

Sermon 38, A Priest Who Saves, Hebrews 7:23-25

Proposition: Jesus is a saving priest, one and undying, through whom we draw near to God and who ever lives to intercede for us.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to a glorious declaration about our Lord Jesus. He is a saving priest, a single undying priest who spends His life in interceding for us. As we saw last week, one way in which Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood is that God made Jesus priest with an oath. This week, we see that another way in which Jesus' priesthood is superior is that it is a one-man operation that lasts forever, saves to the uttermost, and continually intercedes for His chosen ones. Jesus is a saving priest, one and undying, through whom we draw near to God and who ever lives to intercede for us.

I. Many Dying Priests, v. 23

Last week, we saw that the Aaronic priesthood was established without any divine oath. God never swore to Aaron that the priesthood would belong to his family in perpetuity. This week, the writer takes it farther and highlights two more things about these Levitical priests. First of all, they were many. There were dozens, if not hundreds, of high priests between Aaron and the destruction of Herod's Temple, when presumably the last high priest perished. The reason there were so many, of course, is that they all died. They were prevented by death from continuing in office. You might be high priest for a decade or two, but then what? You perished. You died, and your son was high priest after you.

Now, the writer points to this as though it's some kind of defect in the Levitical system. He clearly is not too keen on the notion of many dying priests. Let's just push back a little at him. Doesn't he understand that this is the human condition? We are many, and we die and leave our positions to others. There is not a single person alive on this earth today who was born before the year 1900. Millions and billions of people were born in the 1700s and 1800s, but they are all gone now. The kings and queens of England are dead and buried; Theodore Roosevelt and his cabinet all lie moldering in the soil. That's just how things are.

But of course, that's not how things are supposed to be. That's what the writer has to say for himself and his point about the many dying priests. A priest who can truly repair and

maintain your relationship with God is a priest who will not die, because death is the penalty for a broken relationship with God.

Imagine a mechanic who is driving a new car every time you see him. When you ask him about his new car, each time he says, “Oh, my last car broke down and I couldn’t fix it, so I got another one.”

Well, you would have to conclude that he was a pretty poor mechanic. In the same way, a supposed priest who is under God’s sentence of death for his sins is a pretty poor priest. He can’t even get God to revoke his own sentence of death. How on earth, then, is he going to convince God to revoke your death sentence?

That’s why having many dying priests is such a liability. Their priestly skills clearly leave something to be desired. To put it charitably, they aren’t the best priests. They don’t have the skills to obtain plenary pardon for their flocks.

II. One Undying Priest, v. 24

But, thank God — you and I have one undying priest. He did not serve as the great high priest of the church for forty years and then retire and leave the job to someone else. He is still our great high priest. His priesthood is permanent. Pastors and elders come and go; churches and denominations come and go — but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His priesthood is one and undivided.

This means that we do not need any other priests. The Roman Church, with its many priests who are prevented by death from continuing in office, openly contradicts this passage of Scripture when it encourages its people to seek salvation through the sacramental ministry of its priests. Jesus Christ is one and undying. He does not call a huge number of dying priests to continually re-offer the sacrifice of Himself. There is not a word about such a thing in Scripture. Rather, He alone is able and sufficient to be all the priest we could ever need. If you need someone to repair and maintain your relationship with God — and you do — then don’t go to a dying priest, but to the Undying Priest, eternal in the heavens.

A. He Grants Eternal Salvation, v. 25a

It is well known that you can’t give what you don’t have. A priest who lacks eternal life can’t give it; a priest who is not divine cannot offer his own blood to satisfy God’s wrath. A priest who needs eternal salvation for himself cannot give it to you. But Jesus is able to provide eternal salvation — an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. The salvation that He gives cannot and will not rot away. It is impervious to fungi and bacteria. It will not decay in any way. It is also impervious to sin and the defilement of unholiness. Because Jesus is the perfect Savior who paid the price for sin, He saves sinners — eternally! That means that when you sin, you don’t lose your salvation. You can’t. Your inheritance is not subject to defilement any more than it is subject to rot and decay. Imagine trying to grow mushrooms on stainless steel. It doesn’t work. There is nothing there for them to eat. In the same way, there is nothing in your inheritance from Jesus for earthly defilement to stick to. You can’t make it dirty or unclean, because it’s not the kind of thing to which that can happen.

Finally, your salvation is unfading. Leave it out in the sun for decades and it is still just as bright and shiny as ever. Its colors will not get dull; its rays of glory will not grow dim over time. Every once in a while you will see that clickbait — “Ten ‘80s shows that didn’t age well” — and as you read it over, you will realize “Wow, these really didn’t age well.” But your salvation in Jesus is not like that. Revisit it in forty years, or five hundred, and you will find that it has aged beautifully. In fact, it is just as glorious today as it was in 1992 when you were first saved.

The salvation Jesus gives is what He Himself already has and is. It is eternal, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, kept in Heaven for you. In the same way, your Lord is eternal, incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and waiting in Heaven for you.

