**Christ’s Intercession**

Text: Hebrews 4:14-16

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**Scriptures:** John 11:38-44; Hebrews 4:14-16

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 354, 446, 313, 63, 318, 531+532

**Series:** Belgic Confession (Article 26)

**Theme:** The intercessory work of the ascended Christ

**Proposition:** Because Christ is our advocate and mediator interceding on our behalf, we can have confidence that we will receive mercy and grace in time of need.

**Introduction**

Intercession is ‘the action of interceding, intervening or pleading on behalf of another’. Intercession is the topic of the last of the Belgic Confession Articles (20-26) which focus on the work of Christ. We see many examples of intercession before God in the Old Testament: Abraham interceded for Sodom (Gen 18:23-33) based on God’s justice and mercy; Moses interceded for Israel (Exodus 32:9-14; Numbers 14:11-24) based on God’s promise, His name and His reputation; Elijah interceded for Israel (1 Kings 18:26-37) so that the people would know Him and turn their hearts back to Him.

Intercession was an important aspect of a prophet’s task (e.g. Amos, Jeremiah) and priests were also intercessors (e.g. Joel 2:17). The High Priest’s making atonement on behalf of the people was an act of intercession. Isaiah prophesied that the suffering servant would bear the sins of many, and make intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). The writer to the Hebrews explains that unlike priests in the past, the risen living Christ is able to ‘*save to the utmost those who draw near to God through him, since he ‘always lives to make intercession for them’* (Heb 7:25).

When we pray in Jesus name, He is our Intercessor before God. There are two aspects of His intervention on our behalf which we’ll consider this afternoon:

1. He is our Mediator who gives us access to God and
2. He is our Advocate who pleads for us before God
3. **Christ our Mediator gives us access to God**

A mediator is a person who attempts to make parties involved in a conflict come to an agreement. A mediator acts as a ‘go-between’. A mediator needs to be able to speak the language of both parties and be respected and trusted by both sides in order to bring about a resolution to a conflict. In a disagreement between people, there may be many mediators available who could negotiate a settlement to their dispute.

However the break in relationship between God and people can **only** be ultimately resolved through Jesus Christ. That is why the Bible makes the statement “*There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). It is also why Jesus said to His disciples “*No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Apart from Jesus, we have no access to God; there is no way of resolving the separation between unholy sinners and the Holy righteous God.

Jesus is the unique Mediator. He alone is both God and man (Phil 2:6-7). “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature*” (Heb 1:3). In His humanity, He has been made like us in every respect (Heb 2:17), tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). He is the only completely innocent One who has hung between earth and heaven on a cross, being separated from both whilst suffering for the crimes of others.

Being human he has sympathy for our fallen humanity living in a broken world. Sympathy is ‘the feeling for or capacity for sharing in the interests of another person’. We speak of the ability of a sympathetic person to ‘put themselves into the shoes of another’. To sympathise is literally to ‘have a common feeling’. This speaks of understanding the situation and perspective of someone other than yourself. It is good to be comforted, supported and helped by a sympathetic person. Christ sympathized with the family of the dead man Lazarus ‘*He wept*’ (John 11:35).

I read this story by Bob Weber which illustrates sympathy.

A farmer lived on the outskirts of the community. He had just relaxed on the front porch when a newsboy delivered the evening paper. The boy noted the sign Puppies for Sale.

The boy got off his bike and said to the farmer, "How much do you want for the pups, mister?" "Twenty-five dollars, son." The boy's face dropped. "Well, sir, could I at least see them anyway?"

The farmer whistled, and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house tagged by four of the cute puppies, wagging their tails and yelping happily. At last, another pup came straggling around the house, dragging one hind leg.

"What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked. "Well, Son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to the vet and the doctor took an X ray. The pup doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right." To the amazement of the farmer, the boy dropped the bike, reached for his collection bag and took out a fifty-cent piece.

"Please, mister," the boy pleaded, "I want to buy that pup. I'll pay you fifty cents every week until the twenty-five dollars is paid. Honest I will, mister." The farmer replied, "But, Son, you don't seem to understand. That pup will never, never be able to run or jump. That pup is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want such a useless pup as that?"

The boy paused for a moment, then reached down and pulled up his pant leg, exposing an iron brace and leather knee-strap holding a poor twisted leg. The boy answered, "Mister, that pup is going to need someone who understands him to help him in life!"

