

HEBREWS: REPLACING MAN'S RITUALISM WITH CHRIST
"Part VI: Trusting Christ's Empathy Over Resorting To Ritual Prayers"
(Hebrews 4:14-16)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

A few sermons back in this series on Hebrews, we discovered that using novenas in the newspaper, saying some "Our Fathers" or "Hail Marys" or some other ritual was not what impressed God. God is already impressed with **Jesus**, so we should pray through **Jesus**.

However, does Jesus really UNDERSTAND our needs and is He really WANTING them to be met? Consider the following concerns expressed by people who wonder about praying effectiveness:

(1) I heard a woman once share she used to pray to Mary instead of Jesus because Mary was a **woman**, and she felt a **woman** would better understand her needs than would Jesus who is a **man**!

(2) In the illustrations I used of the novenas that were placed in the newspaper, each of them are **motivated** out of a concern to **get God to CARE** so as to **ACT** for one's help:

(a) One novena said, "ask for 3 wishes, and then for the **impossible**", implying the one praying is desperate enough to want a miracle to happen on an issue!

(b) Another urges one to ask God to "**succor** me in my necessity", an archaic English word that one rarely uses in candid, everyday life! The impression gained from the novenas author is that if you improve your vocabulary, God might be more inclined to answer your prayer simply because He prefers educated prayers!

(3) I have often heard fellow Christians say something like, "If we can get as **many** people praying for this need as possible, maybe **then** the Lord will **answer** us!" This statement suggests that God is moved by majority opinion regardless if James 5:16 claims the prayer of a single righteous man is powerful and effective (NIV).

Though we have learned that God the Father is impressed with Jesus who intercedes for us, IS Jesus HIMSELF fully UNDERSTANDING and CARING so as to approach the Father effectively with our concerns?

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "I know we learned from Hebrews 2:17-3:6 that we do not need to use novenas or other rituals to pray for God's help since God is already impressed with Jesus' prayers for us. But, how **WELL** does **JESUS KNOW** and **WANT** to pray for what concerns me?!"

- I. **Recalling his former teaching in Hebrews 2:17-3:6 (dealt with in sermon III in this series) on how impressed God the Father is with Jesus who intercedes for us, the author of Hebrews urges us Christians to hold fast to our faith in Christ, Hebrews 4:14.**
- II. **Nevertheless, aware that we might think that Jesus MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND or MIGHT NOT CARE to talk EFFECTIVELY to the Father about our needs, the author of Hebrews reveals how very EMPATHETIC is Jesus in His prayers FOR us, Heb. 4:15:**
 - A. Jesus can only empathize with whatever bothers the Christian, 4:15a:
 1. Hebrews 4:15a says we do not have a High Priest in Jesus who is not able to **empathize**, or feel **along WITH us** our life's trials.
 - a. The **single** Greek word for the KJV **phrase** "touched with the feeling" and the NIV word "sympathize" is **sumpathaysai**, and it was used by the Greek classics since Isocrates to express "the **feeling** of one who **enters INTO** the suffering and **makes** it his **OWN**," B. F. Westcott, Hebrews, p. 107.
 - b. This empathy of Jesus is illustrated in Acts 9:4: referring to Saul's persecution of Christ's followers, Jesus asked Saul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou **me**?"
 2. Thus, along with the believer, Jesus actually feels what bothers him!
 - B. Just **how** this divine **empathy** can occur is explained in Heb. 4:15b:
 1. Before gaining His risen, glorified body, Jesus experienced the full range of human weaknesses that we believers all suffer today:
 - a. The author of Hebrews explains Jesus' ability to empathize with the believers' trials by referring to His pre-cross temptations, 15c
 - b. At that time, Jesus dwelt in an unglorified body and suffered hunger (Mtt. 4:1-2), thirst (John 19:28), fatigue (Mk. 4:38), grief (John 11:35), poverty (Mtt. 8:20), distrust from family (Mk. 3:21, 31-32 NIV) and many other typically human trials.
 2. Accordingly, He faced Satan's temptations in all points as we, 15b:
 - a. When man sins, he heeds either the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the pride of this earthly life, cf. Gen. 3:6; 1 Jn. 2:16.

