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Hebrews #20

To the “Uttermost” and “Always”

Hebrews 7:11-25

No matter how seemingly helpful the many psychological formulas that help you cope with life may be, no matter how transforming the practical counsel you might find in today’s world to help you with your problems may be, everything is either *partial or periodic*. What I mean by that is simply this: *they only go so far and for so long* before they lose their capacity to make a difference.

Every person, every strategy, every promise that comes your way will eventually fail you. *If it’s a friend*, the day will come when they won’t show up when you need them most. *If it’s a formula*, the day will come when it proves inadequate to meet your need or answer your question or soothe your conscience or get you over the hurdle of some obstacle in life. *Everything in life ultimately fails. Everyone in life ultimately falters.*

Now don’t think that I’m being a pessimist in saying this. This isn’t cynicism. This is realism. But there’s no reason why what I’ve just said should be discouraging to you. It would be discouraging, indeed depressing, if I said it and had nothing else to offer you. If all I could do was to stand here week in and week out and tell you that there is no program or person or philosophy that will never fail and will always come through for you in the clutch, I wouldn’t blame you for a second if you left and never came back. I certainly wouldn’t want to hear such a dismal perspective on life.

That is why I draw your attention to two words in Hebrews 7:25. These two words are life-saving. These two words are hope-giving. These two words are joy-awakening and heart-thrilling and breath-taking in their force and implication. The two words are “**uttermost**” and “**always**”.

Uttermost

The word “uttermost” is probably *qualitative* in force. It means *to the utmost degree*. It means that nothing in the salvation Christ provides is lacking in any way. It means that there is *nothing defective* in what Christ has done or in the reconciliation with God that he has obtained for us. It means that this salvation is complete and whole and pervasive and all-encompassing.

We struggle to believe that because we think that surely somewhere there must be someone who is simply too sinful to be saved. And maybe that someone is me! Surely somewhere, perhaps right here in the person of myself, there is an individual whose failures are simply too many for Christ to save. Their shortcomings are *too frequent* for Christ to save. Their sins are *too severe*, *too hard-hearted* for Christ to save. Maybe the selfishness of some is *too deep-seated* for the salvation Christ offers to overcome. Maybe the guilt people feel is *too deeply entrenched* in their souls that no salvation, not even that offered by Jesus Christ, can cleanse and wipe clean.

That’s how most of us at one time or another tend to think. ***The quality and extent and frequency and selfishness and repetitive occurrence of our sins in life are greater, so we think, than the quality and capacity of Christ’s person and work to overcome.*** After all, there have to be limits to what even Jesus can do. There has to be a point beyond which he cannot and will not go. I mean, no one is *that* patient or kind or pure or loving. No one is *that* good or gracious or tender or longsuffering. At least that’s how we tend to think.

Most of us at some time or other in life reach a point of complete frustration with ourselves. We’re fed up with our failures and we’re convinced that God is too. We envision God as looking up as we run to him for the umpteenth, saying, “Oh, no. Not *you* again! Enough already! I’ve had it up to here with your stupidity and your sin and how you always expect me to be there waiting for you with open arms, ready to start all over again. Well, that ends today. This simply can’t go on forever.” And it makes sense to us that he would react that way. As far as our own experience is concerned, we’ve learned that everything has a limit, a boundary, a point beyond which not even God can go.

But the point here in Hebrews 7:25 is that our thinking is bad and off-base and skewed. The point of v. 25 is that we have sold God short. We have horribly misjudged what he’s like and have terribly underestimated what he has done and will continue to do.

That's the point of the word "uttermost"! If I haven't made my point yet, listen again. ***This word is saying that there are no lengths to which God in Christ won't go to save you. This word is saying that there are no sins you've committed, are committing, or will in the future commit that are beyond the power of Christ's atoning death to forgive. This word is saying that Jesus Christ has accomplished for you what no one else ever has, can, or will. He has left nothing undone. He has not failed to make provision for every need.***

When you begin to think that God missed a step, I remind you that he saves to the "uttermost".

