

Hebrews 7:23-28 “What’s Jesus Doing Today?”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! I love that song. Y'all did such a fantastic job. That gets me ready for Easter. Anybody else excited for Easter? I do hope you'll join us for our special services this week as we think more about the cross and the resurrection.

Thursday night at 6 o'clock, we'll talk through the first three of Jesus' seven sayings from the cross. We'll celebrate the Lord's Supper Friday at 3.

We'll do the last four sayings in that service. And then Sunday morning, 6 o'clock outside and 9.30 back in here.

So much to celebrate. Amen. And we celebrate, thank you, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus every day, don't we?

[1:06] That song. It's an Easter song. This sermon is Easter focused. It is Easter part one, if you will. I mean, I do hope you'll come back, but you're going to get Easter this morning.

And I am pretty fired up, to be honest with you, about this glorious text. Before I read it, let me ask you to think about something.

I want you to think about how God views you today. In a variety of potential situations you might find yourself in.

For the sake of this exercise, let's assume that you're a follower of Jesus. You're in relationship with God, who, remember, is the infinite, holy, holy, holy, just God of the universe.

Okay? Here's some potential situations. You're doing that same thing again that you know God's Word tells you not to do.

[2:07] That you have promised God before you'd never do again. How does God feel about you today? Or you're just so confused and you're frustrated by the events that are going on around you in the world and in your life.

And you just, you don't even know how to pray anything at all. How does God feel today? Or you're really struggling with doubts again.

Is God really there? Is He really good? Is He really in control? You're just not sure what to think anymore, honestly.

How does God feel about you today? Is God perhaps disappointed in you? Seriously?

Again? Or maybe He's just done caring. He's really disinterested. Like, I mean, I guess I'm going to have to let you into heaven one day.

[3:19] But in the meantime, could you try to get it together? Or maybe you feel even worse that God's dismissive of you. He's ready to be done with you. Putting you in the doghouse.

Don't try to pretend we're good. Don't expect blessing from me. Stay away for a while. You're in time out. And the next time this happens, it'll be even worse. To be clear, the Bible's honest that all of those would be very fair things for God to feel towards you, wouldn't they?

He's a righteous king. He ought to feel those things towards us. In fact, He is so pure that He has to incinerate sin. He can't have it in His presence.

It has to be kept away from Him permanently. And here we are. We're sinners wondering then perhaps if we can have any relationship at all with this holy God.

Hebrews has been telling us Jesus is the key to this. Specifically, that He's our great high priest to stand before this holy God on our behalf.

[4:31] Hebrews 7 has shown Jesus in a permanent, God-appointed role as priest like Melchizedek. Pastor Bill taught us so well last week, I don't even have to talk about Melchizedek.

And now, He shows us how God relates to, feels about us who trust Jesus as our high priest. What's our relationship with God today? It's all about what Jesus is doing today. Let's read at verse 23 of Hebrews 7.

The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. But Jesus holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever.

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

[5:41] For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest. Holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.

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.

For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests. But the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son who has been made perfect forever.

This is God's Word. Let's ask for His help. Father, this is really glorious beyond what You know I have the capacity or abilities to describe.

So, Spirit, would You speak? Would we hear these words in a fresh way? Would it give us fresh hope and confidence and joy in our Savior?

[6:44] We ask in His name. Amen. Amen. What's Jesus doing today? You ever think about that?

What's Jesus up to? Well, the Bible tells us many things, including that He is sustaining the world by the word of His power. He's ruling and reigning over the nations.

He's preparing to return and rescue us and restore all things. That's a lot. But here, the writer tells us that He always lives to make intercession for those who trust in Him.

This is the role of the priest that Hebrews has been telling us about. The one who represents the people in the presence of God. And this, then, is unbelievable.

In every way, this is transformational about how God relates to you. Here's what it is. Jesus is praying for you. What's Jesus doing today?

[7:50] Jesus is praying for you. It's unbelievable. If you didn't realize that, I want this to come home. Because sometimes that's a general thing, okay? Jesus is praying for you.

Great. Jesus is taking our groans, our wandering prayers, and He's making them beautiful to the Father. Fourth century church father, John Chrysostom, said this is like a little boy who wants to welcome his father home from a trip.

And so, he goes to make a bouquet for his father, and he gathers, well, mostly weeds and grass and a couple of flowers. But thankfully, before giving them to his father, he delivers them to his mother, who takes them and fixes them up.

