

July - September 2013

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 8

“And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. 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.” (Exodus 25:17-22)

We come now to the subject of The Mercy Seat. This item of the Tabernacle furniture was a solid slab of pure gold; and whilst being a distinct article, it was designed to form a lid for the Ark. Indeed, the Ark itself was especially shaped to receive this lid, for it had an ornamental ‘ridge’ around its upper edges, described as “*a crown of gold round about*” (Exodus 25:11). The Mercy Seat fitted inside the ‘crown’ and was thus held in place, and prevented from slipping off.

The Mercy Seat differed from the Ark in that no wood was used in its manufacture – it was of solid gold. The only other item in the Tabernacle constructed in this way – solely of gold – was the Candlestick. (This will form the subject of a future article God willing). The size of the Mercy Seat, and in consequence, its weight, made it the most valuable of all the holy vessels. At either end of the

Mercy Seat was a cherub. These symbolic figures had their wings outstretched, overshadowing its surface, with their faces looking down upon it. The cherubim were not made separately and attached to the Mercy Seat, but beaten from the same single piece of gold.

What is the significance of all the details given in the Scriptures concerning this? Considerable variety of opinion and emphasis exists amongst commentators and historians. The best interpretation by far can be found within the Bible itself, in the New Testament. Two essential references are these: *“the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold... And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the **mercyseat**; of which we cannot now speak particularly”* (Hebrews 9:4-5); and: *“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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”* (Romans 3:24-25). In these two verses, the same Greek word (*‘hilasterion’*) is used for ‘mercy-seat’, and ‘propitiation’.

This then gives a correct lead in interpretation. The Mercy Seat is inseparably connected to the work of propitiation. The verb ‘propitiate’ means ‘to appease’, ‘to placate’, ‘to render satisfaction’. This Christ did at Calvary. *“He is the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 2:2). He took His people’s sins upon Himself, and in consequence, the wrath of a Holy God due to those sins fell upon Him. He endured that wrath; yea He exhausted it; paying to the utmost the penalty that was demanded. Thus Divine Justice was satisfied and a thrice-holy God placated and appeased. *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:10).

The Mercy Seat, as Scripture explains, is the place where God rested and communed with the people (cf Exodus 25:22), and as such might be called a ‘Propitiatory’ (noun). But it is separate and distinct from

the actual work of propitiation, which made such communion possible. This is high doctrine, and in such cases the Word of God instructs that we should ‘gird up the loins of our minds’ and use the mental faculties which have been given to us. The Mercy Seat is the ‘Propitiatory’. That is to say, not the place where propitiation was made. Propitiation was rendered at the Cross. But the ‘Propitiatory’ is the location where the abiding value of the work of propitiation is attested to by God, and experienced by the sinner. Hence it can correctly be termed: ‘The Mercy Seat’. God can righteously take His place there, and dispense mercy to sinners on the basis of propitiation – Christ having sustained the sinners’ judgment and placated Divine wrath.

The great propitiation which Christ made, and the ‘Propitiatory’ which is the result of it, were both borne witness to in the ritual of Israel’s annual Day of Atonement. This is described in Leviticus chapter 16. The whole section makes for very informative reading, but one verse must suffice here: *“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”* (Leviticus 16:14). That blood betokened the death of an innocent substitute – that is propitiation. The sprinkling of it upon the Mercy Seat (or ‘Propitiatory’) signified that God had accepted the victim which was offered.

It is also noteworthy that no seats were provided anywhere in the Tabernacle or its courts, other than the Mercy Seat reserved for Jehovah. This foreshadowed the glorious truth that God would find satisfaction, and rest in the perfect work which the Incarnate Son would accomplish. The Mercy Seat, and that only, was God’s throne upon Earth: *“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”* (Exodus 25:22); *“And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the*

Ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims” (2 Samuel 6:2); “The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved” (Psalm 99:1).

It might be asked, ‘how was it possible for a thrice-holy God thus to dwell amongst such a sinful and rebellious people as Israel?’ The answer is, because of the blood that was shed, and its value. The Ark is often depicted in illustrations in bright and shining gold. This is not accurate. Year by year on the Day of Atonement it was sprinkled with blood seven times, and this was never washed off or removed. That perpetual stain gave permanent witness to the fact that Holy Justice had been satisfied. God could never have rested upon that seat and dwelt among those people, were it not for the fact that His wrath had been placated. In the absence of that blood, the Mercy Seat would have transformed into a terrible throne of vengeance.

