

Christ's heart for us

Hebrews 7:25

St. Andrew's, 15th August 2021

Our reading this morning was 6 verses from the end of Hebrews 7. It's good to have some context, so we've heard all 6 verses, but I want to focus in on verse 25, a verse you might be familiar with, but that contains so much in so few words.

I want to focus in on what we can learn about the heart of Jesus Christ, what scripture says about how he feels towards us.

Most of us here probably understand the mechanics of salvation. We understand that we're forgiven - that our sins are taken from us and paid for on the cross. We might even understand justification - that in addition we are given Christ's very own righteousness, counted as righteous in God's sight as Jesus himself. But we can easily fall into the trap of thinking only mechanistically about salvation.

We understand that Christ died for us, but we think he must have been doing it begrudgingly. Very easy to understand that we're counted righteous in God's sight, but hard to believe this isn't something that even God thinks is unfair.

We look a lot at what Jesus did on earth, his life, death and resurrection, but we assume that he's super glad that's all over and now he's in heaven with his feet up before he comes back to earth for a second time, happy to avoid the hard parts next time.

We might be tempted to focus our eyes on verse 26:

▮ *holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.*

How could a saviour like this - one separated from sinners - ever really willingly, gladly, lovingly save us?

You may have heard it said "We know we should love God, but do we like him?" Put the other way, we know God loves us, but does he actually like us?

I hope we'll see, from here and elsewhere in scripture, that this view of things is completely wrong-headed.

Consequently

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

Some versions say consequently, some therefore - the point is that this verse is tied to the proceeding verses, it flows from the verses beforehand.

What comes before this? That Christ is the perfect, eternal, great High Priest. Verse 23-24:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Not just were these former priests mortal - they did not, could not, live forever - but that also they were fallible, imperfect. Think of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10); just as the priestly system is being set up for Israel, no sooner have the priests been initiated, but they fail in their task. Not so with Christ - he continues forever, both because he in his resurrection perfection both never ceases to live and never ceases to be perfect in sinlessness.

Now a priest is that person who stands between God and man, mediates between these two parties. In Israel, priests were there to offer sacrifice on behalf of themselves and the people they represented. The High Priest, the most senior of the priests, would also be permitted to, once a year, enter into the holiest place of the temple, to in that limited way, bring the people to God directly. But our High Priest doesn't enter the holy place once a year, but continually and forever.

It's important that we understand that Jesus is not merely the sacrifice for our sins - he is that, but more than that he applies the sacrifice as well. We're not given the raw ingredients for salvation and then have to work out how to apply them. No, Jesus does the whole thing - the sacrifice is applied and brought before God by him, he does it all. He leaves nothing to chance, nothing for us to get wrong.

he is able to save

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He is able to save - former priests were often willing to save those in their care, they tried, but this says that Christ is able to save. He doesn't just wish he could save us, we should not just wonder if we can be saved, he is able to save.

But what of his willingness? We can be very tempted to think that whilst he is able, he is not always so willing. Does he feel loathsome to save us.

Far from it, for if we look further on in Hebrews, to the beginning of chapter 12 (verse 2):

*...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

For the joy set before him - Christ's joy is not just at our obedience, not just when we follow him perfectly. His joy is found in our salvation, in his pouring out his mercy and grace on sinners who need it. His mission in coming to earth was to save, and his joy is found in the completion and glory of his success in this.

We might think that approaching him in our sinfulness impedes his glory, that our brokenness somehow detracts from him or impoverishes him.

Far from a begrudging salvation, rather our God is one who delights in saving sinners, desires to save us. John 17:24:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am...

To put it in reverse: when we hold back, when we don't take to Jesus our brokenness or don't seek his mercy, not only do we miss out, but he does too. He is glorified and satisfied in our coming to him.

to the uttermost

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This salvation that Christ takes joy in is not just any salvation, it is complete, full, perfect, forever salvation.

Some versions say fully or completely, but I like the rendering 'to the uttermost'. The word in greek is παντελής (pantelēs), which comes from two other words. πᾶς (pas) meaning all or every and τέλος (telos) meaning an end or purpose or fulfilment. When this says 'to the uttermost' it's saying to the very end, the most complete fulfilment.

Another way we can fail to grasp salvation properly is to think that it's like a slate being wiped clean, like a fresh start that we need to then maintain. That there's some extra thing we need to do.

But this says that the salvation is to the uttermost, complete and total. Nothing else required. It's all the way - there is no further salvation, it's finalised.

those who draw near to God through him

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Those who draw near to God through him. These are those that this salvation applies to.

There may be those that attempt to draw near to God, but not through him, not through Jesus Christ. These are not those that can be saved to the uttermost. In John 14:6 Jesus says:

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

It's only via Christ, via his perfect sacrifice, his perfect priesthood that anyone draws near to God.

