

RUNNIN' TO THE MERCY SEAT

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Hebrews 4:16

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, lead us into Your Word, illumine Your Word with Your Holy Spirit, touch our hearts and our wills to be moldable in Your hands so that Your will would be done in our lives today, as we listen to You, Lord Jesus. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

Hebrews 4:16

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

As the NLT says: *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

What a wonderful promise that mercy and grace are available freely to you and me, and that God invites us to come boldly, come confidently to His throne of grace.

We talked about grace a few weeks back, and we saw that grace is an expression of God's power flowing into and through our weaknesses. Then we looked at Paul as an example and saw how he had battled that thorn in the flesh that God had allowed into his life, and how he allowed that to be a portal for God's power to flow in. We also saw that he was able to accomplish so much for the Lord, even in that state, and that it must stir us.

We are challenged to say: Lord, help us too, to take those areas of weakness and allow Your power to come in and make them strength, and to do all the things that You still want to do in and through us in spite of those weaknesses. We saw that it didn't, in any way, crush his spirit; it didn't hijack his agenda; it didn't silence his voice; it didn't foil his purpose; it didn't steal his joy and it didn't stop his prayer life.

I wonder, even as we too went to the Lord and said: Lord, don't let it stop any of those good things that You want to let come into our lives, how are we doing? How have we continued to allow God's strength and power to flow into our areas of weakness? Is grace flowing in, beloved? Are we allowing God's grace to come in and make changes in our lives, to help us to go through difficult time that we may be facing?

Today I want us to meditate on this verse in Hebrews: "Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." I am deliberately moving from translation to translation so that we get a wonderful sense of what is captured in this beautiful verse. At the throne of our gracious God, we will receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it most.

What an astonishing statement, because when you think about it – Come boldly to God’s throne. that was never something that Old Testament people could even imagine. You remember that the high priest went into the holy of holies once a year to make a sacrifice, an atonement. They tied his leg with a rope so that in case he died in that holy place, they could pull him out. There was so much of fear and trepidation in going into that place. You remember Moses, when he told the children of Israel that God was going to come to the holy mountain and speak, the people were fearful. They were told not to even touch that mountain for fear that they would die. Then Uzzah, carrying the ark of the covenant as it was coming in, touched it to steady it, and died immediately.

There was no boldness of confidence in coming into the presence of a holy God at that time. There was so much fear and awe that was associated with God. And yet, in the New Testament, post the Cross, post the salvation that was obtained for you and me on the cross at Calvary, the writer says, “Come boldly before the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace for such a time as this.” For a time when you will need it. Come boldly and receive mercy and grace. I’m not going to go into grace. We will work a little because I’ve seen them both almost going together.

Mercy and grace are almost two sides of the same coin – the coin of love, that is God Himself. But for now, what is mercy? Dr. Harold Willmington, in Willmington’s guide to the Bible says, “*Mercy* is the act of withholding deserved punishment, while *grace* is the act of endowing unmerited favor.” As somebody else put it, “Mercy is not giving you what you deserve and grace is giving you what you don’t deserve.”

Sometimes, we can get into a place where we think that we don’t deserve mercy and grace – that we should get what we deserve and we don’t deserve what we are getting. We can get caught up in that, especially if you know Jesus as your Savior. Then you get into places where you know you ought not to be. Then we think about the Cross and think about what Jesus went through for us and say, “My goodness! How can I be in this place? And yet, God gives me mercy and sends His grace.” But, as we listen to this, we need to remember that even as we look at mercy – on this side of mercy is sin, but on the other side of mercy is forgiveness. And mercy bridges that gap beautifully. Take grace – on this side of grace is weakness; on the other side of grace is God’s power and His strength.

So beloved, for you and me, we cannot ever get to a place where we say, “I can’t accept God’s mercy and grace because mercy moves us from a place of sin or unconfessed sin to a place of forgiveness and restoration. I wonder whether you could be in that place today. I was thinking especially of this lockdown period where we’ve been confined to home, confined to spaces which are not what we are being used to, and we are finding that we are suddenly not in control, that we are beginning to lose it, that things that we seemed to have had a handle on before when everything was going smoothly, suddenly they are not in our control any more.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Take anger, for example. Maybe you’ve handled it well before; God’s grace was there. God was leading you and you could handle this anger well in the compartmentalized way in which your life was – office, home, colleagues, whatever – and now suddenly all of it has come together in one place. And you find that

there is almost a ruffling of the waters of your life and anger is beginning to spout out without any control. It's coming to the fore and you are losing it more often than you are holding it together.

