

# Intercession

by H. A. Ironside

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OPEN your Bibles, please, at the seventh chapter of Hebrews, and read from verse 24 through verse 27:

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

We have been considering various aspects of the work of our salvation and now I want to ask you to look with me at the subject of intercession. When I use the term "intercession," I am thinking not only of the intercession of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ at God's right hand, but also of the intercession of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of all the people of God while they are down here in this world, and also of the intercession of believers one for another, and on behalf of a needy world.

First, of course, and most important of all is the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ. We often speak, and rightly speak, of the finished work of Christ. When we use that expression we are thinking of the work whereby the sin question was settled to the divine satisfaction. When the Lord Jesus in infinite grace went to the Cross, there to do the will of God in giving Himself a ransom for our souls, He cried, "It is finished"; and that tells us that as far as the work of saving the soul is concerned there is nothing that we can do.

I remember reading long years ago of a man who lived in Germany in the Middle Ages, who had lived a wicked, reckless life. He belonged to a noble family and had plenty of money, but he has used his means extravagantly and in a godless way until at last he was reduced to poverty, and he was filled with remorse as he looked back over his life. He realized that he had not only sinned against himself and his family, but he had sinned against God, and he was anxious to do something in order to make some kind of atonement for his sins. He heard of a certain monastery where they observed a very, very strict routine. Absolute silence was required of the monks who were in the monastery, and only one was permitted to speak to outside people who might come to the gate of the monastery. These monks were given to

severe penance. They fasted often, prayed at various hours of the day and night, slept amongst the most uncomfortable of conditions, and in every way were seeking to appease God because of the sins that they had committed. He felt that if he were to enter that monastery and give himself to penance such as that for the rest of his life, he might be able to atone for the sins of the past. So he decided to offer himself as a candidate to become a monk in the monastery.

He had a long way to go but he decided to walk rather than to obtain some means of transportation, thinking that that in itself would be a penance. Finally, footsore and weary, he arrived one evening at the gate of the monastery and knocked and waited. By and by he heard the feeble steps of an aged man coming to the door. The monk opened the upper part of the door—it was one of those double doors that are in two parts —peered out into the twilight, and asked what the visitor wanted. He replied, "I have come to do whatever I can in order to do penance for my sins, in order to appease God and find forgiveness. I would like to enter this monastery, and I wish you would tell me what I can do in order to put away my sins and make amends for them."

The old monk looked at him and said, "My son, there is nothing left that you can do."

"Oh, is it as hopeless as that?" the man replied. "Have I sinned so much that there is no mercy for me? I am willing to do any kind of penance that the abbot of the monastery may place upon me. I am ready to suffer in any way in order to make atonement for my sins and be prepared for heaven."

Again the old monk answered, "But, my son, there is nothing left for you to do." Bitterly he reproached himself for having waited so long, until now it was absolutely hopeless; and then the monk looked at him again and said, "My son, many years ago as a young man I came to this monastery, actuated by the same feelings as yours. I struggled and toiled and endured all kinds of penances for years, but I found no peace. I had no sense of forgiveness. My heart reproached me, my conscience condemned me. But one day I found here in the monastery a copy of God's Word. It was in Latin, but fortunately I was able to read it, and as I read that blessed Book, God's message to lost man was made known to me. I learned that all that had to be done to make satisfaction for sin had already been accomplished by Christ on Calvary. When He said, 'It is finished,' He meant that there was nothing left that a poor sinner had to do; so I rested in Christ's finished work. Many years have gone by since that day. I would have left the monastery and gone elsewhere, but I have no home on earth—all the members of my family are dead—so I remain here and help serve my

brothers, and try as opportunity is given to point others to the blessed Word of God."