This raises another aspect of the work of propitiation and atonement which is rarely spoken upon. Many Christians never get beyond the truth that Christ’s death procured for them an eternal salvation. This is a wondrous fact, in which we will ever rejoice. But there is more to it than this. Christ died for sinners – yes! And He also died **for God**. He died in the **stead** of sinners; but He died on **behalf** of a Holy God.

This requires more explanation. The Lord Jesus lived and died in order that God might take Hell-bound sinners unto Himself, and do it in a way that was consistent with His holiness and justice. “...*Christ Jesus: 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” (Romans 3:24-26). ‘To declare’ means ‘to make manifest’; ‘to proclaim and publicly exhibit’. The code of Divine*

Righteousness demands that God's Law be absolutely obeyed, and if broken, all its penalties enforced. And in this context, the showing of mercy is simply not possible! It would constitute a waiving of the Law of God. Mercy cannot be extended at the expense of Justice. Were such a thing to happen, the very righteousness of God might be called into question! There is so much more to the work of salvation than just rescuing sinners from Hell. God Himself is involved in this transaction, and it must be publicly manifested that His holiness is not imperilled, and that He has not denied Himself, or His own Law.

Christ's death upon Calvary is the fulfilment of the typology of the Mercy Seat. It sets forth the precious truth that God's avenging holiness was completely satisfied by the shedding of the blood of His Son on the cross. Holy Justice has not arrested and punished the bankrupt debtor; neither has it ignored or connived at the debt; but instead received full payment from the debtor's Surety. Thus the deliverance of the debtor is absolutely guaranteed, without any of God's Divine attributes being impaired or jeopardised.

When the 'God-ward' aspect of the Atonement is first seen, new depths of Biblical truth come into view. By His life, Christ 'magnified the Law and made it honourable' (cf Isaiah 42:21); and in His death, He demonstrated all the Divine perfections of God: love, grace, mercy, holiness, justice, wrath, power, and wisdom are all equally displayed upon the cross. This is why the Mercy Seat was made of pure gold. God in the fullness of His glory is set forth at Calvary. Propitiation was made there, and God points to His Son as the proof of it – just as the blood-besprinkled Mercy Seat attested to the fact that propitiation had been typically accomplished.

Consider the dimensions of the Mercy Seat. There is no detail given without meaning in the Word of God, and there is a reason that the exact measurements of the 'Propitiatory' are given: "*And thou shalt*

make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof ” (Exodus 25:17). These, as you will observe, are precisely the same sizes as the Ark itself in length and width. It speaks of the very definite limitations which God has set upon His saving grace.

There is, in a number of hymnals and song collections, a grossly erroneous hymn, that no right-thinking Christian should ever sing, which reads:

“There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty” (Faber)

The aberrant author of these defective words clearly had no appreciation of the spiritual truth of the Mercy Seat, nor of the work of Atonement. Neither do those Christians today who can use such words in their so-called worship. Saving mercy extends to **none** except those for whom Christ met the demands of Divine Justice. The Lord Himself makes this abundantly clear. He died for ‘the sheep’ only; for the ‘little flock’; for ‘the remnant according to the election of grace’. Christ did not die to make a general salvation possible for the whole human race, but to make **certain** the salvation of God’s **Elect**.

He made propitiation for the sins of **His people**. That company are the ones chosen of God and given to Christ from before the foundation of the world. For that number Christ became substitute. That is the extent of redemption. That is the measurement, or limit of the work of propitiation, and the measurement or limit of the ‘Propitiatory’ is precisely the same. The preaching of a ‘universal’ atonement is a grievous error, and is condemned even by such a detail as the strictly defined dimensions of the Mercy Seat in the Old Testament.

Now for a few words about the two Cherubim. The first time these beings are mentioned in the Word of God is in Genesis: “*So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life*” (Genesis 3:24). These creatures are directly associated with the administration of God’s judicial authority and actions – a fact substantiated by various other portions of Scripture. Here is further symbolism of great importance. Recall that in the fabrication of the Mercy Seat, the cherubim were not attached separately, or added on, but beaten out of the same slab of gold, so forming one whole. Both were an intrinsic part of the Mercy Seat. So is set forth the fact that Divine Wrath and Sovereign Mercy are not conflicting attributes. Rather are they two parts of God’s holy perfections. The many attributes of the Eternal God harmonise in one glorious unity.

