

Intercession

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8, we read at verses 33 and 34. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us.

One of the natural fears, most natural fears we might say, of the Lord's people, is the fear that at the end of the day, their sins, of which they are so conscious, and which they know to be so many, will end up condemning them.

They themselves know how guilty they are. And it is not that they doubt Christ's power to save, nor the all-sufficiency of his sacrifice upon the cross.

It is just that somehow they are convinced that if they were truly saved, then they would surely have made a better job of their lives.

[1 : 11] We'd have become more saintly, more prayerful, more like Jesus. And they see that they are not. And they fear this to be evidence of their lostness.

We might say that their feelings are summed up by Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2. We'll look at that in just a minute. But if you want to turn with me to Isaiah 59, we'll be looking at a few different verses of that chapter.

So Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2 says, Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

And they think, Oh, well, that just sums me up. That is just my situation completely. I must surely be lost. But if you read on through the rest of this 59th chapter of Isaiah, you can see that what is being described is a situation of national apostasy, which might indeed apply to us in our country and in our day, yes, indeed, of ingrained depravity.

Well, yes, again, nationally, that would also apply, of hopelessness, perhaps, that because the national sin was so deep-dived, therefore there was no prospect of ever getting back to the Lord.

[2 : 42] So they might as well just carry on and continue in their sin. Verses 12 to the first part of verse 15 in that chapter, we read, For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us.

For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities. Transgressing and denying the Lord and turning back from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away, for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.

In other words, it is positively dangerous to be the one who speaks up for the truth or refuses to run the way of sin and evil. And isn't that the case nowadays in our society and in our land?

But what is really interesting about this chapter in Isaiah is God's own response to this lethargic wickedness. If we go on and pick up again in the second part of verse 15, in Isaiah 59, we see what it says, and we'll read on to verse 19.

[4 : 04] The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

According to their deeds, so will he repay. Wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies. To the coastlands he will render repayment.

So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. For he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives.

He does not write off the nation. He does not destroy it wholesale, but rather he insists that he himself will bring about change.

[5 : 08] He will be, yes, visiting the sins of his enemies upon them, but bringing himself the salvation that his own people so desperately need.

Again, verses 20 and 21 in that same chapter. And a redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the Lord.

And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord. My spirit that is upon you and my words that I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth or out of the mouth of your offspring or out of the mouth of your children's offspring, says the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore.

We might think, well, what does that have to do with our personal anxieties about our salvation?

Well, to begin with, it starts with the very same problem with which so many of us are burdened.

We read again the opening verses of that chapter. Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or his ear dull that it cannot hear, but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

[6 : 23] But then it goes on to demonstrate that God's response to such iniquity is not to leave people stewing in it, but to bring them out of it, and that this is something he does himself.

Of course, the stubbornly unrepentant will be destroyed as per the chapter. Isaiah 59 makes that very clear. But that's not really the situation of the anxious and fearful, is it?

We are not in this situation. Those who are anxious about their salvation and trembling before the Lord, they are not the defiant and unrepentant ones being spoken of here, are they?

The very reason they are sorrowing, the very reason they are fearful is because they want to be better, want to be more faithful, more diligent, and sanctified followers of the Lord.

But they lament their own sinfulness and fear it to be a symptom of a deeper ill. So how do we deal with that?

[7 : 34] Well, we don't. He does. And this is precisely what we find in Romans 8, from which we were reading before, that this is something the Lord does, that the salvation of the Lord's people is something he does.

And because he is the one doing it, there is nobody, nobody in a position to overrule him. This is the verses that we took as our text.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? In other words, who is going to overrule God? Who is to condemn?

Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. We see time and time again throughout this chapter how all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the salvation of the sinner.

Now we mentioned about the three persons of the Trinity this morning. We mentioned about how, you know, when the seraphim with their six wings in Isaiah 6, for example, they shout, holy, holy, holy, before the Lord.

[8 : 50] And we talked about the Aaronic blessing, the Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Three times, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, holy, holy, holy.

It could have been seven times. It could have been ten times. But it's three times. Because we have a Trinitarian God. Three persons in one God. And we see all three persons of the Trinity involved in the work that God does.

Involved in the salvation of the sinner. If we see verses one to four here in this chapter, we didn't read them. We began at verse 18. But if we go back to the verses at the opening part of the chapter.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Second person. For the law of the Spirit, third person, of life has set you free in Christ Jesus.

Second person. From the law of sin and death. For God, first person, has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son, second person, in the likeness of

sinful flesh and for sin.

[9 : 52] For he condemns sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Third person of the Trinity. Second, third, first, all involved in this work of salvation. See, God the Father, Christ the Son, God the Spirit, all involved throughout.

