

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

“Jesus is Able to the Uttermost to Save”

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Hebrews 7:23-28

October 25, 2009

Every Christian knows or at least has heard two phrases: “Jesus saves” and “personal relationship with Jesus.” These are simple, basic statements of Christian faith. Jesus is our Savior: By His life, death, and resurrection, we are rescued from spiritual death and given eternal life. “I can have a personal relationship with Jesus”: Jesus cuts through all that stands as obstacles between us and God—our religion, our sins, our failures, everything. He wants to be in a relationship with you and by His grace invites you to receive Him into such a relationship. This is basic Christian teaching. It’s bumper sticker simple. Anyone can easily understand it, grasp it, enjoy it, and enter a personal relationship with the Savior.

So why is it then that it takes six full chapters and 25 verses to get to this line in Hebrews, “Consequently Jesus is able to the uttermost to save those who approach God through Him”? Beginning the verse with ‘consequently’ implies that the authority of this statement, “Jesus is able to the uttermost to save those who approach God through Him” is dependent on what has come before. But if this is simple bumper sticker stuff, why does it take so long to build an argument to support such a simple statement?

Maybe the statement isn’t so simple after all. Maybe. It is simple to say or to print on your bumper. It’s not complicated. In fact, it’s so simple, some people do all kinds of things to it to make it more interesting. I saw one bumper sticker that read “Jesus saves,” but the letters were colored such that the “us” and the end of Jesus and the “a” at the beginning of saves were colored so that Jesus Saves was in red, white, and blue with USA highlighted in the middle. There’s another one that reads, “Jesus saves. Obama spends.” There’s even a “Jesus saves at Bank of America” sticker. It’s pretty amazing that we can take something so simple and make it so profane.

And the idea of having a personal relationship with Jesus has truth to it as well, but truth that may be more profound than we thought. Jesus invites people to know Him and come to Him. Come to Me all you who are weary and downtrodden, and I will give you rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28). But in our culture, this often gets turned into a kind of creepy, pseudo-romantic relationship with Jesus as our boyfriend. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read, “I am not afraid to be seen in public with God.” Okay. And listen to many contemporary Christian songs and you get the idea that Jesus is just dreamy, the object of a crush that is never unrequited.

So maybe that’s why it really takes six and a half chapters of Hebrews for the preacher to get to this point. It just takes that long to get it right. Remember, this is a sermon. It’s the only sermon like this we have in the whole Bible. It’s a sermon that builds and builds and builds an extended argument. Unlike most contemporary sermons that make Jesus more and more accessible and appealing, this sermon says for seven chapters take everything you know about God and religion and good things, and Jesus is greater and bigger than they are.

Know something about angels. Jesus is greater.

Know something about Moses and the prophets. Jesus is more faithful.

Know something about sacrifices. Jesus is the sacrifice.

Know something about priests. Jesus is a high priest beyond human priesthood.

Know something about covenants? Jesus is a new covenant.

The preacher builds the pressure of this argument, leaving his congregation almost breathless as the image of a personal Jesus who slides up and puts His arm around us gets farther and farther away and Jesus gets bigger and bigger. Hebrews is what scholars call high Christology—meaning what we think about Jesus is really big, more about His divinity than His humanity. Just hear 7:26, “It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” This reminds us of other places in the New Testament where we see Jesus in this light:

Colossians 1:15-17, “Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” This man is no simple carpenter.

Or John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word . . .” He is no simple teacher.

Or the Confession of Chalcedon, about how Christ is both divine and human . . . “We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation.” This is no simple man.

In like manner, Hebrews takes everything that you know and says Jesus is higher, more holy, more perfect, more faithful, more righteous, more eternal, more trustworthy, more powerful than anything else or anyone else you might ever trust in. You once might see Him as a carpenter swinging a hammer, or a dying man on a cross, but now we see him as He is: the Son of God, the high priest forever, the Son made perfect. This is Sistine Chapel Jesus; this is the Jesus that has inspired odes and arias, the hallelujah chorus, Gloria in *excelsis deo*.

Hebrews says, ‘We do see Jesus.’ But when we see Jesus this way, as fully divine and holy, our awe of Jesus may increase while our hope in Him may decrease. If He is so removed from who we are, and we know that we are fundamentally broken, then what hope do we have? If Jesus is so distant and holy, would we even bother raising our voices like the blind man on the side of the road, “Jesus, have mercy on me?”

It is precisely this point to which we are brought. As much as we would like to think of ourselves as faithful disciples marching in step behind our Lord on the way to Calvary, in our honest moments, we confess that we are much more like a blind, helpless beggar on the road aware that Jesus is somewhere nearby and may just pass us by on His way to be with people who are really good, are deserving, and are faithful followers. We figure those people are out there. And we judge we probably aren’t numbered among them if we are really honest about who we are. And that’s where guilt comes in. We

have a vague sense that we are supposed to be better than we are. And we try. Sometimes. Sometimes we try really hard to be good, to do what is right. And sometimes we do. I never cease to be amazed at the capacity for selfless good that Christians demonstrate to one another and to people who have nothing to give them in return. It flies in the face of all that rugged individualism or free-market economics forms in us to be self-serving. Over and over again, Christians, without concern for their own needs, give to others and serve others and stay up all night by the bedside of friends and give their last dollars to help a stranger and well up the strength to discipline their bodies and their minds from that which will destroy them. Sometimes we are really good.

And sometimes we are not. I have ceased to be surprised at the capacity of humans to be duplicitous, to work against our own best interests and our own hopes and dreams, to tear ourselves apart by chasing after short-term wins, by seeking momentary pleasure, by pouring that which won't last into the void in our hearts, to fail to be faithful in small things, perhaps in fear that Christ may ask us to do something even more. The line between good and evil runs through each of us, as does the line between church and world, faithful and unfaithful, sight and blindness. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me? Would you even dare to ask . . . when you have to ask again and again and again? It's very generous of Jesus to say, "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52). It's like He's giving us some credit for something way beyond our ability. If it is true that our faith heals us or saves us in some way, it is not because of the quality of our faith; it is only because of the One we have faith in.

And what hope do we have especially if Jesus is, as Hebrews describes, seated high above, distant in the glory of God's throne room, but nowhere here, right where I need Him in at the hospital bedside, the bar, the boardroom, and the bedroom? It is appealing to seek a Jesus whose salvation is a clever bumper sticker and whose relationship feels like a whirlwind romance. But it is also empty at the end of the day. At the end of the day, it is precisely that Jesus is so grand, so high, so far-removed that makes Him able to save us. We don't need another salve. We need a savior. We don't need another band-aid; we need healing. We don't need another counselor. We need conviction. We don't need another performance; we need a perfect Son of God interceding for us in heaven. We don't need another bumper sticker. We need a Savior who knows us completely and does not turn away. To people who dare to draw near to what can seem to be a distant God, Hebrews says, Not just Jesus saves. But Jesus saves *panteles*. For all time. To the uttermost.

Jesus saves with no gap, with no lack, with no reservation, with no hesitation, with no limitation, with no procrastination. Jesus saves with full, raging, relational, holy, sacrificial, powerful, able, cross-shaped love for you. There is nothing in your life, nothing, never has been, never will be, nothing in your life beyond the reach of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Remember Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us? 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. Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword? Nope. Not death, not life, neither angels nor rulers, things now, things to come, powers, things high or low, nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost, for all time those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Now let us draw near to God, by confessing our sins . . .

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