

**Hebrews 4:14-16**

**August 7, 2013**

**2 Cor. 5:21**

**A High Ranking Friend**

Many years ago, newspaper columnist Mike Royko wrote about clout in Chicago city politics. He said everyone from Chicago knows what clout is. It's what makes the city tick. Clout is what you have if you can call city hall and make a parking ticket disappear. Or to use Royko's examples, a Chicago police officer might have enough clout with a ward boss to get a promotion to sergeant. The ward boss might have enough clout with the mayor to get a sweetheart contract for his brother-in-law. And the mayor might have enough clout with the White House to get an extra \$10 million in pork barrel money for the city. That's clout. It's a grand old Chicago word. I think people in Bakersfield have some understanding of clout. We have the Bill Thomas regional airport – thanks to former congressman Bill Thomas' clout in D.C.

But we also understand that political influence too often translates into big profits for political class, and their large donors, rather than true service for the people. We've also seen how the law is unequally applied to lawbreakers of the political, social, and entertainment elite. It happens in other countries; I saw it in Tonga. I'm pretty sure it happens in Sacramento and probably even here in Kern County.

With the right connections, with special relationships you can influence people and events around you. How much, how many, how far, all depends upon the extent of your connections. Yes, a lot of what may happen in your life does depend on who you know. How much influence do you have?

**Influence can mean power.** Most of us here live above the poverty line in this society. But we're still below the power line when it comes to many things. Not many of us have great influence beyond our families, our work places, our church, or other organizations we belong to. We hope we can influence our children... or at least that our dog will mind us. ...think of what you were when you were called. ***Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth... 1 Cor. 1:26.***

We're not the ones who can make phone calls that change tax policy, or a country's foreign policy, or get someone a cushy, well-paid job. We're not likely the ones who direct decision-making at a fortune 500 company, or persuade a business to move its headquarters to Bakersfield. But we understand that connections to people in high places can make a difference in our lives.

We all need help from time to time. Maybe we can't get a job interview, or we can't get in to see the doctor, or we need some help at city hall, or social security, etc. We need someone who can cut through the red tape and help us when we can't help ourselves. Yet even when you find yourself bereft of such help there's still good news for you. **The Bible tells us that Jesus is our friend in**

high places – **in the highest place.** Even when things don't work out for us, He can make something good come of it.

When we sing that old hymn, **"What A Friend We Have In Jesus,"** we're singing just what the Bible tells us in **Hebrews 4:14-16.** Jesus is the friend we need because He is **the Right Person with the Right Past in the Right Place.** Because of Jesus we've got influence in heaven.

### **The Right Person**

***Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, Hebrews 4:14.***

If we don't have a clear notion of what a high priest is we may not understand this verse. The high priest was the number one person in the ancient Hebrew religious system. There were levels and orders of priests in Judaism, but there was only one high priest. His main job was to represent the nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement. On that day he would go into the Jerusalem Temple and step behind the thick curtain into the Most Holy Place. There he would offer the blood of a goat on the golden Mercy Seat that sat atop the Ark of the Covenant. When the blood was offered in the way God prescribed, the sins of the people were atoned for or covered for another year (You can read about this in Leviticus 16).

The high priest had to repeat the sacrifice year after year. When the high priest died, a new one continued the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

But Christ replaced that sacrificial system. Christ has become our great high priest who has passed through the heavens into the sanctuary of God. Unlike the sacrifices of the Old Testament high priests, **Christ's sacrifice never needs to be repeated.** Through his death on the cross, He made a complete and final atonement for our sins.

***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, 2 Cor. 5:21. We are accepted by God because of what Jesus Christ has done.*** The same Jesus who once walked on the earth is now in heaven, having opened the way to God by His own eternal sacrifice. He is the right person to hear our prayers because He has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven.

### **The Right Past**

Jesus is also the right One because of His personal history ***... we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin, Hebrews 4:15.***

The King James Version of the Bible says here that Jesus is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." There's a world of difference between someone

who says to us in our pain, or failure, “I feel your pain,” and the person who, having been through a similar time says, “I know where you’re coming from. If there is anything I can do, let me know.” **Jesus is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.** He is moved by our sorrow, aware of our tears, sees our weakness, and touched by our failure. He was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” and He truly knows what we are going through.