And when the father comes home and gets the bouquet, it's all flowers. Chrysostom says, See, Jesus' intercession means He is the one, the only one through whom we pray, through whom we talk to God.

He's the way. Don't need saints. Don't need angels. Kids, I want you to think about this. When you sit at home and you sit around the dining room table or wherever you sit to eat your meal, probably y'all often pray before you eat.

[9:27] And when you are getting kind of towards the end of the prayer, do you maybe pray something like, In Jesus' name, amen? Is that how you end? When you say that, what is that? Is that just like saying, Goodbye, God.

We're through now. We're going to eat. I want to tell you it's a lot more than that. When you say, In Jesus' name, what you're saying is that Jesus is actually praying with you and for you.

It's like Jesus is actually coming right down there with you as you're praying at the dinner table and taking your prayers and walking them up towards God, making them beautiful and perfect along the

way and giving them to God so He hears you praying.

Isn't that awesome? That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name, that that's the way we come to God. Kids, God loves to hear you pray. Jesus loves to pray for you.

In fact, we know this from His high priestly prayer in John 17, that when Jesus prays for you, He actually thanks God for giving you to Him as a gift.

[10:36] And He prays that you would be with Him forever. Isn't that so encouraging? That's what Jesus is praying for you. Scottish pastor Robert Murray McShane said of the confidence that he found in Jesus' intercession for him, he said, 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. Jesus praying for you is part of His intercession. It's part of what Jesus is doing today.

But Hebrews is even more specific about what He's praying for. This word, intercession, it has a legal context, okay?

Someone is representing you, speaking on your behalf to the judge, right? Remember, we desperately need a representative before a holy God, or we sinners are in big trouble on our own, right?

Jesus steps forward and says, I'll speak. I'll stand. I'll offer to be your representative. You've probably heard that line at the end of lawyers' ads.

[11:55] No representation is made that the quality of legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers. It's usually faster than that. It's all I can come up with. Y'all, here in Hebrews, on the contrary, every representation is being made that the quality of legal services offered by Jesus is greater than the quality of legal services you can get anywhere else.

That's the whole point. That's what He's saying. He's saying, this is what I'm offering you. And so what I want us to see is three ways that Jesus as the great high priest is the greater intercessor, the better representative.

And the first is at the foundation of all of it. What is His unique basis for His intercession? He's got one that nobody else offers. How does Jesus build a case for a sinner like me before a holy God? Don't miss this. Verse 26. It was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest. What's He like? What kind? A holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

Stop there for a second. That's actually a little odd. You may remember the last time we were told that Jesus was a fitting high priest. Do you remember why it was fitting? Why was Jesus fitting? He actually was fitting because He had been made low to suffer like us.

[13:29] That He had been tempted in every way as we are. That He had become like us so He could be sympathetic with us as a high priest. Jesus is that.

And at the same time also completely, morally, ceremonially, pure, above us, in God's throne room, actually standing before the very throne of grace.

No merely human priest goes there. No way. And He doesn't need, verse 27, to offer sacrifices for His own sins.

Why? Because He doesn't have any. And so He was actually able to make a perfect sacrifice of what?

Of Himself. We got to get this. See, back in Leviticus, God's people were told to bring sin offerings every time they sinned, right? It was a lamb or whatever animal always had to have no spot, no wrinkle, no blemish.

[14:40] That happened thousands and thousands and thousands of times. And then for the first time, a person was offered as a perfect sacrifice with no spot, no wrinkle, no blemish.

And that was where? At the cross of Jesus. God appoints Jesus as priest not for His weakness, but here because He's the Son made perfect forever.

Perfect priest who can offer a perfect sacrifice. That is the priest that we imperfect people desperately need. No one else can make a case for us like this.

It's like Anna with true love interceding before the sword that's coming, crashing down on her sister. Like that, Jesus intercedes for us.

Throwing Himself between us and the wrath of a holy God. He takes it. See, what that means is that when you mess up, Jesus doesn't say to God, now listen, Father, take it easy on Will.

[15:59] I mean, he's a pretty good guy. He really tries, Your Honor. I know he blows it a lot, but give him another shot. He'll do better next time.

No. Jesus' case for you focuses not on you. But on Himself. When Jesus prays for you, He's asking God to give you not a second chance to do better, but a second representative who has done better.