And this is 'through him'. It's not with his help, or with his instruction. It's through him. It's because we are united with him.

Most of us know that in Christ's death and resurrection that our sin is imputed to Christ - that he takes it from us, and that his righteousness is imputed to us - we are now righteous in God's sight. When this glorious truth was rediscovered, in the Reformation, critics pointed out the seeming unfairness of this and the fact that you can't just move around sin and righteousness. Sin and righteousness are not substances that can be transferred from one person's possession to another, they said that this view of justification was a 'legal fiction'.

The solution to this critique is that we and Christ are not detached parties on opposite sides of the courtroom making a deal - we're united with each other. He steps into the defendant's position with us, unites himself to us. There is no salvation without union with Christ.

Romans 5:

...sin came into the world through one man...

...many died through one man's trespass...

...because of one man's trespass, death reigned...

...as one trespass led to condemnation for all men...

...the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...

The problem Christ is saving us from, our sin, is deeper than just our individual acts of sin. It goes further back than our birth, we are born of Adam and share his doomed status. It's not enough to merely have our sinful acts expunged, we must be born again, no longer born of Adam, but born of Christ, united with Christ.

This union with Christ is becoming part of his very own body - 1 Corinthians 12:27:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Colossians 1:18:

...he is the head of the body, the church.

How do you treat your own body? We might, if we're honest, admit to sometimes not treating it too well. But we have regard for it, we don't typically go out of our way to harm our bodies. How much better treated is the body of one who is perfect? He doesn't neglect his own body.

How do you act with regard to an injured part? You would tend to it, care for it, seek to heal it. So why would we think that Jesus, when confronted with an injured or broken or infected body part would immediately look to amputate? No, he treats us as his very own body, and he is the one with the power to heal that body.

The former priests were not able to save when they and the people they mediated for failed to uphold their end of the covenant. Time and again throughout the Old Testament, the priesthood and the people fail to live up to their promises. But this high priest never fails in his covenant duties, and his people are his very own body, of which he is the head. He upholds the covenant on his part as priest and on our part as people. Our part of the covenant is fulfilled in him! We cannot fail in our obligations, because he upholds our obligations.

What sort of a saviour not only takes on our sin, but unites himself to us, even as we were sinners? Our saviour doesn't just save us, doesn't just bring us to safety, but ever lives to be with us and be priest on our behalf!

since he always lives

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he is the eternal God, he is the same yesterday today and forever, his priesthood, his heart for us does not fail or end, he endures and has compassion on us forever and ever.

Eternity is a long time - does Christ really want to be with us, united to us, for eternity?

One wrong way we might think about it is to imagine that God says words to the effect of: "Yes, you can join me for eternity, but the throne room is off limits and please keep the noise down."

But that's not how it is. Ephesians 2:4-7:

God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Seated in the heavenly places with him; the riches of his grace and kindness that he will show in the coming ages are immeasurable.

John 13 (verse 1):

...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

He doesn't love just enough to get us saved, not enough to get us settled into heaven, he loves us to the end.

And how is this love for all time expressed?

to make intercession for them

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Was salvation completed by Jesus' death and resurrection? Assuredly yes! But he is not content to leave it there - his love for us extends beyond requirements, he continues to advocate on our behalf, to pray for us unceasingly, continually making our case before the Father.

Intercession is prayer on behalf of another, prayer to bring someone else before God. Jesus is interceding for those that 'draw near to God through him', praying always for them.

Now one way we might now get the wrong impression is that Jesus, the Son, really loves us, but the Father is more the wrathful sort. That the disposition of the Father and the Son towards us must in some way be different.

No, the Father is glad to hear Christ's intercession - he loves us likewise.

2 Corinthians 1 verse 3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort

The Father of mercies, God of all comfort. And John 14 (verses 9 - 11) Jesus says:

...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me...

Jesus and the Father, and the Spirit also do not have a different will or disposition toward us - the Trinity is in perfect agreement. John 17 (verse 23):

I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Conclusion

Now it's my hope that many of us here already know this, already know that Christ's disposition to us is one of great love, even desire, for us. But even those of us who know this need to be reminded.

Every good sermon needs a point of application - something to take home and do. Well I don't really have much to suggest other than to enjoy this truth, to believe it, to remind yourself of it, preach it to yourself whenever you need to hear it. And if you're wondering whether you are one of those who are part of Christ's body, then take Jesus' words in Matthew 11 (verse 28):

Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.

Jesus Christ, our saviour, is gentle and lowly in heart, his kindness toward us never begrudging, never failing. Jesus also says (John 6:37):

...whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 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.