

The Continuing Work of Jesus

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Date: 11 April 2021

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[0 : 00] May the truth of the gospel bury itself deep in our souls. And may you be glorified through it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated.

Well, if you've been with us the last few weeks, we know that we have been going through a short Easter series. And as we move past Easter, we will be returning to our study of 1 Peter that James will resume next week.

But today we're actually going to focus on a short passage from 1 John. 1 John chapter 2, verses 1 through 2. Now, what do you feel, what are your feelings when you come home after a long day of work?

What's your normal routine when you come home from work? Are you exhausted? You just kind of plop on the couch? I guess the idea of us actually coming home from work may be a foreign concept in this past year.

As many of us are actually working from home. So maybe you just leave your home office or a bedroom and you come downstairs. If you're like me, you may just go to the kitchen and stare in the refrigerator for a few minutes.

[1 : 07] What about kids? What do you do to rest when you come home from school? Do you sit and watch television? Do you get a snack and you go outside and play? What about university students?

Especially as we think about the end of the year. And we think about the final exams that we have and the papers that we have to finish. How great that feeling is when we can rest and know that we're done with our work at the end of the term.

Well, last week we focused on Jesus' resurrection and ascension. And so after all that we know Jesus was put through, we may think that like us, Jesus just needed to rest and recuperate.

That he just went back up to heaven. He sat down at the right hand of God the Father and he just went, whew. Glad that's over. That was a pretty tough 30-some years, especially that last part.

So you may think that Jesus can kind of just put up his feet and rest for a few thousand years until he finally decides to come back. Maybe you picture him as kind of just handing off the baton to the Holy Spirit and saying, It's your turn now. My work is done.

[2 : 15] But that certainly is not the case. And that's not what we're going to see in this passage today. We're going to see the continuing work of Christ. Even though he is no longer with us in the flesh, he continues to work for us.

He continues to love us and care for us. And we'll see this in 1 John 2, verses 1 and 2. So let's read that together now. My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins. And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

This is the Word of God. So as we start to think of the continuing work of Jesus, it's important maybe to recap what we know of Jesus' earthly ministry that we focused on these last few weeks.

Obviously, we know that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. He was fully God, yet fully man. He lived a sinless life. He was without sin. He was perfect in fulfilling the law that we couldn't.

[3 : 20] We know that he went to the cross. And there he experienced the full wrath of God. And it was his blood that was given out for the forgiveness of our sins. We know that after his death, he was buried.

He spent three days in the grave before he resurrected and ascended to the Father. And so, as we're going to look at this passage and some other passages today, and thinking about what happened after that ascension, it's actually maybe helpful to look at a particular catechism.

We know that catechisms can be useful as they can summarize our beliefs and our doctrine. So one that actually stood out to me was the Heidelberg Catechism, question number 46. And I want to read that for us now.

This is what it says. How are we to understand the words, He ascended into heaven? Here's the answer. That Christ, in sight of his disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven, and that he continues there for our interest until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

Did you catch that part? Christ is in heaven for our interest. And we see that this is certainly something that we can look at further in this passage.

[4 : 38] That Christ is in heaven, His redemption. Our redemption is secure, obviously, but He continues to work for us. And so what we see in this passage is really two ways in which Christ works for us.

One, He serves as our advocate. And the second, He serves as our propitiation. And so let's look first at Christ as our advocate.

That word that's used in this passage in 1 John 2, it really means to come alongside. And it's a word that's not used very much in the New Testament. In fact, it's only John who uses this word, and the only other time where he uses it is in his gospel, when Jesus is talking with His disciples during the Last Supper.

And He says to His disciples, He says, I am going away, but I'm going to send you another advocate. And so we know that if He's saying, I'm going to send you another advocate, that He Himself is considering Himself an advocate.

And it's interesting because in John 14, that's usually not, it's not translated as advocate. In the ESV, it says He's our comforter. In NIV, it says our counselor.