The description of the Mercy Seat in Exodus 25 indicates that there was a symmetry to its form. A cherub at either end, facing inwards toward one another, and looking “*toward the mercy seat*”, which is to say, downwards. Remember that these angelic beings have to do with God’s Holy Law and its enforcement. Within the Ark upon which they were placed is the Decalogue; all the righteous statutes of God which condemned the transgressor and called for vengeance. But between the Law and these fiery ministers of wrath was a lid, covering it from view. It was a lid of pure gold. Furthermore there was blood sprinkled upon the lid. What an illustration! Blood between the Law and its Executors!

Imagine for a moment an Ark with no Mercy Seat; the Law laid bare; uncovered; nothing to hush its thundering; nothing to arrest or hold back the execution of its righteous sentence. Suddenly it becomes a place, not of Mercy, but of unmitigated judgment. When the Philistines returned the Ark from their possession (referred to in the previous article) it came into the Israelite town of Beth-Shemesh. The

men of that place, filled with a blasphemous and presumptuous curiosity, dared to look into that sacred coffer, and this is what followed: *“And He smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even He smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall He go up from us?”* (1 Samuel 6:19).

In order to look into the Ark, the Mercy Seat had to be removed; and by taking it away, the Law was suddenly exposed, with nothing to answer its claims or prevent the immediate execution of its penalties. What a picture is here of the atoning and propitiatory work of Christ. Without Whom, there is nothing for the sinner but a certain fearful looking for of judgment (cf Hebrews 10:27). Let any unconverted reader of these words take warning! If Christ be not believed upon; if He is by-passed; the vengeance of a thrice-holy God must be suffered eternally.

Now to a final point. *“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”* (Exodus 25:22). The Mercy Seat is the place of **communion**. There it was that God met with His people. Another beautiful example is given: *“And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and He spake unto him”* (Numbers 7:89).

Precious indeed is the typology here. In the Lord Jesus, we have our Mercy Seat. A place of meeting. Yea, a place of blessed communion. Through Him, and His propitiatory work, the curse of the broken Law

has been silenced. Its claims are fulfilled and have been covered by Christ. Now in wondrous grace, a holy God says unto His people, “I will commune with thee”. He does not primarily say, “you can commune with Me”, but rather: “I will commune with thee”. The God-ward aspects and consequences of the Atonement come first. God invites those who were once lost sinners into His presence. He is reconciled to the sinner, as well as the sinner being reconciled to God. There is now nothing between: no sin, no guilt, no penalty. The veil has been rent. We can henceforth worship in the Holy of Holies. Then, says the Scripture, “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Hebrews 10:22). May God enable us so to do.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“The place where the Mercy Seat was set was upon the Ark; for it was to ‘cover the Ark’. An especial reason hereof is thus rendered, ‘In the Ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee’... The rigour of the Law, in accusing and condemning all that have not perfectly fulfilled the same, is suppressed by the mediation of Christ, and by the atonement which He hath made for us. Well, therefore, is He styled ‘a propitiation for us’ (cf 1 John 2:2). And thereupon the apostle saith, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). Admirable is the comfort which hence ariseth to poor sinners. Should the Law be suffered to stand up against them to indict, accuse, and give witness against them, they must needs be found guilty and condemned. The Law is the sorest accuser that a sinner hath. Without the Law, sin and devil want their evidence. When one is arraigned, if his accusers appear not at all, or without evidence, he is acquitted. Thus by Christ shall such as believe on Him be acquitted; He suppresseth all accusations against all that believe in Him.”

William Gouge (1575 – 1653)

RECONCILIATION THROUGH PROPITIATION

God's hatred and wrath is upon the sinner, and man is at enmity with God; therefore because the alienation is mutual, so also must be the reconciliation. By looking into the offerings and sacrifices of the Levitical order of worship, which are all highly typical of Christ, one soon discovers that primarily their purpose was not to divert man's enmity from God, rather that God should be propitiated, and His wrath diverted from man.

