

# Christ our Intercessor

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Date: 15 September 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Shall we turn back a while to the passage of scripture we read in the gospel according to Matthew chapter 14. Matthew's gospel chapter 14.

And we'll read again a few verses from verse 22. Immediately he, Jesus that is, made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

And in the fourth watch of the night, he came to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, It is a ghost, and they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them saying, Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

[ 1 : 04 ] The gospels frequently record Jesus at prayer. We read in Luke chapter 5 that he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

He went out to lonely places because he didn't want to be disturbed. He wanted to enter into an intimate fellowship with his father, away even from his disciples.

And in Luke 6, one of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. And it was after that particular prayer recorded, well, the prayer is not recorded, but after that prayer mentioned to us in Luke 6 that Jesus chose his disciples.

And I'm sure that much of the content of that particular prayer was Jesus seeking his father's counsel for the 12 men who would become the inner circle, who would become his disciples.

And it was very, very important, of course, to choose the right men, because when Jesus departed from this earth and went back to heaven from where he had come, these were the men who would be charged with the task of building the church.

[ 2 : 18 ] And as we look around us in the world today and we see the extent to which the church has grown, it's a testimony to the success of those men. But it was not a success of their own efforts.

These were men who were led on by the Holy Spirit. I remember years ago when I was sworn in, ordained to Loch Ilpe Church.

There was a lot of people in the church on the Saturday for my induction and ordination. And the following day at the morning service, there was only 24 people.

And that was in quite a big church, a church that would hold several hundreds of people. But the minister who was preaching me in, Ian McCaskill, said that there are twice as many people in church today as there were at the very beginning of the church when it was founded.

So there was a man who sees a cup half full and not half empty. And remarkable when we think that today, the Lord's Day, from one time zone to another, right the way throughout the world, there are countless millions of people gathering to worship the Lord.

[ 3 : 36 ] And it all began through the efforts of these 12 disciples, or 11 disciples, I should say. And much of the prayer time of Jesus, of course, is not recorded for us because he would have had intimate, sweet fellowship with his Father.

Times of prayer when speech would have been unnecessary, even superfluous. And the content of those prayers we do not know, and it was not even shared with his closest associates, the disciples. But several prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ are recorded for us. There is the Lord's Prayer, which is very much a template for our own prayers in this and every day and age.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. And that should be the focal point of our prayers, that we seek the extension, the enlargement of God's kingdom.

And of course, every time a man or woman, a boy or girl comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, then the kingdom is being extended, the kingdom is being enlarged.

[ 4 : 43 ] And of course, Jesus came to establish God's kingdom, establishing it in the hearts of men and women. Because it's not a kingdom that you can draw on a map.

It's not a kingdom where you could point out the borders or the boundaries, such as an earthly kingdom. And that was the work that Jesus was engaged in.

And for us to enter into that kingdom, for us to become a part of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, then we have to come humbly and by faith, trusting in the finished work of Jesus.

The jailer in Philippi fell on his knees before Paul and Silas. What must I do in order to be saved?

And the answer given to him was the same answer that we would give to any man or woman in our own day and age, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

And on the moment of being saved, you are entering into the kingdom of heaven. That's what the gospel is all about. It's simply coming to put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 51 ] There's no hoops to jump through. There's no pilgrimages to undertake to go to some distant shrine on top of a high mountain. Simply trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The thief on the cross. A man whose life was behind him. A man who was hours away from death. And yet he turned by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ and said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And he had that wonderful promise that even this day you shall be with me in paradise. He wasn't able to do anything for the Lord. He wasn't able to go out and evangelize.

He wasn't able to help the poor or the sick. But he trusted in Jesus. And at the end of the day, that is the most important thing of all.

And that's the message that goes forth. I trust from this pulpit week after week. Calling people to give up their trust in religiosity and to trust solely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 59 ] And so we have in the gospel many instances of Jesus at prayer. He prayed at the grave of Lazarus. The grave had not yet been opened.

But Jesus prayed that those assembled would believe that you sent me. And of course salvation comes from the Lord. God sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this world to seek and to save the lost. I am the resurrection and the life, he said. Who believes in me will live even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

And then in Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed, we have a long prayer that Jesus made in which John records for us.

He says in that prayer, now this is eternal life. That they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[ 7 : 56 ] This is eternal life. That they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And there's a great difference about knowing about Jesus and knowing him personally.

And eternal life comes through knowing Jesus, knowing him intimately, knowing him as our savior, knowing him as our friend, knowing him as our Lord. Nobody ever got into heaven through a mere acquaintanceship with Jesus.

Many of you may have been coming to this church for years and years and you've not yet fully come to faith in Jesus. But you might be able to say, well, I have an acquaintanceship with him.

I know a lot about him. I could tell you all sorts of things about Jesus. But I don't yet know him personally. And if we only have an acquaintanceship with Jesus, then that will not admit us into heaven.

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for his disciples. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me. And then he goes on to say, my prayer is not for them alone.

[ 9 : 09 ] I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. So there on the night that he was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was praying for us. He was praying for men and women and boys and girls who would come to believe in Jesus through the message of the disciples.