[5 : 48] But here in 1 John 2, Christ is our advocate. And that's important because this word advocate actually has legal implications to it.

And so when we think of Christ as our advocate, we're literally saying that Christ is our lawyer. Now, for those who don't know a lot about my background, after I graduated university, I then went off to law school.

So education system is a little different here. When you complete university in the States, then you go to law school, which is three more years of education. And one thing you do in between those years of law school is you try to find work, an internship, a clerkship with a judge maybe, a means of getting practical experience, making connections that may lead to a job down the road.

And so I remember after my first year of law school, I interviewed with this firm that did medical malpractice defense work. So it was a firm that represented doctors, hospitals, other health care providers when they had been sued.

It was actually a firm that I worked at, I clerked at for two years in between law school, and then I worked there for seven years before coming here. And I remember very specifically my first time meeting a couple of those partners in that first interview I had with them.

[7 : 05] And of course, they asked me questions about myself, but also told me a lot about their practice and their passion for practicing law. And actually, both of these partners were believers.

And I remember specifically something that they said that really stuck with me. They said that just as Christ serves as our advocate, we want to be an advocate for our clients.

And you could see just how much passion they had for their work. They wanted to support those who were experiencing probably their most vulnerable point in their professional career.

They wanted to represent them with integrity and represent them with passion. They wanted to effectively plead their case to a judge or jury the same way that Christ pleads our case to the Father.

And so when they said that to me, that was something that really stuck. It was something that I used to guide me in my years of practicing law. It's something that continues to serve as a picture for me now when I think about Christ's work in our life.

[8 : 07] And so Christ is literally our lawyer. He's a lawyer that represents us against the accusations of Satan. And so let's look further into this passage.

It says that we have an advocate. That's simple present tense. Not that we had one when Jesus was here on earth. Not that we had one, but Jesus is no longer involved in our lives.

We have an advocate in Jesus. Someone who is continuing to serve us as he is in heaven. It goes on to say the location, which is very important.

We have an advocate with the Father. You know, one of the most important things for me when I was going into trial that was most advantageous for me to know was to know the judge. Not so I could get any special favors from the judge, but when you knew the judge, your trial judge, it helped you in that you know how he may rule in certain issues.

[9 : 06] You know his temperament. You know how he controls the courtroom. So if I was going to trial and I didn't know the judge, oftentimes I'd pick up the phone and call other lawyers that I knew may have been in front of that judge before and ask them, what can you tell me about this judge?

How can I have an advantage in this trial just based on my knowledge of the judge? And so here we see that Jesus, as our lawyer, he knows the judge.

He is always in the presence of the judge. He is united with the judge. So there's no question about whether Jesus is able to get a trial date with the judge. There's no question about whether he knows how the judge may rule.

He is one with the judge. We also see here how our advocate is described. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

Now I've heard lawyers described as a lot of things in my day, but righteous is not usually at the top of the list. I don't know if lawyer jokes are as common here as they are in the States, but I've yet to hear a lawyer joke about the righteous lawyer.

[10 : 18] But that's who we have in Jesus. He is our righteous advocate. He is without fault. His motives are pure. Therefore, his advocacy is perfect.

And so that's the kind of advocate we want. But you may ask, well, why do we need an advocate? Isn't Christ's work on the cross complete?

Aren't our sins forgiven? And the answer is yes. But we need to recognize this relationship that we continue to have with sin that's rather complicated. And this is what John points out in verse 1.

He says, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if you do... And he continues. You see, John's reason for writing this letter was to encourage believers to live righteously.

But he also includes a dose of reality here. He knows that even if we are in Christ, we will continue to sin. And so there's really two ways that we can look at this relationship that we have with sin.

[11 : 24] We can look at it judicially and we can look at it morally. So let's think about it judiciously. Judiciously, we are without sin.

We are innocent because of the blood of Christ. Christ's righteousness has been imputed to us. It says in Romans 5, 9, Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

So we are not guilty in God's court of law. And so when that happens then, God is not only our judge, but he is also our father.