Or let's take getting into stuff that you ought not to. Maybe lust. Maybe till now you were able to hold that in, and you've given that area to God and it was going along well. suddenly you find that with all the tensions that are around, you find yourself looking for some other thing that will help you through this time. It seems like you are going back to old times where you are looking at things that you don't need to look at. You are thinking about things you don't need to think about. You are doing things that you ought not to be doing. Maybe, you're giving in to these desires now.

Or maybe it's about compromise – that those principles that you held so firmly to, and that brought you through so many business negotiations. Suddenly, you're thinking you've got to cut a corner here and there because things are different now. Or even maybe, it's just sloth or laziness, so much of the time you're just hanging around the house and not doing anything productive. Maybe this used to be something that you were used to before. Then God had come in and given you purpose and a focus in life. but now, that seems to have taken a back seat.

As I was thinking about these areas that quite possibly, we could be dealing with during this time of confinement, I thought to myself that it's also a place where we begin to resist God. We begin to look at what we are doing and we don't like ourselves. In fact, we loath ourselves because we are thinking – I'm a child of God and look what I'm getting into. I was doing much better. I was walking as a disciple of Jesus. I'd given up all of these things and now suddenly, they have latched on again.

Instead of going back to God and saying, "Lord, in this area of weakness, I need Your grace. I have fallen. Would You be merciful to me?" Maybe you are withdrawing from Him because Satan is the accuser, and he comes at a time like this and says, "My goodness! You are a child of God? Look at what you're getting into. You thought this was all over? No! This is who you are." And you've bought into those lies, and you've withdrawn. You found a little hole and you sit in it, and you do what needs to be done for the outside world, but deep inside you're just not loving yourself.

Beloved, if you're in that place, I want to remind you of this verse that we just read. The Bible says to you: "Come boldly. Come with confidence to the place where God dispenses mercy. Come to the mercy seat for God will be merciful to you." Why can God be merciful? Because Jesus has already paid the penalty for your sin.

The hymn writer says,

Mercy there was great and grace was free,
Pardon there was multiplied to me.
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary.

The path to the throne room of grace starts with the cross at Calvary. We remind ourselves once more that Jesus died for you and He has paid the penalty for your sin and for the things that you are doing now. And all that you need to get restoration back is to confess them and ask for His forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Does that mean that we continue to sin? No! Paul answered that so firmly in Romans 6 where he said, *“So should we continue to sin that grace may abound? May it never be.”* God forbid, may it never be.

But to you, wherever you are today, you are still His child, but the fellowship has stopped. You are not having any quiet times these days. Your prayer times have stopped. You have stopped reading the bible. You are not able to worship and that’s not a good place, isn’t it? For a child of God to be in that place is not a place of joy. And maybe, today’s the day for you to say, *“I really need Your mercy Lord.”*

Come boldly. How? Why? Look at this passage, in verse 16, *“Therefore, let us draw near with confidence.”*

I had an Old Testament professor in college, Dr. John Oswalt, who used to say, *“Whenever you see the word ‘therefore’ in scripture, always look to see what it is there for.”* So, if you look at the word ‘therefore’ here, then you need to move back because ‘therefore’ is a hinge between cause and effect. We look at the word ‘therefore’ and see that this is the effect – Come boldly. But why can we come boldly? We look before the word ‘therefore’ and it tells you why. In verse 14, *“Therefore, since we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

Beloved, three beautiful points that must let faith arise in our hearts and confidence come back to us. Why can we come so boldly? Because of our High Priest, Jesus, who has gone before us, paved the way for us, paid the penalty for us. So on the other side, you can approach the throne boldly because He has paid our ransom. Then the author of Hebrews tells us there are three things:

1. Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Think about that for a moment. Your weakness, whatever it is. Anger, or lust, apathy, or laziness, sloth, anything. Jesus actually sympathizes with your weakness. He doesn’t point His finger at you, saying, *“Come on! Get with the program,”* or shout at you or deal with you harshly. He sympathizes with you. He understands that this is a weakness. In other words, He almost comes by, not that He is embracing that weakness that may lead to sin, but He is saying, *“I know what you’re going through.”* Why? Because He went through it Himself.

