

we have an advocate

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] You better get yourself a good lawyer. I hope that that is not a piece of advice you have had occasion to be given, though perhaps it is. There are many circumstances that that might be a good piece of advice, and maybe it's advice you have been given, or maybe it's advice you've given to others. You better get yourself a good lawyer. But even if you don't have any personal experience of that, in the receiving of that advice or in the giving of that advice, I think we can all picture the scene. We've seen, I'm sure all of us, some more than others, countless crime dramas or films where that scene appears. One of the characters is in trouble, guilty or not, as the case may be, perhaps simply accused of some crime or other. And a friend or a colleague approaches that character and provides them, gives them that piece of advice. You better get yourself a good lawyer.

We can picture that, that scene, I'm sure. But what has that got to do with the gospel message that is our concern as we gather here to worship God and to focus our mind and our attention on His word? Well, in the passage that we've read, John, who writes this letter, acknowledges not only that we all stand in need of a good lawyer or advocate, to use the word that he employs, and we'll come to that in a moment, but that as believers, we have one. An advocate has been provided for us. Let me just explain the language that I'm using and how it relates to the passage in front of us. Our concern this morning will be to think about the first two verses of chapter 2 of this letter. And you'll notice in verse 1, there is this expression in that verse. I'll read the whole verse, my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, and then we read, we have one who speaks in our defense.

We have one who speaks in our defense. One who speaks in our defense. It's almost a sentence. But these six words, one who speaks in our defense, these six words translate one Greek word in the original in which John wrote this letter. And the Greek word is a word that we meet periodically in the New Testament, and you may have heard reference to it in other circumstances or passages. It's the word *parakletos*. It's a compound word. That's two Greek words that have been put together to make one that literally means one who comes alongside. And it's used in different ways in the New Testament with different associated meanings. To give just one example, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as our *parakletos*, the one who comes alongside us, or our counselor is the way the word is usually translated in that context. On this occasion, the word is being used in the sense of an advocate. And the translators here in the version that we're using here in church have chosen to use an expression rather than one word to explain the intent of that word, one who speaks in our defense. But we could, and some versions choose to do so, use just one word. And the word, an appropriate word, would be the word advocate.

We have an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. An advocate, a lawyer, one who represents us before God. Now, what is all this about? Well, we want to look at this passage and see what this matter of an advocate is all about. And I think in these two verses, we can identify five truths concerning our advocate. We'll, first of all, notice our need of an advocate. That is highlighted very clearly in what John says, our need of an advocate. But also, we will see how the identity of our advocate is identified by John. But not only is he identified, but there is a description of him.

He is described. The description that we'll be looking at is this name or title, the righteous one. So, we need one. Who he is is identified. He's described. But also, we're told who it is that he presents his case before. Who the presiding judge is in this courtroom scene that John is picturing for us.

[5 : 41] But then, crucially, we also have the case that he presents. An advocate needs to present evidence before the judge. What is the evidence that he presents in our defense? We who stand in need of his services as an advocate? So, let's think of these different aspects, each of which is

touched upon, developed in these two verses. First of all, the need that we have for an advocate. There in verse 1 of chapter 2, we read, but if anybody does sin, if anyone does sin. Now, John here is dealing, in the letter that he writes, he's dealing with a very practical and perplexing reality for Christians, for believers, for those who, by the grace of God, have been able to put their faith in Jesus as Savior, whose sins have been forgiven, who have born again, who have been made new creatures, all of these wonderful realities. And yet, in the face of all these realities, we have this perplexing reality that we continue to sin. And of course, that is true. We continue to sin. John's desire for those he writes to, whom he describes as his dear children, he has a great affection for them and his great desire for them is that they would not sin. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. The very purpose of his letter is to help them not sin, to sin less, to resist temptation. And yet, he recognizes, he acknowledges that not only those to whom he writes, but he himself continues to sin. He says, we have an advocate.

He needs one as well. That is the reality. We are forgiven, and yet we continue to sin. Now, is this a problem? If it is a problem, how big a problem is sin in the life of anybody, but in particular here, the concern is in the life of a believer? Well, it's a big enough problem to require an advocate to represent and defend us. Even if we think of that in terms of the picture that's being painted. You know, if you're in a situation where you need a lawyer, generally, you would acknowledge, well, that's pretty serious. You know, there are things that can be sorted out without recourse to a lawyer. But if you need an advocate, well, the matter is, in all probability, a serious one. Well, the fact that John here acknowledges our need of an advocate, one who can speak in our defense, that in itself makes it clear that sin is a serious problem. Sin is an offense against God. It grieves God. It offends God. The holiness and justice of God demand that sin be punished.

We stand accused by God. We stand accused by God and before God. We are in serious trouble because of our sin.

