

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 11. Its Application

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Transcript

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"If the righteous scarcely [literally "with difficulty"] be saved where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18). It seems that comparatively few of the Lord's people have an adequate conception of the obstacles in the way of their salvation, of all that is involved in God's overcoming of them, and of the manner in which His salvation becomes theirs. Rightly did John Owen affirm, "So great and glorious is the work of saving believers unto the utmost, that it is necessary that the Lord Christ should lead a mediatory life in heaven, for the perfecting and accomplishment of it." Yet how few today recognize the needs be for this. There has been such a one sided emphasis laid upon the death of Christ, that the relation of His resurrection, ascension and intercession to the salvation of His people is now little understood even in orthodox circles. If it were more clearly grasped that the redemptive work of Christ is a strictly priestly one, and if His priestly work were interpreted in the light of the Old Testament types we should experience less difficulty in perceiving the necessity, the meaning and the value of His present intercession on High. At the Cross Christ offered Himself to God, in all the merits of His life of perfect obedience, as a Satisfaction for His failing people. But what Christ did for His people, and their actual entering into the good of what He did for them, are two totally different things. That which He purchased for them has to be applied to them. It is at this point that so much confusion exists in the minds of many. God has left nothing uncertain, nor is anything contingent on the creature. Full provision was made by the wisdom of God for securing the results or fruitage of His Son's work: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11) guarantees this. It is by the present ministry of Christ on High and by the operations of His Spirit on earth that this is attained. The first of these will now engage our attention. The offices of Christ, the great Mediator between God and men, are the foundation of our hopes and the spring of our peace and joy, His priestly office particularly so. The exercise of His priestly office concerns two principal parts: His making full satisfaction to God by dying for His people, and His intercession at the right hand of God. "To offer and to intercede, to sacrifice and to pray, are both acts of the same sacerdotal office, and both required of him who is high priest, so that if he omit either of these, he cannot be a faithful priest for them; if either he doth not offer for them, or not intercede for the access of his oblation on their behalf, he is wanting in the discharge of this office by him undertaken" (John Owen). To which we may add that the third act of the high priest is his coming forth to "bless" those for whom he has offered an atonement: (Lev. 9:22; 1 Chron. 23:13; Heb. 9:28). But, as we have said above, through a one sided conception of the death of Christ many fail to see the need for His present intercession as being requisite to their salvation. Their difficulty

may be expressed thus: If our salvation was secured by the "one offering" of Christ, why must He now intercede for us? On the other hand, if our salvation "unto the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25) be obtained by Christ's intercession, what need was there for His atonement? We will answer in the words of H. Martin, "Apparently they mutually exclude each other, because they do really mutually and reciprocally include each other. The offering by which alone we are perfected is not passive endurance or suffering of the cross, but that active priestly offering of the cross which is prolonged without suffering into the function of intercession. And the Intercession, by which alone we are saved even unto the uttermost, is just the perpetual presentation of the 'continual burnt offering' of Calvary, which, as an active offering, subsists in perpetuity, and belongs to eternity, while the suffering of the cross belongs to the history of the past, and the Atonement, had it been mere suffering would have belonged to the past too." The last quotation places the emphasis where it rightfully belongs. Had the Satisfaction of Christ consisted merely of His passively enduring the wrath of God, then everything required of Him as Mediator had been accomplished when He died. But in such case the "much more" of Romans 5:10 and the "yea rather" of Romans 8:34 had been rendered nugatory. Moreover, the sacrificial types of the Old Testament had been emptied of their meaning. Yea, the whole plan devised by God for the glorifying of Himself and the saving of His elect had been thrown into confusion. But allow that the Satisfaction of Christ is a priestly work, in which He is active throughout, and these difficulties are at once removed, for the types and the exposition of them in the epistle to the Hebrews show plainly enough that the work of atonement is not, in all respects, completed at the death of the victim. The intercession of Christ is just as requisite, just as vitally necessary, in order to save His people, as were His incarnation, obedience and death. In support of what has just been said, we would call careful attention to one or two of the details found in Leviticus 16, where we have the fullest Old Testament type of Christ's high priestly office and work. As we hope to devote a separate chapter to the subject, in a later one of this book, we shall now confine ourselves to that which bears immediately upon the present aspect of our theme. First, in 5:11 we read of Aaron killing the bullock for a sin-offering, then, in 5:14, of taking its blood within the veil and sprinkling it upon the mercy seat. In like manner, in 5:15 we find the goat treated in the same way; something more than its blood being shed at the altar, namely brought within the veil. The antitype of this is found in Hebrews 9:12, where we read of Christ entering heaven "by his own blood," and in 9:24, where we are told that He has gone there "to appear in the presence of God for us." Again, "The two altars of Sacrifice and of Incense were combined and correlative instruments of official action to the priest in the one complete office of his priesthood; and they constituted component and indispensable factors of one complete act of sacrificial worship. The same functionary or officebearer transacted at both: he transacted for the self same person or persons; the blood of the self-same sacrifice that he had slain and offered on the altar, he sprinkled or put upon the horns of the other. To dislocate or derange this coordination would be to negate his official action in its intrinsic import, to annihilate the gracious results of his priestly intervention, and indeed to evert his office utterly. His action at the altar of Atonement was pre-requisite to his approach to the altar of Incense: and the successful achievement which signalized his action at the latter, revealed beyond the possibility of doubt the nature and efficacy of the services which he had accomplished at the former; while only in virtue of the two, in their combination and synthesis, was Aaron's priesthood a real priesthood at all" (H. Martin). The intimate relation which existed between the brazen and the incense altars of Israel may be seen from their being linked together (Ps. 84:3): "Thine altars, O Lord of hosts." The close connection between them is revealed in a number of Scriptures. For instance, we gather from Leviticus 16:12, 13, and Numbers 16:46 that the fire on which the incense was laid upon the golden altar, was taken from the brazen altar, where the sin-offering was consumed. Thus, the activities of the one were based upon those of the other, the incense being kindled by that fire which had first fed upon the sacrifice; thus identifying the priest's service