And that's what we have here in the New Testament. We have the message of the disciples. The disciples faithfully finished their work. They were called home to glory.

But they have left us these wonderful passages that we have in the New Testament. The Gospels and the Book of Acts and the letters of the disciples, of the apostles, and of the Book of Revelation.

The apostles, as I've said, they've long since gone to glory. They faithfully fulfilled their tasks. But their message prevails. And that message will prevail until the day that the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to gather his people to himself.

And it is through the reading of that message, it is through the preaching of that message, that people ultimately come to faith. The New Testament testifies that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, died for a wretch like me.

[10:31] And any man or woman who knows Christ can say that, that he loved me and gave himself for me. He died for a wretch like me. And so we find here that Jesus had sent the disciples away.

They'd been on the far side of the lake. He'd fed them. He'd taken the loaves and the fish. He'd multiplied them. And it fed a great crowd of people, 5,000 men besides women and children. And then Jesus sent the disciples away. And he went up to a high place and began to pray. He went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

And when evening came, he was there alone. But the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And I was having my breakfast this morning.

I was staying in Erdogan last night. I'm there for a week. And I was looking down to the bay below the village in Erdogan. There were some big waves. The wind had dropped.

[11:34] But there was big waves coming and crashing against the shore. And in my grandfather's day, they had a boat which they would pull up onto the stony beach in Erdogan because it's not a safe anchorage.

And when the weather was calm, they would take the boat down and they would go out fishing. And I was thinking this morning that this is no day to be caught in a boat with these big waves.

And here we have the disciples. They were straining at the oars. Mark tells us in his account that they were straining at the oars. Their arms would have been sore.

Their backs would have been sore. And they were heading into the waves. And they were making no headway. What was Jesus doing all that time?

He who had the power to still the waves. He who had the power to calm the storms. Was he there just watching on? Was he there just as an interested spectator?

[12:34] Well, the answer is no. Jesus was praying for them as they were going through the travail of trying to make progress in that storm.

And these were experienced fishermen. And I'm sure when Jesus commanded them to get into the boat and to cross over the lake, they would have looked at the sky. They might have looked at one another and perhaps shook their heads with an element of doubt and thought, well, this is not a good time to embark on a trip across the lake.

But nevertheless, because Jesus had commanded them to go, they got into the boat and they set off. And as Jesus was in the midst of prayer, his disciples were going through a trial.

Mark tells us, as I said, they were straining at the oars. And it's an interesting Greek word that is translated as straining. It's a word that means torture or torment.

And I'm sure maybe some of you here have been caught in bad weather and you've been straining on the oars to get back to a safe harbor. And you know just how tortuous and how tormenting it can be.

[13:52] And we're also told here the boat was beaten by the waves. In the NIV it says the boat was buffeted by the waves.

And it's the same Greek word. The boat was creaking. It would have been going up and down and rolling back and forth. The boat itself, like the men who were rowing, was going through a time of torment.

They were into the fourth watch of the night and they were getting nowhere. And what was Jesus doing meanwhile? Well, he was still engaged in prayer.

While they were in torment, he was engaged in prayer. Why did he not just come down straight away and go out to the disciples? It was the fourth watch.

Why had he left them for so long in an agonizing and dangerous situation? Well, he was upholding them through the storm by his prayers.

[14:52] He could have come down from the hilltop. He could have lifted up his arms from the very top of the hill. And he could have calmed the seething waves there and then. But these men had to

learn to trust Jesus.

They had to learn to trust him even when they were away from his physical presence. After the last supper in Luke 22, Jesus told Peter, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And just as Jesus was praying for Simon on that occasion, he prays continuously for all of his people.

Because Jesus lives forever, we read in Hebrews 7, he is a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

When we remember, we pray for individuals. When we remember, we pray for families and friends. I find it quite interesting that every so often, a fist will come to mind of somebody that I knew or had a brief relationship many, many years ago I might even have forgotten their name.

[16:11] And I wondered to myself, why has their face suddenly appeared in my mind? And I think the reason is that God wants me to pray for them, that they might be going through some kind of difficult situation.

They might be on the threshold of eternity and they've not yet come to know Jesus. And so I pray for them. And then I get a sense of peace. I've brought these people before God, but it was he, I believe, who brought them to me in the first place that I might pray for them.

When we remember, we pray for people and situation. But that's not how it is with Jesus. He prays for his people. He prays for his church all the time.

He always lives to intercede for them. And Satan may well try, and he does try, to sift us as wheat, just as he wanted to sift Simon as wheat.

But the prayers of the Lord uphold us through our trials and through our tribulations. He prayed for us on the night of his betrayal and he prays for us still.

[17:19] And we read in Romans, if God is for us, who can be against us? Christ Jesus, who died more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and who is also interceding for us.

And so eventually Jesus came down from the hilltop and he walked out onto the waters to the disciples. The Lord of creation was showing his control over the very elements that he himself had created.

Apparently the ancient Egyptians, if they wanted to describe something that was absolutely impossible, they would say it was like a man walking on the water.

