

06/12/11

## Friend of God #7 – God Interceding for Us

- Many of you have read the trilogy by J.R. Tolkien entitled Lord of the Rings, or perhaps the foundational book to the series entitled The Hobbit...
- if you've never done so, I would encourage you to read them...
- they really are great books and some of them have now been made into movies which have several very important spiritual lessons and teaching points...
- The Hobbits live in a place called the Shire...
  - and one of the beauties of their existence is its simplicity...
  - they are insulated from outside influences...
  - in fact, even when they hear news of wars or battles, they often shrug it off as legend and folk tales...
  - so they spend their time eating multiple meals every day and enjoying the simple things of life...Hobbits are the ones who invented the idea of "second breakfast" which I've always thought was a marvelous idea...
  - they tend their gardens – they get together for parties and gift-giving
  - they love to smoke their pipes...it's the beauty of simplicity...
- what the Hobbits don't know is that they have always been protected by outside leaders including Gandalf the Grey who is deeply concerned for their safety and well-being...
- this protection is also provided by a group of Rangers of the North led by a man named Strider...later revealed to be Aragorn, the rightful heir to the throne of men...
- at a crucial point when Strider first meets a group of four hobbits, he tells them..."**I have often kept watch on the borders of the Shire the last few years. Gandalf seldom left it unguarded.**"
- here's a group of creatures who have friends interceding for them – standing between them and the dangers they face – and they don't even understand it, or recognize it, or appreciate it...
- now, what's the point?...
- this probably isn't going to sound very complimentary, but it really is true...
  - sometimes we Christians can be a lot like Hobbits...
  - where we are receiving protection and watch care from a marvelous Friend and we don't always understand it, or recognize it, or appreciate it...and our friend provides it anyway....
- that's why this morning I'd like us to think about **God Interceding for Us**...
  - now, we are going to look at a number of passages of Scripture this am, but for starters, I'd like to ask you to open your Bible to two of them...Romans 8 and Exodus 32...Romans 8 is on page 123 of the back section of the Bible in front of you (the NT) and Exodus 32 is on page 65 of the front section (the OT)...
- let's take a moment and set all of this in its larger context...
- our theme this year is **Living Life Together**...
  - I know that there are many people here who could point to specific steps you have taken to try to become more connected to your church family...to help us function as the loving community God has called us to be...
- this summer, we're thinking especially about the foundation on which such a diverse group of people could ever live life together in a unified, delightful and satisfying way...

- and that is, because we are each a **Friend of God**...
  - that's what draws us together, and that's what gives us the power to be brothers and sisters in Christ in ways that are meaningful not just for a month or two, but life-long.
  - some of us have been there when our children were born...
  - we were together when they went off to kindergarten...
  - we saw them graduate and went to the open houses...
  - we've been together when a loved one died or when someone was having surgery...
  - for many of us, living life together is a life-long investment in friendships that really matter...
    - but we recognize that the foundation is a source Who is divine...that is the only way it can work and that is the only way it will last...so we realize that this summer we have to deepen our understanding of what it means to be friends of God for a variety of reasons, including the way it will help us all live life together on a more significant level...
  
- now, where have we been?...
- **May 1 – An Outrageous Possibility**
- **May 8 – God Reaching Out to Us**
- **May 15 – God Dwelling in Us**
- **May 22 – God Ruling Us**
- **May 29 – God Loving Us**
- **June 5 – God With Us**
- **June 12 – God Interceding for Us**
  
- let's start in Romans 8, and then we'll circle back around to the book of Exodus...
  
- **read Romans 8:12-27...**
  
- we'll talk about this in much more detail in a moment, but this passage already spoke to us about 2 ways the Lord intercedes on our behalf...
- that is very consistent with what the Scripture says in many other places about the ministry of Jesus Christ for those who have trusted Him as Savior and Lord...
  - **Hebrews 7:25 - Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**
  
- there it is – being a friend with God means a lot of things, including the fact that various members of the Godhead relate to us in ways that are very similar way to how Gandalf the Gray and Aragorn related to the Hobbits...
  - various members of the trinity make it possible for us to have the kind of friendship where they not just put up with us, or grudgingly let us in the family as long as we don't cause too much trouble...
    - they bring us into the family knowing full well in advance that we are going to cause all kinds of trouble...
    - and then they stand in the gap...
    - they always live to make intercession for us...
- please let that thought sink into your mind this morning...
  - you have a Trinitarian friend standing up for you at times when you definitely don't deserve it...and also often when you don't even know it's occurring...
- now, here's the hundred dollar question...when and how does that happen?...