at both. This, in figure, tells us that our great High Priest pleads for no blessings which His blood has not purchased, and asks pardon from Divine justice for no sins for which He did not atone. The measure of the blessings for which Christ pleads is God's estimate of the life which He gave. The wondrous scene portrayed in Isaiah 6 shows us again the inseparable connection between the two altars. There the prophet beheld the Lord of hosts, in His ineffable majesty and exalted glory, seated upon the throne in His heavenly temple, above which stood the seraphim, with veiled faces, crying, "Holy, holy, holy." What he saw and heard was so overwhelming that he said, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (v. 5). Blessed is it to mark the sequel: "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (vv. 6, 7). As another remarked, "The emblem of Divine holiness had already consumed the sacrifice and was also consuming the sweet incense. Thus, symbolically, the prophet's lips were cleansed according to God's estimate of the value of the sacrifice and person of our Lord." 1. THE NATURE OF HIS INTERCESSION

"Christ maketh intercession, by His appearing in our nature, continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of His obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring His will to have it applied to all believers, answering all accusations against them, procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failure, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and sacrifices" (T. Ridgley). This definition seems to embody the essential features of the present intercession of our great High Priest. Having done everything on earth which God required from the Surety of our salvation, both in the removing of what would hinder it (sins and the curse) and procuring what would effect it (perfect obedience or righteousness), He has now gone into heaven, there "to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). First, He "appears" in our nature. The Mediator is "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5) and to "intercede" is to mediate. He did not cast off the human nature when He left this earth, but carried it into heaven, retaining the same body, though glorified, as He had in the day of His humiliation. The same body in which He offered Himself as a sacrifice to God, He now presents in heaven — "a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). The apostle does not say in Hebrews 9:24 that Christ entered heaven, to appear there in glory and majesty, as if His appearance there had been for Himself only; but "to appear in the presence of God for us." As He was born, lived and died for us, so He ascended to heaven and appears in our nature at the right hand of God for us (cf. Heb. 6:20). Second, He appears as our "Advocate" to present His people and their cause unto God. When Aaron was to enter the most holy place to intercede for Israel, he was to bear the names of the twelve tribes upon his heart and shoulders (Ex. 28:12, 29): thus he went there not in his own name, but in the name and behalf of His people. As our Advocate (1 John 2:1) Christ replies to the accusations of Satan (Rev. 12:10). A typical adumbration of this is found in Zechariah 3, where we see Joshua—type of the Church—charged by Satan. Christ, "the Lord," by His intercession with the Father, pleads that instead of Joshua, his accuser might be rebuked and confounded; acquitting and justifying the accused. No charge will have any better success which is formed against those for whom Christ appears as Advocate: see Romans 8:33, 34. Third, He presents His meritorious sacrifice to God, pointing to His obedience and death in the stead of His people, to His blood which was shed for them. The typical high priest, when he was to mediate for Israel before God, brought in the blood of sacrifice and solemnly presented it (Heb. 9:7); so Christ, "by His own blood" has gone into heaven, thereby to "make intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). Christ's blood "speaketh better things than Abel" (Heb. 12:24), crying for mercy, as Abel's did for vengeance. Its efficacy is so potent, and has as much the virtue of intercession, as if it had an articulate voice. The virtue of Christ's blood is still as fresh and powerful as if it were but just now shed — note "new and living" in Hebrews 10:20. Fourth, He presents His will and