The word 'propitiation' is another vital theological term. It defines a very important aspect of doctrine without which there could be no reconciliation. Modern versions of Scripture have eliminated this word under the premise that such terms are archaic and no longer understood; this is a serious misrepresentation. These strong, definitive, fundamental, theological terms are never to be removed or yet replaced by weaker and less precise expressions. The word 'propitiation' is certainly not obsolete; it will be found in modern English dictionaries and it has a deep and profound meaning which must not be minimised, for it is a key factor in the presentation of the gospel. To explain and convey the exact meaning of these basic doctrinal terms, is the work of the preacher and in this he is to be diligent and faithful. He is to 'give the sense' (cf Nehemiah 8:8).

Propitiation has to do with the wrath of God, hence it is vitally linked with reconciliation. To propitiate means to placate or to appease offended justice.

The same Greek word which underlies the term 'propitiation' is translated in Hebrews 9:5 as 'mercy-seat'. This is not without significance, for the Mercy Seat of the Old Testament was sprinkled with blood, and this sprinkling was an integral part of the great offering

of Atonement. The details of this sprinkling are carefully set out in Holy Writ: “*And he [that is, Aaron] 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. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: and he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness*” (Leviticus 16:14-16). All this pertains to sin and to the holiness of God. The Mercy Seat was the place where the high priest applied the blood of the atoning sacrifice for the satisfaction of God’s justice and the placating of His wrath against the sins of His offending people – propitiation.

Another very important point in this connection is that the Old Testament Hebrew word for ‘mercy seat’ was ‘a covering’. The spiritual truth set forth in this definition is profound. Underneath that mercy seat were the tables of stone – the Law of God – that which condemns the sinner; but the blood-sprinkled mercy seat covered that Law. All this is so highly typical of Christ, indeed this was the whole purpose of the old economy; it was to point forward and to illustrate varying aspects of the work of the Redeemer, for in due time God would send Him forth to be a propitiation (cf Romans 3:25).

The propitiatory work of Christ covered every aspect of the Law of God, both preceptive and penal. Christ fulfilled every detail of the Law in His life, and He endured the curse of the broken Law with the consequent wrath of God upon Him in His death. By this dual aspect, the claims of Divine justice are fully met. The minutest precept of the Holy Law of God had been adhered to, and the fierce vengeance of Divine wrath meted out without mitigation or mercy. By this means of

substitution and interposition, that of Christ taking the sinner's place, the wrath of God was propitiated.

Propitiation is an essential element to spiritual reconciliation and from it there can be no deviation. The Word of God states, "*For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life*" (Romans 5:10). A clear statement is made here, "*we were enemies*", God's enemies, the objects of His displeasure, and subject to the hostility of His Law. However, this verse further states, "*we were reconciled*" – restored to favour. This was not due to any action on our part, and primarily it was not even the work of the Holy Spirit, for in the plainest of language it is said that we were reconciled to God, "*by the death of His Son*". It is the substitutionary, propitiatory work of the Saviour which alone effects reconciliation, and initially it is God being reconciled to the sinner. For the immediate context of this statement in verse 10 is, "*God commendeth **His** love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him*" (Romans 5:8-9).

The Holy Spirit is commending the amazing love of God, and the reconciliation of verse 10 is the highest proof and manifestation of that love. It must be emphasized that the reconciliation in view here is not us laying down our enmity to God; if so, this would be the manifestation of our love to Him, rather than His love to us. Justification is also brought in at this point. Again this is the God-ward aspect: "*It is God that justifieth*" (Romans 8:33); but justification is the direct result of the work of Christ. 'Justified by His blood, and saved from wrath, through Him' (cf Romans 5:9).

"*All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 5:18). "*Who hath reconciled us*". When and how did this take place? At the cross when Christ was made sin. "*For He hath made*

Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sins of all God’s elect were imputed to the Saviour, He endured the wrath of God because of this, and in consequence Divine justice is placated. Primarily the work of Christ was to propitiate God in order to effect reconciliation.

Some say that we get no precise expression in Scripture of God being reconciled to man, rather is it man being reconciled to God. This however is not strictly correct, for statements of equivalent import and meaning are numerous; for instance, *“I will praise Thee: though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away”* (Isaiah 12:1); *“I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever”* (Jeremiah 3:12); *“I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God”* (Ezekiel 16:62-63).

