

Jesus, Our Intercessor and Advocate

by Harrison Conley

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How many of you brought a Bible with you? Okay, a few of you. I don't know if you know this. This is church. At church, we bring our Bible. So, if you have a Bible or an electronic device with the Bible, even though it's cheating, you can go ahead and pull it out. If you have a Bible, find two places with me. Both of them are in the New Testament, Hebrews 7 and 1 John 1. We're going to start in Hebrew 7. Then, we're going to make our way, eventually, to 1 John 1. But it won't hurt you to get ahead of schedule. So Hebrews 7 and 1 John 1. Right now, we are in the midst of a series called Christology. I think it's just a great way to start a new year as well. Christology, the study of Christ.

We're looking at the different functions, roles, and offices that Christ Jesus holds. Our prayer is that together, we would rediscover the wonder and the awe of who Jesus is. This morning, I want to speak to you about two of the most important, yet two of the most often overlooked, offices and roles of the Lord Jesus. These are two roles that He is actively engaged in right now. The reason I sort of emphasize that word now is because often, when it comes to teaching about Jesus or thinking about Jesus, we often think in terms of what He's done, but not necessarily what He's currently doing. We speak, and we think often about His coming, about His living, about His teaching, about His miracles, about His dying, and about His resurrection. We reflect on those things, and we speak about the things He's done in order to rescue and save us.

Some of us even go one step further, and we lift our eyes forward and upward. We realize the things He's going to do, that He's going to come back and rescue His Church, that He's going to permanently establish His Kingdom and create a new heaven and earth. So, we think about, and we talk about the things He's done, the things He's going to do, and we should be thinking about those things and speaking about those things daily. We should be reflecting on the grace of our Lord Jesus, thinking about the salvation that He's procured, living with an eye upward toward His imminent return, giving Him thanks for what He's done and what He's going to do. But we should also regularly consider and give thanks for what He's currently doing right now. Right now, in this very moment, our Lord Jesus is praying for you, and He's praying for me. He's in heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. I love that He's seated, not standing. He's seated, which means His work is done. He has His legs kicked up on the Barcalounger. He is seated. His work is done, but He's praying for us. He's acting as our intercessor and our advocate.

I want to talk to you about those things this morning. Jesus, our intercessor, and Jesus, our advocate. These roles don't just describe a particular function that He fulfills. It's far greater than that. These roles actually reveal to us the very heart of who Jesus is. They reflect His deep longing and the deep love that He feels for you, for me, and for His people. Jesus, our intercessor and our advocate. As we get ready to jump into this, there are two things I want you to know from the get-go. First, as is often the case, there's far too much to be said this morning that can be covered in a single sermon. So, I reckon we're going to come back to these topics in the near future. Here's the second thing I want you to know. Both of these roles, intercessor and advocate, are similar in nature. There is going to be overlap, but there is one distinct difference

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between them. And that difference, when we understand it and when we realize it takes our breath away when we see how amazing our Savior Jesus is. If it's all right with you, I'd like to pray just once more and ask the Holy Spirit to come alongside us this morning to be our teacher and to guide us through His Word. Is that all right?

Father, we come to You now. We come in the name of Your Son, Jesus. We ask now as we open Your Word that You would guide us. Holy Spirit, would You speak to us? Would You take my words, divide them a thousand different ways, and make them real and realized in our hearts so that each of our hearts would be drawn to the person of Jesus? May we see Him afresh today in His beauty and in His glory. We pray that we would see Jesus because we know if we can see Him, we can become more like Him. God, as always, we pray You would be glorified in the house. It's in Your name we pray. Amen, amen, amen.

Hebrews 7, I had you find that. Let's go ahead and read beginning in verse number 22. We're not sure who authored Hebrews. If I had a bet, I would say it's the Apostle Paul, but we're not sure. So, the author writes this in Hebrews 7:22–24 ESV.

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. (The former priests, speaking of high priests) ²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he (Jesus) holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

He's eternal. Then, we come to verse 25.

