

JESUS: BETWEEN GOD & US

Hebrews 7:23-37

Recently I spoke to one of the HSC Students at our church who told me that crystals are the latest craze for many of the kids at her school. Apparently, lots of her classmates will head into an exam with gemstones packed into their pockets which are supposed to give them peace and calm and memory and success: all the things you need to ace your test.

But it is not just school students who are buying stones like this. The market for crystals is worth billions of dollars around the world. A recent Bloomberg article said that the demand for crystals is even outshining interest in diamonds. This is a big deal.

Now, it would be easy for me to stand here and simply dismiss this growing demand for gemstones. I mean, surely, in our modern, scientific, rational age, trusting the power of colourful stones is a little bit ridiculous. But I'm not going to do that. And there are two reasons.

Firstly, what people are seeking by purchasing these stones is anything BUT ridiculous. Here are just a few examples:

A bit of Topaz can soothe, heal and recharge. Jacinth provides peace. Sapphire offers wisdom. Jasper sustains and supports in times of stress. Agate opens up ways to forgiveness.

Comfort in a world of chaos. Healing in a world of sickness. Wisdom in a world of confusion. Forgiveness for all your failures. It strikes me that these are fundamental desires of the human heart. Who wouldn't want these things? Don't you want these things?

But the second reason is that the Christian claim is, if anything, far more outlandish. Christians place their hope in the fact that 2000 years ago a man who died in abject humiliation on a cruel Roman cross, rose again from the dead. I mean, surely, in our modern, scientific, rational age, trusting a story of resurrection is a little bit ridiculous. And yet, billions of people around the world today are rejoicing in that very fact. And they are celebrating that in the risen Jesus they have found everything *their* heart desires. Today we celebrate that Jesus is the one who offers comfort, and healing, and wisdom, and forgiveness, and life. As we just read from the book of Hebrews:

Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

This is the Christian claim. This is the Christian hope. Complete salvation through the ever-living Lord Jesus Christ.

And for the next little while we will simply reflect on the two reasons which are given in that verse for this hope we have in Christ.

He ever lives...

...to intercede.

HE EVER LIVES

The fact that Jesus is alive is the beating heart of the Christian faith. And I mean that as literally as I possibly can. Jesus can save us completely and satisfy us fully because in the darkness of a tomb 2000 years ago, Jesus' dead heart began to beat again. He gives peace and comfort and forgiveness and life not because he lives on in our memory or in our hearts, but because he lives even now at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

We see this in the Easter story as the disciples discover the empty tomb and the angels declare he Jesus is risen. They encounter the personal physical presence of Jesus. They talk with him, and touch him, and eat with him. And as they are reunited with their teacher and friend, their despair is turned to joy. And their doubts are turned to worship. Jesus is alive! And if he is alive, then he is the Lord!

And Hebrews 7 stresses for us that Jesus *ever* lives. Jesus is still alive. And if Jesus is still alive, then he is still the Lord. And because Jesus is Lord, he is powerful and able to meet us in all of our mess and meet our every need.

Consider all that Jesus faced in his death, and all that he overcame in his resurrection:

Jesus suffered terrible injustice at the hands of power hungry and cowardly leaders.

He was drained of all his strength.

He was on the receiving end of all all the ugliness of human sin.

He was crushed under the weight of divine judgement.

And ultimately he was plunged down into the darkness of death.

But he triumphed over it all. And in his resurrection he shares the spoils of his victory with all who trust in him. As the living Lord he offers peace to the suffering, strength to the weak, justice to the oppressed, forgiveness to sinners, mercy to rebels, and life to the dead. And all of these things he offers to you. For he ever lives. He ever lives.

...TO INTERCEDE.

And, our verse continues: he ever lives to *intercede for us*.

If the first half of this verse showed that Jesus is powerful and able to meet our need. This second half assures us that he is *ready and willing* to meet our need. Some people live for their career, others live for holidays, or for their family, or for thrilling experiences, or some other hobby or interest. Here we're told that Jesus lives for **this**: To intercede for us. One writer says,

Think of it this way. Christ's heart is a steady reality flowing through time. It isn't as if his heart throbbed for his people when he was on earth but has dissipated now that he is in heaven. It's not that his heart was flowing forth in a burst of mercy that took him all the way to the cross but has now cooled down, settling back once more into kindly indifference. [No,] his heart is as drawn to his people now as ever it was in his life on earth.

