

Christ as Priest (2)

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[0 : 00] Thousands of years ago, the Queen of Sheba traveled hundreds of miles to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. Having completed her visit, she said of him, the report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it.

And behold, the half was not told me. Never a truer word was said about the gospel of Jesus Christ and all the benefits which we as Christ's people are privileged to enjoy. I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me.

For however much we think we know about the gospel and all its benefits to us, there's a mountain of joy left to discover. We're familiar with half the story of Christ's priesthood, namely the offering up of Himself as the sacrifice for our sin on the cross. It's a glorious story, but it's only half the story unless we tie it in with what Jesus, our great high priest, is now doing on our behalf in heaven. Having once offered Himself a sacrifice for our sin, He no longer offers a sacrifice for us. Nevertheless, He continues as our priest.

Our shorter catechism under the heading of Christ's office as a priest tells us that having made satisfaction for our sin, He now makes continual intercession for us, which means that the heavenly Jesus at this very moment is interceding for us right now. According to our dictionary, to intercede is to intervene on behalf of another, to intervene on behalf of another. Right now, Jesus is intervening in heaven on our behalf. He was made incarnate of the Virgin Mary for us. He died on the cross for us, and He makes intercession as our great high priest today for us.

The doctrine of the heavenly priesthood of Christ is a much neglected truth in today's church, and we're very much the poorer for it, because there is a mountain of joy here for us as Christians.

[2 : 47] In Hebrews 7.25, we read, He, Jesus, is able to save to the uttermost, because He ever lives to make intercession for us.

Hebrews, this book which is most devoted to the supremacy of the priesthood of Christ, tells us here in black and white that Christ's continual intercession for us is what gives us the confidence that we are saved to the uttermost.

Now, this evening, we want to consider the heavenly intercession of Christ under two headings. First, the truth we are to believe, and secondly, the truth we are to apply. The truth we are to believe, the truth we are to apply. The truth we are to believe, first of all.

Truth is somewhat of a bad word in today's world. People tell us there is no absolute truth without realizing that by saying that very thing, they've stated an absolute truth.

Nonsense, literally we say absolute nonsense. Their claims make no sense at all. We live in a world of truth. What do we spend our lives learning if none of it is true? The heavenly intercession of Christ is the absolute truth, not just because it makes sense, but because God's Word states it in clear, unequivocal terms. It is here in the Bible in black and white for us to understand and to apply.

[4 : 26] Now, it's a very mysterious truth, and there are many areas of the heavenly intercession of Christ no one truly understands, yet we can make at least three statements about it.

First of all, Jesus made satisfaction. Second, Jesus makes application. And thirdly, Jesus lives forever. So, we can say, first of all, Jesus made satisfaction. The heavenly priesthood of Christ is inextricably connected with the cross. We can't understand one without the other. Though there is no cross in heaven, yet the Christ who hung upon the cross is there and right now intervening on our behalf with God the Father on the basis of all He did on the cross for us. He no longer makes satisfaction for our sins, having once offered Himself up on the cross. Jesus does not offer Himself up again as the sacrifice for our sins, given that He has already died for us. He does not daily offer Himself up on the heavenly altar, having already sprinkled that heavenly altar with His blood. So, in Hebrews 7, 27, we read, for example, about Jesus, our great high priest. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins and then for those of the people, since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself.

The cross was a once for all sacrifice of the Son of God, a single event never to be repeated, which has made satisfaction for our sins and reconciled us to God. That's one of the reasons, of course, we find this Roman Catholic rite of holy sacrament blasphemous, because every time a Roman Catholic priest breaks the bread, it's as if he's offering the sacrifice of Christ once more. He is repeating what cannot be repeated, the one of the sacrifice of our great high priest on the cross.

That sacrifice of Jesus is the basis of our salvation and our hope. It forms the foundation upon which the Christian truth of salvation is built. For the Apostle Paul, it formed the entire message that we preached, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus cried out on the cross, it is finished, He meant what He said. The work of redemption and reconciliation was completed.