²⁵ Consequently, he (Jesus) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Just keep your Bibles open here for a moment. We're going to refer to this verse quite a bit. It's going to be one of our key texts this morning. This statement that we've just read is one of the most important statements in all the world. I want to read it to you once more, but I want to read it out of the amplified translation. Look at verse 25 one more time. The author writes and says,

²⁵ Therefore He (Jesus) is able also to save forever (completely, perfectly, for eternity) those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede and intervene on their behalf [with God].

So, this morning, we're talking about Christ, our intercessor, and Christ, our advocate. Let's start with intercessor. Now, what exactly is intercession? What does that mean? To put it generally, it's when a third party would come between two other parties and make a case to one of these parties on behalf of the other party. Does that make sense? It sounds like a party. Think about it like this. Recently, my wife got an email from one of our son's teachers. This email stated that our son had a lot of missing assignments and that he was in danger of having to take this class all over again. Now, all three of our boys are in a bit of a hybrid homeschool program where they're at home most of the week, and then they go to school and have actual assignments one day a week. The way they do their work and then turn in that homework is they scan it, upload it, and email it off to the teacher, which is still crazy to me. I miss the days of paper and pencils. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? There were actually like whiteboards, chalkboards, and projectors. Now, they scan it, upload it, and email it, but such is this generation.

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Anyway, my wife gets this email from the teacher. At first, it's a little bit perplexing because we know our son has been doing the work. We see him sitting at the kitchen table during the week doing the homework. So, we knew that there must have been some kind of breakdown in the process of scanning, uploading, and emailing. So, on behalf of our son, my wife reached out to the teacher to explain the situation and to find a solution. What was she doing? She was interceding on behalf of our son. Now, keeping that illustration fresh in our minds, what then does it mean for Christ to intercede, and who is He interceding for? First and foremost, He is interceding on our behalf to God the Father. Now, I realize that's a fairly obvious observation, but it doesn't take much to realize that. If you're anything like me, immediately when you think about Jesus interceding to the Father on our behalf, the question becomes, "Well, what is He interceding for?" For my wife, she interceded on behalf of our son over missing homework, but what is Jesus interceding for? What is it that He's praying and pleading for as He sits at the right hand of the Father?

It's a big question. Honestly, there are quite a few answers that we could give, all of which we derive from the prayers that we see Him praying here while He was on earth in His earthly ministry. But this morning, I want to highlight three specific things that Christ intercedes for on our behalf before the Father. Each of these three things are important, but the last one I want you to pay particular attention to because we're going to see Jesus shift from being just our intercessor into Jesus becoming our advocate. More on that in a minute, but let's start here. The first thing that Jesus intercedes for on our behalf is this. Jesus prays for our strength and our sustainment. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 22, we see a striking example of this. Many of you will be familiar with this story, but Jesus is with His disciples. It's the night that He's going to be betrayed, arrested, and then, ultimately, the next day, crucified. He's just finished His meal with the disciples in the upper room. He's letting them know all the things that are about to happen, that He's going to be betrayed and arrested, that they're going to be like sheep scattered without a shepherd. But of course, instead of picking up everything that Jesus is laying down, the disciples are up to their normal things. They're arguing amongst themselves about who is going to be the greatest in Jesus's Kingdom. Peter is getting ready to tell Jesus, "Hey, there's nothing that could happen. Under no circumstance will I ever leave Your side." We pick it up in Luke 22:31–32a NKJV. Jesus is about to warn Peter. Look what He says.

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! (Calling Peter by his given name. Simon, Simon,) Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you . . ."

