of always asking God for something. And beloved, we clearly should praise God, but after looking at this text I am convinced that the only time that we should ever take a break from asking him for anything, is when we have become God and we don't need anything. Until then, recognize that he has commanded to you to boldly, persistently and confidently ask him because your asking is

a means by which he receives much glory! When we ask, we are admitting our need. When we ask, we are acknowledging his supply. When we ask, we are believing that he loves to give to his children, exactly what we need.

2. God's throne is the throne of grace.

Most of us have grown up here in America. We do not do very well with thrones (unless they are our own – of course). The last king we had, we dumped his tea into the Boston harbor. Therefore, we do not have an appreciation for the imagery here, like other people would. God's throne, which is in heaven, which is established forever, which is surrounded by cherubim, which is the nerve, brain, and power center of all that there is and has been and will ever be, is described by God as a throne of grace. Do you understand what means? The one who sits on the throne has power and authority that no one else in the room has. The one on the throne has, what everyone else needs. But, this throne is the throne of grace.

God rules (throne) on the basis of giving his children what we do not deserve. God sits on a throne that is marked by grace. So, put this together with the first point and we now realize that we cannot wear him out with our requests. You cannot exhaust him with your needs. He rules for that! Here are the facts: 1) You need help – desperately, more than you know. That is hard for some of you to admit; especially if you have money. You don't want to ask anybody for anything. But you need help. 2) But you don't deserve help. So, what are you going to do? God is commanding us to turn to him because his throne is the throne of grace. He specializes in helping people who do not deserve it and cannot afford it, and cannot earn it, and cannot pay it back.

Beloved, do not dishonor God by promising to pay him back. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever helped your child with some project and they tried to pay you? On the one hand, they may want to let you know that they are not trying to take advantage of you, but on the other hand, it crushes my heart. I wonder, if they are not yet convinced of how much I love them that I would do anything for them and when you try to attach a dollar value to it, it cheapens it. Can you ever pay God back? No! That is the beauty and the stumbling block of our salvation. Accept it! Trust Him! Enjoy it. Revel in it! Find your joy in it. But do not try to pay him back. 1) You can't and 2) It would cheapen the greatest gift.

3. God is our source of mercy and grace.

Mercy and grace are often tied together. Mercy emphasizes God, not giving us what we deserve, and grace emphasizes God giving us what we don't deserve. Mercy, therefore, focuses on assuring us that our past sins have been taken care of, and grace focuses on the fact that God continues to give us strength to persevere because he has already credited us with the righteousness of Christ. What is more, I think that it is worth noting and reminding you that in our study of the Tabernacle, in Exodus, that the throne that God sat upon in the Holy of Holies was called (what?) the Mercy Seat. The throne he sits on in heaven is called the Throne of Grace. While the two are related, I think that we are seeing

a subtle but important distinction of a truth that is unpacked later in this book. The OT sacrifices could not permanently remove sin, but could only postpone the punishment. That is, the OT sacrifices postponed the punishment and enabled God to be merciful to his people, by not giving them what they deserved. The OT sacrifices did not pay the debt, they only made interest payments (if you know what I mean). With the interest payments being made, the foreclosure was held off. Hence, his throne in the OT tabernacle was the Mercy Seat. But when Christ, the great high priest offered the greatest sacrifice for sin by offering himself in our place, that means that he fulfilled all of the thousands upon thousands of sacrifices that had been offered and he once, and forever, and permanently, and perfectly, and sufficiently, and finally, and infinitely satisfied God's wrath against sin so that the Mercy Seat, which reflected the withholding of punishment is now the Throne of Grace, which is the giving to us that which we do not deserve.

Do you see how the gospel motivates us to run to Christ? He is the champion of mercy and grace. He is the source of it and God is very liberal with mercy and grace. So, right now – what do you need? I did not say, “What do you want?” What do you need? Do you need forgiveness? Do you need to repent? Do you need resolve? Do you need hope? Do you need to forgive? Do you need humility? Do you need strength? Do you need joy? Do you need faith? All of these are gifts of his grace – ask Him!

4. God's supply is always timed to our need.

The last phrase of v.16 is translated, “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” A literal translation of this would be, “that we may receive mercy and find grace in a timely need” or “in a well-timed need.”

It is a wonderful expression that reminds us that God's supply of mercy and grace matches our need, God's supply shows up right on time, and the timing of your need is part of God's plan. That is why you need to come to him boldly. He timed your need to be met with his grace. So, his grace is a well-timed help and his grace helps in our time of need. Both of those aspects are present in this phrase. The one underscores our need and the other underscores God's timing. God is infinitely more concerned about you look like Christ than he is about your relief from stress. The truth is, we live in a constant state of need. You and I cannot move one single inch for God, apart from his help. We cannot accomplish anything of eternal significance without his empowering. I need help to preach, you need help to listen. I need help to understand, help to obey, help to love, help to think about others, help to consider it joy when I am tested, help to react with joy when I am inconvenienced for the sake of another, help to be content when I suffer loss, help to be at rest when my circumstances are upside down, help to not give in to temptation, and help to press on as a pilgrim.

In the next few weeks we are going to dig deeper into this truth and find even more reasons why our hope in Christ is so wondrously secure. In the meantime, it is comfort enough to know that God has not only provided for our needs, he has provided us with our needs that we might know his mercy and grace like never before.

Beloved, this issue, perhaps more than any other reveals our heart. If I love God only because of the benefits, then there is no attraction to this promise of learning and experiencing his mercy and grace. If I love God only for what I can get out of him, then knowing him as merciful and enjoying him as grace is useless. I just want my health status fixed. I just want my employment picture resolved. I just want... Maybe you need to sit still and know that he is God, that his throne is grace and that you will receive mercy and find grace until come and ask for it.

God's wrath reveals his power, and in that he receives glory. But God's grace reveals his heart and in that he rejoices. He is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in him. We are most satisfied in him, when we are most dependent on him. When we are most dependent upon him, we are then, most complete in him. Being complete and confident and at rest in Him by resting on Him, we can Press On with Joy! Press on Pilgrim...Press On!