There was no sacrifice left to be made, for He had already offered Himself once for all. So we must establish that the Jesus who stands at the right hand of God the Father on high is the Jesus who gave Himself so freely and willingly on the cross for us. There is no sacrifice left for Him to make, for He still carries in His body the scars and marks of His crucifixion, the nail marks in His hands, the scars on His hands, the scars on His forehead, the wounds on His side. The Jesus who stands there in our place bearing our nature as human beings has already made satisfaction for our sins. That's the basis of our heavenly, of His heavenly intercession that 2,000 years ago on a small hill outside Jerusalem, the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me. That's the first truth we are to believe.

[8 : 26] Jesus made satisfaction. The second truth is this, Jesus makes application. He makes application. The heavenly intercession of Christ is not about Jesus making new sacrifices for us. Rather, it is about Him intervening on our behalf to apply all the benefits of the cross to us.

He died to take away our sins. He now pleads before His Father, based on the cross on which He died, that the Father would give us eternal life. Now, although illustrations of this are very difficult, the world, it's like this. Suppose today we bought a holiday for next summer. So, we pay TUI or Jet2 holidays the whole balance for next year's vacation in Brazil. As the holiday approaches, we prove that we have paid for it by producing the receipt and we say, I've paid for it. I now want to enjoy what I've paid for.

And in the same way, Jesus' heavenly intercession is His producing of His wounds before the Father, saying, I have paid the price of their salvation. Now I pray that they would enjoy the benefits of what I have paid for. We must not trivialize or misunderstand Christ's heavenly intercession.

Jesus is not praying for us to find a space in a busy car park today. Jesus does not clasp His hands in heaven praying as we understand it.

He stands there bearing the scars of His sacrifice as a constant memorial to His Father that He has once for all paid the price of our salvation. He stands there and His wounds plead for all the benefits of the cross to be applied to us. Most theologians would agree that the intercession of Christ is non-verbal.

[11 : 08] There are no words. It is the appearance of the crucified and risen Christ in heaven, which is His intercession.

James Durham was a 17th century Glasgow minister in the Barony Church up near the cathedral. Now he preached a series of sermons about the heavenly intercession of Christ.

And I was privileged to spend a whole year, a couple of years ago, studying his transcribed sermons. When it comes to the application of the cross, Durham speaks of many areas of our lives in which Christ intercedes for us in heaven. Of the many, let me just mention four.

First of all, Christ intercedes that those whom the Father has elected before the world began would be born again and become children of God. Christ intercedes that those whom the Father has elected before the world began would be born again and become children of God. He intercedes for those who are not yet Christians, but whose names are written in the book of life to repent and believe the gospel. If there were words in heaven, He might say, Father, I have shed my blood for them, though they know it not. Send your Spirit to show them their need of me and to give them faith in me. Second, Christ intercedes for the holiness of His people, for the holiness of His people, but they would become progressively more holy.

In Ephesians 5.25, we read, Christ gave Himself for the church that He might sanctify her to make her holy. On what He died for, He's now praying for the Father to apply that we as Christians and as a church may become progressively more holy by the inward working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts through the Word of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

[13 : 20] And through the Word He has given us. Thirdly, Christ intercedes for the prayers of His people, for the prayers of His people. Jesus died on the cross to give us access into the throne room of God to lay our prayers and petitions before the King Himself. He now intercedes on our behalf in heaven for our prayers that they would be heard and answered by His Father. But our prayers are substandard at best, are they not? Our prayers are substandard at best. They are filled with our selfish motives, our self-centered desires. So, Christ as that intercessor cleans them up, as it were, and gives them to God in an acceptable, pleasing form. Durham writes these wonderful words. He had a very good turn of phrase, Durham. He said, it is Christ who takes the mangled and half prayers of His people and presents them to God. It is Christ who takes the mangled and half prayers of His people and presents them to God. There are many, many more things for which Christ intercedes in heaven. But fourthly,

Christ intercedes that we may be glorified with Him, that we may be glorified with Him. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed, Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory. This is now that for which Christ intercedes in heaven, that having persevered through life and having conquered sin, we would be glorified with Him.