The terminology found in these verses is very meaningful – God’s anger turned away; God pacified (that is, appeased or placated), *“I will not keep anger”*. The New Testament speaks of enmity having been slain (cf Ephesians 2:16). That was effected at the cross: there the anger of God against sin and the sinner burnt out upon His Son; the enmity against us is utterly and eternally slain. This is the wonder of the work of Christ the Mediator. He removed all our sins from before God’s face and carried them as far as the east is from the west (cf Psalm 103:12), casting them in the depths of the sea (cf Micah 7:19); never will they be resurrected. It is because of this that God extends reconciling grace and mercy to sinners.

There is however, another aspect of reconciliation: the sinner must be brought to turn away from his sin and rebellion to God. He has to

come to a voluntary, joyful, yielding obedience. And until this is effected, reconciliation is not vitally and personally accomplished. The former – the God-ward aspect – is effected by Christ. The latter – the man-ward aspect – is effected by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the latter is absolutely dependent upon the former; for the Holy Spirit could never bring about man’s reconciliation to God, if God had not been propitiated by Christ.

So it is that, Christ having first made propitiation, the Holy Spirit regenerates, producing in man’s depraved being a desire to be restored to holiness. As a rebel sinner, man hears that inward call of God; he lays down his enmity and ceases to strive against his Maker; he comes to Christ the Saviour; he believes to the saving of the soul (cf Hebrews 10:39). Then it is that the Spirit of God says ‘ye have now received the atonement’ (cf Romans 5:11). Reconciliation has taken place, it is actually and vitally accomplished in the life and person of the believing sinner.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“One other signification of the blood of the sacrifice was **acceptation and access**. When the high priest went into the holy place once a year, it was not without blood, which he sprinkled upon the ark of the covenant, and upon the mercy-seat which was on the top thereof. All approaches to God were made by blood. There was no hope of a man drawing near to God, even in symbol, apart from the sprinkling of the blood. And now today our only way to God is by the precious sacrifice of Christ; the only hope for the success of our prayers, the acceptance of our praises, or the reception of our holy works, is through the ever-abiding merit of the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost bids us enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; there is no other way.”

C. H. Spurgeon (1834 – 1892)

APPROACHING THE ETERNAL THRONE

For all the detail given in Scripture concerning the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat upon it, this object at the centre of the Tabernacle, was a great enigma to the Israelites of old. It was an item shrouded in mystery and cloaked in secrecy; for whilst they knew well of its existence, they never actually set eyes upon it. Such was God's appointed way. When it was transported from place to place, it was enwrapped in the three-fold covering supplied for the purpose. When situated within the Tabernacle, it was housed in the most central enclosure, behind a sequence of curtains and veils through which none were permitted to pass. When the Tabernacle was ultimately superseded by the permanent structure of the Temple, the same arrangement was maintained – one of impenetrable security.

The only exception to this highly exclusive system occurred on the annual Day of Atonement: *“But into the second [the inner sanctum] went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest”* (Hebrews 9:7-8). From which it is possible to conclude, that amongst the millions of persons who comprised the hosts of Israel through the centuries, there were but a few men who ever saw the Ark and the Mercy Seat in an ‘uncovered’ state. The communion with God promised at that location was enjoyed by an infinitesimally small number of people. The experience of Divine mercy, implicit in the title of that structure, was known only by a tiny minority.

There was a sovereign purpose behind these strange strictures and limitations. By these practical means, the Spirit of God plainly illustrated the fact that: ‘The Way into the Holiest was not yet made manifest’; not yet revealed, nor laid open, nor presented to general

view. That was an era of type and shadow, which still awaited the anti-type and substance. Despite all the fellowship and favour which the Mercy Seat portended, those blessings were, at that time, manifestly unobtainable; so near, and yet so far.

