

He is able also to save • He always lives to make intercession • He is able also to save

A Living Intercessor

(Hebrews 7:25)

One morning when Samuel Clemens¹ opened the newspaper, he was surprised to see a notice of his death. A short time later, Mr. Clemens gave a lecture and opened with these words: "The report of my death is an exaggeration."² Several years ago, the world experienced a "God Is Dead" movement. Some insist that the Bible is a dead book. Further, unbelievers assert that Christianity is outmoded and should be discarded. Reports of the death of God and Christianity are an exaggeration!

I am happy to announce that *Christianity is alive and well* today. We have a living God (1 Timothy 4:10), a living Book (Hebrews 4:12), and a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). We could profitably talk about any or all of these topics; but, as proof that Christianity is alive and well, we will go to a lesser-known example: We have a *living Intercessor*. Our text is Hebrews 7:25: "Therefore He [Jesus] is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since *He always lives to make intercession for them*" (emphasis mine). To appreciate the truths of this text to a fuller extent, we need to see it in context. First, we will take a few moments on Hebrews 7 as a whole; then we will take a brief look at the verses before and after our text. Finally, we will focus on verse 25 itself.

HEBREWS 7

A key word in the Book of Hebrews is "better." In a congregation that is not named, some or all

¹Samuel Clemens (1835–1910) is one of the US's better-known authors. His pen name was Mark Twain.

²"Death" (<http://www.twainquotes.com/Death.html>; Internet; accessed 30 April 2008).

of the Jewish Christians were evidently considering returning to Judaism. Great excitement had characterized the early days of Christianity, but some of that had subsided. Now these members were apparently missing the rites and rituals of Judaism. The author of Hebrews was attempting to bring them back into the fold by showing that everything in Christianity is *better* than it was in Judaism.

Glance through chapter 7 and underline the word "better." The word "greater" is found in verse 7. Verse 19 speaks of "a better hope." Verse 22 mentions "a better covenant." In chapter 7 the specific topic is the *better priesthood* of Christianity. In verse 17 we read, "For it is attested of Him [Jesus], 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" The writer was establishing that One who was a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek was infinitely better than those who were priests according to the order of Levi.

Do not get nervous; we are not going to discuss "mysterious Melchizedek."³ The key words in verse 17 are these: "You are a priest forever."

HEBREWS 7:20–28

Let us now move our focus to the immediate context of our text: verses 20 through 28. The passage begins,

³At this point, I sometimes smile and say, "If you have any questions about Melchizedek, ask . . ." and I name some man in the congregation. For your own information, you can review the discussion on Melchizedek in Martel Pace, "Melchizedek and Christ," in "Hebrews, 4," *Truth for Today* (April 2006): 4–10.

And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they [the Levitical priests] indeed became priests without an oath, but He [Jesus, was made a priest] with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind 'You are a priest forever'" (vv. 20, 21).

The quotation is from Psalm 110, which New Testament speakers and writers considered a prophecy of the resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Messiah (Acts 2:34, 35; see 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20). Hebrews 7:17 quotes from Psalm 110:4: "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" When the Lord merely *says* something, it is *true*. Therefore, when He says it "with an oath," we might think of it as "doubly true, triply true, quadruply true"! There is *no* doubt about it! Concerning what is there no doubt? Jesus is "a priest *forever*."

Verse 22 continues, "So much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant." Jesus is our spiritual "guarantor." A guarantor for a loan guarantees that the loan will be repaid. Jesus is our guarantee that the marvelous promises of God in His new covenant will be fulfilled!

Verse 23 says, "The former priests [the Levitical priests], on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing." Think of all the priests from Aaron to the time of the writing of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hundreds or thousands of Levites had served as priests because it was important that there always be a priest. "If there was need for a priest at all, there was need for one at all times; the office must abide without intermission, though the official might change."⁴ One after another, priests had lived and died. Some were good, some were not so good, and some were very, very bad.

In verse 24 we read, "But Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently." Note these words: "He continues *forever*." Jesus was raised from the dead. He ascended back to God, sat down on the right hand of God, and He continues forever! There

⁴Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, n.d.), 277.

is, therefore, no change in His priesthood. He is our "forever" priest!

That brings us to our text. Verse 25 begins, "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him. . . ." The Greek word translated "forever" in the phrase "save forever" means "complete, perfect."⁵ The KJV has "save . . . to the uttermost"; but the Greek word can also refer to time, so the NASB has "save forever." Perhaps the writer intended both meanings to be included: Jesus is able to save us *completely* in *every* way. Verse 25 concludes, ". . . since He always lives to make intercession for them." Mark those words; we will return to them in a moment.

The passage concludes,

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 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 [as the high priest did on the Day of Atonement], because this He [Jesus] did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath [in Psalm 110:4], which came after the Law [Psalm 110 was written hundreds of years after Moses gave the Law], appoints a Son, made perfect forever (vv. 26–28).