What are we to do? Who can help us? Well, we need an advocate. We need one who speaks in our defense.

I wonder if you recognize yourself as being in this serious trouble because of your sin.

[9 : 34] The reality is that we live in an age, in a society, and it's maybe ever been so in some measure, but I think it's fair to say that it is more so today than perhaps in the past, in our own country, where sin is seen as something that is not really very serious. And many would view sin, even if they acknowledge the reality or the concept, as not a matter to really cause great concern. And we have a situation where those who break the law are deciding whether that is serious or not. But you see, that's the problem. It's not the lawbreaker who decides if breaking the law is serious, but the lawmaker. It is the lawmaker who has that prerogative to determine if it is serious or not, or how serious it is. As I was thinking about this, I was reminded of a case that was in the news just maybe a couple of weeks ago. Some of you may have seen it. A Scottish mine worker in Kazakhstan. I don't know if that rings any bells. But this guy was in Kazakhstan quite recently, and I think it was a national day of celebration.

Some national day was being celebrated at the mine, and the Kazakh workers were enjoying a national delicacy. Now, this Scottish mine worker thought it would be an amusing piece of banter to joke about the food that they were eating. Now, for reasons of decency, I won't explain all the details of it, but if you saw the news item, you'll know what I'm talking about. And so, he joked about the Kazakh national dish.

Just a bit of banter. If somebody had said to him, don't you realize that you shouldn't do that, that's serious, he'd have said, well, what's serious about that? There's nothing wrong with that. It's just a bit of banter. Well, his bit of banter very nearly landed him in prison, because it was deemed that what he had done was in breach of the law of the land. Now, in the event he was deported, that in itself was a very serious outcome in terms of his employment, and well, I don't know the subsequent consequences for him.

But the point is, you see, he didn't think it was serious, but his opinion is neither here nor there. It's the lawmaker who decides if something is serious or not, not the lawbreaker. That's not the prerogative of the one who breaks the law. Now, in much greater measure, that is true of our sin. You know, we could quibble with whether the laws of Kazakhstan make sense or whether they're sensible or foolish or, you know, we can do that if we wish. But when it comes to God's law, let's be very clear that it is God who determines the laws that we are to keep and abide by, and he has the prerogative to establish or determine if the breaking of those laws are serious or is a serious matter

or not.

[12:49] The only opinion that matters is God's opinion, and God has established that the wages of sin is death. So if you sin, you better get yourself a good lawyer. The need for an advocate. But in these two verses, John also identifies who our advocate is. We don't need to dwell on this because it's there in black and white. It's so clear, and we just need to note what it is that he says.

We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense. We have an advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. Jesus Christ, he is our advocate. He is the one who has been provided for us as our advocate. Having noted that, and it's very clear that he is the one, we can move on to how he is described. And this is of particular interest in the language that John uses here, because he not only identifies Jesus as our advocate, he then describes him. He says, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, the righteous one. And clearly, John considers that this truth concerning Jesus is relevant to his role as our advocate. He is the righteous one. He needs to be righteous to practice at this heavenly bar. Only a righteous advocate will do. And Jesus, God's Son, our Savior, is altogether righteous. He is righteous by nature. He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. He is very God of very God. And so, by nature, he is righteous. He has ever been righteous. He is eternally righteous. But he is also Jesus, the one who is righteous by his perfect obedience. He has lived a righteous life. He came into this world. He took upon himself human nature. He became a man. He was tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin. He obeyed God's law perfectly and completely. And he was obedient to his Father, even unto death and death on a cross. Jesus Christ, the righteous one. And as the righteous one, his advocacy, his work as an advocate, will of necessity be righteous. His plea in our defense before the Father, like himself, will be, must be, a righteous plea. We'll come back to the importance of our advocate being the righteous one when we consider the case that he presents in our favor, just in a moment or two. But before we do that, we want to notice another aspect of the advocate or the scene that is painted here by John, and that is the judge before whom our advocate stands.

John says that we have one who speaks in our defense, but he identifies who he speaks to. We have an advocate before the Father, before the Father. He is the one before whom the advocate makes a case in our defense. I want to just pause for a moment there and just think about that reality that it is the Father before whom Jesus, our advocate, stands. Who is Father? Well, I think in the context of what we're looking at, we can notice that he is Father, first of all, of the advocate, of the one who stands before him. And when we think of that, and we might say, well, that's so obviously the case. And yet, just imagine that. Our advocate, he stands before his own father, one who, even by that family relation, is well disposed towards the advocate. The advocate is his own dear son. He is the one who stands before him and makes a case in our defense. And the Father, before whom he stands, more than anyone, knows that our advocate is the righteous one, knows that he is altogether righteous, knows that whatever case he brings will be a case characterized by truth and righteousness and justice. He is the Father of the advocate. But also, he is the Father of the accused. He is our Father. John here at the beginning of this chapter uses this very tender language, my dear children. And of course, that reflects John's affections towards those to whom he writes.

