Preacher: Jed Saville
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Title: Gentle and Lowly: His Present Heart

Riverbank Christian Church

Introduction

How familiar are you with the term one hit wonder, it's a phrase typically used to describe a band or artist (maybe an athlete or celebrity as well), who created one incredible song, one incredible hit, one incredible moment yet they never managed to replicate or reach those same heights again. Maybe you can think of a one hit wonder now?

- If you're into music maybe you've heard of the songs Mambo no.5, Hooked on a Feeling, Gangnam Style or Dancing in the Moonlight, (classics right) but can you remember Lou Bega, Blue Swede, PSY or Toploader who sang those songs?
- Maybe there's a tennis fan out there who remembers Michael Chang the 17 year old who won the French Open, yet never returned to win another major title, or maybe if you enjoy footy you'll remember Tom Boyd's one hit wonder game in the 2016 GF.
- There's also actors and other celebrities who have jumped onto our screens for a brief moment before vanishing again in an instant.

These are all one hit wonders, and today I want us to consider a provocative question, was Jesus a one-hit wonder? And I don't mean the person Jesus, because He has quite clearly transformed and changed the course of history, and continues to transform millions of lives right across the world. But rather as we've looked at the heart of God during our 'Gentle and Lowly' series, I want us to consider if Jesus' passionate and loving heart towards you and me was just a one hit wonder. Is Jesus' heart towards us like a raging fire that burned so intensely on the cross, yet is now faint and cold towards us? Did He love us on the cross, but never to the same extent again? Was it just a one hit wonder moment in time?

Today we're going to be considering this question by focusing on Jesus' heart towards us now, in the present (day-by-day, moment-by-moment) what is Jesus' heart towards you and me.

And to answer this question we're going to look at 3 things:

- Jesus' past work
- Jesus' present work
- Jesus' present heart

and so let's start by looking at this moment in time we're so familiar with, Jesus' past work, His death on the cross and our resultant justification.

Jesus' Past work

This doctrine of justification is a glorious doctrine that we Christians cherish. It is a doctrine that each generation needs to revive and rediscover because it is such a counter-intuitive aspect of Christianity, that we are declared right/just with God, not once we get our act together, but once we collapse into honest acknowledgement that we never will.

The book of Romans unpacks this doctrine so beautifully and in terrific detail. If you're looking for a place to grasp the doctrine of justification Romans is a brilliant place to start. And so let's do that now, if you've got your Bible open it up to Romans 5 (and I encourage everyone to bring your

Bible along to church every week, it's a great exercise to be flicking through the different passages throughout the service).

In the led up to Romans 5 Paul has been building his argument for justification by outlining God's judgment, that through the law we are all condemned, that not one of us is righteous, but instead righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ. Which leads Paul to declare in verse 1 of chapter 5 these words "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith".

This is a statement that is completely about the past, because our justification is a doctrine primarily about what Jesus has done in the past. He died for our sin (in the past), He rose in victory (in the past), and as we place our faith in his past work, we are justified.

"Therefore, *since we have been* justified", past, complete justification, through Jesus.

And a few verses later (Romans 5:6-8) we receive insight into the heart of Jesus in the moment that He went to the cross to justify us:

> "[6] You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. [7] Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. [8] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

That's why this doctrine is so counter-intuitive, it is common for us to forgive people once we have been compensated, to love people who are easy to love and to be generous to people who are able to return the generosity.

But Jesus has already justified us and demonstrated His loving heart for us while we were sinners, not once we clean ourselves up, not once we demonstrate enough appreciate towards Him, not once we've done our profession of faith or evangelised enough people. No. Instead, Jesus demonstrated the extent of his own loving heart for us most clearly in this moment when He died for you and me, wretched sinners.

And if we need further confirmation of this, a few chapters later Paul stamps our justification, in Romans 8:33-34 he says "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. [34] Who then is the one who condemns? No one."

That is the glorious truth about the doctrine of justification, who can condemn us, no one! Because it is Jesus who <u>has</u> justified you through faith, that is what Jesus has already accomplished.

If you're here today and you're not a Christian, then I want you to know that this is the heart of Christianity and what separates it from all other religions. Other religions suggest that if you work hard enough, clean yourself up and serve God well enough then maybe God will accept you, whilst Christianity, or rather Jesus, says you are saved because of what He has done, because He accepted you, because He loved you.

This is what makes it so amazing, our salvation, our atonement, our justification has been achieved in the past conclusively, and if at any moment we ever doubt our salvation let's not place our confidence in our present actions, let's place our confidence in what Jesus Christ achieved on the Cross.

