

The Mercy Seat

Andrew Bonar:

"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17: 11).

"There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat" (Exod. 25: 22).

READER! Have you ever felt your need of salvation! Have you ever sought it, as one who must obtain it—**or perish?**

When a sinner is first brought to feel sin to be a burden—when he feels wrath abiding upon his soul, and that his whole past life has been a life without God—his question is, "What must I do to be saved?" "Is it possible that my sin can ever be forgiven by a God who is angry with the wicked every day?" The awakened publican's cry is, "O God, be merciful to me!" And this cry finds God in the very attitude of grace, proclaiming his name. "The Lord, the Lord God merciful," and pointing to the Saviour on the throne of grace, where we may obtain mercy.

In Old Testament times, the Lord set forth our condition on the one hand, and His respect toward us in the other, in one part of the furniture of the Tabernacle. He did this in the mercy-seat. This name is given to that part of the ark, in the holy of holies, whereon the blood used to be sprinkled on the day of atonement. The mercy-seat was the lid of the ark, as broad and long as the ark itself, and made of the same precious material; and the lid, or mercy-seat, being sprinkled with blood seven times, set forth to us the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth from all sin.

Now, it is where the blood is, that mercy for sinners is to be found. For they deserve to die; and their deserved doom must be exhibited, and exacted at the hands of another, if they themselves are to escape. Therefore, the place where mercy can be found, is the place where the blood is. No other place, O sinner, in the wide world for you! But to that place you may come—**ay, must come, if you would escape the wrath of God.**

(1) You must come as a sinner. You must come with nothing but sin. On the day of atonement, the priest in Israel who came forward to the mercy-seat, laid down nothing but sin on that blood-sprinkled lid. He showed a sinner's way of coming to the Lord; and yet he brought nothing what-ever but sin, to be laid down there. So the sinner, in coming to the mercy-seat, brings nothing but sin. He confesses the sin he was born with: "Behold! I was shapen in iniquity"; and lays it down on the sprinkled blood. He confesses his inheritance of corruption from Adam, and lays it down on that mercy-seat. He confesses his own personal sins, in their various forms, aspects, aggravations; the sins of his life and lips, as far as memory can remember, and lays them down upon the sprinkled blood. He calls to mind his sins as a member of society; sins in the relations of life—sins against the Church of God, sins as one of a guilty nation, sins as a man belonging to a world lying in wickedness. And as he feels and deplors all, he lays down his innumerable sins on the mercy-seat. He tries to look in, and bring out the sins of his heart—sins of thought, feeling, affection, desire, hope. His hardness of heart, his blindness, above all, self, in its ten thousand times ten thousand forms, all are laid upon the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat. His unbelief—the grace of God, as well as His law, despised, slighted, undervalued, set aside, times without number—unbelief, even since he knew the Lord, caused by the deceitfulness of sin, by earthly care, by passing pleasure, by Satan's wiles, by a too pliable or too fearful soul—this, too, is brought out, confessed, and laid upon the blood. Yet more: the sin of his holy things is laid there too; for the very act of confession has its sin, there is some blemish in the very act of faith; there is a film in the eye that looks to the atoning Saviour. Who can understand his errors? Oh, who can declare his own heart's utter sinfulness!

At length it is done. But what does it discover? He has laid down his whole soul there—his very self; but in all this there has been nothing but sin for him to leave there! No holiness is laid down on that blood, for it is from all sin that the blood cleanses.

You come, therefore, wholly as a sinner. Nothing can be more deeply solemnising than this. To have such a burden to lay down there—to have nothing else than a burden of this kind, and to lay all this on the Lord Jesus Christ! How humbling, how fitted to lay the sinner in the dust, is the view this gives of his utter guilt and vileness! And yet nothing is more inviting, for it is with sin he comes, and as a sinner; and the Lord Jesus meets the sin and the sinner. Is there, then, any room for delay? any ground for excuse for hesitating to come at once?

Reader! Have you ever laid to heart that this is THE TRUTH, as to the state in which a sinner comes to the mercy-seat for pardon? Is it true that the greatness of your sins need be no hindrance to your acceptance, if only you are now willing, with all your heart, to turn from sin to God? Yes; it is true. It was for sinners, the

mercy-seat was made. It was for sinners the blood was shed. "This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26. 28). "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick . . . I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9. 12, 13).

