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The Mercy Seat

by T. Austin-Sparks

Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

"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 cherubim of gold; of beaten work shalt thou make them, at the two ends of the mercy-seat. And make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end: of one piece with the mercy-seat shall ye make the cherubim on the two ends thereof. And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high, covering the mercy-seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy-seat shall the faces of the cherubim 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 cherubim 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.

To begin with we are shown by means of this type that through, and in virtue of, the shed and sprinkled blood of the Lord Jesus we have the two great factors in our standing with God.

Remission

The shed blood, which, of course, in the type took place outside by the great altar, provides remission of sins, and before ever we get to the inner place, the sanctuary, the sin question has been dealt with. The sin question is not dealt with in the presence of God, that is, in the inner sanctuary; the sin question is dealt with, as it were, outside. When we do enter in, the question of

the remission of sins does not arise at all; that is settled. The matter is not an open matter at all in the immediate presence of God; that has been settled, concluded. But from the shedding of the blood where there is remission of sins, the blood is brought in by the high priest into the innermost shrine of God's immediate presence and it is sprinkled. The sprinkling, of course, is related to what has taken place outside. It is a testimony to the fact that sins are remitted, forgiven, and atoned for. It is the finished work in relation to sin carried right through into God's presence and placed before Him as a memorial and a testimony that sin has been dealt with. It is not dealt with there; it has been dealt with, but the dealing with it is testified to. The sprinkling says that it is done. It is something in the presence of God which remains the abiding testimony to sin having been dealt with outside.

Communion

But then the sprinkling, on the other hand, is that which makes it possible for us to have fellowship with God. It is in virtue of the sprinkled blood that there is communion. Forgiveness, remission — that is good, but then, even so, we can still be left outside. The letter to the Hebrews sees Christ in the position of the high priest carrying through His own blood, and, in the antitype, passing through the heavens (not through an earthly veil but through the heavens; that veil dividing earth from heaven), with His own blood into the immediate presence, there to appear before God for us. Therefore, Christ being in the very presence of God with His own blood of the testimony, means not just that we are forgiven and left as forgiven ones — with God's full pardon, nevertheless left there. There is the added and the extra value that Christ, in virtue of His blood, having passed through the heavens, brings us into the same place as He occupies with the Father in the heavens. We are now not only forgiven, but in *fellowship* with God in virtue of His sprinkled blood. There must be blood in the presence of God if there is to be any abiding in the presence of God, and so the blood carries us right through with Christ into the fullest fellowship and communion with God.

That is the simple truth with which we are more or less familiar. Through and in virtue of the sprinkled blood it is given to us to have fellowship with God in the utter terms, "I will meet with you there." It is God being free to come to us, to meet with us.

Where God Speaks

That brings us into the place of the immediate voice of God, where God is speaking. And when God speaks, He is speaking His thoughts, His mind; and God's thoughts are very pure thoughts. When I use the word 'pure' I do not just mean morally pure. It is that essence of God-likeness, that essence of divine nature; not only moral purity, but that which is utterly God, and therefore so utterly different from man as man is. "My thoughts are not your thoughts. Your thoughts are not My thoughts". "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts". There is a vast expanse between man's mind and God's mind. I want you to see the vast difference between the mind of God and the mind of man at its best. There is a difference in character, a difference in quality, a difference in nature. The one thing that children of God learn increasingly and right on, no matter how long they may live and go on with God here, is how *differently* God thinks and how *differently* God acts from how we think and act. We get some very exalted ideas and thoughts as to what God would have and how God would act and so on, and yet we learn that our most exalted thoughts which originate in ourselves come far short of His thoughts. We are very sincere, very earnest, very devoted. We mean the very best in what we do and

how we do things in our conceptions of the ways and methods and means of God, and we live to see that they fall far short of God's essential thing: the essence of God's mind.

Here we are in the presence of the most holy place, of God's utter mind, God's utter thought, the very purity which is the essence of God. And the cherubim represent that unmixed thought of God, that divine, that heavenly mind as completely free from the mixture of man's mind and man's thought. If you follow the cherubim through the Scriptures you will find that they are the custodians of what is wholly of God. You see them in the garden in the first instance. What has happened here? Two minds have come into conflict. God's mind has been expressed and laid down quite clearly. God has uttered His thought. Now another mind comes in and raises questions about God's expressed thought: "Has God said...?" That is reasoning, that is a mind set in motion from another source. The result and issue of that is expulsion, and the cherubim with the flame of a sword gets moving in every direction, saying in effect, "In this place of God's abode there is no room for two minds, no mixture of man's thought with God's thought, or man's mind and man's judgement with God's mind and judgement."