- b. Jesus was tempted in all of these areas: (a) He faced the lust of the flesh when tempted to turn stones into bread while hungry, Mtt. 4:1-3; (b) He faced the lust of the eyes when tempted to throw Himself off of the temple pinnacle and land unharmed before adoring crowds, Mtt. 4:5-6 and (c) He faced the pride of life when tempted to bow to Satan to gain the world, Mtt. 4:8-9.
 - c. Yet, Jesus, **unlike us sinners**, overcame the full brunt of all temptations to remain sinless, Heb. 4:15c with Romans 3:23.
3. Since none but the One Who overcame all temptation fully knows its pressure (B.K.C., N.T., p. 790), and since Jesus overcame all temptation in His earthly life, Jesus is able to **empathize** with us believers in our trials of life more than any other being can do!

III. **Thus, we should take full advantage of Christ's great EMPATHY to PRAY CANDIDLY for HELP just WHENEVER we need it!**

- A. Verse 16 is a call for Christians to **pray** for God's **help** in their **trials**!
 1. The KJV's "come" (the NIV's "approach") comes from the Greek Testament's *proserchomai*, and in such a context it means one who comes to a **deity** (Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Engl. Lex., p. 720).
 2. The KJV and NIV use "need" for the Greek text's *boaytheian*, and this word always appears in *petitions* in Greek literature, Moulton & Millard, Voc. of the Grk. N. T., p. 113; UBS Grk. N.T., p. 755.
- B. Well, the **kind** of prayer the author of Hebrews suggests we make are petitions in times of intense personal need in trials, Hebrews 4:16b:
 1. Both the KJV and NIV refer to a "time" of need in verse 16b, an idea coming from the Greek word *eukairon*, Ibid., UBS Grk. N.T.
 2. That word means "well-timed," Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 321.
 3. Hence, the author of Hebrews urges us to approach God's sovereign throne in heaven in **prayer** to find forgiveness and God's gracious supply for us to meet trials and temptations **as they arise**.
- C. Also, v. 16c tells us to pray "boldly" (KJV) or "confidently" (NIV), and the Greek word for this idea, *parraysias* means **straightforward** (Ibid., p. 635); since Jesus **empathizes** with us, we can **afford** to be -- and we really **should** be -- **open** with God in our prayers for help!

Lesson Application: *To touch the heart of God regarding a burden we desire to be met, (1) believe on Christ so He can become our Savior and High Priest, John 3:16; Heb. 4:14. (2) Then, realize that Jesus is (a) MORE than highly respected by the Father, but also (b) fully empathetic with all our trials of this life, and the weaknesses we bear in facing them. Accordingly, (3) PRAY for help (4) WHEN the trial FIRST arises, and be (5) CANDID about it, for Jesus DEEPLY FEELS the burden WE FEEL and so can intercede for us!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Experiencing God, we read an illustration by Henry Blackaby on how he saw God fulfill a need in the nick of time through answered prayer (p. 56).

Henry reported that when his mission church, the Faith Baptist Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada prayerfully decided to call Jack Conner to be its first pastor, the congregation had no money for moving expenses and for a salary to pay Jack to move up from America. Except for a few people in California, Henry said he didn't know anybody who could help them out financially. Anyway, the church felt that since Jack had three children in school, they ought to pledge to pay him at least \$850 a month in salary.

By faith, Jack started his move in passing immigration so he could leave for Canada, and began to drive toward Prince Albert.

While Jack was **on the way**, Henry received a letter from the First Baptist Church of Fayetteville, Arkansas. This Church had somehow heard of the need at Henry's Church in Canada, and had written, "God has laid it on our heart to send one percent of our mission giving to Saskatchewan missions. We are sending a check to use however you choose." The enclosed check amounted to \$1,100.00.

Later, Henry received a telephone call at home. Someone had called to pledge to give toward Jack's salary, and it completed the \$850 list of pledges for the first year needed for Jack Conner's salary.

Just as Henry got off of the phone with this final pledge donor, Jack Conner drove into Henry's driveway, having arrived to pastor the Church in Prince Albert.

In talking with Jack at that time, Henry asked Jack how much it had cost for him to move to Prince Albert.

Jack replied, "Well, Henry, as best I can tell, it cost \$1,100.00."

God is available to meet our needs that are within His will, and he desires to do just that WHEN we need His help! It does not take a lot of ritualistic phrasings or words, but just a clear, candid prayer in God's will and from the heart! Jesus EMPATHIZES with our needs and WILL address them ardently! All we need to do is go ahead and candidly PRAY!