2. He was tempted in all things just as we are.

He was tempted in all things just as we are. That is scripture – that Jesus was tempted in everything just as we are. Jesus would have been tempted in all things – to get angry, to be lustful, to be lazy, slothful – everything that you and I are tempted with, Jesus was tempted. What is the thing we need to understand when we talk about temptation? Temptation is not sin; yielding to temptation is.

3. Yet He was without sin.

And the writer of Hebrews finishes by saying, “Yet was without sin.”

Beloved, that is why we can come boldly, because Jesus knows exactly what you are dealing with. He knows your frame. He knows how you are built. He knows your history. He knows exactly where your strengths and weaknesses are. He knows which point you can, and cannot, take. In fact, when we think of temptation, the verse that comes to mind is 1 Corinthians 10:13 “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience.” In other words, what you are going through is the same thing that everybody else is going through. Satan would have you think that you are the only one who is dealing with this particular temptation. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience.

But here’s the beautiful part of the verse, “And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand.” In other words, He, in His omniscience, sees a temptation that is coming to me that has my name on it, and He looks at me, He knows me, and He says, “That temptation Cecil can handle,” and He allows it because He knows that I, with His strength, can withstand that temptation. He will not allow that temptation to be more than I can stand.

And lastly, “When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.” There is always a way out of temptation.

So, we are looking at mercy and we’re saying – let’s move to mercy; let’s cross over from mercy to the place of forgiveness so that we can get back into a restored relationship with Him. Look at the verses that talk about mercy.

Isaiah 54:10

“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed,” saith the Lord that hath mercy on you.

Isaiah 55:7

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Proverbs 28:13

He that covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.

Mercy is what God gives, beloved, to you and to me. In this place that you're in, that you've withdrawn to, I wonder whether mercy is knocking on that door, saying, "Will you come out, because I can bring a change into your life." You don't have to live with your sin. You don't have to hide your sin. You don't need to be reminded of your sin by the accuser of God's children.

"Faithful and just, to forgive and to cleanse." There's no need to stay in that lonely place anymore. God's mercy, not giving us what we deserve, is available to you and to me. We don't deserve it, but God is saying, "Come boldly, come confidently and receive mercy from the mercy seat of God."

I love this song that Don Moen wrote many years ago.

In the darkness, where everything is unknown
I faced the power of sin on my own.
I did not know of a place I could go,
Where I could find a way to heal my wounded soul.
He said that I could come into His presence without fear,
Into the holy place where His mercy hovers near.
I'm runnin', I'm runnin', I'm runnin' to the mercy seat.

Beloved, I want you to run as well. We're going to listen to that song in just a moment. Wherever you are, will you get up and say Lord, I'm running. I'm coming to the mercy seat.

In the darkness, where everything is unknown
I faced the power of sin on my own.
I did not know of a place I could go,
Where I could find a way to heal my wounded soul.

Refrain:

He said that I could come into His presence without fear
Into the holy place where His mercy hovers near.
I'm running, I'm running, I'm running to the mercy seat,
Where Jesus is calling, He said His grace would cover me.
His blood will flow freely, it will provide the healing.
I'm running to the mercy seat. (2)

Are you living where hope has not been,
Lost in a curse of a lifetime of sin?
Lovely illusions, they never come true.
I know where there's a place of mercy for you.

Refrain:

He said that you could come into His presence without fear
Into the holy place where His mercy hovers near.
Come running, come running, come running to the mercy seat,
Where Jesus is calling, He said His grace would cover you.
His blood will flow freely, it will provide the healing.
Come running to the mercy seat. (2)

We've come running, Master, running to the mercy seat. For each one who is there Lord, would You dispense mercy. Would You move us from sin to forgiveness to restoration so that we can enjoy beautiful fellowship with you once again. O Lord, we thank You that we don't get what we deserve because You took the penalty of our sins on Yourself and we are so thankful. We bless Your holy name, Lord Jesus. Amen.