When you begin to wonder if there are limits to his love, I remind you that he saves to the "uttermost".

When you struggle to believe that an infinitely holy and righteous God would ever allow someone as vile and sinful and wretched as you and me into his presence, I remind you that he saves to the "uttermost".

And when you simply throw up your hands in frustration and confusion, declaring that nothing *this* good could possibly be literally true, I remind you that he saves to the "uttermost".

And what he saves he saves utterly and exhaustively and comprehensively. He doesn't save your soul and leave your body to rot and decay. He doesn't save your spirit but leave your mind to deteriorate. One day your salvation will be consummated when you are raised in glory and made to conform not only in your mind and spirit and heart but in your body also to the glorious resurrection body of Jesus himself. The apostle Paul had this in view when he wrote these words to the Philippian church:

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

That is simply another way of saying that God saves you to the "uttermost"!

But it gets better! You may wonder how anything could possibly get better or how anything more could possibly be said. And then you run headlong into our second word: **“always”**!

Always

Jesus Christ not only saves to the **uttermost**, but he also **always** lives to make intercession for you. If the word “uttermost” has a *qualitative* force to it, “always” has a *quantitative* force. Or perhaps we should say a *temporal* force. ***It speaks of duration and extension in time. It means never-ending, never-ceasing. It points to something that is incessant, eternal, everlasting.***

You and I have a hard time thinking to the end of the month, much less to the end of the year. We find it difficult to envision anything extending beyond our own lifetime. We live by the clock and the calendar. Everything is measured in terms of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. It’s hard to get our minds around something that cannot be contained or limited by time.

It may actually be the case that we struggle more to understand the implications of the word “always” than we do the implications of the word “uttermost”. The reason is that even if something given to us is perfect, that doesn’t necessarily mean it will last forever. Nothing lasts forever. Or does it?

It seems that everything we experience has a *shelf life*. Everything we eat or drink has an *expiration date*. “Good until July 14, 2015,” it says on the medicine bottle. Change your oil every 5,000 miles. Replace the filter on your air conditioning unit every six months. Be sure you install fresh batteries at least once a year in your smoke alarm in the house. “I take you to be my lawfully wedded wife/husband until death do us part.” So not even marriage lasts forever. And some don’t last more than a year or so. Nothing lasts. Or so it seems.

One thing that lasts is the heavenly intercession on your behalf of Jesus Christ our great High Priest!

“Oh, come on Sam. Don’t exaggerate. Are you saying that Jesus continues to live to make intercession for me *even when I prove faithless and fickle and keep failing in committing the*

same sins over and over and over again? Are you saying that *nothing* interrupts his presence at God's right hand on my behalf? What about the chaos in the Middle East? Doesn't he have to take a break interceding for me so he can attend to matters of far greater importance, like trying to arrange a cease-fire that will continue for more than 24 hours? Are you asking me to believe that when hurricanes and tornadoes and financial crises befall us that he doesn't at least take a 15-minute break to put things right?" That's right!

Always? Really? Always? Forever? Are you sure it isn't only for as long as I prove worthy of his attention? Are you sure it isn't only for as long as I love him? Are you sure it isn't only for as long as I don't lose my temper with my spouse and don't yell at my kids? Are you sure it isn't only for as long as I keep my house clean? Are you sure it isn't only for as long as I make him proud of me with my godly behavior? Yeah, I'm sure!

Folks, ask yourselves this question. Is it not the case that our bad choices and our sins and our shortcomings are most often due to the fact that we really don't believe what these two words are saying? Or perhaps I should turn that around and state it more positively. **Try to envision what kind of Christian life you *would* lead if you really believed what these two words are saying!**

Seriously, it would be fascinating if today we could pause for about ten minutes and each of us take out pen and paper or I-pad or laptop and write down how we would feel and what we would do without hesitation if we genuinely and sincerely and consistently believed that Jesus Christ has saved us to the *uttermost* and that he *always* lives to make intercession for us. I wonder how it might affect the way you and I *worship*? Would any of us ever feel restrained in our shouts of joy? Would we ever grow weary of singing his praises? Would we ever again be embarrassed to kneel or raise our hands or clap or dance or weep or laugh? I don't think so.