As the monk thus ministered the precious gospel of the grace of God to that poor soul at last he exclaimed, "Oh, I see it! Christ has done it all; there is nothing left for me to do!" Yes, that is it! The work that saves is finished, and you cannot add anything to His finished work. Simply receive and confess the One who bore your sins in His own body on the tree; believe His Word and do not doubt. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But while we delight to speak, and rightfully speak, of the finished work of Christ, it is just as correct and it is just as Scriptural to speak of the unfinished work of Christ, for when our Lord Jesus Christ left this scene and went back to the glory from which He had come, He began a work which He has been carrying on ever since, and that is His gracious work of intercession on behalf of His people down here in this world. See what we read in our text. He has an unchangeable priesthood. A man might be a priest for a number of years and intercede with God in behalf of the people, and then when he died somebody else had to take his place; but because our Lord Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The salvation referred to here is not salvation from judgment. It is not salvation from hell, but it is salvation from the power of sin and from the difficulties of the way. What the text tells us is this: That the same Saviour who died for our sins on the cross, who gave Himself there a ransom for our souls, now lives in Heaven, and there He is engaged in His gracious work of intercession, that He might save us practically day by day as we go on through this scene.

He wills that I should holy be;  
Who can withstand His will?  
The counsel of His grace in me  
He surely shall fulfill.

He has saved me to make me holy, to conform me to His own likeness; and in order that this blessed work may be wrought out in me, He is interceding with God the Father on my behalf.

"He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." That expression, "to the uttermost" means "forevermore." He is able to save them for evermore. He is able to take us through every difficulty, through every trial, through every perplexity, through every danger. He

is able to give us the strength we need in order to surmount all these things and to live triumphant, victorious Christian lives. He is everything that we are not naturally but which we ought to be, and He is all this in order that He may conform us to Himself and make us as He is.

"Such an high priest became us (was suited to us), who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." We in ourselves are unholy instead of holy; we are harmful instead of harmless. We have often been defiled and alas, alas, we have mingled with the Godless and have learned their ways and become like them. But He is the very opposite to all this, and all that He is He is for us. It is His will to make us partners of His holiness, and to enable us to live in this world blameless and holy, and to walk before Him, separate from everything that would defile us, everything that would hinder the manifestation of Christ in our lives. We love that little chorus that Gipsy Smith has so popularized wherever he has gone:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,  
All His wonderful passion and purity.  
O, thou Spirit divine,  
All my nature refine,  
Till the beauty of Jesus is seen in me.

It is not that there is any change in our old corrupt nature, but the word nature, of course, is used by the poet to designate our innermost being, our true character; and oh, how our risen, glorified Lord delights to so work in His people as to transform their lives and establish them by grace.

Have you ever known any of these transformed people? I have known thousands of them. I could tell of scores of Christians with whom I am well acquainted, men and women who once walked with the world but craved what the world never gave—men and women who were once subject to many sins and to the power of Satan. Many of them struggled for years against these things, and tried to free themselves, but they found themselves only in deeper trouble and distress. And then one day they heard the grand and glorious gospel of the grace of God. They learned that Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again, and that God has set Him forth a Prince and a Saviour, and that all who put their trust in Him have forgiveness of sins; and they came to Him just as they were and trusted in Him. They believed in Him as their own Saviour, and the moment they looked to Him, a great change took place. Perhaps they were not aware of it all at once, but they knew something had happened—there was a change within. They were

born again, regenerated by the Word and the Spirit of God, and then there was a change manifested without. The old habits, the old ways fell off like the dead leaves fall from the trees when the sap begins to rise in the springtime and flows out into the limbs. The new life drove out the old desires.

Long years ago a great Scotch minister, Dr. Chalmers, preached a sermon that has been considered a classic in pulpit oratory ever since—"The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." Having learned to love Christ, old things pass away and all things become new. I have watched many of these people and have seen them grow and develop day after day and week after week and month after month, and today you would hardly know them.

I remember so well when I was over in Scotland a few years ago. We were holding the meetings in the Tent Hall and thousands of people were coming to hear the Word. So often before the preaching had actually begun there would be a kind of a testimony meeting, and Jock Troup would call on various ones for a testimony. There were two old ladies—they call them grannies over there—that I especially liked to hear. Jock would say, "Granny So-and-So, step up and give us a testimony," and this dear old woman with such a sweet, kind face would get up and tell how the Lord had saved her. I would think, Oh my, there must be years of holy living back of all that. And then the other one would be called on, and it would have just the same effect; and then Jock would lean over and whisper to me, "When they came here just a few years back, they were just poor, hopeless, homeless drunkards, lost to everything good and decent and respectable. They entered in rags and were so drunk that we thought they couldn't understand, but they were pointed to Christ and were saved; they were transformed from poor old drunken derelicts into glorious saints of the Lord, and they have been kept by Him, growing more and more like Jesus all the time."

