

Bon Air Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia
Rev. James Pardue, Pastor

November 9, 1997

Sermon: "Our Friend on the Throne"

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-13

There are inspirations and there are heroes in life. Several stories have recently come out of the New York marathon that illustrate that point. One man completed the marathon in a wheel chair, pushing himself for the twenty-six miles; but he had to push at a certain speed because he held the rope of a blind man who was following him and being guided by him. Usually the marathon is won in about two hours and thirty minutes, but one man took two days and four hours to complete the course, but then he didn't have any legs and he completed it on his hands.

We all know people like that who inspire us to do better; but we also know people with great ability and wonderful opportunities who fail to use them. They are the people who turn back when difficulties come and problems arise. They will have written as an epitaph upon their life: "Here was a person of unfilled potential." I look at people in their Christian lives and I literally yearn for them for the Lord. I see what they could be, I see what they ought to be; and I know them for what they are. I recognize that these are the people who could make a contribution in their families, a contribution in their communities and churches, who could really turn circumstances around; and yet they are content not to become all that God meant them to be. So this morning I want to speak especially to those of you who feel that you are one of those unfulfilled, potential people. Or you are one of those individuals who have started out on the journey, run into difficulty, and then decided to stop, or to turn around and go back. I need to tell you that in your Christian experience you never just stop and remain the same, that when you stop you will find that you start regressing. If that is true in your life, then this passage of Scripture is especially relevant for you today.

The illustration this passage of Scripture uses is of the people of Israel as they leave Egypt and go toward the promised land. Those of us who know the story know that these were people who almost made it. They could get to where they could see the promised land; but then they stopped, turned around, and went back into the wilderness. Using that illustration, our passage of Scripture is written to challenge you so that you won't stop and turn around, but will move on and become all that God wants you to be. Our passage of Scripture is in the book of Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 14. *"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 possess."* Here is someone with the faith in his hands, and Paul says, "I want you to hold on to it, don't drop it, don't stop." *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has*

been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. 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."

People have often compared the Christian life with the movement of the Jewish people from Egypt to Palestine. There are really *three very distinct sections*. The *first* section is to be in Egypt; and to be in Egypt for the Jewish people meant that they were in slavery. We recognize that before we came to Jesus Christ we were in slavery ourselves. We were unable to control our own emotions, to determine our own destiny, to decide what we were going to be. There were forces that were pulling us down and pulling us back so that we were simply unable to become all that we were meant to be. *The great danger is that the further we are away from God the more we feel like we can take care of ourselves*. We feel that if we work hard enough and strive hard enough and just give it our very best, somehow we are going to be able to work through all of our difficulties and all of our problems. The further we are away the more self confident we become. That is our danger. A friend of mine, David Brown, likes to fish. One cold, blustery day he decided to go fishing and had to put on extra clothes because it was so cold. He looked and saw a thunderstorm coming and realized he needed to get off the lake. When he started his small boat to go back to the bank, it kicked up and a gust of wind hit it and throw him into the water. David had been in the water many times, he was an excellent swimmer, and he decided to start swimming toward the bank. However, he had never been in the water when it was so cold, and he had never been in the water when he had so many clothes on. Fortunately, his next door neighbor at the camp, who was recovering from a heart attack, was sitting out on his porch and noticed David's accident. He went down and got into his boat to try to be of help to David. When David woke up in the hospital his friend was standing beside him. His friend said, "David, I was the one who got you to the hospital." David looked at him and said "Man, you are just recovering from a heart attack. I didn't mean for you to come down there. I was swimming along, I could have made it to the bank." His friend said, "When I pulled you out of the water I reached a full arm's length. That is how far down you were." David thought he was in complete charge, he could make it. What he didn't know was that he was already two feet under and getting ready to drown.

Before we come to Christ, are two feet under but we keep thinking we can make it. Just give us enough time, we will pull it out and we will do it. You need to understand that part of your experience is that you are in Egypt, and Egypt doesn't let you out without paying a great price. But the wonderful, good news I want to tell you is that those people were freed from Egypt not because of anything that they did; it was done by the act of God. They were released, and they started on their journeys.