desire that His people might have all which He purchased for them: the will of the Divine nature as He is God, the desires of His human nature as He is man. This is revealed to us most fully in that wondrous 17th of John, where we are permitted to hear the breathings of our great High Priest. There we find Him asking of the Father those things which are most requisite for His people in their time-state. There we behold Him putting in His claim on their behalf: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24). Fifth, by the intercession of Christ access to the throne of grace is obtained for His people. Though they have been delivered from the curse of the law, the flesh still remains within them, daily producing its evil fruit, defiling their service and interrupting their communion. As the conscience is made aware of this, the thought of drawing nigh unto the ineffably holy God would terrify, were it not that the Scriptures assure us we have One at His right hand pleading our cause. It is the realization of this blessed fact that gives us "boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19). Imperfect as are our approaches, unworthy as we are in ourselves, feeble though our petitions be, yet, there is One on High who has been given "much incense" and that "that He should add it to the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Rev. 8:3). Thus may we "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

2. THE NECESSITY OF HIS INTERCESSION In an humble endeavor to ascertain the reasons why God has appointed the intercession of Christ, respect should be had unto the Divine honor, the Mediator's glory, and His people's peace and security. Underlying the whole plan of redemption God has determined that we should be saved in a way and manner which most contributed to His own honor and praise, in a way which would most glorify His Son, and in a way which should make our salvation most sure and steadfast. Let us seek, then, to reverently ponder the needs be for our Savior's present mediation in the light of these basic considerations. The first reason, then, respects God Himself. "In general, God will be dealt with withal like Himself, in and throughout the whole way of our salvation, from first to last, and carry it all along as a superior wronged, and so keep a distance between Himself and sinners; who still are to come to Him by a Priest and a Mediator (Heb. 7:25), upon whose mediation and intercession their salvation doth depend; and therefore through Christ, in His dispensation of all to us downward doth carry it as a king, as one having all power to justify and condemn, yet upward toward God, He carries it as a priest, who still must intercede to do all that which He has power to do as king. Therefore, in the 2nd Psalm after that God has set Him as 'King upon his holy hill' (v. 6), namely, in heaven, and so has committed all power in heaven and earth to Him; then He must yet 'ask' all that He would have done — 'Ask of me and I will give thee' (v. 8) God says to Him; for though He be a king, yet He is God's king — 'I have set my King,' and by asking from Him God will be acknowledged to be above Him — i.e., above Him as Mediator. "More particularly, God hath two attributes which He would have most eminently appear in their highest glory by Christ's effecting our salvation, namely, justice and free grace; and therefore hath so ordered the bringing about of our salvation, as that Christ might apply Himself in a more especial manner unto each of them, by way of satisfaction to the one, of entreaty to the other. Justice will be known to be justice, and dealt with upon its own terms; and grace will be acknowledged to be free grace, throughout the accomplishment of our salvation. You have both of them joined together in Romans 3:24, 26: 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth.' Here is highest justice and freest grace both met to save us, and both ordered by God to be 'declared' and 'set forth.' "Our salvation depending and being carried on, even in the application of it, by a continuation of grace in a free way, notwithstanding satisfaction unto justice, therefore His free grace must be sought to, and treated with like itself, and applied upon in all, and the sovereignty and freeness of it acknowledged in all, even as well as God's justice had the honor to be satisfied by a price paid to it, that so the severity of it might appear and be held