We are welcomed into relationship with God the Father and God the Son. And so that's when we look at our sin judicially, but how about morally?

Well, we know, as John has pointed out here, that we are still sinful. And even though there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, we are still going to sin for as long as we have breath on this earth.

[12 : 30] And the problem is that sin disrupts our relationship with God. And we see that Paul verbalizes this struggle in Romans 7, where he says this, For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin who dwells in me. So Paul admits too that we continue to have this sin problem even when we're in Christ.

And so if we continue to sin, that means we continue to need God's forgiveness. We continue to need the Spirit to convict us. We continue to need Christ as our advocate to restore our relationship with the Father.

And so how does he do this? We know now that he is our righteous advocate, but practically speaking, how does he serve us? Well, it says this in Hebrews 7, 25.

Consequently, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[13 : 39] That's the key word there at the end, intercession. Jesus is continuing to make intercession for us. We see at the end of Jesus' life, when he was in the upper room with his disciples during that last supper, he talked to Peter directly, and he said to him that you are going to deny me three times.

But he says something else that gives us this insight into the heart of Jesus. He says, Satan demanded to have you that he may sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

We see hours later that Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, and this is where he prays his high priestly prayer. And two of the things he prays for is, one, his disciples, and two, for all believers. And so, just as Christ did in his earthly ministry, Christ continues to do that now. Christ is continuing to pray for us.

As he sits at the right hand of the Father, it is Jesus who intercedes for us. And so that can give us great confidence in our salvation, because we know Jesus has promised, I will pray for you.

[14:55] You know, when I would get a new case in my office when I practice law, it was pretty much guaranteed that it would take about two years before this case ever went to trial.

Certainly there were cases that would get dismissed or settle along the way, but just how it went to work up these cases. There was medical records to review. There was discovery to complete. There were expert witnesses to get. There was depositions to take. There were hearings to attend. And finally, you got the chance to set a trial date. And so, even though I would represent doctors or healthcare providers for ongoing two years plus, I wasn't with them every day.

I wasn't caring for their case on a daily basis. Even though there were times I was working very hard for them, there may be weeks or months at a time where I don't pick up their file, because I have 20 other plus files that other things are going on in their cases.

And so, we need to recognize that that's not how God, that's not how Jesus operates. He is continually making intercession for us. So, we can know that we have a living Savior who is praying every day for us at the throne of God, that our faith may not fail.

[16:11] Robert Murray McShane said this, If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference.

He is praying for me. What a great comfort that is. And to know this, that His praying, His intercession for us, is always effective.

As our advocate, Christ never loses. There's a saying that lawyers, I've heard often that lawyers say, is that if you've never lost a case, you just haven't practiced long enough.

Well, that's certainly not the case with Christ. For the more that He serves us, the more He wins. No matter how great our sin, His intercession is always effective on our behalf.

And so, that brings us to our second point then. We know that He is our advocate. We also know that Christ is our propitiation. Look in verse 2. It says, He is a propitiation for our sins, not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

[17:19] Now, propitiation is one of those kind of big Christian words that we may not know what to do with or what exactly it means, but this is what it means. Quite literally, Jesus is the wrath averter.

He has satisfied the wrath of God for our sins. And so, it's important to recognize this because this is really foundational into understanding if He is our advocate, He is, first of all, our propitiation.

If He wasn't our propitiation, then He could not be our righteous advocate. One of the cases I had when I was practicing law was representing an obstetrician.

That's a doctor who delivers babies. I know healthcare systems are different between here and the States. I know midwives are more responsible for deliveries here and doctors do most of the deliveries in the States.

And this doctor I was representing had been sued by a family of a baby that was born who was born with a permanent birth injury. And they thought it was my doctor's fault for causing this injury.

[18:20] And our theory in the case was, no, it wasn't our doctor's fault. He didn't do anything wrong. In fact, there was a complication during the delivery that caused this injury. It was a known risk and outcome of this complication.

