

Lesson 22
The Unfinished and Finished Work of Christ
Hebrews 7:20-28

Each one of us, as Christians, have been under the tremendous pressures of life to the point that we were in great discouragement and despondency. In these doldrums of living, it is always uplifting to the troubled soul to hear a fellow Christian say, "I'm praying for you." These are precious words and give us great security of mind because we know people care enough to pray for us in an hour of crisis.

The human security that comes from knowing other Christians are praying for us is nothing compared to the security Christ brings to the troubled soul as our Intercessor, for He is continually praying for all the people of God.

BACKGROUND

Hebrews chapter seven was written to prove the superiority of Christ's present priesthood in heaven to the earthly Aaronic and Levitical priesthood, which was part of the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament. In this chapter it is shown that Christ received the authority for His priesthood from Melchizedek and not from Aaron. The Levitical priesthood was temporary, but Christ's priesthood is eternal and therefore superior to the whole Levitical priesthood. In fact, Christ's priesthood has supplanted the Levitical priesthood, and in so doing has brought an end to the Mosaic Law, or the Old Covenant.

These professing Hebrew-Christians had to be convinced that Christ's priesthood was superior to Aaron's, for many were contemplating leaving Christianity and going back under the Levitical system. This would be tragic, because the Levitical system had been done away with by Christ, and it could in no way bring a man to God. Therefore, it was essential that the author of Hebrews persuade these professing Hebrew-Christians of the superiority of Christ's priesthood to the priesthood of Aaron.

CHRIST'S UNCHANGEABLE PRIESTHOOD - Hebrews 7:20-24

"And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever'") ..." -- This is the second quote of Psalm 110:4 in chapter seven to show that Christ was made a priest by God's holy oath and no such oath was ever given in relation to the Levitical order of priests in the Old Testament. God never said the Aaronic priesthood would be everlasting, but He did say that the priesthood of Christ would be forever. God swore to this promise and declared that He would never change His mind. Christ is a priest forever with an eternal priesthood.

If ever for one instant our exalted Lord would cease to exercise His priesthood, then He would be a breaker of His promise and of His holy oath. This is unthinkable because God cannot lie! God

has sworn His Son will be a priest forever and He will not repent.

“... so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.” --The only way that Christ’s priesthood could supercede the Levitical priesthood was to do away with the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Law). The whole Levitical priesthood was based on the Mosaic Law. God, through the death of Christ, has done away with the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood, and now Jesus Christ has become the guarantee (pledge) of a better covenant. The “better covenant” is the New Covenant which the author will begin to explain in chapter eight.

“And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in great numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, but He, on the other hand, because he abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.” -- The Levitical priests all died; the sons of Aaron were mortal. Levitical priests had to pass on their priesthood to their sons, and the total number of priests, over the history of Israel, ran into the tens of thousands. No Aaronic priest could serve more than 20 or 30 years. But Christ, who is eternal in nature, holds His priestly office eternally. Christ has an unchangeable and in transmissible priesthood as contrasted to the Levitical priesthood which was temporary and perishable.

CHRIST’S UNFINISHED WORK - Hebrews 7:25

“Hence, also, He is able to save forever (to the uttermost) those who draw near to God through Him ...” -- The “hence” relates back to what has been previously said -- because Christ has a permanent priesthood and abides forever, He is able to save men forever. “He is able” actually means, “he is powerful.” Christ is all-powerful and can and does save men forever. The word “forever” may have the meaning “completely” as well as “forever.” Jesus Christ saves sinners totally and completely and forever. Christ takes sinful men and saves them from the deepest degradation. Christ saves completely, and no one is so debased or has committed so many sins that Christ cannot save him. When Christ does save men, He saves them forever. Christ provides a complete, perfect and unending salvation. Christ not only saves sinful men from the guilt and the penalty of sin, but He continues to save sinful saints from the power of sin in their daily lives. Someone has well said, “Christ saves from the guttermost to the uttermost.”

Who is it that God saves in such a complete way? Is it everyone? No! He saves those who draw near to God through Christ and these continue to draw near to Him. Those who are recipients of this uttermost salvation are all who trust Christ. The words “draw near” actually mean “to approach” and it refers to those believers in the Old Testament who were worshipers of the one, true God. Without faith, it is impossible to please God, and the only way men can please God is to come to God through Christ. **“Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me”** (John 14:6).

This is one of the strongest verses in the whole Bible on the security of the believer. Once a person truly comes to Christ, he can never be lost. Once a person is saved, he is always saved.

“... since He always lives to make intercession for them.” -- The reason that Christ saves men eternally is because, as an eternal priest, He is constantly praying for all true believers in Christ. Our salvation does not just depend upon the death of a dead Savior, but it depends upon the

resurrection, ascension and high priesthood of a living Savior. When Christ makes intercession for His own, He entreats God the Father on their behalf. Jesus Christ has finished His work for sin, but He has the unfinished work of praying for the saints. Our salvation is secure because Christ, the Eternal Priest, is praying for our eternal salvation. Christ never dies, never sleeps, never tires and never retires, but His ministry is an unbroken stream of powerful and efficacious intercession for God's people.