HEBREWS 7:25

We should be ready to examine our text more closely: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (v. 25). We will pull from this verse two key thoughts.

"Jesus Lives . . ."

The first is that "He [Jesus] always lives." After Jesus gave the Great Commission, He told His disciples, "I am with you *always*, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b; emphasis mine). Paul wrote to the Romans, "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him"

⁵The word translated "forever" is *παντελής* (*panteles*). It is a form of the same word that is translated "complete, perfect" and can mean "to the uttermost" or "finally" (W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985], 656).

(Romans 6:9).⁶ Again and again, Hebrews 7 states that Jesus is a priest *forever*.

“... to Make Intercession for Us.”

Why is Jesus always with us? “He always lives to *make intercession* for them [that is ‘those who draw to God through Him’]” (emphasis mine). What is “intercession”? The word refers to pleading on behalf of another.⁷

It was prophesied regarding the Messiah that He would be an intercessor. In the great passage on the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, we read,

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors (v. 12).

The setting is that of the crucifixion, so the reference may be to Jesus’ interceding for His tormentors: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a). That which Jesus did on the cross, He also did during His personal ministry on earth and now does as part of His priestly ministry in heaven.

During His earthly ministry, He told Peter, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).⁸ Another example of Jesus’ intercession is His high-priestly prayer in John 17. He first made intercession for the apostles: “I ask on their behalf [the apostles’ behalf]; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours” (v. 9; see v. 15). Then Jesus made intercession for us. Note verse 20: “I do not ask on behalf of these [the apostles] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word [this refers to us and all others who believe in Jesus because of the apostles’ testimony in the New Testament].”⁹

⁶You may want to take the time to list a few of the proofs that Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. A good source is Hugo McCord, “The Greatest Miracle: Jesus’ Resurrection,” in “The Inspiration & Authority of the Bible,” *Truth for Today* (April 2000): 38–39.

⁷*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. (2001), s.v. “intercede.”

⁸Perhaps Jesus prayed for Peter during one of His all-night prayer sessions (see Luke 6:12).

⁹Specifically, Jesus prayed that all His followers might be *one*. (See vv. 21–23.)

That which Jesus did on earth, He continues to do in heaven. The writer to the Hebrew Christians emphasized this. First, let us read from Hebrews 2:

Therefore, He [Jesus] had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (vv. 17, 18).

Now, let us see how that passage is tied to one in Hebrews 4:

Therefore, since 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 do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (vv. 14–16).

We have a high priest who can “sympathize with our weaknesses.” The KJV has “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” When Jesus healed the deaf-mute person in Mark 7, he looked “up to heaven *with a deep sigh*” (v. 34; emphasis mine). When Jesus saw Mary and the friends of Lazarus weeping, “He was *deeply moved in spirit* and was *troubled*” (John 11:33; emphasis mine).

Since Jesus was made like us “in all things” and was “tempted in all things as we are,” He can “sympathize with our weaknesses.” I know intellectually (in my head) that the One who made me knows me (see Psalm 103:14), but it helps me emotionally (in my heart) to know that Jesus actually became like me and truly understands my struggles in the flesh.

Someone may protest: “But Jesus never had to deal with the specific problem I have!” For instance, one might say, “Jesus never had a mate who abandoned Him!” Jesus’ bride is the church (see Ephesians 5:22–32; 2 Corinthians 11:2). Has the church always remained true to Jesus? Another may object, “But Jesus never had to deal with unruly and disobedient children!” The Lord has His children (see Ephesians 5:8). Do not His children sometimes break His heart?

A final objection may be made: “But Jesus died when He was about thirty-three. He never

had to go through the trauma of old age!" Nevertheless, He understands. A commonly heard phrase is "I feel old," but what does it mean to "feel old"? The only time I "feel old" is when I look in the mirror. Other than that, I cannot think of any distinctive feeling associated with getting older. In my seventies, how do I feel? I generally feel tired and exhausted; I have aches and pains. Think about it. Did Jesus ever feel tired? Did Jesus ever feel pain?

Once G. C. Brewer was challenged by a man who had undergone many tragedies. He said, "Jesus never had any such experience. . . . He doesn't know what I suffer. . . ." Brother Brewer replied,

My brother, let me tell you that Christ our Lord does know your feelings and your great trial and he alone can bear you up and heal your heart. It is true that Christ never had this identical experience while living among men, but we do not have to have the same experience to know the same emotion. To illustrate: You have laughed and I have laughed. You laughed at one thing and I laughed at something else, but we both know *laughter*. You have wept and I have wept. One thing caused you to weep and another caused me to weep, but we both know what it means to weep. We have both been angry. Our anger was not provoked by the same experience, but we both know anger.

Here is a musical instrument. It has all the notes of tones in music and every tone has been made on it: Every chord has vibrated, but we know every piece of music that was ever composed has not been played on this instrument. Many compositions have never been rendered on this keyboard, but every tone that is in them has sounded here.