forth in our salvation. Thus God having two attributes eminently to be dealt with, His justice and His free grace, it was meet that there should be two eminent actions of Christ's priesthood, wherein He should apply Himself to each, according to their kind, and as the nature and glory of each doth require. And accordingly in His death He deals with justice, by laying down a sufficient price; and in His intercession He entreateth free grace, and thus both come to be alike acknowledged" (T. Goodwin). What has been said above supplies the key which unlocks the blessed meaning of Hebrews 4:16, where Christians are encouraged to "come boldly to the throne of grace," and that, because they have "a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens," the "therefore" of 5:16 looking back to what is said there in 5:14. Observe well that it is called "the throne of grace" at which our High Priest now officiates: it is so designated because it is chiefly "grace" which His sacerdotal office now deals with and sues unto: therefore does He there treat with God by way of intercession. Of this throne of grace in heaven the mercy seat in the holy of holies was the type, and as Aaron brought the blood and the mercy seat together (Lev. 16:14), so has Christ. But more: Aaron not only entered the holiest with blood, but with incense too (Lev. 16:12) — the figure of prayer (Revelation 8:3) — to show that heaven is opened unto God's people not by mere justice (bloodshedding), but by grace also, yet grace which must be entreated. Thus it is that there is the unfinished work of Christ in heaven, as well as His finished work on earth. In the one He dealt with justice here below, in the other He is treating with mercy in heaven. All the grace which Christ now bestows on His people He first receives from God, and that, in answer to His petitions. In Acts 2:33 it is said that, consequent upon His ascension, "He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, which He [Christ] hath shed forth," namely, on the day of Pentecost. Yet, if we go back to John 14:16 we learn that Christ received the Spirit (that as Mediator He might send Him forth) in answer to His intercession: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." So too in Ephesians 4:11 we read that the ascended Christ "gave" gifts unto His Church, but, if we go back to Psalm 68:18, we learn that He "received [from the Father those] gifts for men," and that, as the fruit of His intercession. In the second place, God had respect unto the glory of His beloved Son. In ordering our salvation to be accomplished by His work of intercession, God had in view the honor and praise of Christ too, that "all might honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (John 5:23). Thus, for the maintaining of His honor and the manifestation of His glory, it was appointed that He should continue to intercede. None of His offices were to lie idle. All offices have work assigned them, and all work (properly done) has honor as its reward. When, then, Christ had finished His work here upon earth, as pertained to the meriting of our salvation, God appointed this perpetual work in heaven for the applying and bringing His people into possession of His salvation, and that, as a Priest, by praying in the virtue of the one oblation of Himself: see Hebrews 7:24. For the same reason it became Him that the whole work of salvation from first to last, in every step and degree of its accomplishment, should be so ordered that Christ would still continue to have as great a hand in its application and consummation as He had in laying the first foundation thereof. This we have expressed in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith." In what immediately follows, two things are said of Him, as the two causes of two effects, concerning each of which faith needs to be "looking unto" Him. First, He is to be "looked" at as dying — "enduring the cross"; second, as "set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," there interceding. We need to look to Him as dying as the "Author," or "beginning of our faith," and at His sitting at God's right hand as an Intercessor, for the "finishing of our faith," and so of our final salvation. Christ is both the Alpha and Omega. In the third place, God had respect unto the comfort and security of His people. "God would have our salvation made sure, and us saved all manner of ways, over and over. First, by ransom and price (as captives are redeemed), which was done by His death, which of itself was enough. Second, by power and rescue; so in His resurrection, ascension, and sitting at God's right hand, which also was sufficient. Third, by intercession, a way of favor

and entreaty, and this likewise would have been enough, but God would have all things concur in it, whereof notwithstanding not one could fail; a threefold cord, whereof each strand was strong enough, but all together must of necessity hold" (T. Goodwin). The whole application of Christ's Satisfaction, both in justifying and saving us, first and last, has a special dependence upon His intercession. The leading difference between the influence of His death, and that of His intercession, unto our salvation, is this: the one was the means of procuring or obtaining it for us, the other the means of securing and applying it unto us. Christ purchased salvation by the one, but we are possessed of it by the other. It was not until Christ was "perfected through suffering" that He became "the Author [or "applying cause"] of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:7). The two things were united at the cross: "He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). That while the death of Christ procured our salvation, it did not (of itself) secure it, seems very evident from 1 Corinthians 15:17: "If Christ be not raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins." Those for whom Christ intercedes are they whose sin He bore (Isa. 53:12), namely, those given to Him by the Father (John 17:9). That for which He intercedes is what He purchased for them by His Satisfaction, namely, "eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12), which includes the gift of the Holy Spirit to apply unto them all the virtues of His perfect work. That which the Holy Spirit communicates to them is life, light, love, faith, repentance and perseverance in obedience. As we shall devote the whole of the next chapter to an amplification of this deeply important yet greatly neglected aspect of our theme, only the briefest statement thereon can now be made. By His death Christ meritoriously procured for all of His people an actual participation in the blessings of redemption, and this is infallibly applied to them by His Spirit. By the operations of the Spirit the elect are brought to saving faith and repentance, so that every requirement of God's government is fully met.