The words, “*not yet*” (Hebrews 9:8) which hang ominously over that Old Covenant scene, are wondrously dispelled in the New Testament by the counter-statement: “*But Christ...*” (v.11). He is the destination to Whom all the former signs pointed; He is the fulfilment of the Law; He is “*the Way*” (John 14:6) “*now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Timothy 1:10). The Hebrew Epistle, which forms a glorious commentary upon the practices of the Tabernacle and its furniture, makes it abundantly clear that Christ has ‘opened’ this ‘way’: “*we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God*” (4:14); “*...which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever*” (6:19-20); “*by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place*” (9:12)

Here, comparisons are made with the functions of the High Priests of the Levitical economy. But it is the contrasts and differences that are more worthy of note. The Lord Jesus has not entered the presence of God in the ‘old’ way, but “*by a new and living way*” (Hebrews 10:20). He has not entered, only to return back again, closing the path behind Him for another year! He has gone in ‘once’, there to remain in perpetuity. He has not entered by and for Himself alone. He has gone in ‘for us’ – preparing, and consecrating a way, whereby His people might also approach themselves. He has not entered a mere hand-built, man-made Sanctuary on earth. He has gone ‘into Heaven itself’, the spiritual and eternal dwelling place of Jehovah.

The New Testament believer, seeking the presence of God – desiring communion and the blest experience of Divine mercy – comes not to an impassable blockade, but finds instead a ‘torn veil’, billowing open;

a door which stands unlocked and ajar; admitting both sight and access into the Holiest of All. Approaching still nearer, those who come thus far cannot fail to notice the spilt blood which lines the way. This is not the result of any animal sacrifice. It is nothing less than, “*the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered **Himself** without spot to God*” (Hebrews 9:14). Nor is its sprinkling restricted only to the Mercy Seat. His shed blood begins at the threshold. For the rending in twain of that barrier-curtain was accomplished at the cost of His own rent flesh upon Calvary (cf Hebrews 10:20). The evidence of His never-healing wounds can be traced from that point, right into the Holy of Holies where He stands for evermore. It falls on and before the Mercy Seat (cf Leviticus 16:15); and even upon those who enter there, to purge both their heart and conscience (Hebrews 9:14, 10:22).

“He sprinkles with His blood
The mercy-seat above;
Else justice had withstood
The purposes of love:
But justice now objects no more,
And mercy yields her boundless store.” (Kelly)

Those who thus draw nigh are instructed to do so in a particular manner: ‘**boldly**’, or ‘with boldness’ (cf Hebrews 4:6, 10:19). The language of Scripture here is not to be taken as meaning a presumptuous haste or irreverent audacity. The hallowed sanctity of this scene precludes any such interpretation. The underlying word used has particular connection to ‘freedom of speech’. The same term is to be found translated elsewhere as, ‘speaking plainly’ (cf John 16:29, 2 Corinthians 3:12), ‘speaking freely’ (cf Acts 2:29, 26:26) and ‘saying openly’ (cf Mark 8:32). This patently has reference to the subject of supplication. Christ has wrought for His people a perpetual means of access unto God. They experience it first and foremost in salvation. They enjoy it constantly thereafter in the act of **prayer**.

“Approach, my soul, the mercy seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.” (Newton)

Indeed, God’s own commandment, with promise, is: *“Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips... for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him”* (Hosea 14:2-4). Concerning our voices, so often engaged in earthly communication, He says, *“cause Me to hear it”* (Song of Songs 8:13). This is what it means to ‘enter boldly’ into the sanctuary – with liberty of speech before God in prayer. The entrance has been secured at so great a cost, the Intercessor is so perfect, His advocacy is so efficacious, the opportunity is so Divine – that any less an approach than this would be inappropriate. In such a glorious setting, concealment is futile; reticence is sinful.

Having arrived in faith at this unspeakably wonderful destination, consider the names by which it is called. Firstly, **the Mercy Seat**. ‘**Mercy**’, rightly defined, is the withholding of punishment deserved, or the revocation of a penalty warranted by an offender. By extension, the one to whom mercy is shown can return to the enjoyment of blessings which were previously forfeit; and be restored to a state of communion again. Such ‘mercies’ as these are the experience of the saints of God, as often as they draw nigh unto Him in supplication. Though they are sinners by nature, and He a relentlessly Holy God, fellowship can be had: *“It is of the Lord’s mercies that [they] are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:22-23). In converse with their Lord, believers know a return to that Paradisial concord which once obtained in Eden, but was lost on account of sin. God mercifully renews it unto them, by means of prayer.