If you have a pen, maybe just highlight that first. "But I have prayed for you." The New Living Translation says this. "I have pleaded in prayer for you that your faith should not fail, and when you've returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Jesus is about to be arrested and go to the cross, and in the process of those events, He knows how it's going to affect His disciples, particularly Peter. As a matter of fact, if you keep reading the very next verse, verse 33, Jesus tells Peter, "Hey, you're never going to leave my side? Guess what? Three times in the next few hours, you're going to deny even knowing Me." Jesus knows ahead of time the overwhelming shame that Peter is going to feel from this denial. He knows that Satan is going to try and use that shame to derail Peter's faith and convince Peter that he's unworthy, making him feel like he's disqualified from the call that has been placed upon his life. Jesus knows all of these things are going to happen, so what does He do? He prays for Peter. He pleads in prayer for Peter that he would be strengthened and that his faith would not fail. Peter's about to face one of the hardest moments of his life. It's a test that's going to shake him to his core and bring his confidence and his own abilities and his own strength crashing down around him. But Jesus had been praying for Peter. Jesus had been interceding on his behalf. Notice, Jesus didn't pray that

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Peter would avoid the trial. He prayed that Peter's faith would be strengthened through the trial and that he would endure it.

This teaches us something critical about how Jesus prays and intercedes for us. He doesn't pray that we would escape every challenge and/or trial that would come our way. No, instead He prays that we would be strengthened through the trial and that our faith would not fail. Looking back at Peter as our example, we know how his story goes. After his failure, after his denial, he repents and Jesus restores him. Peter would go on to become the key central pillar in the New Testament church. He would use his story as an example that would lead countless others to Christ, to faith. We're still talking about him 2,000 years later. I'm telling you, the same is true for us. Jesus knows that trials are inevitable in this broken world. As a matter of fact, He promised us they would come. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "In Me, you'll have peace, but in the world, as long as you are on this sphere of a planet sucking oxygen, there will be trouble. There will be trial. Things will not always go your way." But then He says, "Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." The point is this. He promised us that trials, pain, and situations are going to come. He knows there are going to be times when we feel like giving up, when it feels like the weight of the world is unbearable. Times when we deal with shame and disappointment. Times where we are overwhelmed by pain to the point where we feel like we are disqualified from His love and from the call that He's placed upon us. But He also knows this. He knows what we can become if we endure through those trials. He knows what will become of us if we allow those trials to push us to His feet. I love the English preacher Charles Spurgeon. He said, "I've learned to kiss the wave that slams me into the Rock of Ages."

He knows what we will become if we allow those trials to push us to His feet and we adopt His strength and not our own. It produces a steeling effect on the inside of us where it transforms us into a greater likeness, an image of Himself. So, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, and He intercedes on our behalf. He's not just praying for our protection but praying for our growth and our transformation. He's asking the Father to preserve us in the trial so that we come out on the other side stronger, more faith-filled, looking, sounding, and acting more like Him. Let me give you a picture. Think about it like this. Think about a gardener who's planting and then tending to a young sapling. That gardener knows that storms are going to come, that bad weather is going to come unless, of course, that gardener is from Southern California. Then he has the easiest job ever because there's never any bad weather.

But anywhere else in the world, when the gardener plants that little sapling, what does he do? He knows storms are going to come. He knows the wind is going to come. What does he do? He ties up that little sapling to a sturdy stake that's been planted in the ground next to it. He makes sure that the sapling's roots are watered and well-nourished because, inevitably, bad weather is going to come. The storm and the wind might bend and batter that little tree, but because that tree has been cared for, because it's been tied up to that immovable stake, that sapling, though young and tender, is going to be supported, and it will not break. Over time, that little tree is going to grow taller and stronger. Why? Because it endured. This is how Christ cares for us. His prayers act like that stake and the nourishment. They hold us steady, and they provide what we need in order to grow. Even when the winds of this world feel relentless. Listen, guys, this is why this matters. Life's challenges are not a sign that God has forgotten us or abandoned us. On the contrary, we need to remember in the midst of those things that Jesus is interceding for us.