And then we read verses nine to eleven. If you just go down the passage a wee bit more. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. If, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

[10 : 51] And then verses fourteen to seventeen. If we go on. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

And then it goes on to the past, the beginning of where we read from verse eighteen onwards. So we see what it says about every person of the Godhead is involved in this work of salvation.

He has planted his Spirit within his own children. And because of what he is doing, it is not down to their performance. It is not down to their abilities.

Look at what it says about our own groanings and our own anxieties. You mentioned at the beginning, you know, the anxieties that the Lord's people may have about how sinful they are.

[11 : 58] And we see this at verse twenty-six, for example, where it talks about, you know, likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought.

But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Now, what this means is that groaning, which is deep and heartfelt, and yet which cannot be put into articulate words.

If somebody said to you, tell me what's wrong? Tell me why are you mourning? Why are you downcast? Why is your soul so upset in this way? Then you couldn't tell them because you couldn't put it into words.

You know something is wrong. You might even know what is wrong, but you just can't articulate it. You can't find the words to express it. It is too deep.

It is too heartfelt. Perhaps it is too shameful. But you just cannot put it into words. Well, you see, even if we wouldn't know what to say, the good news is that with God, we don't have to put it into articulate words and sentences.

[13 : 08] He knows already because it is he himself, God the Holy Spirit, who has kindled those yearnings, these groanings, this unhappiness with our sinful self.

It is he who has kindled these emotions which defy verbal description. And because they are of him, he can interpret them.

He can understand them. He can articulate them and present them to the Father on our behalf.

Look at what verse 27 says. He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit.

He knows what the Spirit is trying to say with these groanings which cannot be put into words. And because he knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

In other words, he takes these things you and I cannot put into words and he articulates them and presents them at the throne of grace. He is able to do that for you.

[14 : 14] He is able to do that for us because if they are truly there, he can take them and he can interpret them and he can translate them into whatsoever may be needed at the throne of grace.

You see, it's okay to have doubts about your own saintliness. Your doubts are very probably entirely justified. No offense, but they will be.

It's okay to doubt your own strength, your own fitness for heaven. The real question is not how good are you or how fit are you for heaven, but rather in whom is your faith?

Faith in itself is not necessarily a virtue. You know, those who follow false religions, they've got faith. People are going all these pilgrimages around lots of pagan temples or shrines and walk barefoot and burn incense sticks and all the rest of it in front of statues of fat people and so on.

These are not saving faith. Their faith is not in one who can redeem. They've got lots of faith. Can't knock the fact that they've got faith and they may have it in abundance, but it's not rather even do you have faith, but rather in whom is your faith?

[15 : 31] Because if your faith is that one day if you are really good and devout and obedient, God will give you the strength somehow to be good enough for heaven, then let me tell you now as a friend, you're in the process of boarding the Titanic and it may look splendid and have an awful lot of high-class passengers who will assure you of the speed and comfort and unsinkableness of this vessel that you're getting on, but sink it will because ultimately that faith is in man.

It is in yourself and how good you hope one day to be. It is in you and it will fail. It will sink. If that is your hope, it will fail.

Don't waste your time. Don't waste your life hoping that one day you will be good enough and God will have mercy in the form of turning a blind eye to the rest of the things you've done wrong.

If you have enough good things to somehow outweigh them, you won't. That faith is going to sink like a stone. That hope is going to perish. In whom is your faith?

A Christian is never saved because of anything they do. They are always only ever saved because of something God does.

[16 : 58] If He plants the love of Himself, of His Son Jesus Christ in their hearts, then all things, even disasters, setbacks, pain, illness, struggle, bereavement, work, somehow, by some means, work together for the good of those who love Him.

Not simply who believe that He exists. Remember what James says, chapter 2, verse 19, the devil's belief and tremble, but they don't love. They don't love the Lord, but it works together for good to those who love Him, who love the Lord.

We see what it says, verses 28 to 30 here in Romans 8. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom He predestined, He also called. And those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified. Right? Predestination to glory.

[18 : 16] Not something we can do. Something God does. Something God does explained in these verses. Something God does refer to also elsewhere in Scripture.

Your unworthiness may be absolutely true. In fact, it will be absolutely true. Your performance as a Christian may be abysmal.

Isn't it a wonderful thing that your performance had nothing to do whatsoever to do with your election or lack of it?

With your predestination or lack of it? Because if sinners are predestinated before the foundation of the world, then it cannot possibly be down to anything that they have done.

Look at what it says in Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 to 7. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ Jesus with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

[19 : 21] That we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will.

To the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood. the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.

The forgiveness of our trespasses. Now it stands to reason if we if we stand who stands in need of the forgiveness of their trespasses?

Who stands in need of the forgiveness of sins if not sinners? Jesus said I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

So as we said the question is not how good are you or how worthy are you for heaven but rather the question is in whom is your faith? If your faith be in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins then it will be only it will be that way only because he has called you to that.

