

THE ULTIMATE ENCOUNTER - ENCOUNTER SERIES

Good morning Life Fellowship. I hope you all are doing well. Let's turn in our Bibles to Exodus Chapter 25 this morning. And we are almost done with this series called, "Encounter." We have journeyed through the tabernacle beginning back in September and we are now in the Holy of Holies. If you weren't here last week, this sermon is the second part of last week's sermon when Pastor Dan discussed the Ark of the Covenant.

So if you are visiting with us or this is your first Sunday here, we are glad that you are here, but we need to give you a little background and kind of walk us through what has been going on up to this point. We have been studying the tabernacle that we find in the book of Exodus. This is the first building that God told His people to build in order to worship Him. So there are a lot of things that we can learn about God, and there are a lot of things that we can learn about worship when it comes to what God instructed Moses and the children of Israel to do.

Every week we have been journeying through the tabernacle. If you have been with us from the very beginning you know that there was an outer courtyard where the Altar of Sacrifice was. And that was where the animals were sacrificed, which was a sign by the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. Also in the outer courtyard there was the Bronze Laver that was used for the ritual cleansing of the priests.

Inside the actual tent part of the tabernacle it was divided into two sections. There was the Holy Place and then the most holy place which was the Holy of Holies. In the Holy Place there was the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Shewbread and the Altar of Incense. Every single week we have been going through a piece of furniture that was a part of the tabernacle, and now we are behind the veil. The veil separated the Holy Place from the most holy place, the Holy of Holies. And this is where God's glory resided, where His presence was in its fullness.

Last week we looked at the Ark of the Covenant and Pastor Dan did a phenomenal job of describing that. And I have to be honest with you and say that most of us would stop right there. We hear about the Ark of the Covenant and we think we have covered everything. Right? But what we are going to talk about today is maybe something that you haven't ever really dug into deeply, or learned about a lot when you were going to Sunday school.

But what was known as the Ark of the Covenant actually has two parts to it. And so today we are going to look at the Mercy Seat which was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Now most of us when it comes to what we know about the Ark of the Covenant probably comes from seeing 'The Raiders of the Lost Ark.' Am I right? We can just acknowledge that most of us have been more informed by that movie than what we have read in Exodus when it comes to our understanding of the Ark of the Covenant.

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When I was growing up and that movie came out, my parents would never let me see the end. Was anybody else like that? When you were a kid did your parents not let you see the end of some scary or violent movies? But one day I was old enough and they weren't around, and I watched the end of it. I got to see their faces melt when they opened up the Ark of the Covenant. And if I am ruining the movie for you I'm sorry, but you have had 37 years to watch it, okay?

But there is this sense that the Ark of the Covenant is this magical, powerful, scary thing. And in some ways that is right, but that is not the complete picture, because the Mercy Seat that sits on top of the Ark of the Covenant is really the culmination of the encounter. It is really where the ultimate encounter takes place.

We have been talking about this series of 'Encounter,' and every single week we have been discussing about the ways we encounter God. And the Mercy Seat is the apex of this encounter. So we are going to dig down deeply into this, because one of the things I had never done before was really spent time trying to understand the Mercy Seat when I studied the tabernacle. So I hope this will be an enlightening time for you.

Let's look at Exodus Chapter 25 and read verses 17 through 22. Again Pastor Dan talked about what the Ark of the Covenant was and what was held inside the Ark. There was the Ten Commandments, there was a bowl of manna, and there was Aaron's rod that budded. So the Ark of the Covenant held the Law, the Ark of the Testimony that God had given to Moses, and which was a symbol of His holiness and perfection.

So let's begin reading in verse 17 of Chapter 25. ***"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel."***

Now verse 22 is the key because it tells us what the purpose and role of the Mercy Seat was to be. I love it when God's word gives us the point, and right here in verse 22 it gives us the two points for this sermon. He says He is going to meet with you at the Mercy Seat and He is going to speak with you at the Mercy Seat. So that is it, those are

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the two points right there, the ultimate encounter about God meeting with us and speaking with us.



So first of all let's look at meeting at the Mercy Seat. Why is meeting at the Mercy Seat so important? Again, if you were to look at the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark encompasses just the general box that contains the Ten Commandments, but the lid on the top of it, that is what they actually call the Mercy Seat with the two cherubims on top of it.

And the words 'mercy seat' literally means 'place of atonement.' It is the Hebrew word '*kapporeth*.' It is not two words in the Hebrew; it is just one word, and it means 'place of atonement.' It is where they get the root word for atonement, and maybe you have heard '*yom kippur*', which means 'date of atonement.'

So what Moses was saying was that the Mercy Seat was a place of atonement. He knew this would be the place where on the Day of Atonement, which was celebrated just one time a year, the High Priest would bring in two bowls of blood from the goat and the bull, and he would sprinkle it seven times on the Mercy Seat.

This word 'atonement' really means 'to cover,' or 'to cover over.' And this would be a symbolic act with the blood covering the sin of the people. Again, remember the Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments and this was very symbolic. If you look at the two pieces, the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, here is what you have to understand. The reason why the blood was needed, or that mercy was

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needed, is because the Ten Commandments were the Law and it was the standard of perfection of holiness that you and I do not meet. And we all know what the Ten Commandments were - *'Do not have any other gods before me; Do not take the Lord's name in vain; Keep the Sabbath; Honor your father and mother; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not commit adultery; Do not lie and Do not covet.'*

And we realize when we are confronted with all of these commandments that we fail. We have failed spiritually, we have failed physically and we have failed emotionally. We fall short of God's standards. So what do we need? We need a covering. And God was saying that the blood was the thing that covers the sins that we have committed. We all need to make sure that our sins, the offense that we have committed against God, is covered.