Even in the most confusing and painful of trials, our risen Savior is praying for us. He's praying and interceding before the Father that our faith would grow stronger, that our character would become more refined, and that in the storm, we would learn what it is to be fully dependent

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upon Him and His grace. So, when you feel overwhelmed, remember this: you're not alone. The Son of God is actively interceding for you. In the very moment of your struggle, He's there. The next time you find yourself in the middle of that storm, don't just ask, "Man, why is this happening to me? Why do bad things happen to good people?" No, instead, ask this question. "What is Jesus, the Son of God, interceding and praying for me right now?" Because He is praying for you, and His prayers never fail. So, that's the first thing we see. Jesus prays for our strength and our sustainment. Number two, here's the second thing He's interceding. He prays for our salvation to be secure. Now, don't get caught up in the language. I know some of you are looking at me a little bit sideways, going like, "Wait, wait, wait, hold on." Let me explain. In John 17, we see a beautiful prayer prayed by Jesus. Scholars call it the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It gives us a glimpse of what's in His heart. He starts by praying for His disciples. Then, He prays for us, those who would come. This is what He says in John 17:24 NKJV. Praying for those who would come, He says,

²⁴ "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

Jesus said, "Father, I desire." His greatest prayer and His greatest desire is that we would be with Him where He is. Where is He? He's in heaven. That we would be with Him for all of eternity and that we would experience in its fullness the glory of God. He prayed that for us, prayed that over us while He was here on the earth. He's praying the same thing for us right now as He sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father. So, when I say that Jesus is praying for our salvation, that it would be secure, this is not about Jesus interceding on our behalf so we don't lose our salvation, but rather His intercession is about the applying of what His atonement accomplished and purchased for us. His prayers are actually a reflection of the fullness and the completeness of His earthly work and ministry. In other words, what He did for us in the past, His dying on the cross and His resurrection, it already accomplished salvation for us and there is nothing lacking there, but His current intercession, what He's doing right now for us is the moment by moment application of that atoning work in our lives. This is why the New Testament will link together the doctrines of justification and intercession. Now, I know those are big words, but let me show you what I mean. I'm going to take you to the Scriptures. In Romans 8, beginning in verse 33, the apostle Paul begins to give us this idea. In this idea, in these statements, he welds together these two truths about justification and intercession. They need to be seen together. He begins in Romans 8:33 NKJV and says,

³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

There's that term justification. It's the doctrine that says we've been made right with God through what Jesus has done for us, through His death and through His resurrection. He says, Romans 8:33b-34 NKJV

³³ It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

So, in this one thought, Paul glues these two doctrines together: justification and intercession. Why does he do that? Because they go hand in hand. Let me try and explain it further. Christ's intercession is the constant hitting of the refresh button when it comes to our justification in the court of heaven. Now, why is this important, the combining of justification and intercession? First and foremost, it's important because it clearly reflects how profoundly personal our rescue is.

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I want you to think about that for a second, how profoundly personal our rescue is. If we knew about Christ's death and resurrection, if we knew about justification, but we knew nothing about His intercession, we'd be tempted to think and to view our salvation in mechanical and almost formulaic terms. Like A plus B equals C. If He does this, then it equals that. It's across the board, and there's no personal touch needed, but Christ didn't just justify us. He's also interceding for us personally, which reflects the true nature of His heart when it comes to justification. What that means is now He's personally interceding for us, meaning that when He went to the cross, He had each of us individually on His mind. He was thinking about you. He was thinking about me when He went to the cross.

Our justification is so profoundly personal, and that same heart that He carried with Him, you in His heart, as He went through the torment of the cross, is the same heart that now manifests itself in His constant pleading and prevailing upon His Father to always welcome us. Thank You, Jesus. What a Savior You are. Now, you might hear that and go, "Well, hold on. Does that mean that the Father is reluctant to embrace me? Or does it mean that Jesus has a more loving disposition toward us than the Father does?" No. Listen, Jesus doesn't intercede because the Father's heart is cool or cold toward humanity. Nothing could be further from the truth. For God, the Father loved the world so much that He gave His only Son. He loved the world so much. He loved the world so much. He loved you so much. He loved me so much that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The Father's heart is not cold toward humanity. No, the Father's greatest delight is to say yes to the Son's interceding on our behalf. Let me maybe say it like this. Jesus interceding on our behalf is His heart connecting our heart to the Father's heart.