There is no room for the two, and there is expulsion, the severing by fire between these two things. The cherubim right through stand for the thing which is wholly heavenly, divine, and utterly of God. They stand to represent that and are the custodians of that; wholly heavenly and wholly spiritual as to divine thoughts, divine counsels and divine judgements.

Turn to the prophecy of Ezekiel and see the day in which Ezekiel lived. See the mind of the religious people of Israel over against which he was set; the conflict of minds religiously in Ezekiel's day, the terrible battle with the religious mind and God set against that religious mind. The whole of Ezekiel's prophecies open with the presentation of the cherubim, and it is as though God in the cherubim sets in motion His heavenly mind, for the cherubim and the wheels are linked with a Man in the throne. Here is God projecting His counsels, His thoughts, His judgements, setting them in motion so that they go right forward. The Spirit of Life is in them, and they turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left. There is no deviation in the counsels of God or in the Divine thought. It is straight, persistent, inviolable, utter; and Israel with their religious mind astray has got to be measured by these thoughts of God.

There is no place in the presence of God for man's mind. God's mind is utter and it is final. What would you think (it is unthinkable really) of Moses going into that most holy place, and between the cherubim God beginning to express His will, His mind, and saying, "Now, so-and-so must be done..." Then Moses saying, "I think, Lord, that it would be best to do it this way"; or, "So-and-so said this about it!" It is unthinkable. There would have been a breaking forth of the Fire. Man's mind has no place here. It is not the advice that someone else has given, and not what someone else has said. God here tolerates *no* mixture of man's mind or judgement; His thought is here guarded, preserved; it is final. We may not bring into the oracle what we think or what others say.

You see the point. The life of the Lord's people was to be governed out from that centre. There was a centre to Israel's life and all the government came from that centre, and that centre was the most holy place where only God speaks and only God's mind rules, not man's mind. From the most holy place the life of the Lord's people has got to be governed, not by human counsels. We do not begin from the circumference in counsels, and judgements, and committees laying plans and projecting schemes, discussing what we are going to do for the Lord. That is beginning from the circumference. The life of God's people has to begin from the centre, where everything is silent before the Lord. We

stop our thinking, and judging, and coming to conclusions, comparing, taking into account the pros and the cons and then arriving at something. We stop being influenced by outside things such as apparent demand, seeming requirement, force of circumstances; all such things have to be silenced.

All that the best of God's people would counsel and advise has to be put back. There is something that comes before that, there is something deeper than that. The most holy man, the most holy woman must not be allowed to protrude their best judgements into the place which God occupies alone with His people. All those things have got to be silenced before we can know the Lord and the Lord's mind. In that place there must be the utter silence of everything that belongs to the life outside religiously, and in every other way. The one and only thing in the most holy place is what God says, and God waits for that silence before He speaks. Only as we are free from man's system of things can we get a pure expression of God's mind. God will lead us in the measure in which we are free from the government and influence of an accepted order. If we are governed by a system which is in the hands of men more or less; that is, if we have our spiritual lives governed by something established of men, in that measure we have no voice of God within. But to have the utter voice of God, every other influence and government has to be put back.

There may be very good men and women who know the Lord, but we can never be sure that the best man, the best woman, the most godly, is not in some little way influenced by some consideration that is human, earthly, and that their judgement is not in some little degree touched and affected by upbringing, training, tradition, human opinion, or the accepted thing. You can never be sure. Therefore, the aim and object of every child of God should be to be silent to every other voice, every other influence, silent unto the Lord. "My soul be thou silent unto God" ("wait thou only upon God", is our version; Psa. 62:5 Lit.). "My soul". What is my soul? My feelings, my reasonings, my desirings, my willing, all the life around me and its influences, "...Be thou silent unto God".

This is a very high and a very utter position. I have to measure up to it as much as you have. I am not presenting something to you; we all have to recognise this. But this is not only a demand, not only a challenge; this is a blessed privilege, a blessed possibility. He, Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens; that passing through the heavens which were closed ("No man cometh unto the Father") until He fulfilled His work on the Cross and God raised Him from the dead. Then the heavens were rent. The rending of the heavens, which is the removal of the barrier, the opening of what was closed, made it possible for man by the Holy Spirit to go through an opened heaven. The Holy Spirit came in virtue of Calvary, by which the heavens were opened. Now we are represented as being in the heavenlies. That is only another way of saying that what is in heaven is in us. There is no geography in this matter. There is no space nor time in spiritual matters. It is all present and immediate. The same is in us as is in heaven. What is it? A most holy place. How? "...My Father will come unto him, and we will make our abode in him". Christ within is the propitiatory, the mercy seat, of the remission of our sins, and also the sanctuary where God speaks. In a word, we have an opened heaven, we have a place in the immediate presence of God; Jesus is in our hearts. This is what Peter meant when he said, "Sanctify in your hearts Christ Jesus as Lord." What does that mean? Well, if Jesus is in your heart, making there the sanctuary, then Jesus must be Lord, and you acknowledge Him as Lord when you put back your own mind, your own judgements, your own feelings, your own desires, and all other considerations of what people say, or want, or judge, or predict, or threaten. When you sanctify Him as Lord in your hearts, then you recognise He is there governing, and any other mind has no place there. This is the place where He is to be sanctified as Lord; the Lordship of Christ is to govern.