He pleads that none of us would be lost, but that all of us would appear before Him, robed in the majesty of God's glory. So, you see, the heavenly priesthood of Christ is all about the application of the benefits of the cross. Jesus has already paid for them at Calvary, but now at the right hand of God, He intervenes on our behalf that what He's already paid for would be ours. Jesus makes application. Thirdly, Jesus lives forever. He lives forever. In Hebrews 7, 23 through 25, the writers compare in the ministry of earthly priests, the Aaronic priests, with the supremacy of Christ as our great high priest.

And He's making a simple point, namely that those earthly priests like Aaron were mortal men and therefore, in His words, were prevented from continuing in office, verse 23. They held their office for a few years and then death stole them away. By contrast, the writer says, but He, that is the exalted Jesus, holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever.

Consequently, He's able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. So, the writer is saying here, the continuing efficacy of Christ's heavenly intercession is based on this. Christ lives forever. He has been standing at the right hand of God since the day He ascended on high, pleading that the benefits He purchased for His people on the cross would be applied to them and enjoyed by them. He's been interceding for us all since before our birth that we being His elect people would come to a living faith in Him.

[17 : 14] Jesus lives forever, and for as long as He lives, yes, even I believe when we get to heaven, He'll continue to intercede for us that our joy may be unmeasured in the eternal presence of God His Father. There's no cross in heaven, but the Christ who died that intercedes for us.

There are no wounds in heaven, but there are words. There are no scars in heaven, but there are sentences, because Jesus, our great high priest, is and will save us to the uttermost.

He ever lives to make intercession for us. The Queen of Sheba said about the wisdom of Solomon, the half was not told me. Even though now we're beginning to know the truth of Christ's heavenly intercession, the reality of it still exceeds our imaginations. Christ knows my name.

Christ knows your name. And at the right hand of God the Father, He is intervening on your behalf.

Secondly, this evening, and more briefly, the truth we are to apply, the truth we are to apply, we must be crystal clear. All the truth we learn from the Word of God is practical in its application.

[18 : 51] If the truth we believe cannot be usefully applied, it is almost certainly false. The heavenly intercession of Christ may seem to be a rather abstract doctrine, but perhaps it's one of the most useful and practical of all Christian truths. Christ stands for us at the right hand of God, advocating our case by virtue of His wounds and scars. And He's pleading that the benefits of the cross would be applied into our daily lives.

I recently wrote a paper detailing ten practical applications of the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ. But in this concluding section, I want to briefly mention just five.

First of all, the heavenly intercession of Christ gives assurance to the doubting. It gives assurance to the doubting. Many Christians wrestle with forgiveness. They think that the sins they've committed are so serious that even God can't forgive them. And because of that, they struggle to forgive themselves.

How can God forgive such a serious sin? The doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession teaches us that our present experience of forgiveness rests both on Christ's past satisfaction on the cross and His present intercession in heaven. I love what James Durham says.

There is a way to be freed from the charge of a long list of debts before God. There is an advocate at the right hand of God in heaven who paid our debt and is now interceding for us.

[20 : 52] And this is a brilliant line. Who can lose the case when He pleads it? Who can lose the case when He pleads it?

If you are wrestling with the experience of forgiveness, do not look inwards. Look upwards to the right hand of God where Christ is advocating for you based on His payment for you on the cross.

Who can lose the case when He pleads it? Secondly, the heavenly intercession of Christ gives encouragement to the desperate.

It gives encouragement to the desperate. Many in our congregation here have been praying for revival in Scotland for many, many years. Many have been praying for a change in the circumstances of our church.

Many others have been praying for the conversion of their children. Years have turned into decades and we increasingly become desperate. We begin to question, is God listening to a word I'm saying?