3. THE EFFICACY OF HIS INTERCESSION

First, this is fully assured by the fact that Christ's petitions are grounded upon indisputable merit, and therefore must prevail in the high court of Justice. His obedience unto death was infinitely meritorious and did deserve for His people that which, as Intercessor on their behalf, He pleads for. He fully satisfied every demand of the law, Perfectly performed the work which He came to do, paid to the last mite all His people owed, and therefore, because of the intrinsic value of what He did, He must, in very righteousness, be granted that which He purchased. Second, the success of Christ's intercession is fully assured by the fact that He sues only for that which is agreeable to His Father, and therefore is the Father entirely ready to grant His requests. He pleads for nothing but what is according to the will of God: Hebrews 10:7-9. God's will was that Christ should be a sacrifice, and it is upon the ground of having perfectly performed His will, that His plea proceeds; such being the ground, it must prevail. Were it not effectual, the will of God were ineffectual. But, it is God that justifieth, so as none can condemn. How so? It is Christ that maketh the intercession: Romans 8:33, 34. Third, the success of Christ's intercession is fully assured because it is a commemoration of His sacrifice. That which Christ pleads before God is His own blood, which is "precious" in His sight. The sacrifice of Christ is a "sweet-smelling savor" unto God (Eph. 5:2). He is infinitely pleased with it, and in view of it He cannot but grant Christ, upon His personal application, that which it was offered to procure. If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, "how much more shall the blood of Christ" prevail as He pleads its merits before God (Heb. 9:12,13)! Fourth, the success of Christ's intercession is fully assured by the fact that He is the Beloved of the Father. In Him the Father is so well pleased that He can deny Him naught that He asks. Christ Himself declared, "Thou hearest me always" (John 11:42). When Esther appeared before King Ahasuerus to intercede for her people condemned to destruction, he gave her this assurance, "What is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom" (5:3). Christ was given still greater assurance before He entered upon His sacrificial work, "Ask of me," God said, "and I will give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possessions" (Ps.

2:8). This is the greatest thing for which Christ does ask, the sum of all He intercedes for. Finally, the success of Christ's intercession is fully assured by the fact that nothing, in, of, from, or by His people can possibly countervail it. "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" (Heb. 7:25). If Christ has once taken a person into His prayers, He will never, under any circumstances, cast him out. A man may be cast out of good men's hearts and prayers as Saul was out of Samuel's, and apostate Israel was out of Jeremiah's, but no man was ever cast out of Christ's prayers when He once took him in. The only possible danger could be through sinning, but Christ's prayers see to it and prevail and prevent them from apostatizing (John 17:15), which is the only sin for which there is no forgiveness. "If any one [of the family] sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). How infallibly certain it is, then, that Christ shall "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). He sees to it Himself that nothing which He purchased by His obedience unto death shall be lost. The application of His Satisfaction is as sure as the impetration of it. He is Himself constantly engaged in maintaining the interests of those for whom He died. There is not only an "access" into the grace of God "through our Lord Jesus Christ," but there is also a standing in the same (Rom. 5:1,2), and that continued "standing" is expressly attributed to His "life" (Rom. 5:10), which, as it is interpreted for us in Hebrews 7:25, means His ever living to intercede. "We owe our standing in grace every moment to His sitting in Heaven and interceding every moment. There is no fresh act of justification going forth, but there is a fresh act of intercession. And as though God created the world once for all, yet every moment He is said to create, every new act of Providence being a new creation; so likewise is Jesus continually, through His continuing out free grace to justify us at the first, and this Christ doeth by continuing His intercessions; He continues 'a Priest forever,' and so we continue to be justified for ever" (T. Goodwin).

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