When, at any time, you have heard Christ in all His fulness pressed upon your acceptance—when you have been invited, without delay, to draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith—is it not true that secretly you may have been raising some such difficulty as this. "Oh, but I am such a sinner—I cannot expect to be received just as I am. I must wait till I have mended my life, and then I will come. I must wait till I have prayed longer, and then I will come. I must wait till I have had deeper convictions of sin, and then I may hope that the Lord will receive me if I come"

Is this your view of the way of salvation? If it be, you are surely all in the wrong. Is it not just as if you were to say, "I cannot go to God just now, for I am a poor, vile, guilty sinner, with no good thing about me at all—a poor beggar, who has nothing to give for salvation. But I shall wait till I have something to recommend me, and then I shall go." Dear reader, would this be a free salvation? You want to pay for salvation; but God offers you salvation without money and without price. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55. 1). "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22. 17).

But, moreover, supposing it had been required that you should bring some good thing with you when you came to the mercy-seat, how vain would have been your hopes? He, who for a moment, cherishes such a thought has evidently never been brought to feel the total and utter depravity of his nature—that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing (Rom. 7. 18). When a sinner is once truly awakened by the Spirit of God to see the awful ruin of his condition, he then feels that, so far from its being a comfort to him, the very thing that is the likeliest to drive him to despair would be to tell him that he must wait till he find some good thing in him to recommend him before he could hope for pardon from an angry God.

The Lord shows us a more excellent way. Glorious truth! spoken of Jesus by those who were stumbled by its very glory— "This man receiveth sinners" (Luke 15. 2). In the Gospel-call, so far as any ground of acceptance is concerned, the Lord has no respect to the sinner's state at all, as to whether it be better? or whether it be worse. The only question is, Art thou willing? The invitation is, "Whosoever will."

(2) The sinner who comes in faith to the mercy-seat is immediately received. The priest who thus confessed and spread out his sin, found God at that spot where the seven-times sprinkled blood lay, waiting to be gracious. There never was seen the flash of angry lightning over the mercy-seat. There never was heard one faint murmur of Sinai-thunder there. There was, on the contrary, the bright and glorious cloud that cast its mild rays, sweeter than ever did setting sun, over the sinner who had on that spot spoken out his soul's guilt, and left it on the blood.

God looked on the atoning blood, and pointing to it, seemed to say, "I am well pleased therein; and therefore, spare this sinner." He saw His justice satisfied, because fully met by that setting forth of death for the guilty. Bending over it, it was as if He bent over His beloved Son, in whom He is ever well pleased.

The sinner, too, fixed his eye on the same atonement that lay on that mercy-seat; and after having so confessed his sinfulness, stood gazing on the blood, as if to say, "Lord, there is my death for each sin; there is my satisfaction; there is my propitiation; there is Thy law's demand; I do not seek aught inconsistent with Thy perfect righteousness!" And this is the position of a believing soul. His eye is on Jesus. His ear hears the testimony, that because of the blood, God has given us eternal life (1 John 5. 11). His soul says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to me." He is told, "Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation" (Rom. 3. 25), and he believes it, and holds it up to God. God owns it as enough, and is at peace with him.

Reader! have you ever laid to heart that this is THE TRUTH concerning the blood of Christ—that there is immediate pardon for every sinner believing in it, and resting upon it? The broken law proclaims that the wages of sin is death. The sinner's hope is not a hope procured upon any other terms. If it were so, where. or when for a moment, would the sinner be safe? It would be but a saying, "Peace, peace," while the law said there was no peace. No. Salvation is not an unrighteous compromise between the law and the Gospel. The law's terms to the sinner are, "The wages of sin is death." And the law's terms to the sinner's Surety are, "The wages of sin is death." God does not take the believer's five talents for the hundred which he owed, and call them a hundred, in order that his saving love might reach him. But for the hundred talents which he owed, Christ has paid a hundred—paid the uttermost farthing. The law required perfect obedience, and blood. Christ, as the sinner's Surety, has rendered perfect obedience, and blood.