If we grasped just a small measure of what these two words mean there is simply no way to predict what our *prayer* lives would be like. I would never have to encourage you to attend a prayer meeting. I would never have to appeal to you to serve as a *volunteer* in some capacity here at Bridgeway. I would never have to expend one breath of air in asking you to be generous and sacrificial in your *giving* to the financial needs of this local church. Never.

If you doubt what I'm saying, I suggest you still don't know what these two words are saying. If you honestly believe your worship and your prayers and your praise and your love and obedience would be restrained and controlled, there can only be one explanation. **It must be that you still mistakenly think that "uttermost" means *almost* and that "always" means *sometimes*.**

“Sam, you make it all sound so simple. But it can’t be. It must be more complicated than that. My life is too complex for it to be that simple.” Really? If that’s what you think, all I can do is to ask you to meditate deeply and for more than a minute or two on the words “uttermost” and “always”.

Putting “Uttermost” and “Always” in Context

The author of the book of Hebrews is attempting to convince these people in the first century and us in the twenty-first that Jesus is the only high priest who can do this. The temptation they were facing was to put their hope and trust and confidence in the priesthood of the Old Covenant, the priesthood of the Mosaic Law, the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants. And so our author is forced to point out some fundamental shortcomings and flaws in that Old Covenant, Levitical priesthood. He is forced to bring it into comparison with the priesthood of the New Covenant, the priesthood after the order not of Aaron but of Melchizedek. And that is what he does in Hebrews 7:1-24, all of which leads him to the conclusion of Hebrews 7:25.

That is the force of the word “*consequently*” with which v. 25 opens. Here is the consequence of that comparison: Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone is able to save to the uttermost sinners like you and me who draw near to God through faith in him, because he always lives to make intercession for us.

Aaron couldn’t do this. None of his descendants could do this. Only Jesus can do this.

For us today, you may think that we face a different temptation. But not really. Granted, we aren’t drawn to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. We aren’t tempted to bring a goat or a turtle-dove or a lamb to church and cut its throat on the platform thinking that by doing so its shed blood will forever atone for our sins.

But we are tempted to look to someone other than Jesus to make life right and worth living. We are tempted to trust in something other than Jesus to get us to God. We are tempted to believe that someone other than Jesus and what he has done can remove our guilt and bring us peace and joy and meaning during our short time on this earth.

And so it is as important for us today as it was for them back then to understand how and why Jesus is a superior high priest to all that came before him and to all that might follow.

Once you understand that this is what's going on here, Hebrews 7 isn't the difficult, foreboding, technical, "it's-way-over-my-head" passage that you've been led to believe it is.

So here's what I want to do. I'm going to read through vv. 11-24, line upon line. And as I do I promise you that if you'll keep in mind what our author's purpose is, you'll say: "Wow, that wasn't so tough after all. That makes perfectly good sense to me." And better still, you will then fully grasp the glory of that word "consequently" in v. 25 and all that he says about the priesthood of Jesus in that verse.

Talking through Hebrews 7:11-25

Let's begin with vv. 11-12.

11 Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

What he's saying is that, for all its beauty and truth, the OT Levitical priesthood could never bring men and women into the presence of God or offer a sacrifice that would forever cleanse them from the guilt of sin. Furthermore, if that OT priesthood had been perfect, why would King David have announced hundreds of years later in Psalm 110 that God has appointed a new priesthood, not after the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek? Whatever is "perfect" and permanent doesn't need to be replaced. His point, then, is that years after the Levitical priesthood was established God speaks of yet another, superior, and abiding priesthood, namely, that of Jesus Christ, not in the line of Aaron but in the line of Melchizedek.

We also see that priesthood and “law” are inseparable. The Law of Moses stated the terms of the Aaronic priesthood and governed its activities. With the change in priesthood, therefore, must also come a change in law. Simply put, the Law of Moses, under whose instruction and authority the Aaronic priesthood operated, is no longer operative or binding on the conscience of God’s people.