Earthly priests do not claim to grant eternal salvation. They demand that you come back and utilize their services again and again. The Roman priest requires you to make an annual confession, and he rather likes his weekly tithe as well. The sacrifice of the mass is emphatically not once-for-all; it is repeated 364 days per year because it’s never enough, just as the sacrifices in Solomon’s Temple, Nehemiah’s Temple, and Herod’s Temple were never enough. The effects of these earthly priests aren’t eternal; they are transient. But the salvation offered by Jesus is once-for-all. Obviously, we receive it according to who we are. We are time-bound creatures who need to keep coming back to Jesus and worshiping Him and seeking His forgiveness again and again. But the salvation that He gives us is an eternal salvation, a salvation that does not change or fade.

Imagine buying eternal food. You never need to go to the grocery store again. Imagine buying living water; you drink it once, and you’re never thirsty again. That’s the salvation Jesus offers. Because He personally is eternal His salvation is eternal too.

Do you live as the possessor of eternal salvation, or do you act as though your salvation is temporary and capable of being lost? Do you freak out from time to time, horrified that your salvation is gone? Or do you live in the quiet confidence of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, kept in Heaven and ready to be revealed?

If you have that confidence in your Christian life, then you will do what the text describes next.

B. Who He Saves: Those Who Draw Near God Through Him, v. 25b

You will draw near to God. We just saw this in v. 19. The writer describes salvation as coming to God, drawing near in worship. This is something that is only possible for us through Christ. Notice, too, that these are the people whom Jesus saves. He saves the ones who come to God through Him. Now, we have talked about this as well. There are many ways into the mansion of salvation. It is described with a dozen or more different terms and metaphors in Scripture. The Hebrew writer does not say that Jesus saves us *because* we came to the Father, but rather that Jesus saves *those who come to the Father*. All of those who come to God are saved, and the converse is true too: All of those who are saved come to God. In our Reformed world, we often begin with the truth that Jesus saves first and then all the other good things flow out of that. That is true, and what the Bible teaches when you put it all together. But it is equally true to say that Jesus saves this group that can be described as those who draw near to God through Him.

There is no other way to the Father. If you want to be saved, approach Him through Jesus Christ's priestly work. The people who do that — and only those people — are the ones He saves. If you don't want to be close to the Father, you don't want to be saved. But if you do want to be close to the Father, you will be saved: The one who comes to Him He will in no wise cast out.

Where do you draw near the Father? Above all, in the assembly of the saints — in church. Through Jesus we both, Jew and Gentile, have access to the Father. Paul emphasizes that we have that access together. United as one in Christ, we come to the Father.

Not everyone you see in church is necessarily saved. But there is an unmistakable and indissoluble connection between coming to the Father and being saved.

C. How He Saves: To the Uttermost, v. 25b

Not only is the salvation that Jesus brings through His priestly work eternal and for those who come to the Father; it is also salvation "to the uttermost" or completely. There is no remnant of sin left that you have to pay for on your own, no bit of condemnation that you have to deal with on your own. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's because they have been saved to the uttermost. Jesus paid it all, as the hymn writer said. He did not just pay 80%, or even 99%. He paid it all. His salvation is comprehensive.

That means that it is for all parts of you — body, mind, spirit, soul, emotions, past, present, and future. Do not say that God can't save such-and-such. He can redeem your past, your body, your spirit, and everything else about you. That is how comprehensive, how perfect, the priestly work of Jesus Christ is.

D. Why He Lives: To Make Intercession, v. 25c

And that work continues right up to the present moment and into the future. Today, rather than dying on the cross, Jesus does the work of a priest by interceding for you. What He is doing is what we would call "praying" if He and the Father were "physically" separated (insofar as such a notion makes sense for the Almighty). But since they are "in the same room," with the Son sitting at His Father's right hand, we call it "interceding" rather than "praying." Essentially, the Son is asking the Father to apply the Son's priestly work to cleansing and saving all of us here on earth. This is a request the Father delights to hear; this is the very reason that He sent His Son to earth. We should not think of a wrathful Father with a smooth-talking Son trying to get the Father to see reason and go easy on us sinners. That's not it at all. Rather, the Father and the Son are united in saving us, and the form that unity takes is that the Son is constantly speaking to the Father, co-directing with Him the work of saving us by applying the Son's priestly sacrifice to us.

It is mind-boggling. It is glorious. And it is what we celebrate in worship. We don't know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit intercedes for us — and so does the Son! It is overwhelming to hear what the author tells us here. He says that Jesus Christ's purpose for living is to make intercession for us. He loves us so much that He and His Father sit and talk about us and together act to save us. Jesus doesn't live to go skiing, or to fly, or to eat delicious food and listen to heavenly music. He lives to intercede for us. I don't think we can even begin to wrap our

minds around that. This is love. This is heaven. This is your God and Savior. His priestly work was finished on the cross, but it continues in Heaven as He and His Father work together for your good and their glory.

So come to God through Him. Come in joy, in delight, in worship. He is your Lord; bow to Him, and be like Him. You too are a priest to God. Love and delight in and intercede for one another, even as Jesus lives to intercede for you. Amen.