- my guess is that if I had asked you this morning – do you believe that God intercedes for you?...you would probably say yes...
- but how far have you ever thought down that trail?...
- if I asked you to stand to your feet right now and answer these questions, how long would it be before you would be out of stuff?...
  - when do you really need God to intercede for you?...
  - and what does that intercession look like?...
  - and what are the practically out-workings in the life of a person who realizes and appreciates that God does this?...
  - and how should it impact the way we relate to one another as part of the family of God as we live life together?...

- now, here's how we're going to divide the rest of our time...

### **I. An Example of God's Intercession**

- that's because everything that is said in the NT about God functioning this way would probably have been understood through the lens of one of God's servants who functioned in an intercessory way...
- to anyone who knows their OT, if you said the word "intercessor" – he/she would probably think about Moses and the way he interceded for the people of God...
- the fact that the Lord would use the word intercessor in light of what Moses had already done just takes your breath away...
- because you could legitimately say that what Moses did for the children of Israel, God stands ready to do for us...

### **II. The Way Your Friend Intercedes**

- there are at least 6 ways God stands ready to do this for each one of us...how many of them could you name right now?...maybe we'll increase the size of your list before the morning is over...

### **III. The Duration of Your Friend's Intercession**

- what if God is willing to do this, but only for a limited period of time...then what?...
- on the other hand – what if this is a relationship that will endure life-long?...
- how should that impact your heart and soul this am?...

### **I. An Example of God's Intercession**

- we'll be back in Romans 8, but please look now at Exodus 32...
- page 65 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- this is the story of what happened while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the first copies of the ten commandments...
- if you know your Bible, you know that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain...(feel free ladies, to say – under your breath – yea, he wouldn't ask for directions)...
- that's not exactly the reason...

- but in the intervening time, Aaron and the people committed a very serious sin...they took some of their jewelry they had received from the Egyptians and he fashioned it into a golden calf...
  - which is significant for a lot of reasons, including the fact that the first two commandments they were about to receive were that they were to have no other gods besides the Lord, and that they were not to make any graven images...

- then Scripture tells us that... **Exodus 32:6 - ...the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.**
- and you understand that rose up to play didn't mean they had a volleyball tournament on the front lawn...
- **“The Hebrew word allows for the inclusion of drunken and immoral activities so common to idolatrous fertility cults in their revelry. Syncretism had robbed the people of all ethical alertness and moral discernment” (MacArthur Study Bible).**
- now, what was our Holy God's response to this?...**read Exodus 32:7-10...**
- and that's exactly what you would expect from a God who is Holy...
- and by the way, please don't say – well, that's the god of the OT, I worship the God of the NT...
- that is a lethal mistake theologically...there is plenty of love and mercy in the OT and there is plenty of judgment and wrath in the NT – just ask Ananias and Saphira...
- and that's where this part of the text ends...with the Israelites in their sinful condition...and God prepared to exercise wrath that they had without a doubt earned for themselves...
- now please tell me this – because if you can answer this – you're well on your way to understanding where all of this is going...
- what did the children of Israel definitely need at that very moment?....
  - they needed an intercessor...they needed a mediator...
  - someone to stand between themselves and their God and cry out for mercy and grace on their behalf...
- and that's why what Moses did next was such a marvelous thing...
- **read Exodus 32:11-14...**
- now, is there any question in your mind why the subsequent generations of Jewish people would revere Moses?...
- the nation never had a closer friend...
  - he had every reason to be angry at them too...
  - he had every reason to ask God to judge them immediately and completely...
  - but he loved this nation...and he functioned just like a real friend would...
  - when they needed it most – he stood in the gap and pleaded their case, not on the basis of its own merits...but on the basis of the glory of God and His eternal covenants...
- please tell me that you find what is unfolding in this text to be amazing?...is that an understatement?...
- A. Amazing that God would allow Moses to function in this way.**
  - please don't ask me to explain all of this...because I can't...
  - I just know that this is what happened because God's Word tells us it happened this way...
  - and Jesus made it clear that not one jot or tittle would pass away before all of this was fulfilled...
  - so I can't fully explain it but I know it's true...
  - also keep in mind that Jesus Christ would later give a theology lecture to a couple of disciples on the road to Emmaus... **Luke 24:27 - Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.**

- later in the Bible when we are taught that Jesus Christ always lives to make intercession for us...
- how?...like this?...like Moses did for the children of Israel...
- so it is amazing that God the Father allowed this...