But here was no mere man. He was the one who is fully God and fully man, the Lord of glory. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

The disciples were weary. Their strength was ebbing away. And added to that was their terror at seeing what they thought was a ghost walking on the water.

[18:25] And it was at that moment that Jesus came alongside them and said, Take courage, it is I. Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.

Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And we might ask ourselves, what is it that the Holy Spirit wants us to take from this particular passage of Scripture?

Does he want to demonstrate the power and authority that Christ has over the natural elements, over the sea and the power of the waves?

Well, partly that. He wants us to know that Christ is none other than almighty God. In Isaiah chapter 9, we read for us, To us a child is born, to us a son is given.

He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And the disciples had already seen the power of Jesus demonstrated when he was asleep at the back of the boat when they were caught in another dangerous squall so that the boat was nearly swamped.

[19:37] And then when they roused the sleeping Jesus, he rebuked the wind and the waves, and they both died down completely. And the terrified disciples exclaimed, Who is this?

Even the wind and the waves obey him. Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. The ancient Israelites were not a seagoing people.

Yes, the disciples were fishermen, but they didn't go out to sea. They were fishermen on an inshore lake. For the ancient Israelites, the sea represented chaos.

It represented the primeval forces of chaos. And although they lived beside the sea, although some of their tribal territories were beside the Mediterranean Sea, they were not a seafaring people like the Greeks and the Phoenicians.

And it's interesting that Solomon used the ships of Tyre, the Phoenician peoples, for his trading. Jesus calmed the raging sea.

[ 20 : 41 ] And it's important for us to know that there is not a single situation into which Christ cannot come and bring peace. And we live at a time of great turmoil.

We live at a time of great uncertainty. And people are running back and forth and going hither and hither and forming themselves into factions all to do with Brexit.

But we have to know that God is in control. He is sovereign. He is bringing about his own eternal purposes. And the practical lesson for us is here that Jesus knew that the wind would blow.

He knew that the waves would rise up. He knew that his disciples would end up straining against the oars. And when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, when we come into his kingdom, God never promises us a plain sailing or a smooth passage.

He will often send his people out to attack Satan's strongholds, to do battle with a ruthless and an implacable enemy, an enemy who can do us tremendous harm.

[ 21 : 53 ] And that enemy in our own day and age holds millions and millions of people in chains, the chains of false religion, the chains of unbelief, the chains of atheism.

And yet Jesus sends his people out to do battle armed with nothing more than the gospel, the gospel that is the power of salvation for all who would believe.

But when he does send his people out, he doesn't leave them to their own devices. His eye is upon them as his eye was upon the disciples battling against the waves.

And he is upholding them by his prayers. Satan may try to sift us as wheat, but Jesus is praying for us. And when we think the storm is at its highest, and when we think that we may be overcome when the battle is at its fiercest, that's when we're reminded of the words of Jesus.

Take courage, take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. And hell will always seek to oppose the true proclamation of the gospel.

[ 23 : 01 ] Satan will always try to fling his fiery darts at the Lord's people. But Jesus assures us, I will build my church.

I will build my church. Yes, he sends his people out to do his bidding and to help him, but I will build my church. And even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And at the end of the day, the greatest turmoil, the greatest storms might be within in our own hearts because there are situations which we feel so puny, so weak, and so overcome with fear. But the Prince of Peace is with us. He gives us the wonderful words of encourage. Take courage, take heart. It is I. And do not be afraid.

We live in an age of secular humanism. We live in an age of militant Islam. We live in an age of bitter opposition for all that Jesus stands for.

[ 24 : 04 ] We live in an age of moral confusion when the tide of righteousness seems to have gone so far out that we sometimes wonder, will it ever come back in again? When I was in Loch Ilpid where I had my ministry, the tide would go out and it would go out sometimes as much as a mile.

And there was this sort of mixture of sand and mud. It was quite firm because people used to ride horses on it. But I was often reminded by the fact that the sea had gone so far out.

It was a bit like our present day and age in this country as if the tide of God's righteousness had gone far out. And would it come back in again? And of course, the tide always comes in again.

We live under the watchful eye of our sovereign Lord. And if the Lord Jesus Christ is on our side, then who can be against us? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Jesus watches our every effort. He prays that we would be protected, strengthened, encouraged, and upheld. But he doesn't just watch from afar.

[ 25 : 16 ] When he sees our strength there being, when he sees us starting to fall back, then he strengthens us by his Holy Spirit. And he gives us the words, take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.

And these are not mere words given for encouragement. Because the words of Jesus, the power of Jesus, is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit to help his people in their times of distress and in their times of tribulation to bring us through the storms.

Let us be confident of this as we read in the letter to the Philippians, that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

May each of us this morning take courage from the knowledge that Jesus is watching over us, that he is upholding us at the throne of grace, and that he is constantly interceding for us with his Father.

And we can know that his purposes for you as a church, his purposes for you as Christian individuals will be fulfilled.

[ 26 : 30 ] Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid. Amen. May the Lord add his blessing to those thoughts and meditation. Thank you.