[22 : 03] Though it does not guarantee that we shall have exactly what we asked for, Christ's heavenly intercession guarantees that God will listen to us and that therefore we should persevere.

God will answer. Perhaps not in the way we might wish Him to. But Christ's heavenly intercession means that we will always have access to the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth in prayer.

Always. The third powerful application, and I think this is very contemporary, it's a powerful application.

The heavenly intercession of Christ gives joy for the depressed. It gives joy for the depressed. This is a most precious application for so many of us.

Many Christians with mental health challenges find prayer incredibly challenging. By virtue of their own mental pain, they struggle to verbalize any thought to God and are almost wholly taken up with themselves.

[23 : 17] Listen to what James Durham writes. On account of Christ's intercession in heaven, a sigh, a groan, a broken word, nay, a breathing will be accepted.

A world of pain is often expressed in a groan or a broken word. And by virtue of the heavenly intercession of Christ, it is heard and understood by God.

Durham continues, Christ accepts the prayers of all His saints, the weakest as well as the best. For the best goes not up by His blood, and the weakest goes up the same way.

God accepts our prayers, strong or weak, because of Jesus. If you're going through mental health challenges right now, don't despair at being unable to verbalize your prayers.

Groan to God, and it will be as expressive in His ears as the most eloquent of long prayers, and all because of the heavenly intercession of Christ. Fourth application of the heavenly intercession of Christ.

[24 : 42] Restoration for the backslider. Restoration for the backslider. Durham writes, Christ's intercession is suited unto, appointed, and designed for sinners.

It is suited unto, appointed, and designed for sinners. Churches are filled with Christians who have stagnated or going backwards in their faith. Now, no true believer wants to continue in a backslidden state, but they often feel trapped by the choices they've made.

Being assured of the heavenly intercession of Christ for them can provide them with the willingness and ability to repent of their sinful lifestyle and to return to a healthy faith.

Christ intercedes at the right hand of God today for the perseverance of your faith. And He intercedes for backsliders. Have you grown stagnant in your faith?

Are you going back in your faith? Christ intercedes for you by name. He intercedes with His Father for your perseverance.

[25 : 49] And then lastly, there's lots and lots of applications, but lastly here, the heavenly intercession of Christ gives confidence for the church, gives confidence for the church.

The British church is passing, undoubtedly, through a season of decline. We do not have enough ministers and our preaching lacks spiritual power and oomph.

It's enough to make even the most optimistic of us, and I'm not one of those, downbeat. And yet, if we were to see the intercession of Christ on the church's behalf, we would not despair, but be filled with confidence for the future.

Those who oppose us here on earth are all by themselves, but we have the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and He advocates for us in heaven.

He died to create and redeem His church. Shall He then give up on us? Not at all. His heavenly intercession secures our confidence, for He pleads for the growth and establishment of His church in Scotland and all over the world.

[27 : 00] He calls us to go out on mission for Him, and every step we take is surrounded by His effective pleading on our behalf.

This may be the first time that many of us here have heard anything about this doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ. It's a mysterious subject, and the truth is that none of us can really visualize it.

And yet, the Scripture teaches it, and therefore, we believe it. I feel that in such a short space of time, I can scarce do justice to not even 1% of its riches, far less the half of which it's not been told.

But if I was to sum it all up, it would be by using a beautiful phrase taken from James Durham. He died as a very young man, died probably of exhaustion.

But he says of the Christ who stands at the Father's right hand interceding for us, he says of Christ, He shall not leave a tear on the cheek of any of His own.

[28 : 11] Here all be done. He shall not leave a tear on the cheek of any of His own. Here all be done. All those tears we've shed, all those tears we shall yet shed, our broken hearts, our broken minds, our broken bodies.

In the depth of human experience, Christ, our great High Priest, shall not leave a tear on the cheek of any of His own. Here all be done.

All that's left for us now is to trust Him in all this, to worship Him for all this, and to run to Him with all this. And Christ, our great High Priest, will have all the glory yesterday, today, and forever.

Amen.