### **B. Amazing that Moses would be willing to function in this way.**

- Moses was generally a meek man, but he had a temper...think “striking the rock instead of speaking to it”...
- plus this event must have disappointed him terribly, especially from the perspective of Aaron’s involvement in the fiasco...
- he could have run over to God the Father’s side – remember, his face was still glowing...and distanced himself from the people, or screamed out for complete, absolute, and immediate judgment on the people for their sin...
- but he stood in the gap...one hand here, and one hand here...he identified with them, risking suffering the consequences for the choices they made right along with them...but that’s what intercessors do...

### **C. Amazing that the people would not recognize, appreciate, or value the process.**

- I said that subsequent generations revered Moses for what he did...
- I chose those words carefully because the truth is – the current generation certainly didn’t, or not for long...
- they continued to grumble and rebel against Moses’ leadership...
- they were like Hobbits – so engulfed in their small world of sin that they had no appreciation for someone protecting them and standing up for them in the midst of the immediate judgment they so clearly deserved...

- now, it’s with that kind of context that we enter into the NT...and think about how amazing it also is that God offers the kind of friendship with you and me where various members of the Godhead intercede for us, His children...
- now, here’s what I want to ask you to think about...
- in what senses do you even need an intercessor?...
- we really need to answer that now...

## **II. The Way Your Friend Intercedes**

- here’s at least six ways...

### **A. Between you and the old covenant.**

- now, before you start yawning, or thinking this has no practical implication to where you’re living today...get back here, please...
- because interestingly enough, when we find the word intercessor in the NT, it is frequently associated with this concept...and you’ll see why in a minute that we really need to start here...
- consider these three passages...
- **Hebrews 8:6 - But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.**
- **Hebrews 9:15 - For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**

**- Hebrews 12:24 - and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.**

- now, what does all of that mean?...
- simply, in the Old Testament...salvation was achieved by placing ones faith ion whatever God had revealed up to that time...
- so God's people practiced the sacrificial system...and the blood of bulls and goats would cover the sin they had committed up to that point...but the moment they left they sinned again and they were constantly behind...
- what was needed was the kind of forgiveness that would judicially address your sin—past, present, and future...once and for all...it would be paid for completely...
- but here's the thing – it's like shopping wholesale...you can't get into that store on your own merit...
  - you've got to know somebody...you have to have a friend in the salvation business...
  - which is why Paul reminded Timothy -- **1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus,**
- one of my questions for you this morning would be – has there ever been a time in your life where you admitted your sinfulness...and your complete lack of ability to receive forgiveness from God on your own...
- and you held out your hand to the intercessor---the mediator---the One who was willing to stand between you and Holy God and satisfy His righteous demands by dying on the cross in your place...
- and secondly, in your have done that...when's the last time you stopped and thanked your Savior for interceding for you in that particular way?...
- now, that's really just the beginning of the ways your friend intercedes...here's another one...
 

**B. Between you and your adversary.**

  - do you know that Satan does not have unfettered access to you?...
    - if you say – well – but I'm facing all sorts of trials right now...you very well may be...
    - but do you realize what you would be like if Satan had his way with you right now?...
    - that's part of the point of the book of Job...
    - and you realize that we know a lot more about the way that story unfolded than Job ever did on the front end...
    - because we're privy to the conversation between God and Satan...who suggested that the only reason Job loved God and served God was because the Lord had been so good to Him...
    - it was a test of Job's faith and more importantly, a test of God's ability to change a man or woman at the level of the heart apart from immediate physical blessings...
    - but God put limits on what Satan could do...He stood between Job and his adversary and said... **Job 2:6 - So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."**
    - this is one of the ways that people like you and me can be like hobbits...
    - when's the last time you can remember thanking the Lord for protecting you and interceding for your safety and health and that of your loved ones...
    - you better believe that if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, your Friend has his finger in the face of your adversary, saying on a regular basis – no further – no further...