Here's a picture I want you to consider. Right across the street here, we have the Naval Base. Oftentimes, if you're in town driving around, you see them running drills and testing equipment. Sometimes, you'll see guys jumping out of planes with their parachutes open. Other times, you see like a convoy of Humvees rolling down the road. One of the things I love watching is when they get the gliders going up in the sky. Where one plane attaches the cable to the glider, and the plane pulls that glider up in the air and then disengages. That glider kind of then smoothly makes its way back down to earth. Here's the picture I want you to consider. We're the glider. Jesus is the airplane, but He never disengages; that cable never comes off. He never lets us go. He never lets us go, wishing us the best and hoping we can do the best we can and glide the rest of the way into heaven. No, it's through His intercession that He carries us all the way home. Now, how do we know that to be true? Because Hebrews 7:25a NKJV tells us. Again, going back to our key verse this morning, the author writes and says,

²⁵ Therefore He (Jesus) is also able to save to the uttermost (to the uttermost, to the uttermost) those who come to God through Him . . .

That word uttermost speaks to the totality of Christ's saving power. He saves us forever, fully and eternally, without fail. This isn't a temporary or a conditional salvation. It's eternal and unshakable. Jesus is not just concerned with us starting the faith journey and then leaving us to figure it out on our own. No, He is committed to bringing us all the way home. Thank God for that. Because honestly, and you and I know this because we know ourselves deep in our own hearts, we know we are to the uttermost sinners. And because of that, we need a to the uttermost Savior. Never forget, Church, Jesus doesn't just help us. He saves us. The truth is we know this, but somewhere along the way in our own hearts, we sometimes feel the need to add on to or to somehow strengthen His saving work. Instead of actually believing what's written in Hebrews 7:25, that He's able to save to the uttermost, we tend to live more like it says that He's able to save for the most part. And that His forgiveness doesn't really stretch all the way down

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into those small, dark pockets of our lives. Those sinful places that seem so ugly and so deep and so far beyond redemption. Church, what if I told you that when the Scripture says that He is able to save to the uttermost, it actually means that God's forgiving, redeeming, restoring love actually reaches down into the deepest, darkest parts of our souls, those places that nobody else knows about, those places that we keep hidden, those places that we feel most ashamed and defeated over.

What if I told you that it's actually in the darkest places of our lives where Christ's heart is drawn the strongest to us? He knows us not just to the uttermost; He knows us to the gutter most. His heart is drawn to us right there. Do you know what that means? It means we can't sin our way out of His tender care. I don't know about you, but that's really good news. How do we know it's true? Because the Scripture tells us He's able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since, here's why. He always lives to make intercession for them. Jesus' heavenly intercession is the reason we know our salvation is secure. I love that the Scripture says He never ceases or that He always lives to bring His atoning life, death, and resurrection before the Father in a moment by moment way. He lives to make intercession for us. Hear me; our sinning might go to the gutter most, but His saving will always go to the uttermost, and His saving will always outpace our sinning because He always lives to intercede for His people. I'm so grateful for that. When my heart grabs a hold of that truth, it's freeing. It means I can live without the fear of losing my salvation. It means I can live without the pressure of having to perform where my salvation or my standing with God is based upon my ability to hold onto Him. No, friend, it's not that.