Christ, when He intercedes on our behalf, is praying that our faith will not fail and that we will persevere unto the end. This verse says that Christ saves forever those who continually draw near to God through Christ. The Bible teaches that those who are eternally secure in Christ will continue to exercise faith in Christ. ***“Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”*** (1 Peter 1:5). It is not that the Christian's faith is keeping him saved, for Christians are kept by God's power, but faith is the evidence that we are secure in Christ. It is God's power that is bringing about our faith.

We still might ask the question, “How can we be sure we will continue in faith?” We can be sure because Christ is praying that our faith will not fail. The perfect example of this is when Christ prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

You know the story of how Peter did deny the Lord three times and in one sense we can say his faith faltered, but it did not fail, for Peter repented and got right with the Lord. His faith was dimmed and flickered, but it was not extinguished because Christ prayed that it would not fail.

Satan, at this very hour, still desires to sift those who trust in Christ. The world, the flesh and the devil still bombard the true Christian. Trials and temptations beckon the children of God. Yet, Christ is praying for all who draw near to God through Christ, that their faith will not fail. Every one of His own is on His sympathetic heart every minute of the day. There is not an instant that He does not bear us up before God's throne.

The cross was the place of Christ's finished work for our sin; the Father's throne is the scene of His unfinished work for us, where He intercedes that we might come through all of life's experiences triumphantly and with persevering faith.

The high priest of the Levitical priesthood is a beautiful type of Christ's priestly prayer for His people. The high priest wore the breastplate and the ephod, and upon these were engraved, in precious gems, the names of God's chosen, the tribes of Israel. The priest could not enter the presence of Jehovah without those names upon his breast and shoulders. So Christ bears ever within His heart the names of His own. Your name and mine are there, as He manifests and declares them there in the Father's presence, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for us.

CHRIST'S FINISHED WORK - Hebrews 7:26-28

“For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest ...” -- Jesus Christ is made to order for the Christian because He cares, understands and loves us. He, as our high priest, meets our needs in this pressure-filled, hectic and highly mobile, tension-torn life. Christ is suitable to us. In Himself nothing is left to be desired; nothing is wanting that the sinner or saint needs. Someone has put it in a beautiful acrostic with the name J-E-S-U-S – “Just Exactly Suits Us Sinners.”

“... holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens ...” -- Jesus is not weak through sinful flesh, but holy, and He ministers in perfect holiness. Levitical priests were sinful but Christ is perfect and He now ministers in the heavenly sanctuary at God’s right hand.

“... who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this he did once for all when He offered up Himself.” -- Levitical priests were sinners in need of a sacrifice for their own sins. But Christ is sinless and makes no sacrifice for Himself but makes a sacrifice for the sins of God’s people. This was a once and for all sacrifice where Christ forever secured the salvation of His people. Christ, in His death, finished His work for sin and sinners. The most wonderful thing is that Christ was both priest and victim.

The Bible records for us seven sayings of Christ upon the cross. In three of these sayings, He is acting as a priest and in the other four He is taking the role of the victim.

His first words were, ***“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*** Here He is interceding for the bloody murderers who nailed him to the cross. Then He turns to the thief at his side and says, ***“Today you shall be with me in paradise.”*** Here Christ is ministering grace to this revolutionary who readily admitted his need. Then to His mother and the disciple, John, who were standing at the foot of the cross He said, ***“Woman, behold, your son! Behold, your mother!”*** He is still a priest ministering comfort to their hearts, giving one to the other to meet the need of life.

But at this moment a change occurred. The sun was hidden and a strange, unaccountable darkness fell across the face of the land for three hours. The first cry from the cross after this darkness was, ***“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*** He is no longer a priest as such, but a victim, as He was bearing the sins of God’s people in His body. He was a sacrifice on the altar of the cross. Then, from the midst of that hot hell of pain and even more excruciating anguish of spirit, come the words, ***“I am thirsty.”*** This is followed by the last two cries from the cross when, with a loud voice, at the end of three hours, he shouted, ***“It is finished,”*** and then, ***“Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!”*** Even in these last words. He is still a sacrifice, having completed the work that the Father gave Him to do.

“For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.” -- God, on the basis of His oath, appointed Christ, the eternal, sinless Son of God, to His priesthood, but the Law, which is temporary, appointed sinful men to the Levitical priesthood. Jesus Christ was perfected forever through His sufferings for sin and He continues a priest forever.

CONCLUSION

Saved

Whenever anyone says to us, "I'm praying for you," we should thank God for our faithful Christian intercessors, but Christians are but frail men and often fail to pray for one another as they ought to. Yet, Christ, our Great High Priest, ever lives to make intercession for us because He loves us and desires that our faith fail not.

Unsaved

For you who are without Christ, you have heard that Christ can save a person completely and forever. Christ, because of His finished work for sin and His unfinished work of intercession, can give men the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and keep them forever. Salvation in Christ is not possessed by all because salvation is only for those who draw near to God through Christ. You must receive Christ as Lord of your life and Savior for sin, and when you do exercise faith in Christ, you will draw near to God and be saved completely and eternally!