- and that's why you and I can go through even the trials of life with a level of peace and security...
- it's because we're not dualists...we don't believe that God and Satan are on some kind of equal footing and it's anyone's guess who's going to win today...
  - Satan is powerful, but **1 John 4:4 - ...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**
  - and because you have an intercessor – you have someone always standing between you and your adversary...
- here's one that might sound a bit strange, but it actually came up in the verses we read in Romans 8...God is also willing to be an intercessor...

### **C. Between you and yourself.**

- do you know who the biggest obstacle to your spiritual growth is on a fairly regular basis?...
- it's the person you see in the mirror in the morning...(and by the way, when I say that, please don't respond with, how did Pastor Viars know we had a double sink in our master bath)...
- and one of the ways that dynamic plays out is a the man or woman who says over and over in their heart...you're not a Christian, you're not a Christian...you've messed up too badly...your past is too wicked, what if everyone knew everything you've thought or done...
- and did you see what Romans 8:16 says?...**Romans 8:16 - The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,**
- now I realize that some people might say – but wouldn't it be best if God always kept us guessing?...wouldn't that keep us on our toes?...
- wouldn't it be best if He never gave us assurance of our salvation in this life?...wouldn't that motivate us to greater faithfulness just in case?...
- humanly speaking that makes sense...but that is not the way God chooses to relate to us...
- He has designed the salvation process to something that you can know for sure...
- **1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**
- and this passage in Romans 8:16 goes so far as to say that the Holy Spirit will intercede in this matter of doubting ones salvation...He testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God...
- now, you might say – how does He do that?...that's a great question...we like to think of the assurance of ones' salvation in three important ways...

### **1. Theologically.**

- in other words, the Holy Spirit gives us His Word which clearly explains what it means to become a follower of Christ...
- and when a person can say with confidence – yes, I have repented of my sin and I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord as outlined in the Scriptures...then the Holy Spirit can take His Word during those times of doubt and give you confidence on the basis of His Word...
- **Romans 10:9-10 - that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

## 2. Historically.

- this is a specific decision made at a point in time...
- and I am not saying that every person knows the exact moment they were saved...but they understand that they were born in sin separated from God and if they are trusting Christ as Savior, some decision had to be made at some point in time...and the Holy Spirit can intercede with your spirit so you can say with the apostle Paul...
- **2 Timothy 1:12 - ...for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.**

## 3. Experientially.

- Christians are anything but perfect—we'll talk about that in a moment because it's a key aspect of everything we're studying...but there is no question that for a person who truly knows Christ...there will be change, there will be growth...
- **1 John 2:3 - By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.**
- and during times of doubt the Holy Spirit can remind you that while you may not be everything God wants you to be yet – you're certainly not what you once were...
- and your doubting spirit is quiet because your Friend settled the argument...

- now, what did you see later in this same text?...the Holy Spirit intercedes...

### D. Between you and your pain.

- were you astonished at verses 26-27?...
- **Romans 8:26-27 - In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**
- have you ever felt like you were alone in your pain?...
- I want to say this gently – but do you realize if that was the case, that you were thinking like a hobbit?...
- and if you asked me this am, PV – exactly what does that look like – I honestly can only imagine that – this fits under the heading of “the secret things belong to the Lord...”
- but let me just say it this way – shame on me for thinking at times that I was alone in my suffering...probably many times at the exact moment my friend was interceding on my behalf within the trinity with groanings too deep for words...
- that's how much our intercessor loves us and is concerned for our spiritual well being (praying according to the will of God)...

- your Friend also intercedes...

### E. Between you and your temptation.

- **Hebrews 2:18 - For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.**
- **Hebrews 4:15-16 - For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**



- when you're tempted, are you taking advantage of the friend who stands ready to give you mercy and grace to help in time of need?...or are you going at it alone...(like a hobbit would...)

- lastly, your Friend intercedes...

**F. Between you and your Father.**

- in my mind, this may be the most amazing aspect of this entire discussion...

- and it comes down to this...

- do you remember when the children of Israel really blew it...and God was angry with them...

- we find ourselves in that position from to time...is there anyone here who would want to argue that?...

- and at that moment...it's not Moses who stands on our behalf...it's...Jesus...

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

- but what if all of this is only temporary?...

- that brings us to one more piece of great news...

**III. The Duration of Your Friend's Intercession.**

**Hebrews 7:23-25 - The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**