"Do we, then, make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3. 31). There is nothing in all the universe which so proclaims God's holy wrath against sin, as that blood of Christ, which is the only meeting-place between an unholy sinner and a holy God. The law proclaims that the wages of sin is death; the Gospel proclaims, through that blood not only that wages of sin is, but has been, death. That blood tells every one that believeth, not only that the wages of his sin is death, but that the wages has been paid, and that now the bitterness of that death is past. Reader! see in that blood that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so now grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5. 21).

Here is peace for the guilty, rest for the weary. Behold this blood! Behold, in what it has done in all generations, the power of that blood to bring far off sinners nigh! Behold that mercy-seat, where the precious atonement-blood is sprinkled? There God is waiting to be gracious—waiting to meet you! There, and there only, the Holy One can meet with the guilty, and be reconciled. There is salvation to the uttermost, to all who will draw near. That blood offers immediate forgiveness. It is the plea which God Himself, with whom we have to do, has furnished to the perishing sinner. Will He not accept His own plea?—"the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him who do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Peter. 1. 21). Will He not recognise the preciousness and power of the blood of His beloved Son, when it is held up in faith by the believing soul? (Read 1 John 1. 7; Col. 1. 12-15; Eph. 2. 12-15; Heb. 12. 24).

(3) Is a sinner's appeal to the blood of Jesus his only ground of acceptance? Yes, the one and only ground. The great thing that has created a difference between the soul now believing, and other souls still in sin, is that the eye of the believing one has been fixed upon the atonement. Others see not the power of the blood, and so have no plea with God.

There is nothing else on which the Holy Ghost fixes a sinner's eye, when it is He who is guiding us to God. The world sends us to qualities in ourselves, and to efforts of our own; and Satan approves of the world's way, as being a part of the way of death. But the Holy Ghost, who testifies of Christ, guides none to peace and salvation, but by fixing their eye on the blood alone. He never turns a sinner's eye in on himself as a means of confidence, He never bids a sinner see his own character, and so draw encouragement. No! the Lord's way ever has been to "glorify Christ," in order to give confidence to a sinner.

The seven-times sprinkled blood on the mercy-seat is enough to give us boldness to draw near—enough to give us full assurance. Believer! why do you live with anything less than full assurance of your acceptance? Why cast suspicion on the fulness of Christ? Why raise doubts concerning the truth of God's testimony? Why act as if you feared that Christ's death and resurrection were not the sinner's all-sufficient warrant? Why tremble, as if the Rock of Ages were giving way?

And yet, how many, even among the people of God, live as if they believed that a sinner might find hope in resting his soul upon the blood of Christ, but that assurance of salvation were not to be looked for till after many days. Does it not seem as if it were not till something they fancy they can do, or be, or suffer, or attain to, is reached, that they think they can presume to look for a joyful assurance of salvation? Are not souls often met with, inquiring the way of salvation, and perhaps, evidencing their sincerity with many tears, who say that as yet they have no comfort, but that they are trying all they can, and they hope soon to attain to it. May there not in all this be a looking, perhaps an unconscious looking, towards something else, for present acceptance and a present joyful assurance of salvation, besides the finished work of Christ? Is it not to be feared that a dimness of perception, in this respect, is the cause of much of the darkness and bondage in which many, even of the true children of God, are held so long? Is there not in this a practical denial that Christ's work finished for sinners, and that finished work alone, is ground sufficient to warrant a believing sinner's present hope and full assurance of salvation? Is there not in this a confounding of the Spirit's work in the sinner with Christ's work for the sinner, as the ground of his acceptance with God? Does it not tend toward the Popish delusion, that it is for our work accepted for Christ's sake, and not for Christ's sake alone, that we are accepted? Is it not just a going about, in a more subtle form, to establish a righteousness of our own, and a refusing to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God? Is it not just the voice of the same deceiver who said of the terms of the old covenant, "Ye shall not surely die!" now saying of the terms of the new, "Ye shall not surely live?"

Dear reader, we affectionately urge this matter upon you; for we believe it nearly concerns your own salvation—your own peace and holiness. If my warrant to be assured of salvation depended upon the measure of my attainments, how could I ever be assured of salvation? How could I ever be assured that I had attained such a measure as would secure my acceptance, and my deliverance from the hand of my enemies,

that I might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of my life? How could the jailer have been safe in rejoicing in Christ, the same hour of the night? How could the eunuch have been warranted in going on his way rejoicing?

But, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord." Blessed be God, it is not a peradventure, left in uncertainty until after death or judgment, on which I am pleaded with to rest my eternal all. It is a work devised for sinners, undertaken for sinners, wrought out for sinners, finished for sinners, and accepted by God for sinners, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. And we have not to go to the uttermost parts of the earth to seek it. O reader! that finished work, that immediate acceptance and salvation, is nigh thee—*in thy hand—*in thy mouth—*in thy heart!* "Hearken unto Me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteous-ness; behold! I bring near My righteousness!" (Isaiah 46. 12, 13). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16. 31).

But is there, then, no hope that we are in Christ unless we possess this full assurance? We do not say so, though we believe that this question has often been used as a refuge from the guilt of not resting with full confidence on the blood of Christ. By reason of the weakness of their faith, and the strength of corruption within, the holiest of men are often found walking in darkness; but what we plead for is this, that if a child of God be not kept in peace as regards his acceptance, it is not for the want of something in Christ, but because of his own want of faith, to take freely what has been so freely given; and that all such doubts and fears regarding the fulness of Christ—whatever be the humbled and exercised look they may assume—while they are the believer's misery, are no less truly the believer's sin.

And this is the true way of holiness. The same apostle who proclaims salvation "to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly," beseeches us, by those very mercies of God, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. The same sprinkled blood which speaks peace to the sinner, proclaims to that sinner continually, "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6. 20).

How precious, then, this way of acceptance! We need no more than this, for immediate and present pardon. The crucified and risen Jesus, and nothing else, brings us nigh to God. The crucified and risen Jesus, apart from all besides, reconciles us to God. The crucified and risen Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. He has borne an awful testimony that the wages of sin is death, and has thus opened the way of salvation for the very chief of sinners, the very basest and vilest of men.

Reader! have you ever felt this blood of Christ to be precious blood? Have you been convinced of sin, and convinced of righteousness? Have you ever felt God's holy justice in requiring such a sacrifice, and His holy love in providing it, not sparing His only begotten Son? Have you ever felt the necessity for that blood being shed, and sprinkled upon your soul before you could be pardoned? It is the blood, and the blood alone, which maketh atonement for the soul. It was to this blood of Christ, seen by faith through the types of the ceremonial law, that David was looking in the Fifty-first Psalm, when, in bitterness for his guilt, he cried, Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa. 51. 7). Has the insupportable burden of sin ever thus fixed your eye upon that blood whence alone pardon and relief can come?

Or are you yet easy-minded about the state of your soul? Does your conscience tell you that it would make no material difference to you, if you were to be told that now there was to be no longer any access to the mercy-seat for you? Dear reader, think what you are doing. Is sin a fancy? Is the wrath of God a vain imagination? If these were matters of little consequence, if they were as small matters as you now think them, would God have given His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life?

You do not deny that you are a sinner—by nature "dead in trespasses and sins," a child of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2. 1, 3). How, then, do you expect to be saved? Are you not neglecting the great and the only salvation? How shall you escape? (Heb. 2. 3). He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10. 28, 29)?

The blood was always upon the mercy-seat. It was there, night and day, summer and winter, year after year. So Jesus is. He is never unable or unwilling to receive one coming sinner. Do you ask, Who are they who would be welcome? He answers, "Him that cometh" (John 6. 37). Every sinner, of every kind and character. Great and small, young and old, are welcome. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night—and he was welcome. The woman

that feared to be seen touched Him—and was cured. All the publicans and sinners drew near to Him—and He stood in the midst. "Him that cometh," said He, "I will in no wise cast out."

And who must come? All that would not perish for ever. For, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4. 12). No other mercy-seat, no other throne of grace, no other key to open the door, no other way into the Holiest, no other plea that the Advocate will use at the great assize, no other advocate, no other propitiation held forth by God, no other cord of mercy flung out, in view of that wide, endless eternity.

"Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; 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" (Heb. 10. 19-22). Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1. 18).

And, O reader, there is no other time but "Now."