Better than Adam. Better than me. Better than you. Jesus, the perfect Son. He's saying, God, give Him that record.

Why is it that we can sing about our souls rising up and shaking off their guilty fears? Is it because we've done really well? What are we saying? The bleeding sacrifice on my behalf appears.

Before the throne, our surety stands with our names written on His hands. Can you believe that? Jesus says, Father, this will guy, let me tell you what's important about him.

[17:15] I bled for him. I see it right here. I bled for that guy. Jesus stands to make your case before the throne of God and He speaks of His five bleeding wounds that pour effectual prayers that strongly plead for me.

Forgive Him, Father, wretched sinner though He be. Forgive Him for my sake. That's what happens. Hear how Paul says it in Romans 8.

Why does Paul say, no charges stick against us? Why is that true? Christ Jesus died and was raised to light and is indeed present tense today interceding for us.

You know what that means for you and me? That means actually that if we think of Jesus asking God to be merciful and gracious, when Jesus is pleading your case before God, He's not pleading for mercy.

There's plenty of mercy and grace in Jesus, don't get me wrong. But Jesus comes before His Father and says, Father, give justice. Give what must be given now.

[18:33] 1 John 1 says it, right? If you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive your sins. He sees Jesus has already paid for those sins.

Jesus doesn't have to say, Father, come on, find it in your heart to give Him a break. No, He says, Father, give Him the forgiveness that I purchased, that I have earned, that I have won.

That's what Romans 3 explains has been happening with these sacrifices and priests all along. What's been going on through the Old Testament is that as they bring all these sacrifices, God is passing over sins.

He's passing over them until a time would come when there was a perfect sacrifice, when God could be just, He could receive sin's deserved payment and at the same time be the justifier of those trusting Jesus' perfect sacrifice.

Friends, Jesus is our great high priest, our qualified representative because unlike any other religious leader, His case is based on His perfect sacrifice.

[19:55] So His prayers for you are always heard. Just like when He prayed for Peter, He knew Peter was going to deny Him. He prayed that when Peter fell, His faith would not fail. And God hears.

Pastor Edmund Clowney tells of a time he sought out the holiest, best prayer he knew because he was hurting deeply. He found famed theologian John Murray and said, pray for me, John.

This is what he writes. In a time of devastating personal grief concerning a member of my family, I sought John Murray to request his prayer. As John interceded for me and for the deepest concern of my heart, he prayed with urgency and strength, weaving together passages of Scripture to form the fabric of his claim on the mercy and promises of God.

At that moment, I confess, I was overwhelmed with the sheer blessing of having such an intercessor to take me before my heavenly Father.

I think that's how I used to feel with Delilah Harris or Jenny Doss or your grandmother when you heard them praying for you. He says, then, as his prayer was lifted to the mercy seat, he began to

thank the Father for the mediation of God's eternal Son, the merciful and faithful high priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.

[21:25] Clowney says, then it came home to me. I had a better intercessor than John Murray. Jesus Christ, my Savior, prayed for me.

Praise Jesus. Jesus, praise for you. well, that sounds like a good representative to have, right? It's a good start. But how long will he continue representing me? That's a real issue here in Hebrews because these Old Testament priests, there were a lot of good ones, but they all died. And you had to wonder, would the next guy successfully make the sacrifices? Would he safely bring you near to God? God? First century Jewish historian Josephus estimates 83 different high priests from Aaron until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

One after another after another. But remember, Jesus is a permanent priest. How? The power of an indestructible life.

[22:38] Verse 16 told us that. It's Easter. It's resurrection, right? Verse 24. But Jesus, he holds his priesthood permanently.

Why? Because he continues forever. Verse 25. He always lives. There's our eternal security, right? It's in the resurrection. Jesus has beaten death at death's own game. Hosanna, save us. You've conquered death. Do it for us. We never have to wonder if the next day or the next failure will condemn us.

If God's gonna turn and decide to give up on us this time. No. Our case is not based on us. It's based on the perfect priest who is the forever priest never dying, never retiring, never leaving us, never sleeping, never wavering, never failing to intercede for us no matter where we find ourselves. He ever lives above, right? For me to intercede, his all-redeeming love, his precious blood to plead for every race at the throne of grace.

[23:51] He's there today if you're wondering what's Jesus doing? Why isn't Jesus in church? He's interceding. Pastor Andrew Murray explains what that means for us, what that frees us up to do in our lives if Jesus is always interceding.