We now turn to vv. 13-17.

13 For the one of whom these things are spoken [that, of course, is Jesus] belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

His point again is clear and straightforward. If the Law of Moses is still in effect, then Jesus can’t be a priest because he is descended from the tribe of Judah. According to Moses, a priest in Israel had to be a descendant of the tribe of Levi, and within that tribe, from the family of Aaron. Jesus is neither. ***Jesus isn’t a priest because he qualifies physically according to an OT law but because he is eternal life itself, now in human flesh. He lives in the power of an eternal and indestructible life.***

By the way, there were in the Law of Moses more than 140 physical blemishes that could disqualify a man from being a priest. But Jesus isn’t our High Priest because he is physically perfect. He qualifies as our High Priest because he is *spiritually* without blemish and *morally* without blame or sin!

Now let’s look at vv. 18-22.

18 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. 20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not

change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’” 22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

The “former commandment” in v. 18 is a reference to the law by which the Levitical priesthood and its succession were regulated. It had to be “set aside” or abrogated because it was unable to bring us to God and unable to secure full and final forgiveness of sins. We, on the other hand, are the recipients of a **“better hope”** through the priestly ministry of Jesus because he accomplished once and for all what no priest of Aaron ever could: he fully and finally atoned for our sins and brought us into the very presence of the heavenly father!

And if that isn’t enough to prove the finality and superiority of Christ’s priesthood, our author reminds us yet again that no priest in Aaron’s line was installed by God himself taking an oath. But when it comes to his Son, our Savior, ***God swears by himself, he appeals to his own glory and honor and dignity*** and says to Jesus: “You are a priest forever. Never to be replaced. Never to be succeeded.” And thus the covenant that Jesus established, the New Covenant, is “better” than the Old Covenant of Moses. This is the subject of Hebrews 8.

Finally, we read this in vv. 23-25,

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 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.

Let me again come straight to the point: all the OT high priests who descended from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron were *mortal*. They all eventually *died*. They were all at some point succeeded and replaced by another. But Jesus is *immortal*. He lives and loves us “forever” (v. 24).

When Aaron died, his son Eleazar took his place (Num. 20:28). When Eleazar died (Josh. 24:33) his son Phineas took his place. The Jewish historian Josephus calculates that from the time of Aaron to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. there were some 83 high priests who served Israel.

Try to imagine the discomfort, the insecurity, the uncertainty and anxiety in Israel every time a high priest would die. People feared for their spiritual welfare. “Who will offer sacrifices for us now? Who will intercede in God’s presence for us now? Who will hear the voice of God for us now?”

But not so with us, for our High Priest “holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (v. 24).

Consequently! Consequently! For this reason we know with absolute, rock solid, unshakable confidence that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost anyone and everyone who draws near to God through him. And we know this because “he always lives to make intercession for them” (v. 25).

“Since”

One final and critically important thing to note is the relationship between Christ’s ability to save to the uttermost and the unending, incessant intercession he fulfills on your behalf. Did you see that word translated “since”? He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him ***“since” (i.e., because, for this reason, on these grounds)*** he always lives to make intercession for them. Clearly, then, the fact that Jesus is always and forever on your side as he sits at the Father’s right hand is the reason why we can have confidence that the salvation he gives us is complete and comprehensive and all-inclusive.

In other words, if Jesus did not always live to make intercession for us he would not be able to save us. But ***“since”*** he ***“always”*** lives to represent us before the Father and to plead our case and to defend us against Satan’s accusations we can rest confidently in the salvation that he died and rose again to obtain. As the apostle John put it in 1 John 2:1, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

When Jesus died and rose again on our behalf he obtained for us the very faith by which we continue to draw near to God. He promises that he will continually sustain that faith in our hearts so that we will never turn away from him (see Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5).

And just how effective and long lasting is this ministry of Jesus on our behalf? Our two words provide the answer: he fulfills his ministry to save us to the ***“uttermost”*** and ***“always”***! Praise God from who all blessings flow!