

Jesus Intercedes for You

(Hebrews 7:23-27) Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; {24} but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. {25} Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. {26} Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. {27} Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Tell me, have you ever been in a situation where you knew you were in trouble with someone in authority? You broke the rules and you knew you would have to face the consequences. And the whole matter left you feeling a little sick to your stomach. I expect that we've all had moments like these. You know, those "just wait till your father gets home" moments. Or "the boss wants to talk to you." Or "the officer is at the door." Ugh.

I remember a time when I was back in grade school. My brother and I were at my aunt's house and we were playing with a Super Ball. Do any of you remember what a Super Ball is? This black rubber ball that bounced like a mile in the air. Anyway, my brother and I were bouncing this Super Ball, and one of us missed it and it went bouncing down the driveway, headed right for the street. And the whole time I'm thinking to myself, "Please don't let it hit a car. Please don't let it hit a car." Well, no such luck. Not only did my super ball hit a car. It hit a car with a big gold star on the side of it. My Super Ball hit a sheriff's car! Can you believe it? I'm thinking, you've got to be kidding me! Can you imagine how my brother and I felt as we watched that officer do a quick U-turn and come barreling up the driveway? We were shaking in our boots. "Oh my goodness, are we in trouble now. Not only with the officer but wait till Dad finds out about this!"

But actually, we didn't have to wait long. As the sheriff was coming up the driveway, Dad was walking out of the house. He met the officer in the driveway and he says, "I'm sorry, officer. I should have been keeping a closer eye on those boys. I'll take the blame for what happened. If there's any damage to your car, I'll pay the price to make it right again. I hope you can see your way clear to let these guys off the hook." Which is exactly what the officer did. Whew!

My friends, do you realize what my father did for me in that situation? He intervened. He stepped in to plead my case. He went to bat for me. You might say that he "interceded" for me. You realize, that what my father did for my brother and me so many years ago, Jesus Christ is still doing for each one of us to this day. In fact, it's one of the ways that the Risen Lord continues to have an impact on our lives today. You see, Jesus is risen, in order to speak on our behalf. Or to put it another way,

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Our text for today comes from the book of Hebrews, a book that was originally written to Jewish Christians. It was designed to draw a contrast between the ways of the Old Testament and the way of Christ. In fact, sometimes the book of Hebrews is subtitled, "The Good—and the Better." For example, one of the contrasts the author makes is between the Old Testament

priesthood and Jesus, the “better” high priest. In what way was Jesus a high priest? Well, think about what the priests in the Old Testament did. Hebrews 5:1 tells us, *Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.*

So the number one job of the high priest was to represent the people, that is, to come before God to offer sacrifices of bulls and goats on behalf of the people and secondly, to offer prayers on behalf of the people. The incense which the priest burned on a daily basis represented the prayers, yes the intercessions, which the high priest was offering up to God.

But there were a number of shortcomings, a number of drawbacks to the Old Testament priests. For one, those Old Testament priests kept dying. God had to keep replacing them with new high priests. Not so with Jesus. Once Jesus was installed into the office of high priest, he was in that position forever. How does our text put it? *Now there were many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.* Old Testament priests were temporary. Jesus is eternal.

The second way that Jesus was better than the priests who preceded him? Old Testament priests were sinful. Jesus was not. How does the writer describe Jesus? *Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens* (Heb. 7:26). The fact that Jesus Christ was born into this world without a speck of the sin that we all inherit, the fact that Jesus lived his entire life without ever thinking a sinful thought, the fact that Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of God's law in every way—all these things made Jesus unlike any of the other high priests who went before him. Because Jesus had no sin of his own to atone for, he could do something that no one else could do. How does our text put it? *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself* (Hebrews 7:27).

My friends, that is the number one reason we can call Jesus our high priest. Because he could offer up the sacrifice of himself. He offered his perfect life on the cross for the sins of the world. He was both the sacrifice and the sacrificer. He was both the lamb and the priest.