Section number two is to walk on the way to the Promised Land. The Christian life is a journey, it is a destination. God has His hand on you to help you become what He wants you to be; and it is going through that wilderness to finally become what God has in mind for you. I need to remind you that God has a dream for you. God has a hope for you, and He wants you to get to a certain place to become what He wants you to be. Part

of that *becoming* is the journey. In the journey, you have to start putting behind you what you were, building a relationship with God, and then having the hope and the dream of becoming all that God wants you to be.

Now *the third part is that finally you will get to the promised land, and in that promised land you begin to receive the full blessings of God.* That is when you are sustained and strengthened to be of service to other people. But the tragedy is many people get out of Egypt and never make it to Palestine. What they are doing is still wandering around in their wilderness. Some of them get close. They can almost see where they need to be, but they turn around and go back. Unfulfilled potential. Is that you? Are you still heading toward your promised land or have you turned around and gone back? Maybe there is a problem, a temptation, a failure, or maybe the journey demands too much. I don't know why, but you have turned around and you have gone back. So somehow I want you to sense the challenge in this Scripture and start on your journey again.

I found it fascinating to ask myself the question: if you had to say something to a person in that situation, what would you say? Listen to what the writer of Hebrews said. *“If you are in that situation you need an enlarged vision of Jesus Christ.”* The first thing we humans ever made were idols. An idol is a small replica of the real thing. One of the things that we always do is try to reduce God in size. The problem that all of us have is that instead of catching an enlarged vision of God, we keep shrinking God down to our size. There was a movie a few years ago with a fascinating title, “Momma, I shrank the kids.” Guess what? You and I keep on shrinking God; and if you don't have a God who is majestic, who is awesome, a God you are constantly learning about, then you don't have a God who can challenge you. Listen to how Paul said it. He did not go back and talk about Jesus as he was or used to be. He talked about *Jesus as He now is*; and what I want you to see is the Christ who is now in the very throne room of heaven.

You will never get a good view of Jesus and understand Him unless you *understand Him in His three ways.* You have to understand Him *before He came to the earth.* You see, Jesus didn't begin as a baby in Bethlehem. Jesus was the eternal Son of God who always was with the Father; and what makes Bethlehem so significant is that it was part of God who came to the earth. *The God who always was.* You have to look way back into eternity to begin to understand who Jesus is; and then you need to see Him *as He lived on earth, the model man.* The man who was always right with God and who taught us the truth. Notice this passage of Scripture. You won't understand Him all unless you see Him *as He now is.* What is He now? This passage of Scripture says He is *your great High Priest. He is gone through the heavens, the Son of God, and He is at the right hand of the Father.*

Since you and I don't have human priests, let me remind you what a priest is. A priest is a person who speaks to God for the people. In Latin the word is *pontifex, bridge builder.* Visualize a man with his hand on God and his hand on people, the conduit between the two. He is your great High Priest. *You can't turn away from Him because He*

is the one who connects you to God. I want you to recognize that He is there. With all of your hurts, needs and problems, He is the one who is talking to God for you. If you turn away, who is going to be in His place? No one. Don't turn. *Catch a vision of He Who Is Standing As Your Great Priest.*

Queen Victoria was a young girl when she was elected Queen of England. I am told she lived a very sheltered life and did not know how to be a queen, with all the protocol involved. She went through months of training to know how to act on the day of her coronation. As part of her coronation a great choir sang part of Handel's *Messiah*, the *Alleluia Chorus*. That is what our choir is going to sing at Christmas. When they got to the section where it says, "King of King and Lord of Lords," she stood, even though part of a queen's protocol was not to stand up in public. With her face turned toward heaven she began to weep when she recognized the greatness of the Christ whom she served.

All of us are going to find ourselves turning away, turning back and letting loose unless we have an expanding vision of the *great Christ who came to save us*.