We remembered on Good Friday the clear display of Christ's love in his death on the cross. Now, in his resurrection and ascension, the love of Christ is displayed in his constant interceding on our behalf.

So what then does it mean that Christ intercedes for us? Well, it means that he is the ultimate middle man. He stands between us on the one hand, and God the Father on the other. And the flow of his intercession goes in both directions. For as we have already seen, Jesus bestows blessings upon us *from* his Father. Through Christ we receive the peace, comfort, mercy, forgiveness, and life of God.

Yet we do not only receive from God, we are also brought to God. As Hebrews says, we come to God *through* Christ.

As Jesus told Mary and his disciples in the garden:

'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

Jesus rises from death and ascends into heaven. And he takes us with him. Through Christ, God becomes our God. His Father becomes our Father. And because of Christ's completed work on the cross, the Father rejoices in us, just as he rejoices in his Son. He hears us, just as he hears his Son. He helps us, just as he helps his Son.

Jesus presents our needs before the throne of God. He pleads our case in heaven's courtroom. He carries our prayers into the presence of His Father and ours. The easiest way to think of Christ's interceding work is simply to imagine that Jesus is praying for you right now. And the Father delights to hear and answer the prayers that Jesus prays for all his brothers and sisters.

Here is tremendous comfort. Christ's intercession means that our prayers never fall on deaf ears. It means that we come to God not on our own merits, but by the merits of God's own beloved Son. It means that even our ill-formed and half-hearted prayers will be answered by God in ways that are best for us. It means that even in death we will not be turned away if we come to God in Christ's name. I love the Old King James translation of our verse for today. It says: Jesus saves us to **the uttermost**.

And so it doesn't matter what sins lie in your past. It doesn't matter how weak you feel in the present. It doesn't matter what anxiety you have about your future. There is no such thing as being too far gone, or in too deep for Jesus. His saving always outpaces and overwhelms all our failure and frailty and fear. He saves to the uttermost, because he always lives to intercede for us.

GEMSTONES AND THE HEART OF JESUS

This is the good news of Jesus' resurrection. Not only does he live. But he lives as the ultimate middle man. He is completely committed to his calling, and he is very good at his job. He offers God's blessing to all who trust *in* him. And he brings to God all who come *through* him.

To use the language of Hebrews 7: Jesus is our priest. A permanent priest. The true high priest who can truly meet our need. For he alone is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

Jesus is the priest that every other priest of God's people was always pointing to. The sacrifices they made year after year for themselves and the people always pointed to Jesus' sacrifice once and for all on the cross. The incense they burned on the altar always pointed to the way Jesus would carry our prayers up into heaven for us. And the high priests entering into the centre of the tabernacle, and the most holy place of the temple, always pointed to Jesus ascending to his Father and interceding for us there, on our behalf.

And here we come full circle. For there is a beautiful picture of the Old Testament priests that will help us to grasp what it means that Jesus ever lives to intercede for us. And it has to do with Crystals.

In Exodus 28 we're told about the garments the high priest would wear when he entered the tabernacle. And the final item of priestly clothing was a golden breast-piece. And fixed upon the breast-piece were twelve gem-stones. 12 crystals like the Topaz, Jasper, Sapphire and Agate we mentioned before. Each of these crystals represented one of the tribes of Israel, and together they represented all God's people. And so as we read in Exodus: "Whenever the high priest entered the Holy Place, he bore the names of the sons of Israel over his heart."

This was the shadow. In Jesus we know the reality. For in the biblical imagination, we don't need to purchase gemstones. We are the gemstones. And Christ has purchased us at the price of his own body and blood.

For Christianity is not about tapping into some abstract force or power. Rather it is being drawn into a real and personal relationship with Jesus as our high priest. We find comfort and peace and forgiveness and mercy in Christ, precisely because we know Jesus. For all who trust in Jesus are precious to him. For the fact that the High priest carried the gemstones on his heart means that we as God's gemstones are always next to the heart of Christ. And as he bears us on his heart, he ushers us in to the very presence of God.

You may feel like an ugly grey stone that has been cast aside. You might feel like a brittle rock that is crumbling apart. But this Easter, know in faith that Jesus your high priest carries you on His heart. You are of infinite value to him. Every desire of your heart satisfied in him. And your future is secure in him.

*Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save **completely** those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.