It's based upon His ability to hold onto us. It rests upon Christ's perfect intercession. I'm telling you, the Savior is praying for us that we would stay anchored in Him. Guess what? His prayers are always effective. So, hear me. When life feels overwhelming, when life feels uncertain, when we have messed up so bad that we feel like we have been disqualified from the call of God on our life, remember this. Jesus is not only our Savior; He's our intercessor. He's praying for us. He's praying that we would remain secure in Him. And because of His prayers, we can walk in total confidence and in total hope, knowing that we are secure. Why? Because He always lives to make intercession for us. So, He intercedes for our strength and sustainment. He intercedes that our salvation would be secure. Then, I want to move into the final point of our study this morning. Here's where we see a slight transition. Now, He's going to move into being our advocate. When we stumble and fall, like all of us do, Jesus shifts from praying for our endurance to stepping into His role as advocate, where He doesn't just pray for us, but He defends us. He stands before the Father and ensures that our sins are forgiven and that our relationship with God will remain unbroken.

So, here's the third thing. Jesus pleads for our sins to be forgiven. Again, don't get so caught up in the language here. I realize it can sound a little foreign. Someone goes, "Wait, hold on. I thought it was my responsibility to pray and repent and ask for my sins to be forgiven?" It is. Repentance is part of the gospel. There is no salvation without surrender. When we do sin, we have the responsibility to cry out in repentance and in surrender. But when we do, we can do so with confidence. Why? Because Jesus Christ, the righteous, stands before the Father as our advocate. How do I know that? Well, let me take you to the Scriptures. I had you find 1 John 1 a little while ago. We finally made our way there. First John 1. At this point in his writing, our author, John, is up in age. He's Grandpa John, and he's not pulling any punches. First, second, and third John are probably my three favorite chapters or books to read in the Bible because John tells it straight. He's literally like a grandpa. If you have a grandpa or grandma in your life where they've just lived so much life. They see what you're doing. They're not going to like tiptoe

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around the bush; they just tell you, “Hey, you're being an idiot. Stop.” John is doing that here. In 1 John 1:5–8 NKJV, he gets right to the point. He says,

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

See what I mean? He's not pulling any punches. But then verse nine,

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Drop down in 1 John 2:1–2 NKJV. John continues the same thought and he writes this,

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

I love this. John says we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. Now, we shift from Jesus being the intercessor to Jesus being the advocate. Let's explore the difference there a little bit. When Jesus intercedes for us, He's praying on our behalf. As we read in Hebrews 7:25, He lives to intercede for those who belong to Him. Intercession is about sustaining us in our faith. It's about strengthening us in the trial and ensuring that we endure to the end. Advocacy is somewhat different. Advocacy comes into play when we sin. As our advocate, Jesus stands in the courtroom of heaven, and He represents us before the Father. The reason I sort of use that picture language of the courtroom of heaven is twofold. First and foremost, in our modern world, we use this term advocate. We think about the term advocate. Immediately, we think of the justice system and a lawyer or a solicitor who stands in our stead. Secondly, I use that language, the courtroom of heaven, because, in Revelation 12:10, we're told that we have an enemy, the adversary, Satan. He's called the accuser of the brethren.

We're told that he brings accusations against us, against the people of God. He brings them before God, the judge, day and night. So, whether or not there's a real, actual courtroom in heaven, I don't know, but that's one of the pictures that the Scriptures paint. When these accusations are brought against us, whether from Satan, the accuser of the brethren, or even from our own hearts, what do we see? We see Jesus step forward on our behalf and begin to plead our case before the Father. Now, in His role as intercessor, Jesus prays for our growth and our preservation. In His role as advocate, He defends us when we've fallen. You see, intercession is the idea of mediating between two parties and bringing them together. Advocacy is similar, but it takes on an added dimension of aligning oneself with another. It speaks of a sharing of an experience or sharing of a feeling that another person has. Let me say it like this. An intercessor stands in between two parties, but an advocate doesn't simply stand in between the two parties but rather steps over and joins the one party as they then approach the other.