There is a second thing he told us. There are so many of us who feel we just got lost in the shuffle. God is in the business of running this whole universe, and there are six billion people on the face of the earth. Sometimes we think, "He doesn't have time for me, He doesn't know my hurts, He doesn't know my problems, He doesn't know anything about me." One of the problems we always feel is a sense of insignificance. I remember a man who told me, "I feel so bad about myself, they don't even ask me to lead in silent prayer." He felt like he was a nobody. That came up in politics this week: forty-three percent of Virginians didn't feel their vote was important enough for them to go to the poll and vote. What were they saying is: it doesn't make any difference what I do. Most of us go through life feeling the way some of you sitting here in church this morning feel. What we are saying is, "God, I have all of these needs and I have all of these problems and you don't even know." Do you remember that in the New Testament it says that when the anti-Christ comes, he is going to give you a number. Take a number and wait. But I want to tell that in Jesus Christ you have a name. He gives you a name. He knows you, He cares for you and He has been through everything you have been through, and if you say, "Lord, here I am," He replies, "I know you and I understand."

You have been waiting for somebody to understand you and sympathize with you. I want to tell you Jesus does. I read a beautiful story not long ago about Ron Smith. Ron was a helicopter pilot shot down in May of 1957 in Vietnam. He said when he woke up he was lying out in a rice paddy and the pain was so intense he just passed out and woke up in a hospital about a week later. When he pulled the sheet down, he realized his legs were gone. He spent nearly a year going through all kinds of operations, therapy and learning how to walk with a prosthesis. Ron and his wife never had any children and a couple of years ago they began to hear about children in Eastern Europe who didn't have any parents. They decided they would try to adopt some children from Eastern Europe. When they received the information they received a picture of twin boys, and the little note said, "No one wants these boys; we are having a hard time getting them adopted."

Ron read on down and the reason nobody wanted them was because they were born without any legs. Ron and his wife made arrangements, went to Eastern Europe, stood in a run-down hospital, and saw the little boys pushing themselves on their arms--the country was too poor to provide them any kind of prostheses. As they were pushing themselves across the room Ron opened the door and walked in, sat down with the boys, took off his legs, and said to them, "I understand, I understand." He let the boys feel his legs, feel his stumps, and then he turned to them and said, "I want to take you back to America, I want to get you legs like these, I want you to know I understand." Ron put his arms around the boys and said, "You are part of my family because you are just like me."

I want to tell you Jesus walks on prosthesis. He knows where you hurt. He knows how to be with you. When you feel left out and nobody understands, there is One who does. He has been through everything you have.

Notice the *third* challenge. He said *He wants you to see where He is seated and what He is doing*. Some of us think that He is seated on a throne saying, "You are not doing enough, you have to do more, why did you do that?" We feel like somehow He is the angry Christ who is always demanding that we do more. *But He is on the throne of grace and He is there to give you mercy which you do not deserve and grace far more than you deserve. He is there to provide all of your needs in your time of distress.*

My! You turned away from Him, and here He is trying to give you everything you need to make it through life. So, let me ask you: why did you stop? Why--when you were on the journey and becoming what God wanted you to be—did you turn around and go back into the wilderness? Is it because you did not understand this wonderful Christ; you did not understand that He cares for you; you did not understand He is seated on the throne of grace? Why did you turn back? After the first service this morning one of the men came up to me and said, "I have been walking in the wilderness for ten years and I so need to come back." I want to tell you there is a promised land, I want to tell you there is more than you ever dreamed or hoped. I want to tell you that you will get sick and tired of being in the wilderness. I want to tell you that in the wilderness you are going to lose your joy and your happiness. I want to tell you that God wants to bless you far beyond what you can faintly comprehend. I want to tell you that you that in the wilderness you are never going to be the servant--which is the joy of the Christian life--helping others. So I want to ask you if you want to start your journey again.

A little boy had a school holiday and he asked his dad if he could go to work with him that day. His Dad said yes. His dad ran a service station. It began to rain that day so the little boy had to stay inside, but he looked through the plate glass of the service station and he said, "Look, Daddy, there is a rainbow." He went running outside, looked up in the sky, and said, "Look, Daddy, the rainbow is gone." Then he began to notice the puddles of water around his dad's service station. You have seen how when oil gets mixed with water, it looks like different colors in the water. The little boy said, "Daddy, the rainbow is gone; it fell out of the sky, and now the rainbow is lying on the ground." Some of you saw the rainbow and you headed toward it, claimed the promises of God for

your life; and now it has fallen somehow, and for you it is just lying on the ground. Oh, could you look up again, could you sense what God has for you, what He wants to provide for you? Could you not say today, "Oh, dear God, today, tired of my wilderness, I want to start my journey again."