That is the effect of His intercessory work. He is up there talking to the Father on our behalf. If you want to know what He says, read the seventeenth chapter of John, for it is just a sample of our Lord's intercession as our great High Priest. He prays for His own. He prays that they may be sanctified by the Truth. He prays that they may be kept from the evil that is in the world, that they may manifest Him down here in this scene. And when we draw from Him, as we recognize Him as our High Priest and Intercessor, as we come to Him we receive the power that we need to live to His glory in this world.

Turn back to Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 14, and read on to the end of the chapter:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

There, you see, you have the blessed Lord seated at the Father's right hand, our High Priest, our Intercessor, and we are invited to come to Him and to come with boldness, not with hesitancy, not feeling that perhaps we won't be welcome, but to come readily, gladly, boldly, and bring to Him the story of our need, our trials, our disappointments; and we receive as we thus come to Him [for] mercy, mercy because of failure and sin, that we may be forgiven. We all need His mercy, and we need grace to help in time of need. That is, it is not the grace by which we are saved from our sins, from the judgment due to sin, but it is grace ministered to us to empower us to resist temptation, and thus to live to His glory.

He is there as our great High Priest and Intercessor, as our Forerunner, in order that He may lead us in our worship, as we come into the very presence of God. In Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 19 through 22, we read:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Because He is there in the presence of God, in the holiest of all, and has made full atonement for sin, we are now invited to enter within the veil. The veil has been rent; there is nothing to separate, and we can come direct to God. We do not need a mediator apart from Christ Himself. We do not need to call upon anyone else—saint or angel. We do not need to look to anyone but our blessed, risen, glorified Lord, and in His name we come into the presence of the Father and we bring to Him the adoring expression of our grateful hearts. We worship Him and bring to Him our petitions, assured that He will undertake for us.

Then if we fail, when we are actually conscious of sin, He is there interceding on our behalf. We read in First John, chapter 2 and verse 1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not..." That is the ideal for the Christian, but immediately he adds, realizing our weakness:

And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ

the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

My dear young brother or sister, you who have recently come to Christ, sometimes you get discouraged when you try and fail, when temptation comes and you forget to look to the Lord for help and you go down. Well, do not let the devil keep you down. Say to him: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me." You may look right up into heaven and you may see there by faith our Advocate in the presence of the Father to intercede for you. Satan is there to accuse, but our Advocate is there to meet every accusation and His precious blood is the answer to every failure. He says, "I took that sin into account when I died at Calvary," so that no sin that you have ever committed has been unatoned for. but now, strengthened and encouraged to know that you are not cast out because of your failure, you come to Him for help in the future, even as you bow before God and in contrition confess your sin, and then you may say, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" Well, so much then for the intercession of our blessed Lord at God's right hand.

Now another aspect of intercession is the intercession of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus is called our Advocate, as we noticed in that last Scripture. The Spirit is called the Comforter. Everybody may not be aware of the fact that in the Greek language from which our New Testament is translated these two words are exactly the same. The Greek word *parakletos* is translated *Advocate* in one place and *Comforter* in another. It means one who comes to your side to help, to help in the hour of need. You have the Lord Jesus as your Intercessor, also as Advocate and Comforter in heaven, and the Holy Spirit as Advocate and Comforter here on earth. We read in Romans, chapter 8, verse 26:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Do you know what the Apostle means? You may often be in circumstances where you really do not know what to say when you kneel before God in prayer. Terrific pressure is being brought against your soul and you are not quite sure what the will of God is. You bow before Him and do not know what to say. At the very time the Holy Spirit who dwells within you makes intercession. He knows what is right— He knows the will of God for you, and He makes intercession within you with groanings that cannot be uttered. And we are told in the next verse,

He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27).

