

Exod. 25:8-22

The Mercy Seat

And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold – v. 17

The book of Exodus has as its grand theme – Redemption, or deliverance. The whole 1st half of the book unfolds the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Abraham 400 years earlier that the Lord would bring His people out of the land of Egypt after the time of their affliction. That time of affliction was hard. The Israelites were in bondage. They served as slaves to the Egyptians until the time of deliverance at last came.

If you know the book of Exodus then you know the story. The Lord sent Moses to Israel. And through Moses and Aaron the Lord unleashed 10 plagues upon the Egyptians. Up until the last plague Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let Israel go. But when the final plague came – Pharaoh not only let them go – but the Egyptians themselves urged them to hurry and depart. Ex 12:33 *And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We [be] all dead [men].*

This deliverance from slavery in Egypt is encapsulated by the words of Deut. 5:15 – *And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm.* There's a spiritual sense in which our testimonies are the same as those Israelites who were slaves. We too were in the bondage of sin. We were slaves to the devil – slaves to the world – slaves to our lusts until that day that the Lord visited us with power. We too have been saved by the stretched out arms of Christ – arms that were stretched out when they were nailed to a cross.

As we approach the portion of scripture we've read this morning we find the Lord dealing through Moses with those that He has delivered by His mighty power: *And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. 4 And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.*

A key verse for the entire 2nd half of this book could be found in 25:8: *And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.* Here is the statement of God's purpose for His redeemed people – that He may dwell among them.

God's purpose is exactly the same today as it was then – to dwell with His people – to enter into communion with them – to have fellowship with them. Thus we read in Jn 14:23 *If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.*

And yet as you discover when you read through the last 15 chapters of Exodus there was a meticulously defined way in which this communion was to be entered into. We can't help but note how carefully, exactly and strictly this pattern of the tabernacle is expressed. The message of the tabernacle is clearly spelled out that God specifies the way in which He is to be approached.

Now today I want to take you right to the heart of this matter of our communion with God. We must come to what could arguably be labeled the most important piece of furniture in that tabernacle. As we pass through the gate of the court of the tabernacle, we pay attention to the pieces of furniture we pass – first there would be the brazen altar where the animal sacrifices were made — then the laver where the priests were ceremonial cleansed and then into the first room of the sanctuary. We recognize as we take this trip that we are passing types and shadows but the remarkable thing in the economy of redemption is that even the shadows can give forth light.

We pass the table of showbread and the candlestick until we come right up to the veil with its skilled embroidery work of angelic beings. We pause here just long enough to remember that only one person on one day out of the year could pass beyond this veil – and that only after a strict observance of the ceremonial law that pertained to the day of atonement.

As we pass through the veil – we behold an unusual piece of furniture – it’s called the ark of the covenant. Obviously not the same thing as Noah’s ark. It’s not even the same Hebrew word. This ark of the covenant is a box – the size of a chest covered with gold inside and out. Within the ark we would find the 2 tables of the law, the rod of Aaron that budded, and a pot of manna. That would all be down the road. What we have in Exod. 25 is the blueprint for this ark which would be built right after the plans were given. But we’re considering the finished product now. And what strikes us most about this box is its golden lid that sits atop the chest known as the mercy seat.

We’re moved to wonder and awe as we behold the dazzling brilliance of it – the gleams of light that glisten from the wings of the cherubim are practically blinding. There’s a look of reverence permanently engraved on the faces of the cherubim as they gaze at the mercy seat. And as we fix our gaze where their gaze is permanently fixed we are moved to reverence by the mercy seat. And it is here – here I say that we learn of this blessed truth of entering into communion with God. So we read in v. 22 God’s word to Moses: *And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.* What then does this unusual piece of furniture teach us about our entrance into God’s presence? I call your attention to 2 important truths displayed by this mercy seat –

Man’s Need & God’s Provision for that Need

I. Man’s Need

That need can be found in the very name that is assigned by God to this particular piece of tabernacle furniture. God Himself refers to this lid of the ark of the covenant as a mercy seat. *And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold* God says to Moses in v. 22. The restricted entrance into this inner sanctuary, as well as the lessons conveyed by the ark and the mercy seat – indeed the message of the entire tabernacle is that we’re in need of God’s mercy and grace. God’s mercy has to be extended to us if there’s to be any communion between God

and man. Aren't you glad that this mercy seat corresponds to what we read of in Heb. 4 which is a throne of grace?

Consider the color of the ark and the mercy seat. They were gold – and the mercy seat was pure gold. Gold, you could say, is the color of Deity. The radiance of this metal serves to remind us that *God Himself dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto which no man hath seen nor can see* (1Tim. 6:16).