But once he carried out that ultimate sacrifice, once he said, “It is finished,” does that mean he was done being our High Priest? No, it doesn’t. Even though he was done offering up a sacrifice, by the end of his state of humiliation, he was not done offering up prayers on our behalf. Even in his state of exaltation, Jesus is at the right hand of God, busy making intercession for us. Isn’t that what the writer to the Hebrews says? *[Jesus] is able to save completely (or maybe better, save eternally) those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.* St. Paul says it even more clearly in Romans 8:34. *Jesus Christ, who died—more than that, who is raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

So what does that mean? That Jesus is interceding for us? The word intercede comes from a Latin word meaning “to come between” or “to get in the middle”. Kind of reminds me of those clown cowboys who get in between the bull and the rider who just got thrown off the bull. But actually that word intercede is focused not so much on a person’s actions as on his words. When my father stepped in between the officer and me, it wasn’t so much his presence that made a difference. Rather, it was the words he spoke. In effect, he brought a petition on behalf of my brother and me. He said, in effect, “Officer, please forgive them. Blame me instead. I’ll pay whatever they owe.” That my friends, is an intercession.

And that’s what Jesus Christ does for us. When we are the ones who do things that are

foolish, when we are the ones who break the law, when we are in trouble with someone who has authority over us, Jesus comes to our defense. How does St John put it in his first epistle? *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* (1 John 2:1)

Yes, Jesus is the one who speaks to the Father in our defense. The question is, What that conversation sound like? What does Jesus say in our defense? Well, I'll tell you what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, "God, will you cut these guys some slack? I mean, nobody's perfect. They're really not "bad" people. They're doing the best they can. I'm sure they'll do better next time around." No, if that's what Jesus says to defend me—well, I might as well say that myself. In fact, I've already made all those excuses to God.

No, when Jesus defends us, when he intercedes for us before our Father's throne, he doesn't point to who we are, or what we "could" do. No rather, he points to what he has already done for us.

What does Scripture say? Romans 4 verse 25: *Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* 1 Peter 3:18, *Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.* 1 John 1:7, *The blood of Jesus, God's son, purifies us from every sin.*

The point is this. Jesus has already done everything that needed to be done to make our case before God. The bill for our sins has already been paid. It's kind of like if someone pays your way into some event like a rock concert or a dance, and the guy at the door puts a stamp on your hand. If you go outside for a few minutes and then want to come back in, do you have to pay the admission price a second time? No. You just have to show them your hand. So it is with you and me—and Jesus. When we're guilty of sin, when we step outside the boundaries of God's law and then want to come back to God, what does Jesus do? He shows the Father his hands—the ones that still bear the marks of the nail for you and me. There's the proof that we still belong in God's family. That's how Jesus, our great high priest, intercedes for us.

But now here's a theological question for you to chew on a little bit. Is your good standing with God dependent upon Jesus dying for you? Or is it dependent upon Jesus interceding for you? Or to put it another way, are you saved because of what Jesus did for you? Or Because of what he's still doing for you? The answer is, It's both. Lutheran theologians put it this way. *Jesus' intercession in the state of exaltation is not satisfaction; it's application.* What does that mean? It means that by his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus satisfied all the demands of God. He paid the full price for our sins. But because we keep sinning after Jesus died on the cross, Jesus has to keep applying what he did on Good Friday to the sins we committed this morning. That's why Scripture says, *he always lives to intercede for us.*

In fact, isn't that why Christ's Resurrection is so important for us? I mean, if Jesus is still dead in the grave, who's going to go to bat for you? Who's going to plead your case before the Father? Are you going to ask the Virgin Mary to intercede for you? Are you going to pray to one of the saints? I mean, they're all dead, too. Not to mention they're all sinners. They need an intercessor just as much as you and I do.

The fact is, you and I have the intercessor we need. We have one who is alive, and perfect. one who knows what we're going through; one who has dealt with the same trials and tribulations we face. How does Scripture put it? *[Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

My friends, remember that your high priest is merciful. Remember that—when you fall

back into that same old sin for the umpteenth time. Remember that—when Satan tries to tell you that God has turned his back on you. Remember that—when you realize that God has every right to turn his back on you—but he didn't, because you have a merciful and faithful high priest who continues to intercede for you.

In fact, do you know who Jesus, the Intercessor, reminds me of on this Mother's Day weekend? He reminds me of my mom. How many times when I did something really stupid, how many times when I knew I was in big trouble, how many times when I had it coming, how many times did my mother intercede for me? How many times did she meet dad at the door, or had a long talk with him in the middle of the night—all just to plead my case? To go to bat for me. To speak in my defense. And because of her intercession, my father (who was not a mean man, but was certainly just)—because of my mom's intercession, my dad had mercy on me.

Thank God for moms. But more importantly, thank God for Jesus. What my mom did for me, Jesus has done for all of us, a million times more. Thank God that you always have someone who lives to intercede for you. In Jesus. Amen.