

Christ's Heavenly Intercession

This is a subject of immense dimensions and importance and we need to understand it. Of course Christ was—and is—truly ‘a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’ and from his baptism—if not before—he began his work of intercession. This was not an easy work. When we come to investigate—so far as we are enabled and privileged to do so—the ministry of Christ as great High Priest and as Intercessor for us, we will realise that true intercession is taking the burden and impact of sin before the Holy Father to Whom the intercession is made. He alone was ever the true Intercessor, and largely so in the wonderful action of Gethsemane. He was the human race in himself when he took the death-dealing judgment, was immolated in the sin, evil and guilt of Man, and was not destroyed by it. We are naive if we think this was not ‘the hour and authority of darkness’, that Satan was not *at* him in the form of the tempter, and that he was not tempted to draw back, but then never did draw back, not even for a fleeting second. As we will see, true intercession is getting under the load of another’s sin—or the sin of the whole world—and shouldering what the bearer of that sin cannot otherwise fully shoulder and cope with. We conclude, then, that what had to happen did happen. It had to happen so that the suffering which had to come to him for the world—even in the garden of Gethsemane—came and was borne and endured.

Intercession has a substantial history in the Old Testament, where the word ‘intercession’ can also mean ‘intervention’. This understanding is based on Isaiah chapter 59 which ought to be read fully alongside this article. In order to give some understanding of the word in Hebrew it will be good to look at the two quotes given below from two scholars on Isaiah 53:12—‘Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors’—which will help us to understand something of its nature:

He acted as mediator and made intercession . . . The base meaning is ‘to cause to reach’ and hence ‘cause someone’s plea to reach someone’s ears’ (to intercede) or to ‘introduce someone into someone’s presence’ (to mediate). The Servant is thus a go-between, interposing between two parties, not as a barrier but as a bridge. In verse 6 the Lord put his Servant in between, using him as a means of disposing of that (our iniquity) which alienated him from us. Here the Servant comes voluntarily to stand with us so that when he had borne our sin he might bring us to God.¹

The hip’il of the verb pa’ga’, ‘to light upon someone’, means ‘to cause to light upon’, as in 53:6. Used absolutely it means ‘to intervene’, as in Isa. 59:16. This elucidates the meaning here, ‘he interceded for the transgressors’. This does not mean, as some editors imagine, that he made prayers of intercession for them, but that with his life, his suffering and his death, he took their place and underwent their punishment in their stead.²

Christ’s intercession was a taking up of the sins of the sinner—of the sinful world—and bearing the excruciating weight of them to their full judgment and exhaustion. This was begun in Gethsemane and completed on the Cross. The intercession was voluntary and therefore valid and so, effective. This is the basis now for his heavenly Session–Intercession. Hebrews 4:14–16 encourages us to seek intercession at Christ’s throne of grace:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses,

¹ Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, Leicester, 1993, p. 443.

² Claus Westerman, *Isaiah 40–66*, SCM, London, 1969, p. 269.

but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 7:23–25 is also encourages to trust in his High Priesthood which is his ministry of Session:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Undoubtedly part of his intercession is to do with those who have not yet come to God by him, but much of his intercession has to do with those who already are his people, his flock, his church. This is shown by Romans 8:33–34:

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?

We see, here, that those for whom he intercedes are believers, no longer under condemnation. What, then, is his intercession? It is for those who need him to intervene against Satan, the world, the flesh and all accusation. By such intercession believers can be victorious in Christ.

INTERCESSION, SUFFERING, HUMAN INTERCESSION BY THE SPIRIT

This opens a wide subject. Not only is Christ the Interceder but, being Christ's people, each person is thus an interceder. When we come to Romans 8:18–30 we see the matter of glory is being expounded. The whole creation is groaning, is in convulsions until the sons of God be revealed in their final glory. Then creation will be released from the bondage of corruption into the glory of the liberty of the children of God. Believing persons also groan even though they have the first fruits of the Spirit. They know that on the way to glory they also feel the convulsions, and they would intercede properly, as is seen in Romans 8:26–27 where the Holy Spirit also intercedes for the believers when they do not know 'how to pray as they ought'. The text tells us 'because of our weakness' we are unable to intercede. On the one hand we do not know what the content of our prayer should be, but on the other we do not have the true strength to intercede, since intercession—in some sense or another—is intervening, is getting under the load of the creation and Man and virtually becoming as the one or the thing for which we intercede! Here are shades of Gethsemane and the Cross.

The amazing and thrilling thing is that the Spirit within us virtually tells us, 'You cannot do it, yet you truly yearn to do it. I become as you in your intercession. I feel your groaning and I share that groaning. I make that intercession for you "according to the will of God"'. He takes my intercession for yours and accepts it so that *you have truly interceded*. Intercession, then, must cover all elements of the life of the believer and the believing community. How encouraging! How fortifying!

Summing up the matter of intercession we may say that Christ's Session, our intercession and the Spirit's intercession make a triple intercession. The intercession of the High Priest is one with his people who are interceding even beyond their own needs to that of the coming liberation and glorification of all things. They are aided by the Spirit so that, they too, intercede according to the will of God. This 'triple intercession' is about the one thing—the ultimate climax of God's great plan and intention. Thus the believer can live in the intercession of his High-Priest Lord. He can also intercede and know that the Holy Spirit so loves him, and so loves the nations that he and Christ are bringing to the Holy City, that he can assure them they are worthy partakers in the triple intercession.

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