Christ is not so much the crippled Saviour who understands crippled people like you and me, although there is truth in that. He is the unblemished Saviour who suffered unto death who understands imperfect suffering people like us.

We suffer in this life because our own sin weakens us, the sins of others weaken us, and the effect of the curse in the world in which we live weakens us; we experience sickness and aging. Jesus, who is the Almighty Son of God understands our weakness. To paraphrase Jacinda Ardern’s phrase ‘They are us” – “Jesus is us”. He is also “not us” in the sense that He is holy, perfectly righteous and beloved by God because of His own willing obedience to His Heavenly Father’s will. He alone, gives all those who trust in Him access to God. It is because Christ simultaneously ‘is us’ and ‘not us’. He is the **only Mediator** between God and people; He is also the **only Advocate** – which brings us to our second point.

1. **The Christ our Advocate pleads for us before God**

It can be difficult doing some things by yourself sometimes. Alone we often lack the strength and ability to tackle some tasks. We need help, especially when we are weak. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Helper promised by Jesus to His disciples in the Upper Room (John 14:16; 26; 15:26). The Greek word here translated as ‘helper’ is the word translated ‘advocate’ in 1 John 2:1 ‘*we have an advocate with the Father’*. Here, the word is used of a helper in a legal setting, like an attorney in a court of law, pleading before the judge and jury the case of someone who has been arrested and charged with a crime.

In our New Zealand judicial system, it is possible for a person to represent themselves in court without engaging a professional lawyer to act on their behalf. However, before the divine heavenly court this is not possible for people like you and me. The holy God is ‘*of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong*’ (Hab 1:13). No mere human advocate, a descendant of Adam, can gain access into God’s presence.

An advocate makes a plea on behalf of an accused person. A plea can mean ‘an emotional appeal’ or a “*formal statement by or on behalf of a defendant or prisoner, stating guilt or innocence in response to a charge*”. Scripture uses the word in this second sense. An advocate’s plea is made in response to an accusation. The charge against us all is that we have sinned against God. We have ‘missed the mark’ of the standard of his law, in thought, word and deed: by omission – not doing what His perfect law calls us to do, and by commission – doing what His perfect law forbids us to do. The charge against us is expressed in Scripture for example: “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23). *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one*." (Rom 3:10-12, quoting Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3).

Satan, the Accuser, brings the charge ‘guilty’ against us so that we might be sentenced to death. Christ’s plea is not that we are naturally innocent, but that He has removed our guilt so that we can justly be declared without fault. John writes: “*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). Propitiation is the removal of God’s righteous wrath against the sins of guilty people like you and me. Jesus took upon Himself the penalty for the sins of all those for whom He died so that the guilt of all God’s people would be removed.

Christ’s plea is that He has done the necessary work to enable us to be acceptable to God and to receive pardon. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*” (Rom 8.34). Brothers and sisters, Christ pleads, appeals, intercedes on our behalf. That is why we can have confidence, even though we have not yet completely conquered sin in our lives, even though we let Jesus, who calls us his friends, down badly at times. Beloved brother and sisters in our Lord, when you stumble in your battle against sin, be comforted by the support of Jesus, who is our advocate with the Father, pleading your cause based on His work of receiving God’s wrath on your behalf and transferring His own righteous obedience to your account.

Good legal representation in court is very costly and will not guarantee that you are acquitted of crimes you have committed. In contrast, Christ represents each of God’s people perfectly and freely as their advocate, having been admitted to the Heavenly court room through his ascension, being perfectly qualified to act on our behalf and pleading our cause on the basis of His own innocence, propitiation for our sins and perfect obedience to the law.

Guido de Bres in Belgic Confession Article 26 encourages us with this question “Who will be heard more readily than God's own well-beloved Son?” Christ, the perfect man, has ascended into the ‘court’ of God His Father. He has been admitted into the presence of God and Has the most highly honoured status there. As the Scriptures reveal, God ‘*raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places’* (Eph 1:20b).

For all whose faith and trust is in Him, Jesus is an exalted Mediator and Advocate. He is *‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named*’ (Eph 1:21). There is no better, no other, mediator and advocate to have with the Father than Jesus Christ His only begotten Son. There is no other advocate available to needy people like you and me. Jesus expresses his own uniqueness in these words. "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

Brother and sister in Christ, why has He done so much for you? - because he loves you – He laid down His life for you. **“***Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16).

**AMEN.**