To come to God through Christ means nothing less than entering into the holiest of all, God's very presence, and dwelling there all day, spending our lives there, abiding there continually. He's interceding before God today and always, so you live, you rest, you abide before God today and always.

A priest with a perfect sacrifice, with a permanent, permanent service of intercession.

One more phrase that I don't want us to miss. How effective is Jesus at bringing me to God?

[25:00] In other words, if I'm going to hire him, how often does this lawyer win the case for his client? verse 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.

Because he lives forever, because he always lives to make intercession, he saves to the uttermost. Great word.

Great word, uttermost. Don't use it very often. It means from all your sins at all times in all ways Jesus saves.

That's what his name means. That's what his father sent him to do. It's what he came to accomplish on the cross and in the empty tomb. And it's important because you need to know something when you're wondering about how God feels about you.

When you say, I've been a Christian a long time, but lately, I'm just really, I'm really struggling. I'm really wavering a lot. I don't feel like God and I are doing well. Jesus didn't, Jesus didn't make your salvation possible.

[26:20] Jesus made your salvation real. Not a possibility, a reality. He actually accomplishes salvation. He saves to the uttermost.

Later it says of his sacrifice, once for all. So nothing else is needed. This Jesus is a savior. He came to seek and to save the lost.

He is able to save to the uttermost. So listen, what does that mean? That means there is no sin too big for him. It means there is no sinner too bad for him to save.

There's no offense too often repeated. No runaway too distant. No situation too complicated. No valley too dark where the good shepherd can't find a lost sheep.

No rebel too hardened. No shame too deep. No life too far gone. But Jesus saves today to the uttermost. All of them.

[27:19] five bleeding wounds. Five bleeding wounds of Jesus cry, forgive him. Who? Which one? That one? Is he too bad? They cry, forgive him.

Always. Always. Dear friend, if you're here today and you are just kind of exploring Jesus, maybe seeking, wondering about Jesus, not sure what to think about him, I'd urge you to ask him to be your representative, to intercede for you.

He loves doing it. He lives for it. And he will save you to the uttermost. You and God completely good forever and always can never be separated from him.

That's what Jesus will do for you. Dear friends who have trusted in Jesus maybe for most of your life, won't you today, as you hear Jesus praying for you, leave your life of self-condemnation, of half-hearted distance from Jesus, of playing church occasionally but feeling like God's far off.

Leave your life of sin that Jesus has paid for and remember that he is interceding for you today. So God is not disappointed.

[28:47] God is not disinterested in you. Today, while Jesus is interceding as he always does, your father is smiling on you. He's delighting in you as his perfect son.

He is welcoming you home. Come home, he says. Before we close, I want to remember why the writer thinks this is so important.

Why is he telling them about Jesus as their greater priest? Do you remember the whole letters about this? Some of them in life's difficulties, they're in a tough place and they're thinking about going back to the Jewish sacrificial system with dying priests and repeated sacrifices and many regulations.

They're thinking about that because they all know and feel deeply they need a representative before God's throne. But they also know other options. They've lived them. The spirit of their age was to go back to the sacrifices.

sacrifices. That's not what many people contemplate these days. That you haven't been thinking that during this sermon. Maybe I'll go back to that. No.

[30:10] Instead of clinging to this great representative before God, what's the spirit of our age? I think having lost a reverent fear of God that makes us desperately dependent on a representative.

The spirit of our age is representing myself. In fact, we do it while we go to church. One of the classic ways I'll say that I'll represent myself is I'll be moral.

I'll be good enough for God to be okay with me. By the way, that is way underestimating His holiness and our weakness to think that that's how we could navigate the relationship.

Others do the same thing by saying, you know, really all I need to do is be true to myself. And that makes me and whatever God is out there, we're fine. However I live, as long as I'm true to myself. As much as it is never a good idea to represent yourself, is it, Barnes? this instinct is there in all of us to represent myself.

[31:22] I'll show you a version of it in my own life. A couple weeks ago, Christy asked me to do something for her, not anything unusual or unreasonable, just helping out around the house.

But she told me how I could be helpful to her and she explained how she wanted it done. And I listened, mostly. But I kind of thought I just kind of handle it my own way.

So when it wasn't done the way that she asked, she wasn't so much frustrated at how it was done, she capably did it better. She was hurt.