Do you understand what I'm saying? So, the question becomes, why do we need an advocate? First John 2:1 tells us really plainly. John says, “I write this to you so that you will not sin.” Let's

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just pause there for a minute. I want to make something abundantly clear about the gospel. God's desire for our lives is that we would live holy. I think over the last 20 years, the hyper-grace movement has gone too far. God has called us to live holy and, in so doing, reflect His character. Make no mistake, the gospel and the grace of Jesus calls us to leave sin, full stop. You don't get to live how you want to live and say, "I'm a follower of Jesus." It does not work like that. The gospel is not morally indifferent, and grace is not an excuse to live how we want to live. Paul would write in the book of Romans, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not." Now, the call of Jesus is equal to anybody and everybody. He says this, "Come and die. Do you want to follow Me? Come and die. Die to self and die to your sin."

If this was the sole message that John was trying to communicate to us in verse number one, it would be valid, and it would be appropriate for us to hear. But truth be told, that message, although true, would crush us because we all know the reality of our own lives. We know that we all regularly fall short of God's standard of holiness and perfection. John, knowing this, being a human himself, offers us a lifeline. The rest of the verse says this, "But if anybody does sin, if anybody does fall short, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." Here's why this is such good news because we all sin. Romans 3:23 NKJV,

²³ . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

None of us are perfect, and even in our best moments, we still stumble and fall short. Even after we come to faith in Christ as Savior, we stumble and fall short. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it tell us that once we've made Jesus Lord of our lives, suddenly we become these perfect, sinless human beings that we never sin again. No, the Scripture teaches that once we call Jesus Lord, we enter into a process called sanctification, a setting apart. Pastor Kenneth talked about it two weeks ago, where we become more like Christ. I would even say this. As we begin to submit to God's Word and allow sanctification to take place, when we do sin, it actually feels more sinful than before we were even saved. That's the work of God in our life. But this is also why Christ's work as an advocate becomes so important. It's God's way of encouraging us to not throw in the towel when we mess up. We try and follow Christ the best that we can, and His Holy Spirit comes alongside us, but yet we fail, and at times we're unfaithful. Thank God, when we're unfaithful, He remains faithful. His advocacy on our side rises higher than our sins, and that advocacy before the Father speaks a better and a louder word than any failure we might have. The moment we repent of that failure, we repent of that sin, and we turn, and by the way, that word repentance literally means to turn. It's not even so much about turning away from something as much as it's about turning towards something, namely someone. As we turn toward Jesus, inevitably, we turn away from our sins.

That's what repentance is, and as we repent, Jesus, as our advocate, stands before the Father in our place. He doesn't minimize our sins. He doesn't try to explain it away before the Father. He doesn't pretend that it's a big deal. No, He confronts that sin head on, declaring, "Yes, Father, they have sinned, but guess what? I've paid for that sin, and My righteousness covers them." Jesus says to the Father, "Father, You made Me, who knew no sin, to be sin for them." You can insert your name there, and I can insert my name. "To be sin for them, that they might become the righteousness of God in Me, and now their lives are hidden in Me." Jesus is the only one qualified to stand before the Father as our advocate. That's why John calls Him, Jesus Christ, the righteous because we don't have that righteousness in and of ourselves. His advocacy on our behalf is not based on our performance or our goodness. That advocacy is based upon His perfect righteousness, because when He stands before the Father, He stands as the sinless Lamb of God, who has already taken our place and paid for the sins of the world. Here's the best part. This is not a one-time, one-off role that Jesus plays. No, His role as

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advocate is constant and ongoing on our behalf. How do I know that? Hebrews 9:24 NKJV. They're going to throw it up on the screen. It tells us this,

²⁴ For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Why? For us. For us. This means that His role as advocate is not a one-time event; it's His ongoing ministry. Every time we stumble, every time we fall, Jesus Christ, the righteous, is there to remind the Father that we are covered by His blood, and that's good news. Making this practical for just a moment. How do we apply this, and what does it mean for the daily grind of our lives? Let me give you two things, and then we're going to be done. Number one, it means this. It means we can live free from condemnation. One of the enemy's oldest and greatest tactics is to keep us trapped in guilt and shame. When we do things that we know we shouldn't have done, he likes to replay those things over and over in our minds. He likes to beat us down with shame and guilt. He wants us to believe that our failures disqualify us from God's love and from God's call upon our lives. Hear me; when we remember and rehearse that Jesus is our advocate, and that He stands in our place, when we repent of those sins, we can silence the lies of the enemy. We can speak Romans 8:1a NKJV over our lives with confidence.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . .

I don't know about you, but that's good news that we can live free from condemnation. Here's the second thing. When we realize that Christ is our advocate, it gives us motivation to pursue holiness. Knowing that Jesus is at work on our behalf, that He's our advocate, doesn't give us a free pass to sin. It's not a get out of jail free card. Rather, it gives us the confidence to pursue holiness because we know that He's there to catch us when we fall. It means that we can take risks for the kingdom, and we can live boldly in faith, living in obedience without fear of failing. Why? Because He's there, He's holding us, and He's representing us. One final picture, and then I promise we're going to pray and be done. Do you remember teaching your kids how to ride a bike? I have three boys. My oldest is 16, which is crazy. He has a car, a driver's license, and a girlfriend. It's crazy. Yes, pray for me. They are 16, 13, and 8. It's insane how quickly life is going. I still remember vividly teaching each of them to ride a bike. When you were teaching your kids to ride a bike, did you employ the seat holding method? Do you know what I'm talking about? They sit on the bike, you hold the back of the seat, and you kind of run alongside them.

I remember my boys being really nervous and quite a bit wobbly when we took those training wheels off. They sat on there, and I remember just saying to them, "Hey, look, no matter what, you're going to be okay because I'm sitting here. I'm holding your seat." They could feel my arm up against them. As they started to pedal, I would run alongside them. No matter what, even if they felt like they were going to fall, they would stay upright because Dad was holding onto them. Just have that picture for a moment. This is what Jesus does for us. His advocacy before the Father on our behalf holds us steady, even when we feel weak or unsure. If we were to fall, He's not there to scold us every time we fall, wobble, or stumble. He's there to encourage us, to help us back up, and to keep moving forward. When we realize that, when we realize that He's in our corner, that our lives are hidden in Him, it brings this great motivation to live in holiness and to walk upright into the call and the purpose that He's placed on our lives. It's not a call or a free pass to go and sin, but it's a call to holiness.

If my wife were to walk into the room one day, and it's just me and her, and she said to me, "Harrison, I love you with all my heart. There's nothing you could do to make me stop loving you. You could do whatever you want, but I'll still love you." If I hear that, does that immediately

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make me want to go out and have an affair? No. “Well, she said no matter what I do, she’s going to love me.” No, I hear that, and my heart is drawn to it, and it makes me want to love this one woman with all of my heart on a greater and deeper level. Listen to me. The Savior of the world says to you, “I love you, and there’s nothing you can do.” How dare we look at that as a free pass to go and live how we want! No, no, if anything, it should draw us toward Him on a greater and deeper level. It’s a call and a motivation toward holiness. I have so much more to say but not enough time to say it in. So, let me wrap up and just say, as our intercessor, Jesus prays for our faith to remain strong and for our salvation to be secured. He carries us through every trial and temptation, but as our advocate, He stands in our place. When we sin, He ensures that the grace and the forgiveness of the Father flow freely into our lives. It’s through His work as intercessor and advocate we can know beyond any shadow of a doubt that nothing, not our failures, not our stumbles, not our mess-ups, not our mistakes, nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Come on, let’s pray.

Father, Father, we love You. Thank You for taking this simple teaching this morning and making it real in our hearts. Father, I’ve done my best, but I know Your Holy Spirit has been at work. Holy Spirit, would You continue to make Your Word real in our hearts? Would You bring comfort to those who are needing comfort? Would You bring wisdom to those who are needing wisdom? Would You bring a reassurance to those who have felt like they have disqualified themselves from Your love and from the call that You placed on their lives? Holy Spirit, would You remind them right now that they have an intercessor and an advocate? May they feel the warmth of the Father. May they feel His smile upon them. Oh, we love You, Jesus. We love You, Jesus.

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