Now the human heart is a harp of a thousand strings. It has chords like a musical instrument and Christ our Lord has touched every chord. He knows every emotion.¹⁰

Moving to the next passage we want to read in Hebrews, we find our primary text: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). Raymond Brown wrote that "the rabbis maintained that intercession on behalf of the people was a ministry entrusted to the angels and especially to Michael the archangel." Then he noted,

¹⁰G. C. Brewer, *Christ Crucified: A Book of Sermons* (N.p., 1928; reprint, Nashville: B. C. Goodpasture, 1952), 78–79.

[Jesus] intercedes for us *meaningfully* for, unlike the angels, he has first-hand experience of our trials. He intercedes for us *compassionately*, for, unlike the angels, he knows exactly what we need. He intercedes for us *effectively*, for, unlike the angels, he has the power to meet our need.¹¹

Before we leave the Book of Hebrews, let us notice one final verse: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us [on our behalf]" (9:24).

Of course, the writer of the Hebrew letter was not the only one to declare that Jesus always lives to make intercession for us. Paul stated the same truth in Romans 8:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us (vv. 31–34).

Only two are qualified to bring a charge against us. The first is God—and He is "for us," on our side. The second is Jesus—and He died for us and is now at the right hand of God, interceding for us!¹²

Another inspired writer who emphasized Jesus' intercession for us is John, but he used different terminology: "If anyone sins, we have an *Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1b; emphasis mine). "Advocate" is from *παράκλητος* (*parakletos*), which refers to one called to your side to give aid.¹³ In this passage "advocate" is used in a legal sense: the One who pleads your case. If we had to appear in court, we would want the best defense possible—the best legal representation money could buy. Most of us would have to "make do" with what we could afford. Spiritually, however, we have the best "Defense Attorney" there is—the best heaven can provide: Jesus Christ the righteous!

Through the years, there has been consider-

¹¹Raymond Brown, *Christ Above All: The Message of Hebrews* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 135–36. (Emphasis mine.)

¹²Another passage from Paul that might be used is 1 Timothy 2:5.

¹³Vine, 111.

able controversy regarding precisely *how* Jesus pleads our case. Some have depicted Jesus standing before a stern-faced Father, begging Him to forgive and help His children. If we have that concept in our mind regarding Christ's intercession, we need to dismiss it immediately. Remember Romans 8:31, which says that "God is *for* us."

It is unnecessary for us to know how Christ intercedes for us or all that is involved in His intercession. We just need to know that He does. Robert Milligan was probably right when he said, "The word *intercede* . . . is used here in a very comprehensive sense, to denote all that Christ is now doing for the justification, sanctification, and redemption of his people."¹⁴ Do not worry about the "how." Just rejoice in this truth: He always lives to make intercession for *you*.

Note that the text uses *present* tense: not "He *did* live" or "He *will* live," but "He *lives*"—"He always lives." Year by year, month by month, week by week, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, He is interceding for us! I like the way one writer put it: Even when we are not thinking about Jesus, He is thinking about us!¹⁵

In an ever-changing world, there is this constant: Jesus lives—He always lives!—and He is making intercession for us. In the midst of turmoil, to what can we cling? Some put their trust in material things, but these can slip through your fingers in a minute. Some put their trust in their physical strength, but that can be gone in an instant. Here are some permanent truths we can hold tightly to our hearts: Jesus loves us . . . He died for us, and He was raised . . . and now He lives and intercedes for you! Thank God, we have a living Intercessor!

CONCLUSION

As you look at the promise of our text, do not miss the fact that the promise is conditional: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those *who draw near to God through Him* . . ." (emphasis mine). God has shown His love for us in a hundred ways, but especially in giving His Son on

¹⁴Robert Milligan, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1876; reprint, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1954), 213. (Emphasis mine.)

¹⁵Adapted from J. N. Darby, *Notes from Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), 63.

the cross (Romans 5:8)—and now we must respond by drawing near to Him. James wrote, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).

How do we "draw near to God"? We "draw near to God *through Him*," through Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Speaking of Jesus, Peter said, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We must believe *in Jesus* (John 8:24), we must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3) and *turn to Jesus*, we must confess our faith in *Jesus* (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9), we must be baptized *in the name of Jesus* for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and we must then begin a new life *in Jesus* (Romans 6:3, 4).

Do you believe in Jesus? Have you repented of your sins? Are you ready to confess your faith in Jesus and be baptized into Him? If you are already a Christian, do you need to return to Him? Remember: If you draw near to the Lord, He will draw near to you.

• Note •

Many great songs refer directly or indirectly to Jesus' interceding for Christians. Here are a few in the song book we use where I worship: "He Knows Just What I Need"; "In the Hour of Trial"; "Yes, for Me He Careth." Songs like these can be used before or after the sermon, and the wording of these songs can even be used as part of the lesson.

David Roper

Versions of the Bible Used in This Study

AB — Amplified Bible

Goodspeed — The New Testament:
An American Translation,

Edgar J. Goodspeed

KJV — King James Version

NASB — New American Standard Bible