I didn't respect or value her. I'd selfishly messed up and hurt someone that I love.

How's I going to respond? This actually, you haven't seen it yet, this is where you're going to see the self-representation. What happens in that moment for me? I mount my self-defense.

[32:27] It's a pretty common one. There's several things I do. I call character witnesses. You know, just the beginning of a conversation, you know, I work in, naturally weave in the fact that this happened after I was picking up the girls.

I'm usually pretty helpful, that's what you're supposed to hear. Plus, there were extenuating circumstances. I had a long day at work. I wasn't feeling great. There was a lot on my mind.

You know, that needs to be included. My noble intentions. Sweetheart, I didn't mean to hurt you. But the closing argument comes, maybe you've made this one before, future commitments, right? Look, it won't happen again, right? Of course, it won't happen again. So we're okay, right? You're happy with me now. See how I've told you how good I am and will be? Aren't you okay now? Well, that's no way to live, is it? Self-representation, especially if you're having to draw up a defense constantly to prove you're good enough, not just to another person, but to God, to the one who sees everything that you do, to the one who knows every thought and intention of your heart, representing yourself to him and explaining it away.

[33:56] Can you imagine? Most of us can imagine. You know what you'll do if that's the way you live with God? I'll tell you because I've lived it. You'll quit drawing near to him. You will. I don't know what it'll look like, but you'll quit getting close because it's exhausting. It's too much work to get to the place where you know he's okay with you, where you've proven your case. You'll either know you're not good enough or you will get exhausted from trying to convince yourself that you are.

How about this way of living with him? I'm sorry. I was unthoughtful. I hate how this hurts you and our relationship.

Please forgive me. I have nothing. I need forgiveness. Why is it so hard for me to say that?

[35:01] As a husband? As a child of God? Because I love to represent myself. I want to tell you, Jesus loves to represent you.

He lives to intercede for you. He's doing it today and always. You can count on it. You can live like it's a reality.

Don't represent yourself. Don't run back to making enough of the right sacrifices. You know, a few Sunday mornings at church, a couple service projects, a few bucks in the plate.

Yeah, God and I, we're good now. No, no. That's exhausting. Y'all, it's also ineffective. And there is a greater priest than that.

He knows your pain. He gets your temptation. He's walking your shoes and He's holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens, interceding in the very throne room of God.

[36:08] He's praying for you right now. Dear ones, run to Jesus and don't ever run away from Him. Three points in a poem.

That's what a sermon is supposed to be. It's not usually the way I go. But I like this poem. Martha Snell Nicholson. I can relate. I think probably many of you can too.

I sinned and straightway post-haste Satan flew before the presence of the Most High God and made a railing accusation there. He said this soul, this thing of clay and sod has sinned.

Tis true that he has named thy name but I demand his death for thou has said the soul that sinneth it shall die. Shall not thy sentence be fulfilled?

Is justice dead? Send now this wretched sinner to his doom. What other thing can righteous ruler do? And thus did he accuse me day and night and every word he spoke oh God was true.

[37:16] Then quickly one rose up from God's right hand before whose glory angels veiled their eyes. He spoke each jot and tittle of the law must be fulfilled the guilty sinner dies.

But wait suppose his guilt were all transferred to me and that I paid his penalty. Behold my hands my side my feet one day I was made sin for him and died that he might be presented faultless at thy throne.

And Satan fled away. Full well he knew that he could not prevail against such love for every word my dear Lord spoke was true.

Jesus there you stand before the throne of God above making our strong and perfect plea. How beautiful it is to us. that you pray for us. You defend us. You plead your blood for us.

[38:27] Praise you Jesus for your sinless life that makes us beautiful to our Father clothed in your righteousness. Praise you Jesus for your sacrifice of yourself that washes us clean from all our sins.

Praise you Jesus for always living to intercede for us. thank you for praying for me. Would you help us even this week to run and cling to your cross?

We're going to have it before us. We're going to have opportunities. Help us from the depths of our hearts to see it as the most needful thing in our lives and the most important thing of all.

Help us to worship you for your love. Help us to find our hope in your empty tomb and your ongoing life and your intercession before the throne of God.

Pour out your grace on us. Give us joy and confidence in you. Thank you for loving us. We pray these prayers in your name knowing that you pray them alongside of us and we give you great thanks.

[39:37] Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org and we have to a home to have to have!

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