Gold is used to describe the radiance of John's vision of Christ on the isle of Patmos. Rev. 1:13 – *And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.* Gold is used to describe heaven's brilliance. The 24 elders in Rev. 4 wear crowns of gold. The candlesticks in John's vision are gold. The vials which are said to contain the prayers of the saints are gold. We read of a golden censure, a golden altar, and we read of a crown of gold on the head of Christ Himself. The 7 angels who hold the 7 last plagues are dressed in golden girdles.

The New Jerusalem is said to be of pure gold – and as we've seen in our text the mercy seat is of pure gold. This precious metal depicts the splendor of God's majesty and holiness and we see then immediately our need for grace and mercy. We have no grounds to approach one who is so pure and holy.

All the visions of the Lord throughout the Bible demonstrate the contrasting character between God and man. Such is the splendor of God's majesty that the presence of man before such a God tarnishes the beauty of God the way a man who worked in the mud all day would tarnish gold if he were to walk into a jewelry store after work and handle golden bracelets and necklaces with muddy hands. Joshua, Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel and John on the isle of Patmos – The effect is always the same with them – the brightness of Christ's radiance produces fear and trembling – falling down as dead men because of a consciousness of sin and the consciousness of God's purity by contrast to sin.

Woe is me for I am undone; Isaiah cries out because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.

We see our need for grace and mercy to approach God in another way – Within the veil and inside the ark were the tables of the law. In man's hands those tables would be broken – Moses would smash them at the foot of the mount when he beheld the sensual idolatry of the Israelites in their golden calf worship. Eventually, however, they would be re-written by God and preserved within the ark. Each inscription on those tables testifies to man's need of grace and mercy to enter into communion with God. *By the law is the knowledge of sin* (Rom. 3:20).

Sin is the transgression of that law and every transgression incurs a debt – a debt of guilt that must be paid according to the strictest standards of God's justice. This is a debt that cannot be merely overlooked by a Holy God. This is important to note – our understanding of this will play an important role when we come to consider the meaning of the mercy seat. But what we must see now is that man in his natural state is what the scriptures call *a child of*

wrath. So we read in Eph. 2:3 *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.* The lost sinner, outside of Christ spends his life storing up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5).

And it's only as this wrath is dealt with that a sinner can enter into communion with God. It's only as the Christian has confidence that this wrath has been dealt with that he can gain the confidence and boldness to enjoy fellowship with God.

There has to be a provision, therefore, from God for man to enter into and enjoy communion with God. But O the condescension of God that He would graciously overcome all obstacles to establish the glorious privilege of communion with Himself. This to me is the marvelous feature of the book of Exodus

You think of it – God Almighty who demonstrated His sovereign power over nature in the plagues He unleashed on Egypt – His sovereign power over all nations seen by His dealings with Pharaoh – God who thundered the law at Mt. Sinai, who commanded Moses to get down to the people and warn them to stay back lest the fury of the Lord break forth upon them – God who is infinite and eternal, who fills all space would say to Moses –

Make thee a mercy seat ... and there I will meet with thee and will commune with thee (Exod. 25:17). What condescending grace! What blessed favor that God would show to Moses and through Moses to Israel. And this leads to our next and final point. Consider with me then:

II. God's Provision through that Mercy Seat –

We find in this mercy seat a graphic portrayal of a gracious provision for a grand privilege of communion with God.

Where then is God's provision for communion or fellowship? We know, of course in this New Testament era that it's to be found in the person and work of Christ. And the ark of the covenant crowned with the mercy seat graphically pictures for us the person and work of Christ.

Consider the ark – it was made of acacia wood – this was the common wood of the area in which the children of Israel were then located at the base of Mt. Sinai. They were not commanded to use cedar wood (that would have required a journey to Lebanon). They were not commanded to use gopher wood – which was the wood of Palestine.

They were to use the common wood. And here we have the same picture that the bread portrays for us this morning. It's a picture of the incarnation of Christ. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn. 1:14). Do you see the provision here for communion? *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us – Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them* (Exod. 25:8).

We're reminded of the testimony concerning Christ in Isa. 53:2 – *He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.* You see, He took upon Him our common humanity – He was subject to all our infirmities.

But this wooden box was covered within and without with gold. We've already seen how gold is the color of deity. So we have pictured for us the complex person of Christ – 2 natures in one person without confusion pictured by the wood of that box as well as the gold of that box. But we have pictured for us as well the character of Christ. Recall those two tables of the law resting in the ark. Those tables that reveal God's moral commandments that call for our condemnation. Just like those two tables rested in the ark of the covenant so the precepts of those tables rested in the heart of Christ. He was and is altogether without sin. Every step He took, every deed He performed, every notion He entertained were all in perfect conformity to the law of God.