It was actually our doctor who followed the standard of care in delivering this baby through this complication actually saved the child's life. And so, during this trial, I had the opportunity to cross-examine the baby's father who was in that delivery room that day.

And what I did during that cross-examine is try to allow him to explain exactly what he saw.

Because when he explained that, even though he thought the doctor was doing something wrong, he actually gave a textbook description of what the doctor should do in the circumstances.

And so, after the trial was over and the jury was deliberating, they were out for about an hour before a note was brought to the judge from the jury room asking if the jury could be brought back in to

listen to my cross-examination of the father again.

And I knew when they asked that question that we were most likely going to win the case because in that cross-examination, I was able to use the plaintiff's witness to prove that my doctor abided by the standard of care, that he didn't do anything wrong.

[19 : 38] And so, sure enough, they re-listened to this examination, they went back into the jury room, and 15 minutes later, they returned a verdict in favor of my doctor, not liable. And so, my strategy in working up this case, just like any other case I ever did, was to prove that my doctor abided by the standard of care, that he was not responsible for the injury because he didn't do anything wrong.

But that's not how Jesus goes before the father. It's quite the opposite. Because Jesus goes before the father and says, this person is guilty.

But, he uses his own righteousness as our propitiation. Matthew Henry says this in his commentary, the clients are guilty.

Their innocence and legal righteousness cannot be pleaded. It's the advocate's own righteousness that must be pled for the criminals. And so, if we continue to think about this in legal terms, if Christ is our advocate, then his evidence that he uses before the father is his own propitiation.

John Calvin said this, that Christ's intercession is the continual application of his death to our salvation. There's another saying that attorneys have, that if the facts are on your side, argue the facts.

[21 : 08] If the law is on your side, argue the law. If neither is on your side, just argue. Well, in this case, we see that Jesus has both the facts and the law on his side.

The fact is that Jesus was able to live a sinless life. That he was able to fulfill the law that we could not. So, therefore, when he serves as our advocate and puts himself forth as our propitiation, he is pleading our case on the basis of who he is and what he has done.

He lays out the evidence of his own suffering. And so, when we think of propitiation, it's not just this fact that Jesus has to die over and over again or experience the wrath of God over and over again. He lays out this evidence that is sufficient for an innocent verdict. And so, this is really not that popular of an idea with some because when we talk about the propitiation of Christ, it inherently deals with the wrath of God.

And oftentimes, that's really an uncomfortable subject to think about. We don't want to think about the wrath of God because it makes us think that God is just this angry, vindictive God with a short temper who needs some sort of sacrifice in order to be appeased.

[22 : 33] But what's important for us to remember is the wrath of God is all about the righteousness of God. Because of His holy nature, He rightly hates sin.

And so, therefore, He cannot set aside wrath toward our sin and remain holy. And so, this is where the propitiating love of Christ comes in.

God meets His demand for holiness through His Son, Christ. And so, if we think about it in the Trinitarian terms, it's actually God who propitiates Himself on our behalf.

So, propitiation isn't about us trying to convince God to save us and forgive us. It's not about Christ as our advocate going before an angry God and just begging Him not to judge us.

We need to see that through our propitiation, it's God that takes the initiative, that He's the one that takes the step toward us in love. He's the one that provided Christ as a propitiation for our sins.

[23 : 41] He's the one that appointed Christ as our advocate to continue serving for us. It says in Romans 5, 8, that God commanded His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And not only for us, it says it in verse 2 of our passage, not only for us, but for the whole world. So, this pardon for sin through the work of Christ is offered to all. And so, if we look back what we studied a couple weeks ago when Christ was crucified and we see the curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom that our access to God the Father has been opened up, we see that God is inviting us into His presence through the blood of Jesus.

And so then, how should we respond? respond. Well, maybe if you've seen movies or maybe in person, you know people who think they have a good lawyer and that gives them the right to act however they want.