But is it not the case that this same language reflects the heart of God towards us, his children? He looks upon us in our guilt and in our rebellion as my dear children.

[18:39] He is the Father of the accused. He is our Father. We are his dear children. The advocacy of the Son, the advocacy of Jesus Christ, the righteous one, is not presented to a stern or reluctant deity, but to his and our own Father, the one who delights to pardon, the one who delights in mercy, the one who is overflowing in love for his own children. But he must be just. His very nature demands justice. His love, great and deep and wide though it is, cannot override his justice. Hence, there is a need for a case to be made and presented to the Father by our advocate to secure our acquittal, our freedom.

And what is that case? What is the case that Jesus, our advocate, the one who speaks in our defense, what is the case that he presents to the Father? Well, the case is described for us in the second verse.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Before we think about that and the case that is being spoken of there, we do need to be very clear about what our advocate does not do as he would speak in our defense, what he most assuredly does not do is try and argue our innocence. We know you've got lawyers who are very clever and some very well paid. Of course, that's not true of all lawyers,

but some who are very, very clever and very well paid who, because of how clever they are, can argue the innocence of their client even if their client is as guilty as sin and can get them off the hook because of their skill and their knowledge and so on and so forth. Our advocate doesn't begin there. Our advocate knows that those he defends are guilty. We're guilty as sin. We're guilty as charged. He is the righteous one.

He couldn't possibly seek to defend us on the grounds of our innocence because we are not innocent. Well, what case can he then make? Is the matter lost even before he begins? He's taken on a client who he can't possibly defend because the client is guilty. What case can he make? Well, his case is identified there in verse 2. His case is the atoning sacrifice. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

His case is a sacrifice, a sacrifice for sin. We've already mentioned that God has established that the wages of sin is death.

[21 : 54] God has also determined, as we can read in Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 22, that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. If guilty sinners, such as we all are, are to know and experience forgiveness, then a sacrifice is required. And this is what Jesus presents as his case before the Father, a sacrifice for sin, an atoning sacrifice, to use the language that is employed there in verse 2.

Now, there are two important aspects to this sacrifice that we need to understand. We need to understand something of the nature of the sacrifice and the identity of the sacrifice. Very briefly, the nature of the sacrifice. Well, the expression there in verse 2, atoning sacrifice, translates one great word that has been a bit of a battlefield in Bible translation. And the battle lines are drawn on whether the word that here is translated, atoning sacrifice, should be translated as expiation or propitiation. And I'll explain what these words mean in a moment. Now, the translation that we're using opts for an expression that conveniently incorporates both meanings. And the reality is that the sacrifice Jesus presents, as his case before the Father, is a sacrifice that both expiates and propitiates.

Now, what do these words mean? It's not difficult to explain in simple terms. The sacrifice that Jesus offers expiates or removes sin. Expiation is just a fancy word for removing sin, expunging sin. And the sacrifice that he offers achieves that. It removes sin. The sin that has placed us in the dock is removed.

But the sacrifice also propitiates or satisfies the righteous anger of God by the removal of the sin that provokes his righteous anger. The word expiation highlights the effect of the sacrifice that Jesus presents on sin. Whereas propitiation highlights its effect on God. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated.

Now, the very notion of God's anger being placated is met with indignant horror by many. Many would say, many would say, what a primitive picture you're painting or the Bible is painting of God. [24 : 51] Such a notion of God being placated, of his anger being satisfied, we're told is primitive. Indeed, a stronger language would be used to decry the very idea. God is love. And the very idea of an angry God is to be rejected out of hand by all civilized, reasonable people. Well, what do we make of that accusation or observation? Well, if we accept the authority of the Bible, then our own opinions on the matter are neither here nor there. If the Bible speaks of God's anger as it does, and of the need of that anger to be appeased, then that's the way it is. But even if we were to leave aside the Bible's authority, foolish though that would be for a moment, the reality of a God who is angry with sin is far from being, even in the minds of reasonable men and women, primitive and repugnant. I think we all recognize in the depth of our being and who we are as men and women, we all recognize that there is a rightful place for righteous anger. When we witness a wicked evil deed, and our appreciation of what is evil and wicked is war, but even so, when we witness that, we acknowledge that anger is an appropriate and a right response. We would be horrified if people weren't angry in the face of oppression and cruelty and injustice. We acknowledge that it has a place. Indeed, justice and integrity and love requires anger in the face of injustice and oppression and brutality. So the sacrifice presented by Jesus, this atoning sacrifice serves to expiate, to remove sin, and also to satisfy God's justice and God's anger. This is the nature of the sacrifice. But then also, what about the identity of the sacrifice? What is brought as a sacrifice? Who is sacrificed? Well, we know the answer, Jesus himself is the sacrifice. The advocate doesn't really present really present a case. He doesn't have a file that he brings in and opens up and says, well, look, here's all the evidence. No, he himself is the case. He is the atoning sacrifice. That's what

we're told. In verse 2, he doesn't say that there is an atoning sacrifice. No, he is the atoning sacrifice.