They say that “Opportunity only knocks once, but temptation bangs on the door everyday!” You and I face temptations all the time. The Bible reminds us, ***For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world, 1 John 2:16.***

**How assuring it is to know that Jesus was tempted just as we are.** The devil tempted Him to use His status as Son of God for His own personal gain (Matt. 4:1-11). He was tempted by materialism, fame, power, and desire to control others. Just before His sacrifice on the cross for us, He was tempted once again. This time to cowardice – to run away from God’s call... He didn’t fail.

**Where we give in, He stands strong.** Where we collapse under pressure, Jesus obeys His heavenly Father. He was tempted, yet He never sinned by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. Only those who try to resist temptation know just how strong it is. A person who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. When we give in too early, we never feel the full force of temptation. Jesus let the waves of temptation rush over Him and stood like the Rock of Gibraltar. Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows fully what temptation means (see C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 142).

Because of this, we may be sure that He is never surprised by anything we say or do. **When we pray, we don’t have to worry that we will somehow shock Him.** He’s heard it all and seen it all. We can be totally honest about our failures because He knows about it even before we tell him. With Him our wrong past can become the right past as we resist that temptation when it comes along again and as we help someone through tough times.

### **The Right Place**

***Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need, Hebrews 4:16.***

Many people think of God’s throne is like the principal’s office at school. Were you ever called to the principal’s office? It usually meant you were in trouble. Some students went in to the principal’s office were never seen again! That’s how many of us think of God’s throne because we have a vision of an angry God who is looking for a chance to hurl a lightning bolt at us. But it is not true.

**Because of Jesus, the throne of God's justice is now a throne of grace.** When we pray, we are invited to come to the "throne of grace." When we come before that throne in Jesus' name, we will not be turned away. He's in the right place at the right time for us! ***In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence, Ephesians 3:12.***

I heard about a guy who got a card from the National Hockey League that admits him free of charge to every arena in the NHL. All he has to do is show the card and he gets free VIP parking, free admittance to the special entrance for players and management, and the right to enter otherwise restricted areas. The card gets him in free and gives him special privileges, but it does him no good unless he uses it. If he wants to, he can still pay for parking and still pay for his ticket and still sit with the general public. The card has to be used boldly in order to do him any good. Otherwise, the privileges that are his will go unused.

**God has given to every Christian a card that says "Admit to the Throne Room of Heaven."** The card is stamped with the blood of Jesus Christ. But that card does you no good unless you use it boldly when you pray.

What this means is we don't have to prove ourselves worthy when we pray. When we come before God in prayer, we don't have to be ashamed of what we've done or not done, or act bashful or watch our words lest we say something wrong. We are accepted by God only on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done. ***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1.***

To believe otherwise is to deny the gospel itself. None of the tattered rags of our "good deeds" will get us in. And none of our mistakes will keep us out. It is either all by grace or not by grace at all.

**We can come to God just the way we are,** clinging only to the cross and **claiming nothing but the blood of Jesus** as our own hope of being accepted when we pray.

### **Lord, Have Mercy**

***... so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need, Hebrews 4:16.*** Sometimes when our lives are so full of stuff and all jumbled up the best we can do is to pray, "Lord, have mercy. God, have mercy. Jesus, have mercy." ... God offers mercy. In Him we find "grace to help in our time of need." Or as the Greek says, "grace for timely help." **God gives us the grace we need but not until we truly need it;** not too soon and not too late. God's answers are always perfectly timed.

It's a wonderful thing to feel complete freedom to come into God's presence. It's like a small child that can walk right up to Mom or Dad even when they are in front of a gathering. That's the confidence that all of us can have when we pray.

**It's good news for all of us: we've got a friend in high places- as high as heaven. We've got a friend at the throne of grace who is ready to vouch for us. He's the Right Person in the Right Place.**

**Because He's been through it, He can sympathize with what you're going through right now. Nothing you say will surprise Him. So come boldly. Come often. Come to the throne of grace and pour out your heart to God. You will find mercy and help just in time.**

***Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need, Hebrews 4:16.***