But how does this moment in time on the cross where Jesus' heart burned with such intensity and love, connect to God's heart for us now, is there a connection? Or was His past work of immense love just a one-hit wonder, has His heart petered out, never to reach the same heights of love again?

Intercession – Jesus' present work

Well, that's what we're going to begin to explore now, our second point, Jesus' present work.

And, if we continue reading verse 34 of Romans 8 it reveals to us what Jesus' present work is. Please read it with me, it says "Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"

More than just his past work, Jesus who was raised to life is presently seated at the right hand of God interceding for us. Intercession is therefore what Jesus is doing now, intercession is His present work, but how does His present work of intercession connect to His past work of justification?

Well to explore this we're going to need to strengthen our understanding of intercession, and let's start this by asking the simple question what is intercession? (which is not actually that simple, and if you're sitting there thinking that's not an easy concept to comprehend, well that makes two of us, because I've had to wrestle with the details of intercession quite a lot myself this week as well). So, what is intercession?

Intercession is the act of intervening or mediating on behalf of someone else, such as a lawyer interceding on behalf of their client, or a parent interceding as a fight between siblings breaks out, or a real estate agent interceding between the landlord and the tenant. The core of intercession is that someone has a need and therefore requires someone else to intercede or intervene on their behalf

For instance my Grandpa has been slowly deteriorating for a number of years now, and this has meant that he is no longer able to do many of the things he used to do. Instead he now requires my Grandma to do these things on his behalf, such as cooking every meal for him, doing all the driving, looking after the backyard, even helping him move around the house. And maybe you can relate to this because you have a family member who also requires extra help, who needs intercession.

But if we have already been completely justified by Jesus' past work, why do we need an intercessor? Why does Jesus need to intercede on our behalf before God? Is something incomplete? Is God not satisfied? Do we still require extra help?

In our main passage for today, Hebrews 7, the connection and relationship between Jesus' past work and present work is revealed to us more clearly, and this is particularly done by comparing the Priesthood of the Old Testament with the Priesthood of Jesus.

You see in the Old Testament it was the role of the Priest to intercede on behalf of the people of Israel, and the Priests role as the intercessor involved two main aspects:

> Firstly, to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. And to do this the Priest needed to first make himself ceremonially clean by bathing then by offering a sacrifice for his own sins, because an unclean person cannot enter into God's presence. Once he'd completed this he then was able to proceed to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people of Israel, for their sins. (So, firstly sacrifices on behalf of the people)
>
> And secondly, he would then offer up requests and petitions to God on behalf of the people of Israel.

These two aspects are deeply intertwined. Because you see as the Priest intercedes by offering requests and petitions on behalf of the people of Israel, what he is actually doing is applying what the sacrifices have already accomplished.

The answer is therefore not that our justification is incomplete, but rather Jesus, our intercessor, is applying what His sacrifice on the cross has already accomplished, through His petitions and requests.

And in Hebrews 7, particularly in verse 25, we can observe this splendid picture of how Jesus, day-by-day and moment-by-moment, is interceding for us.

Let me read verse 25 to you, it says "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Jesus is able to save completely, (or this word could be translated: utterly, totally, absolutely, comprehensively, entirely), Jesus is able to save completely, because of three things:

> (1) in comparison to all other Priests He lives forever. Unlike in verses 23-24 where it states that death has prevented all other priests from being able to intercede, in contrast Jesus lives forever.
>
> (2) in comparison to all other Priest's, Jesus is already eternally clean. In verse 26 it differentiates Jesus from all other Priests by stating that "Such a high priest [as Jesus] truly meets our need— [because He is the only] one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.
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> and (3) in comparison to all other Priests His sacrifice is sufficient and final. In verse 27 it distinguishes Him again by stating that "unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. [because] He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."

And so because Jesus lives forever, because He is holy, blameless and pure and because His sacrifice is sufficient and final, He is able to save completely and He is able to continue His work of intercession.

That is why the New Testament welds justification and intercession together, just as we've seen in Romans 8 & Hebrews 7, they cannot be separated. In contrast, if we only knew about Jesus' work of justification, and not his continual work of intercession, we could easily be tempted to view our justification as merely a mechanical formality, plus we could begin to believe that Jesus' heart for us has faded.

But instead, Jesus' ongoing intercession is like the day-by-day and moment-by-moment application of our justification, like the constant hitting refresh of our justification in the court of heaven. It is not a reflection of anything lacking in His earthly work, rather it reflects the fullness and victory of His past completed work.

Jesus' present heart

However, if you've been a Christian for a while, you might be thinking to yourself, of course Jesus saves us completely. But if you're anything like me, you have this unceasing impulse to strengthen or contribute to His saving work, to somehow attempt to justify/certify the decision/reason why Jesus saved you.