And this, of course, is where the description of Jesus, our advocate, as the righteous one, comes very particularly to the fore. Jesus was able to present himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin precisely because he was and is and remains altogether righteous. Listen to what Peter says when he writes in his letter in 1 Peter 3, in verse 18, for Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous.

He is the righteous one. It was necessary that he be the righteous one in order to be our perfect sacrifice. For Christ died for sin once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you, to bring me, to bring us to God.

But as we picture Jesus presenting himself, the blood he shed as he died on the cross before the Father as the sacrifice for our sin, let's remember that it was the love of the Father that sent him to his atoning death. It was the Father who provided his Son as our atoning sacrifice.

Indeed, if we listen to the one other occasion in the whole of the New Testament where this word, translated here in verse 2, atoning sacrifice, or expiation, or propitiation, or both of these things intermingled, the one other occasion where this word is found is in the same letter.

[29 : 20] In 1 John chapter 4, in verse 10, we read, This is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

It is the Father, the one before whom Jesus presents our defense. He's the one who provided Jesus. He is the one who, born of his deep love for us, sent Jesus to be our Savior, to be our advocate, to stand before him in our defense.

He's the one who provided his own. In verse 1, as we just reflect on that reality, the word that is translated by an expression, one who speaks in our defense, or advocate.

And in the manner that it's translated here, it pictures Jesus speaking to the Father. Expression used involves the use of that verb, even though that's not something that was in what John wrote. He just used this one word, advocate. I wonder, and I'm just wondering here, how much speaking does our advocate need to do? You see, he is the atoning sacrifice, his very presence at the right hand of the Father is sufficient.

[30 : 51] When the Father sees him, that's enough. That's enough. Just that he's there. The Father knows who he is. The Father knows what he's done. The Father knows the righteous offering that he has made.

Jesus doesn't need to make and argue a great case before the Father. He doesn't need to do much speaking. Just being there at the right hand of the Father, that is sufficient.

He is our advocate by being there, having done what he has done. The Father sees his Son.

The Father sees Jesus. Even now, Jesus at the right hand of the Father, the Father sees his Son.

And he joyfully and justly forgives those the Son represents.

Indeed, justice requires that the sinner who is trusting in Jesus be forgiven. Justice requires it. Not only mercy. Justice requires it.

[31 : 59] That's the whole import, the whole sense of what we read in verse 9 of the previous chapter. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.

And we say, well, how is it just for God to forgive sinners? How is that just? Well, it's just because of what Jesus has done. Given that Jesus has paid the price, then justice requires that the sinner, you, me, be forgiven.

As we participate in the Lord's Supper, as we'll do in a moment, we do so. And in doing so, if there's one thing we acknowledge, and there are many things we acknowledge, but surely we acknowledge this as we participate, we acknowledge that we are sinners.

If we weren't sinners, then what need would there be to participate in such a sacrament? We are sinners. And we do sin. But we participate in grateful celebration that God has shown His love by providing in the person of His Son an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

And the one whose atoning death, we remember, is even now, as we gather around His table at the right hand of the Father, by His very presence, interceding and advocating for us.

[33 : 32] How are we to respond to such generous and loving provision that has been made for us? Well, there are two ways, I think, in which we respond, and I'll develop them a little bit more at the table, but we are to hold on and we are to hold out.

And I won't explain any more now, but leave you hanging somewhat. And in a moment, explain a little bit more what I mean by that. How we are to respond to God's wonderful provision for us. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that the Bible recognizes our reality as it is. It recognizes our reality as sinners, as those who have rebelled against God, as those who are in our own condition in deep trouble.

But we thank You that in the Gospel we discover Your marvelous and glorious provision for us, that our sins might be forgiven, that we might be brought back to Yourself, that we might be reconciled to You.

We thank You for Jesus. We thank You for Your own Son, the One who is altogether righteous, the One who is eternally righteous, and the One who presented Himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[34 : 55] We thank You for Jesus, and we thank You that now we can remember and gratefully celebrate what He has done for us. And we thank You that as we do, He is the One who is seated at Your right hand and through whom we pray.

Amen.