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Intercession on the Ground of Righteousness

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Gen. 18:16-33

"Wherefore also He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:25-26).

"But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you... And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:11,26).

"My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, establish thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32).

I think the passages we have read carry their own message; not very much needs to be said about them. You have recognised that every one of them bears upon intercession.

I want just to point out to you something which it is very necessary for us always to bear in mind. It is this: if ever we have reason to believe or conclude that the Lord has been speaking to us or

leading us to a consideration of any matter, bringing up before us something in a living way so that we are able at the time, and perhaps afterwards, to realise that that is something which the Lord has said, we should always conclude that the Lord is saying that not only in relation to the moment in which it is said, but that the Lord who dwells in eternity, with whom the future is always the present, says these things and does these things in the light of what He knows lies ahead for us. That thing is present with Him. It is future for us, and He speaks in His perfect knowledge of all that which, so far as we are concerned is yet to be, in His mind.

The importance of such an attitude towards anything said or done by the Lord is found, in the first place, in this way: that you and I must never just say, 'We have had a message from the Lord today', or 'We have had a time of blessing, the Lord has been speaking' and then go away from our time and look upon that as belonging to that day. 'That was last Lord's Day's message. That was today's word'. What I want to emphasise is this: that that is tomorrow's word, this is next week's word, this is next month's word, it may be next year's word, in this sense that the Lord is moving and working towards a situation which He knows is going to arise where we are concerned. He has it already under His eye, and He is speaking to us in relation to what He knows is coming. Now, that is perfectly clear in our own case as a people here.

The present position is one which finds us hedged up to intercession. I think we all recognise that that is the thing to which we have been brought. We all know today quite well that our business is intercession. Whatever may be possible in addition to that, that is the basic thing, that is the thing which represents God's own word and position and ministry for us today.

But, you know, you cannot get to intercession all at once. That is, you cannot change your position mechanically. You cannot say, 'Well, yesterday I was in one form of ministry; today I change it and take up this form.' You cannot do that with spiritual things and especially not with intercession. I mean that we cannot just resolve today that we are going to take up a ministry of intercession. Immediately we come into that, we find ourselves up against hindrances, difficulties, the need for a state in ourselves, the need for having a position. For this is not just the utterance of words, this is something mighty, this is prevailing with God. It is prevailing over the enemy.

Here we have Abraham, and these two things confronted Abraham. God brought him right into this conflict. On the one hand, there is death pending, death imminent, death and destruction, and that had got to be overcome, if it could be, and the ground for overcoming that death had got to be secured. On the other hand, there is God. God has got to be provided with that ground and brought onto that ground and prevailed with by that very ground. This is no small thing, you cannot do that by your own decision. It is a mighty spiritual effectiveness in the realm where things matter most, back of everything.

Every one of the passages we have read brings in this fact quite clearly, that to prevail in the intercession over death, over the Evil One, demands the ground of righteousness. It cannot be otherwise.

Here is Abraham, the enemy, and the Lord. Who is going to prevail? Death or Life? It depends entirely upon righteousness, and so, by a process of reduction, the number is brought down to the number of responsibility: ten, and if only righteousness can be found sufficient to take responsibility, then the judgment and the death will be turned aside, and Life will prevail. In that case, ten righteous were not found and Abraham was compelled in his heart to say of the judgment, of the death, 'God is right'. He had challenged God on this ground, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right" or 'righteously'? That was Abraham's word to God. God said, "Find Me the righteous,

find Me sufficient righteous", and, when Abraham had sought and not found righteousness represented by ten, he had to say, 'As Judge of all the earth, You do right in destroying the city'. He vindicated God in His action. God brings an instrument into that position where its ground to prevail or to have to surrender to God, is the ground of righteousness.

You see those other passages:

"He ever liveth to make intercession... For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb. 7:25-26).

"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

"Simon... Satan... but I..." (Luke 22:31-32).

You see the point. Jesus Christ the righteous - "but I have prayed" - it is who prays, who intercedes, the ground upon which the intercession is made, the ground of righteousness which is by faith.

Again, it is "life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10). That means that you and I need to have a very sure ground when we come to the ministry of intercession, and we need to have that assurance which gives us a positive position. It is not a passive position, for righteousness is always seen as something mighty, something positive, something militant. It is a breastplate of righteousness, something militant. Abraham is fighting the battle for the cities on the ground of righteousness, and righteousness is the means by which the issue is decided. It is something tremendous, this righteousness of God in Christ which is ours through faith, and it should bring us, not only to a position of quiet, passive thankfulness, but of active, aggressive intercession. It is a tremendous thing.

You see, the Lord allows Himself to be challenged. How that comes up in chapter 18 of Genesis! Abraham there is showing some element of fear in his constant address to God, in reducing this matter, almost afraid to go further, but nevertheless he goes on and God so wonderfully submits Himself to the repeated challenge, as much as to say, "Yes, you can take Me on. I am ready to come on with you if only you can find ground upon which you can challenge Me and say that if I did a certain thing when there was righteousness there, I should be going against Myself, denying My own nature and My own Name; be guilty of inconsistency. If you can get Me on that ground, you have paralysed Me; I cannot do it. I submit Myself to you and it is for you to decide what the ground is". God allows Himself to be challenged by us like that. What a strong position it is!

May I say it, without being misunderstood, that you can defeat God, that you can bind the hands of God, that you can simply put God out of action in any proposed course of His which looks to be in the direction of unrighteousness if you can find the righteousness in that direction. Of course, in practice it cannot be done because God will never be found taking or proposing a course that is unrighteous, but He wants us to come into this thing. This is the nature and essence of intercession. Get God onto His own ground, and you prevail. Get on to God's ground and you prevail, but if there is a clash, if there is unrighteousness and no righteousness, then you have no power.

So the Lord would have His people come on the positive ground which involves Him, and what is the positive ground? Well, surely it is the ground which He Himself has given us of righteousness in Christ by faith.