They're not concerned about the consequences for their actions because they think their lawyer can just get them off the hook. But that's certainly not how we should respond to Christ as our advocate.

We talked about how much God hates sin. We also need to have a hatred for sin. The problem is far too often we're lenient in our sin.

[25 : 07] We tolerate it. We ignore it. We hide it. We're flippant about it. But as we grow in grace, we need to recognize the sin in our life should become more and more ugly.

So let's not grow content in our sin. Let us set our whole soul against it. If we keep reading on in 1 John 2, if we continue reading verse 3, it says this, We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not do what he says, is a liar. And the truth is not in that person. But if anyone does, if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. So here's the facts. That if we are truly converted, then we will earnestly pursue holiness.

Because if we don't truly hate our sin, then we won't truly value the cross. But the problem is sometimes we can go on the ditch on the other side of the road too, right?

[26 : 20] Rather than being too lenient towards sin, sometimes we can be too severe in thinking about our sin. And we can just beat ourselves up over and over again and see ourselves as a failure because we continue to struggle with anger or pride or envy or lust or anger, hatred, whatever it may be.

And so we think that we are not worthy of God. How could God possibly accept us? We're ready to give up on this Christian life because we can't make it work. And so, even though it's good to be ashamed of our sin, we need to recognize that our attitude should not be one that forgets or neglects Christ's willingness to forgive and restore us.

It says right before our passage in 1 John 1, 9 that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And so, let's be eager to confess our sins knowing that God is eager to forgive us.

And let us be eager then and grateful to allow God to step forward, to step toward us in His love and provide us with Christ a sinless substitute.

Now, if you're not a believer, this idea is a difficult concept. Like we said, propitiation, it presupposes the wrath of God.

[27 : 53] And that can make us really uncomfortable to think about. But that's the reality of our situation. That if you are not in Christ, then you are guilty under the law and that you are deserving of the wrath of God.

But we have hope. We have the message of the gospel. That though the gospel points out our sin and wrath that is due us, it also extends to us grace and forgiveness.

And so I urge you to recognize that our only hope is in Christ. There's nothing that we can do to be declared innocent before the Father apart from Christ. And we can know this, that the completed and ongoing work of Christ as our advocate and our propitiation is sufficient for every case. and it's sufficient for every defendant. Let's pray. God, we thank you for the work of Jesus who does not sit at your right side and just rest.

He continues to work. He continues to serve as our advocate because he is our propitiation. Lord, we pray that we remember that that truth will be ever before us and we can choose to turn from our sin.

[29 : 22] God, we ask that you convict us. We ask that through Christ you restore our relationship with you. And God, for those who don't know you, we pray that the reality of your wrath be something that is before them.

but to recognize the goodness of the gospel that through your blood we have been forgiven, that we are innocent, that we are not guilty because of the righteousness of Christ.

We thank you for that truth today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing our last hymn together, He Will Hold Me Fast.

When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast, When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path, for my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.

[31 : 06] He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast.

For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

He will hold me fast. Those He saves are His delight.

Christ will hold me fast. Precious in His holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast. His promises shall last. Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.

[32 : 15] He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast.

For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

For my life He bled at night.

Christ will hold me fast. Justice has been satisfied. He will hold me fast.

He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast. Christ will hold me fast. I will hold me fast. Christ will hold me fast. He will hold me fast.

[33 : 14] Till our faith is turned to sight. When He comes at last. He will hold me fast.

He will hold me fast. For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.

He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast.

For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast. He will hold me fast.

Will you stand with me to receive the benediction taken from Psalm 121. Now may the Lord keep you from all evil. May He keep your life.

[34 : 29] May the Lord keep your going out and your coming in from this time. forth and forevermore. Amen. When I tell God.

May the Lord keep you from all evil. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me old again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the flow. That makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[35 : 56] For my pardon this I see.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. For my pardon this I see.