[20 : 33] Again back to verse 30 again whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified. If you have faith in him it's because he has called you to have faith in him for your own human nature will never admit of such a need or of such a faith.

Our own human nature always wants to seek ways by which we will somehow have done enough and inverted commas for God to have mercy on us.

Somehow to convince God that I'm a good person and because I'm a good person and I'm kind to animals and I pay my taxes and I help people if I can and I give money to charity and because I'm a good person God will turn a blind eye to the multitude of evil of which I am guilty.

God will not. God is a righteous God and every sin that we have ever committed in the thoughts of our minds in the words of our lips in the deeds of our hands and feet in the neglect of the good that we should have done.

Remember Matthew 25 the separation of the sheep and the goats that chilling chapter in the gospel account where those who are condemned are condemned not for what they have done but for what they did not do.

[22 : 05] Throw into the balance all that we have failed to do and it ought to give us a more accurate perspective of where our so called righteousness may stand before God but if Christ be in you it will change you it will change your heart it will change your standards of what you consider good of what is acceptable it will change your priorities it will change your desires your likes and dislikes it will gradually make you more like him it will to use the authorized version statement of it in Peter it will sanctify you as it says in Peter 1 Peter 3 15 verses 15 and 16 but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts I think it says in our ESV that honor him in the place of your hearts but sanctify is what it says in the old

Bible and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear having a good conscience that whereas they speak against you as of evildoers they may be ashamed that falsely accuse you by your good conversation in Christ or your good behavior as our ESV has it in front of us if Christ is in you it will change your priorities it will change your understanding of yourself and how good we think we are or how much God may owe us salvation it will also change our fears that because we are so bad God must surely condemn us if I was really a Christian I would be better you are not better I am not better Christ is better and when the world or the unbeliever or the liberal so called Christian will chide you for your arrogance and conceit in daring to believe yourself actually able to say that you know that you are saved your answer must surely be

I am not saved because of anything I have done I am saved rather because of everything that Christ has done saved because of what Christ has done back to our verses who shall bring any charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us so it's not are you good enough that answer is always going to be no but rather the question is is Christ good enough and it's going to be a very brave idiot who's going to say no Christ isn't good enough of course Christ is good enough everybody even the most liberal questioner and doubter is going to say well of course Jesus is good enough yes Christ is good enough and that's your question not am I good enough but is

Christ good enough because that is where your faith needs must be placed in the one who is himself perfect the one who is himself righteous it's not how good are you it's how good is Jesus and who is going to be so brave so foolish so wicked as to say well actually Jesus isn't good enough well if he's not good enough who is there is none save he God himself God the son who has paid the perfect price of sin upon the cross is Christ good enough of course he has to be it is not it is never how good are you but rather how good is Christ and the answer to that must be he is perfect he is absolutely right for the task he is perfected even in the midst of his suffering he is whole he is complete he is

God the son you cannot do better you cannot be better than this divine perfection and that divine perfection is what stands in the place of every saved soul on the last day and the divine justice of God looks not upon you and me cowering in the filthy rags of what was our own false righteousness or rather we hope having that stripped away our nakedness clothed then in his righteousness our unworthiness not seen because he stands in front of us and in our place and the wrath of God's justice looks upon him and doesn't see us behind him because it looks only on him who stands in our place and intercedes for us and sees there perfection and sees there the beauty of holiness and sees there the price paid in full it is never how good are you it is in whom is your faith and how good is

[27 : 43] Christ yes the devil will have a go accusing you before the Lord but his power is broken by the blood of Christ upon the cross if you turn to revelation you see in chapter 12 what it says there verse 10 I heard a loud voice in heaven saying now the salvation and the power authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before our God this is not merely a prophecy of end times it is here and now we see in verses 10 and 11 of that same chapter for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before our God and they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony for they love not their lives even unto death he is overcome now therefore rejoice oh heavens and you who dwell in them but woe to you oh earth and sea for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows that his time is short his time is short but the

Lord's people have all eternity before them he may accuse but the Lord will not listen for if he has justified who will overrule him back to our verses who shall bring any charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who was at the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us do you see the point if our faith is in Christ and in him alone then to doubt our own worthiness may be natural indeed justifiable but to doubt our salvation is to question his power and the efficacy of his sacrifice and that friends we must never do for there is nothing that can overcome the

Lord this is where you must put your faith your trust it is the one safe bet it is the one certainty the one ground of assurance Christ in you the hope of glory your faith may falter your sins may be many and your love may wax faint but still none can separate you from him and his love who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that was raised who is of the right hand of God who indeed is interceding for us who shall separate us from the love of Christ you see your love and mind may falter it may fade it may wax and wane but the love of Christ does not change it only well it changes only in the sense that it increases and grows and becomes more and more strong tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword as it is written for thy sake we are killed all the day long we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us for

I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord let us pray