

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
May 28, 2017

Mercy Seat

Hebrews 4:14-16

4:14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

After the Resurrection, Lord Jesus appeared in front of his disciples for 40 days and showed them He was alive, and then ascended to Heaven. We call the day “The Ascension of the Lord” and it was last Thursday. The Ascension Day is a holiday in European countries such as Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, France, Belgium and Monarch, but not in the US. For American churches, we commemorate the Sunday after the Ascension Day as “The Ascension of Christ Sunday”, instead of the Ascension Thursday. This is easy to forget, but there are important meanings to celebrate the day of the Ascension of the Lord. On this year’s Ascension Sunday, let’s learn together what Lord Jesus is doing in Heaven.

1. The Throne of Authority

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is exalted to the right hand of God. “Right hand of God” means no higher place exists beyond it, i.e. this

is the highest place. Jesus Christ sits at the highest place and rules everything.

Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” in Matthew 28:19-20. But how were the disciples able to do this? The disciples were surrounded by those who killed their Master and Lord. It was easily predicted that once they started the outreach activity, these people could oppose and persecute them. Then, why did they dare to talk about Jesus Christ despite of rejection and persecution? That is because Lord Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18) to his disciples before He ordered them to do. In fact, Lord Jesus was going to sit on the right side of God, which is above all the authority, and He rules everything from there.

When we travel, we carry a passport. The American passport states, “The Secretary of State of the United States of America hereby requests all those whom it may concern to permit the citizen/national of the United States named herein to pass without delay or hindrance and, in case of need, to give all lawful aid and protection.” The passport issued in almost all the countries says the same thing. We can travel safely because we are granted that our own government will take care of unforeseen troubles. Likewise, the reason why the disciples were able to go to the end of the world to spread the Gospel was that Jesus Christ Himself guaranteed the Mission. They knew that there was an authority of Jesus Christ, which was beyond everything on this earth, behind them.

Philippians 2:6-11 says, “Though he (Christ) was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is considered to be a hymn of early churches. The early Christians repeatedly sang this song in the worship service, and looked up Christ who was above everything. Supported by the authority of Jesus Christ, they were sent to mission and testimony.

Although the style is different, the essence of our worship service should not be different from that of early churches. Just as early Christians, we are all invited from where we live to this worship service to kneel down to the authority of Jesus Christ. Then, by the authority of Jesus Christ, we will be sent to the place where we live as the witnesses of Christ. They have the authority of Christ on their back, which is above everything. I would like to have our worship service today and every week such that we are assured of the authority of Christ and sent to each place where we can make a testimony.

2. The Throne of Grace

According to Hebrews 1:3, it says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat

down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ...” and Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Additionally, in today’s verses, the right side of God is called “the throne of grace,” and Lord Jesus is seated there as “the merciful High Priest.”

The right hand of God, where Jesus is seated, is the throne where Jesus rules over and judges the world as the King. If He is only the King along with countless of authorities, or the very disciplined administrative judgment, we can fearfully neither draw near to the seat, nor even look up. However, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is there not only as the King and Judge but also the “High Priest.” Moreover, He had become man and been tempted likewise we do yet without sin, and knows every respect of human’s weakness and needs. Jesus represents not for good people before God, but for the fragile people with lack of many good things in the sight of God.

“The throne of grace” specifically meant the cover cap of “the Ark of the Covenant” located in the holy of holies at the temple in the Old Testament. It is called “Mercy Seat,” or “the cover of redemption.” The high priest in the Old Testament annually pours the blood of sacrifice over the seat on purpose of redeeming people from their sins (Leviticus 18). At the time, people didn’t know what the traditional custom actually meant, but Jesus Christ made it clear; it was the symbolic action of the true redemption coming afterward, the true great priest, Jesus Christ, sacrifices Himself for all of the sin of man and will be crucified on the Cross. The blood of Jesus Christ was delivered into the temple in Heaven, rather than the temple on the land that will be vague after its role done. Jesus was raised and took the blood as the high priest into the temple by Himself, in addition to

having a seat right next to God as the King of victory. Consequently, the redemption was completed. Jesus' cross and His blood became the eternity to save people, from 2000 years through present, and forever and ever.

Today's verses invite us to draw near to the "mercy seat" for being redeemed by Jesus Christ. Mercy, grace, and all of help that we need from God is through the redemption of Jesus Christ. The biggest problem of man is sin, and its result death. We cannot come closer to God without forgiven status, even though we have already gotten a slight fortune on the land. Of course, how could we live with God forever if our sins haven't been redeemed? So it's meaningless how long we lived on the land. No problems in our lives could be solved as long as our sins were forgiven and saved, because every trouble, fear and anxiety in our lives occur from the fear of death that still not be vanish by the power of salvation.

It was only one time that Lord Jesus sacrificed Himself for the redemption. Lord doesn't continue it, but He keep showing His redemption on the mercy seat before God and to us. His prayer to God would be like, "God, forgive them because I offered myself as the sacrifice for their redemption according to Your will." To us He would say like, "Child, your sins were no more. Go in peace! I completed the redemption for you." When we draw near to the mercy seat, we see the power of redemption, the power of what Jesus Christ had done, always lives and still works for saving us.

3. The Throne of Prayer

Then, what is Jesus Christ doing at the throne of grace as the High

Priest. The first job of a priest is prayer, especially, intercessory prayer. So, Lord Jesus is saying intercessory prayers there. Romans 8:34 says, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Imagine that Jesus Christ, who clothes with glory and wears all the crowns, steps down from the throne and kneels down for prayer. The prayer is an intercession for sinners who sin against the Lord of glory. We should pray to Lord Jesus, but actually He is praying for us. How awful and how graceful it is!

Once the Lord said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers," (Luke 23:31-32) and prayed for him who had denied his Lord. By the prayer of the Lord, Peter could recover from his denial. The Lord prayed for those who crucified Him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) When Peter preached on the Pentecost day, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified," the people were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" The conversion of the people was led by the Holy Spirit, but we can see Jesus' prayer on the cross behind the conversion.

When we seek close relationship with God more, we'll find our shortcomings more. We try to pray more seriously, we will feel our imperfectness in prayer more. Most sincere Christians have been disappointed by finding their own powerless. But, let look at the

throne of grace in such case. We'll find there the One who prays for us. Lord Jesus intercedes our imperfect prayers, makes our incomplete faith complete, and brings them to the Father. Therefore we can look at heaven and ask forgiveness and help boldly in spite of our shortcomings or imperfectnesses. Our Lord is merciful. He sympathizes with our weaknesses. The Lord forgives and revives those who come to Him. We can come to Him to ask help in any situations. As the verse 16 says, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need," let us come close to the throne of grace, boldly and without any hesitations.

(Prayer)

Father, we thank You that you opened our eyes to heaven and led our mind to Lord Jesus in heaven. The way to the throne of grace is always open for us. Give us true repentance and bold faith, and lead us the mercy seat. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our merciful High Priest.