

## Christ our Advocate. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 4 April 2012.

Today (4<sup>th</sup> April) marks the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of one of the best known advocates of the twentieth century. I refer to Martin Luther King Jr. who has gone down in history as the great advocate in the United States of non-violent protest and of equal civil rights for all, regardless of colour or race. Having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he was killed – gunned down – at the age of 39 on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968.

But this morning I want us to think for a few minutes of a far greater advocate than Martin Luther King Jr.

I refer, of course, to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because today we have reached number 11 in our series on the titles of the Lord Jesus – that of ‘Christ, our Advocate’. But He, our Lord Jesus, is *not* – as Martin Luther King – an advocate *of a cause* (no matter how worthwhile), *but an Advocate on behalf of His people*. He is, that is, the believer’s legal representative with God.

And our Bible reading for today comes from the pen of one of Jesus’ disciples, that of the apostle John ... ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar ... But if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins’.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening words of our reading, John was referring to the brazen claim made by certain false teachers of his day – that *they* had never committed any sins whatever.<sup>2</sup> As the apostle pointed out, in making such a claim they had the effrontery to make out God Himself to be a liar – for in His word He had made it abundantly clear that, in *His* sight (and *He* knew the human heart as nobody else ever could) ... that, in *His* sight, *everyone* had sinned. Had His word not included both the statement of Solomon that ‘there is *no one* who does not sin’,<sup>3</sup> and the equally plain statement of Isaiah that, ‘*all* we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, *every one*, to his own way’?<sup>4</sup>

No. John said, such a patently false claim would never wash – for, as his fellow apostle (Paul), had expressed it plainly, ‘*all* have sinned’. But over against the false claim of the heretics of his day to have never sinned, John points his readers to the wonderful provision which God has made for the sinning Christian – to the provision which He has made in the Lord Jesus ... as our Advocate who appears for us in the presence of the One against whom ultimately all sin is committed, namely, God the Father.

And it is, I note, John who speaks elsewhere in the New Testament of the devil as ‘the accuser’ of believers<sup>5</sup> ... as the one who brings charges against them ... and who does so relentlessly. Alas, speaking for myself, my own conscience bears witness that Satan has no problem whatever in finding ample ammunition for his accusations against me!

Quite often on Lord’s day mornings, some of us sing the words of an old hymn, which reads

*I hear the accuser roar  
Of ills that I have done;  
I know them well, and thousands more;  
Jehovah findeth none.*<sup>6</sup>

And the reason that God does not hold any of the believer’s sins against him or her is simply that the Lord Jesus has suffered for them in his or her place ... that He is, in the word of our Bible reading today, the ‘propitiation’ for our sins ... that word ‘propitiation’ meaning there that, in His sacrificial death on the Cross, the Saviour fully appeased the wrath of God against our sins – wrath being the inevitable and inescapable reaction of a holy God to sin.

And, as John made clear, it is on account of His sacrificial death on our behalf *in the past*, that the now risen and exalted Lord Jesus appears as our Advocate with God the Father *in the present* ... ‘if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins’.

The Jewish Rabbis taught that a man’s advocates with God were of his own making. ‘He who performs just one precept (of God’s law), they said, ‘gains for himself an advocate’.<sup>7</sup> And again, ‘in the heavenly judgement a man’s advocates are repentance and good works’.<sup>8</sup>

A thousand times ‘no’, John says ... no work of our own can ever act as our advocate with God! ... only Him whose one single sacrifice dealt with our sins fully and forever.

And my shelter from God’s wrath today does not come – as the false teachers of John’s day supposed – from denying that which I have done, but in trusting wholly in that which He (the Lord Jesus) has done.<sup>9</sup>

We read in the Old Testament – in the early days of Samuel the prophet – of an old priest in Israel by the name of Eli. Sadly, Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were extremely wicked men – both religiously and morally. On one occasion, their father rebuked the two scoundrels. 'Why do you do such things?', he asked, 'I hear of your evil dealings from all the people ... if someone sins against *a man*, God will settle the dispute as arbitrator through the proper authorities, but if someone sins against *the Lord*, who will entreat for him ... who will arbitrate – who will intercede – for him?'<sup>10</sup>

The answer to his question was, as Eli meant it to be understood was, of course, that no one *would* – that no one *could* – entreat ... that no one could act as advocate on behalf of the person who sinned 'against the Lord'. Ah, but from *our* standpoint today ... with the Cross of Christ behind us ... each of us whose trust is wholly in the work of our Lord Jesus on that Cross can respond, 'Eli, you ask, "if someone sins against the Lord, who will entreat for him"; well, we know someone who will – and who does – the Man of Calvary ... the One who there suffered the judgement and wrath of God in our place, and who now lives to be our Advocate with God.

And so this morning you and I think not so much about Martin Luther King Jr. (the advocate of equal civil rights for all) – whose death is remembered by many today (Wednesday) – as we do about the Lord Jesus (our Advocate with God) – whose death will be remembered by many this coming Friday – on so-called Good Friday.

Whatever the details of his assassination,<sup>11</sup> there can be no doubt that Martin Luther King was killed only because he chose to be the advocate he was. But, by way of contrast, the Lord Jesus has become our Advocate only because He chose to die the death He did. But, for Him – Jesus – that death was not the last chapter ... and, unlike Martin Luther King, as many of us will be celebrating this coming Lord's day, He (Jesus) rose from the dead on the third day – to be our Saviour, our Lord ... and our Advocate with the Father.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1. 10 to 2. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Which is the implication of the tense John used.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 8. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. 53. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 12. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Hymns of Light and Love, number 297.

<sup>7</sup> The Talmud, Treatise XII, Chapter IV, Paragraph 11 ... <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/bar/bar092.htm>

<sup>8</sup> The Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Shabbat*, Folio 32a ... [http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath\\_32.html](http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_32.html). See too Kittel, Volume V, page 802.

<sup>9</sup> The Jewish Rabbis taught, 'He who fulfils one commandment gains for himself one advocate', 'in the heavenly judgement a man's advocates are repentance and good works', and 'there are no better advocates than the sacrifices'. No, says John, no work of our own can ever act as our advocate with God! Only Him whose one single sacrifice dealt with our sins fully and forever.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Sam. 2. 23-25. See Keil and Delitzsch Commentary for the translation quoted here.

<sup>11</sup> And the possibility of a conspiracy. See, for example, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/civil-case-king-family-versus-jewers>, <http://whatreallyhappened.com/WRHARTICLES/ARTICLE1/overlooked.php>, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig12/douglass-jim1.1.1.html>, and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination\\_of\\_Martin\\_Luther\\_King,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_of_Martin_Luther_King,_Jr.)