To pave the path of restored communion with God, He kept for us those precepts that we were unwilling and unable to keep and have transgressed countless times. We could go on to describe how He is depicted by the budding rod or Aaron – That budding rod, you may recall was the means through which God indicated to the Israelites that Aaron was chosen by God to be God's priest. That rod, you recall supernaturally brought forth buds. And so we may think of Christ, chosen of God who possesses life in Himself.

And we're reminded by the pot of manna (and this ties into our communion feast this morning) that Christ is the bread of life. We've seen that in our studies of John's gospel. Jn. 6:35: *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

But we come now to this all important mercy seat. The two pieces of furniture were distinct and yet they were indissolubly linked to form a single piece of furniture. Are we not reminded that the person and work of Christ are likewise linked?

The mercy seat testifies of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. It was the sacrificial blood sprinkled on the mercy seat by the High Priest on the day of Atonement that rendered it efficacious for bringing man back into communion with God. So we read the instructions given to Aaron with regard to that mercy seat in Lev. 16:14 *And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.* So likewise is it the shedding of Christ's blood that opens the way and constitutes the grounds of our communion with God.

In whom we have redemption through His blood (Eph. 1:7). *Without the shedding of blood there is no remission* (Heb. 9:22). We could add to this that without remission there is no communion – only abiding wrath. You see the shedding of that blood accomplished a work God-ward. It appeased or propitiated the wrath of God toward our sins.

You may recall from Luke's gospel – the story of the Pharisee and the publican. The publican could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven – but prayed – *God be merciful to*

me a sinner. He would have uttered that prayer with reference to that mercy seat. His prayer might literally read – *God be propitiated toward me, a sinner.*

This term *propitiation* speaks to us then of appeasing God’s burning anger against us and it speaks to us of the satisfaction of God’s justice. And Christ is that propitiation – *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God – to declare I say at this time His righteousness: that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus* (Rom. 3:24,25).

God’s wrath was visited and expired on Christ so that there is not yet cannot be any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. This satisfaction of God’s justice through the blood is graphically displayed by the cherubim situated on that mercy seat. Angels, you see, are often times the executors of God’s justice. Cherubim and a flaming sword bar man from the garden of Eden when man has fallen so we read in Genesis. It was two angels that executed the fiery judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah later in Genesis. It was an angel sent from the Lord that executed judgment upon 185,000 Assyrians – so we read in 2nd Kings. And in Ezek. 1 we read of the lightning quick execution of God’s will by these strange angelic beings.

Now in our text we find these angels symbolically still as they gaze on the mercy seat. This is a testimony to satisfied justice. There’s nothing for them to do, you see. Justice as been executed and satisfied by the shedding of blood. This mercy seat, you see, even in Old Testament times was a blood sprinkled mercy seat. And so these angelic beings made of gold behold the mercy seat in wonder and admiration. So the mercy seat speaks of a work that was accomplished God-ward.

But that blood sprinkled mercy seat accomplished a work man-ward as well. It portrays the removal of our guilt. Not only is our sin propitiated but they are also expiated – taken away. God says the sinner’s guilt is removed as far as the East is from the West. The blood of Christ is said to have blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. We have these truths then perfectly portrayed in the mercy seat – for that golden lid formed a perfect cover over that broken law and bore testimony that the guilt of sin was removed – or hidden from the eyes of God – hidden under the blood sprinkled mercy seat.

By now I’m sure you’ll be able to see, dear Christian, that the same ground upon which you base your salvation is the ground of your entrance into the fullness of joy and communion with God. It’s the blood that saves. It’s the blood that assures you you’re saved. It’s the blood that gives you access into God’s presence.

This earthly tabernacle in Exodus, you see, points us forward to a time that Christ actually entered the holy place of heaven. So we read in Heb. 9:11 *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

And so this morning as we meet around the table of the Lord let the truth be ministered to your soul that God has not only paved the way for your salvation – He has saved you! He has saved you that you may abide with Him and He with you. His purpose in saving you is to draw near to you and you to draw near to him. This is the heart desire of every Christian and we rejoice this day in the provision that Christ has made to satisfy that desire.

The elements of this communion feast preach to us essentially the same message that the mercy seat preached to the Israelites. Both point to Christ. The wooden chest or the bread remind us that He is the Son of man. The gold – or the truth that He is risen from the dead reminds us that He is the Son of God.

The sprinkling of the blood – or the cup which is the emblem of His blood reminds us that He has propitiated God's wrath and expiated our sins. And the mercy seat – as well as these divinely ordained elements have as their design – our communion with our Redeemer. Let's examine ourselves then, in the light of His Word – and let's appropriate by faith His provision for our salvation. And then let's draw near to Him in communion.