This is our privilege. However high and difficult it may sound, this is the privilege of the believer to know the Spirit of the Lord governing the life from the inner sanctuary, the Spirit of the Lord speaking the mind of God in the heart. Now let us be clear, the Holy Spirit does not always come in a way which is like an audible voice although not an audible voice. He does not come with words and say to us when we seek the Lord, 'You shall do this, you shall not do that!' He does not do anything like that. The Holy Spirit in us constitutes a spiritual sensibility, for the language of the Spirit is a divine language, and a language in itself. It is not a language of human words (although the Lord has sometimes come down to spiritual children and communicated Himself almost in human words; at any rate, with such understanding and apprehension), but it is the cultivation of the *spiritual sense* that is needed. Although unable to say the Lord said such words to us definitely, we are able to say, 'I know quite well the Lord wished that, and did not wish that. It is as clear and plain to me as anything what the Lord's mind was or is about that.' That is the believer's privilege, and it is for us to grow from the immature forms of spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity, knowing in the heart what the Lord desires. It is more — if I may put it this way — according to Divine preferences than according to Divine statements.

By living with a person you do not need that person to say, 'I want this, and I want that' in words; you get to know the preferences of that person, and if you love that person and esteem them highly, you become governed by what you know to be their desires and how they are disposed. It is an inner sense of their disposal towards this or against that. That is like the Life in the Spirit. It is the cultivation of a spiritual sense which governs us. To have that we have to stand clear from every other influence. It is difficult very often when those we love and those who love us, and those who have our highest interests at heart bring their counsel to bear upon us and advise us. It is difficult not to be influenced; that is, not to be influenced to the point of making our decision according to what *they* say and how they react. But if we are going to be wholly governed by God we have to suspend that and say, 'That sounds like good, sound judgement', and we take account of the fact that it comes from one who has a love for God, is walking with the Lord and although we will not discount it altogether, we must go to the Lord about it. It is not to be done in a spirit of superiority, but we must maintain that position with the Lord. I do not know what your experience is, but mine is that I have often been checked up afterwards by being influenced in my attitudes and decisions by the good counsel and judgement of other children of God, even servants of the Lord. As I have said, you can never be sure that there is not something there which comes from another source — not necessarily a satanic source directly, but merely from a human source, and is not from God.

If a thing is to be wholly of God, then it means that it must be wholly separated from man; God requires that. Remember that the measure of the abiding value of anything is the measure of its having come from the Lord. Every bit that comes from man, even good men, will perish; sooner or later it will break down. Only that which is from God will stand, and we are not building and working for time. We have got a long, long time afterwards, and only that which comes from God will have a place there. We should extract ourselves from this domination of the time factor of this world, and stand all the time in eternity, and ask, 'What is the value of this for *eternity*? What is the *spiritual* value of this? How much of *God* is there in this?' If we can always be governed by these considerations, then there is going to be a large measure for eternity. We may have to suffer if we adopt this position of a walk with God. Be careful of spiritual pride that causes us to think that no one else knows but ourselves and that everybody else may be wrong and may be influenced by wrong considerations. They may be right, this may be the voice of God; nevertheless we must have it confirmed, we must take it to the Lord and say, "Oh my soul, be thou silent unto God." It may be that I do not like that thing, or it may be that I do like it. That does not matter. What we like or do not like

is not the factor. "Be thou silent unto God" my soul, God alone has got to speak here if the thing is to work out to His own glory.

See Israel and Israel's history all in the balances of this inner voice of God. If Israel had lived according to the most holy place, they would have got into the inheritance very much more quickly. We shall come into the fulness of Christ in the measure in which Christ is sanctified as Lord in our hearts, and that means what we have been saying, that there is one voice, and that is the Lord's voice. We should give thanks that in virtue of the sprinkled blood we have an opened heaven — nothing between — and that to know the Lord for ourselves, growingly, is our privilege as His child, and that knowing is secured unto us in the sprinkled blood of Jesus in the presence of God.