Or maybe you're only a new Christian or doubt your salvation at times. You think to yourself surely Jesus will change His mind because my sin is still so great, so repulsive, so constant, if Jesus really knew my heart there is no way He would want to save me.

But that is exactly the point, because Jesus always lives to intercede for you, to apply in your life what He has already accomplished, your justification. You can be so confident that you are saved completely, utterly, entirely because Jesus' present heart continues to burn with such great longing for you.

Which is our 3rd point, Jesus present heart.

There is the objective reality of our salvation, which we seem to grasp more clearly, that we have been justified not by meeting the standard of the law, but by the blood Jesus spilled.

But there is also the subjective reality which we struggle to grasp as strongly in our inner being. The subjective reality is the sheer readiness that is in Jesus' heart to receive you and to do for you what you need most. Nothing pleases Jesus more then to give away what He has accomplished and to bestow it upon us, the weary and needy.

The truth is there is no Christian ever who hasn't had their name mentioned by the Son to the Father. And please, do not picture a son as he pleads before his reluctant and callous Father. No. The Father's heart is not cold (He doesn't need convincing or persuading by His Son, he delights to say yes to Jesus). The Father (God) delights to hear the pleading requests of His Son who sits at His right hand. He delights to hear them, he delights to answer them. This was something the Father and Son joyously planned in eternity past.

If we read verse 25 again it says "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him"

We are coming to a delighted Father, who has an overjoyed Son, Who is thrilled to ever live and plead to the Father on our behalf and the Father is elated to respond to the Son's plea is jubilant agreeance.

As every Christian's name is constantly brought by the Son, to the Father with love in his heart (the same love that brought Him to earth and to the cross), the Father repeatedly, with a wide grin cheek-to-cheek on his face, joy in his heart, delights to say yes, yes, yes…

How often do we really stop, pause and acknowledge that Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of Father as we speak interceding for you? I know I can easily convince myself that Jesus' heart is distant, but theologian Louis Berkhof whilst speaking about Jesus' work of intercession says this, "It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life. But what if you heard Jesus praying aloud for you in the next room? Few things would calm us more deeply". How profound.

And what might the content of Jesus' plea before the Father be? Well, in John 17 we receive a glorious glimpse of Jesus' prayer, Jesus' intercession, for his disciples and us. Let me just read to you a number of Jesus' prayer requests:

> V11 protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one
>
> V13 that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.
>
> V15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

V17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

As Jesus intercedes by bringing your name before the Father, He does not pray that we be taken out of the world, that all temptation be removed, that life become a breeze. No, something even better. He prayers for protection from the evil one, for unity among believers, for the full measure of Jesus' joy, for sanctification by the truth.

If you're someone who feels like Jesus begrudgingly forgave you, or you sense that He was coerced/forced to be in a relationship with you, or that He is disappointed with your progress. Please know that that is not Jesus' heart for you, He will never give up on you and He will never stop praying for you until you arrive home safely into the presence of God in heaven.

Jesus' intercession reflects his gentle and lowly heart for His people. The same heart that carried him through life on earth and down into death on behalf of his people (which Reuben preached about in week 1), it is the same heart that will never drive us away, that shall lose none of those the Father has given Him (which Jack preached on in week 2), it is the same heart which promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit, when He departed (which Jack preached on last week). Jesus' present heart, his interceding heart, is the same heart that now manifests itself in constant pleading with and reminding and prevailing upon His Father to always welcome us, and the Father joyfully obliges.

Intercession is not just an abstract nice afterthought from Jesus, it is His vital primary present work on behalf of the people He loves.

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is no one hit wonder, He did not retire after His resurrection, He is not resting, having a break or living off past glories. No. He is joyfully still working, and His heart is still as deeply affectionate towards you now, as it was during His time on earth.

The doctrine of Jesus' heavenly intercession is one of the more neglected doctrines in the church today. We marvel, as we should, at the amazing past work of Christ, but we would be doing ourselves a great disservice if we didn't equally marvel at the present, continual, intercessory work of our beloved Saviour.

His intercessory work continues to display His heart for His people, His heart which Dane Ortland in his book Gentle and Lowly, illustrates so wonderfully for us, and I'll finish by sharing this quote. He says "Think of it this way. Christ's heart is a steady reality flowing through time. It isn't as if his heart throbbed for his people when He was on earth but has dissipated now that He is in heaven. It's not that His heart was flowing forth in a burst of mercy that took him all the way to the cross but has now cooled down, settling back once more into kindly indifference. No, His heart is as drawn to His people now as ever it was in his incarnate state. And the present manifestation of His heart for his people is his constant delight to forever intercede on their behalf."