It is also a marvel to contemplate the truth of Almighty God being ‘seated’ – for it is a posture which evinces, not the execution of sentence, or administration of wrath; but rather, a rest from labour (cf Hebrews 4:10), satisfaction, the reception of supplicants, and the distribution of favour. It denotes a settled state, from which there will be no change; no variableness neither shadow of turning. Such is the disposition of God toward His redeemed people. His Divine attitude is alike (though vastly superior) to that of a certain earthly king, who ‘sat upon his royal throne in the royal house’, and saw, standing in the court, one that obtained favour in his sight; unto whom he ‘held out the golden sceptre that was in his hand’, and said, “*what wilt thou... and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee*” (cf Esther 5:1-3).

Secondly, that place of intercession and prayer is further styled in Holy Writ as, “*the throne of grace*” (Hebrews 4:16). This does not speak of another, different location. The descriptions provided in Hebrews chapter four of the priesthood of Christ and His entrance thereunto, accord with those elsewhere in the Epistle. The instruction to ‘approach with boldness’ is repeated in both instances. The Mercy Seat is one and the same with the Throne of Grace. It is “*the throne of the Majesty in the heavens... [in] the sanctuary... the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*” (Hebrews 8:1-2). This latter title conveys additional truth. More than a ‘seat’ only, this place is a **Throne**. The One that occupies it is, by definition, a king. Moreover, He is, “*the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God*” (1 Timothy 1:17).

He is, therefore, the highest and best authority unto whom any mortal man could turn. His heavenly court is supreme over all others. There is no case that lies beyond His universal jurisdiction; no issue that falls outside of His Divine remit. There is no plea so small that it might escape His omniscient attention; nor matter so great that it exceeds His omnipotence to address; for He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Consequently, the answers which He gives are attended with regal authority, sovereign power and royal bounty.

That Throne of God, characterised in other Scriptures by its eternity (cf Psalm 45:6); holiness (cf Psalm 47:8); justice and judgment (cf Psalm 89:14); and glory (cf Jeremiah 14:21), is here specifically called the Throne of **Grace**. The Divine attribute of ‘grace’ goes still further beyond ‘mercy’ – adding to the pardoned sinner, favours unmerited, blessings undeserved, the free and unconditional gifts of God. These are “*the riches of His grace; Wherein He hath abounded toward us*” (Ephesians 1:7-8); these He makes the ‘habitation of His throne’. To receive such grace, He instructs His subjects to come, nothing doubting.

There is great significance attached to the names of persons and places in the Word of God. Not without reason does the Almighty refer to the place wherein He dwells as a ‘Mercy Seat’ and a ‘Throne of Grace’. Its titles are indicative of that which will surely be received by the those who approach thereto. He, “*said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain*” (Isaiah 45:19); these are no empty or delusive descriptions, but a sure promise of that which will be received. “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may **obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need***” (Hebrews 4:16).

A way has been opened whereby the saints on earth may pass into the heavens, yea into heaven itself, to commune with their God; they may enter by faith the very place from whence their help cometh (cf Psalm 121:1-2) to receive Divine aid; they can draw nigh into the eternal realm to secure all that they require for the needs of this present time. This is the promise and provision which God has made. May our portion then, prove evermore to be, “**Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour**” (Titus 1:4).

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

Prayer is a miracle. This necessary and familiar Christian exercise – neglected by many, maligned by some, abused by others – is nothing short of miraculous. That mere creatures should be able to address their Creator is wonder enough. Add to this the enmity that has arisen on account of sin, further separating these widest of extremes, and the prospect of communication becomes even more amazing. And the notion that with ‘words’ alone, spoken or thought, fallen humans of earth can be heard – and accepted – in the heavenly courts of a holy, eternal God, defies the most sanctified of minds to explain.

Yet prayer is a reality. For God, in the Trinity of His being, has engaged Himself to make it a possibility. Upon Earth, in the person of the Holy Ghost: “*the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*” (Romans 8:26). At the right hand of the Majesty on High, in the person of Jesus Christ, who is: “*able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25). While upon the Throne of His Grace, God the Father declares: “*And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*” (Isaiah 65:24).

Prayer is a glorious provision. Eternal counsels, Divine wisdom, and sovereign power have been employed, in order that saints below may come, weak as they are, into the very presence of Deity above; there to confess their sins, lisp their praises, and falteringly make their wants and burdens known. Oh, if we could better comprehend the mighty works that God hath wrought to open up this way, with what greater zeal we would apply ourselves to the use of it! For as often as we bow our heads in prayer, we are participants in another miracle of grace.