And so, my brother, when you do not know what to pray for or how to pray, you get down before God and if you cannot do anything else, remain there on your knees in silence and let the Holy Spirit of God who dwells within you voice your petitions. Let Him make intercession and be assured that God will hear and answer.

So many of our young men today are facing problems that perplex them. Here is a young man, we will say, who has an aged mother dependent upon him and yet he is subject to his country's call. He might feel like praying that he might be allowed to remain at home and care for his mother. On the other hand, he is a patriotic American. He says, "I ought not to be willing to stay at home and let other fellows go out there and fight for me," and so he does not know just how to pray. He can kneel before God and say, "Lord, I do not know what to pray for in this situation, but oh, wilt Thou not have Thine own way?" As he puts it up to the Lord, the Holy Spirit makes intercession according to the will of God, and whichever way the answer comes, that young man can say, "I am satisfied that it is the will of God, and I will accept His will."

So often other questions arise. Perhaps a loved one is very, very ill, suffering terribly from some malignant disease. Our natural thought is, "O Lord, won't you heal this dear one?" and yet on the other hand the thought comes that perhaps after all it might be God's holy will to take this loved one home to be with Himself. You do not know how to pray. You do not know what to ask. Very well, bow before God and say, "Lord, here is the case." Spread it out before Him and say, "Now, Lord, not my will but Thine be done." Let the Holy Spirit take the case to God. He will make intercession according to the perfect will of God with groanings that cannot be uttered. You won't hear a sound, but God will hear, and the answer will be in accordance with His own blessed will.

And then there is a third aspect of intercession that we must not pass over, and that is the intercession of believers.

The first Epistle to Timothy, chapter 2, verses 1 through 6:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will [that is, He



desires] have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Now here the Spirit of God through the apostle is putting upon us the responsibility of intercession, and what a remarkable privilege it is! Here is a Christian, perhaps poor as to this world's goods, hardly known outside the block in which he or she lives, perhaps scarcely known outside the little apartment in which they dwell; but this Christian has the wonderful privilege of access to the throne of God, and they can go into their little room alone, kneel there before God, and she can start things going from that room which will affect individuals, families, communities, churches, and nations for good. Is not that an amazing thing?

Let me give you an instance. On one of the first occasions that Mr. Moody went to Great Britain, the very first time he went, in fact, he was disappointed to find that the man who invited him over there had died while he was on the way, and nobody seemed to be on hand to welcome him. Finally, a certain pastor got in touch with him and said, "Mr. Moody, will you preach for us?" He agreed to do so and was to preach on Sunday morning and Sunday night, and I think to continue for several nights. A young woman who listened to him that Sunday morning hurried home and said to an invalid sister, "Who do you think preached in our church this morning?" The sister said, "I don't know."

"Dwight L. Moody," came the reply.

"Dwight L. Moody of Chicago—the great Sunday School worker?" That is the way he was known then.

"Yes," she said, "and sister, right here in this room we have been praying for months that God would send D. L. Moody from Chicago to our church!" And God had brought him all the way across the sea and had so ordered his providential arrangements that out of all the churches in England, that was the only one to which he was invited that Sunday. Oh, the power of intercessory prayer, when the one who prays is in touch with God!

Consider the present world crisis. Oh, if Christians were only stirred to pray as they should, I have no hesitation in saying that victory would come for righteousness in a very short time indeed, and every foe of liberty and of Christianity would be destroyed. "Pray," says the Lord Jesus, "to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." We should intercede on behalf of others, on behalf of those in high places, in behalf of all men

everywhere, on behalf of the work of God, on behalf of our nation, on behalf of Israel in their present agony, on behalf of the troubled nations everywhere. It is our privilege to intercede with God, coming to Him in the name of our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and men. We need no other. We do not need to go to Peter, or Paul, or Jude, or to Michael the archangel, or to Mary, or to any of the rest of them, but we go to God our Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate, directed and guided by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

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