Now I don't like health insurance. Can I hear amen from anyone else about that? I do not like health insurance because of my experience with health insurance. I remember years ago when my son hurt himself by falling out of a tree. We weren't sure if his arm was broken or not, and it was a big deal because we had planned to leave the next day for Germany. So I had to make sure that my son's arm was okay before we took this trip.

Now we had health insurance at that time and we had this little card that we had to show to the doctor or to the hospital so they could determine what was covered and what wasn't. I remember we went to Urgent Care on a Sunday afternoon when this happened because it was one of the only places that was open on Sunday. And the doctor looked at my son's arm and he wasn't sure if it was broken or not, so he decided to take him across the hall and get an x-ray of it. He comes back a while later and told us that his arm wasn't broken.

So we go to Germany and then we come back and there is a bill waiting for me. I thought, *'What is this? I have health insurance.'* My co-pay for the Urgent Care visit was about 50 bucks, so I thought fifty dollars would cover the visit. But oh no, you have to understand that my son was walked across the hall for an x-ray which was then considered a hospital visit. And so the radiology department was going to charge me as well as the hospital.

So I am calling them and trying to figure out what was covered with my health insurance and what was not covered. I had a book about an inch thick stating what was covered and what wasn't, but who reads that stuff until you need it? So what did I do? I learned at every hospital visit or doctor visit after that to ask the question: *"How are you going to code that charge? What number are you going to give that?"* Because I wanted to make sure that whatever was being done at the doctor's office was covered under my health insurance.

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Coverage is important, is it not? We want to make sure that what we expect is covered. And listen, there is nothing greater than the covering we need for our sins. And this picture of the Mercy Seat symbolizes the blood covering over our sins when we break God's Law. The High Priest would come in with the blood and sprinkle as a symbol of the blood covering their sins.

And we need to understand that the Mercy Seat and the Ark of the Covenant represents God's holiness and justice, because He must punish evil, He must punish those who break the Law. But also God is showing His graciousness by giving us mercy through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. We have the culmination of God's loving justice through Him.

Listen, when I say loving justice we need to understand that His justice is loving. I hope what happened a couple of weeks ago in Pittsburgh bothered you. Did the tragedy in Pittsburgh cause you to get angry at the fact that someone went into a synagogue and slaughtered people? That should make you angry. Sin should make us angry. Most of us, even though we are sinners, have a sense of justice inside of us. And it is God's love that shows His holiness, that shows His justice. And it is also His love that wants to give us forgiveness.

So in this moment in the Holy of Holies there was a combination of God's undiminished holiness and His relentless mercy. I want you to see that His holiness is not diminished and His mercy is relentless. That is what the Mercy Seat is all about. The Mercy Seat is where God's wrath is satisfied by the blood.

In fact here is something that is really cool. If you go into the New Testament in Romans Chapter 3 and verses 21 through 25 some people say these are one of the most important paragraphs in the entire Bible. It talks about faith and forgiveness and atonement. There you will find the word propitiation which means to satisfy in the Greek. It means to satisfy the righteous requirements of God. Here is what it says:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins.”

When the Greeks translated the Old Testament into Greek, which they called the Septuagint, the word they used to translate Mercy Seat was the Greek word propitiation. It is the place where God's wrath is satisfied. It is the place where our righteous requirements are satisfied.

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Here is what we need to understand. All of the things that we have been talking about, everything from the Altar where the sacrifices took place to the Table of Shewbread, it is all a picture of Christ. And the Mercy Seat is the ultimate picture of Christ because it was His blood that was shed for us on the cross for our sins. So everything in the tabernacle points to Jesus - everything. The Altar of Sacrifice was His sacrifice that was done for us. Jesus is the High Priest. Jesus is the bread. Jesus is the light. Jesus is the veil. Jesus is the one who fulfilled the testimony, the Ten Commandments, perfectly. And He is the one who now sits at the Mercy Seat because it was His blood that covers the Mercy Seat for us. It is Jesus all the way through.

I want you to see this in the New Testament. We have been in Hebrews a lot over the last weeks in our study and we need to look there again today. Turn to Hebrews Chapter 9 and let's look at verses 11 through 14. I really wish I had the time to read Chapters 8, 9 and 10 this morning, because there is so much in these three chapters that talk about how Jesus is the better sacrifice. He is the better High Priest. So all of these pictures that we saw in the Old Testament were to show what was going to be ultimately fulfilled through Jesus. I want you to see this as we read verses 11 through 14.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places. Now I want you to do something here. If you have a pen, underline that phrase, 'once for all.'

“He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

Here is what we have to understand - the actual Holy of Holies is up in Heaven. Everything that we see in the tent was made with earthly hands. Remember Moses got a picture of this on Mt. Sinai when he was given directions by a vision from God. And when Christ died, what He did was enter into the real Holy of Holies with His own blood. His blood was for the payment and remission of our sins, not just the people in this room, but for the sins of the world. That is what Jesus accomplished.

So when we look at the tabernacle and we see the ways in which they did things we realize it was an incomplete encounter. But now through Christ we have the ultimate encounter because here is what we understand. The old way of doing things, the old way of the tabernacle where there was actually the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat made of gold involved many sacrifices and one person. So there were many sacrifices

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but only one person. Only one man, the High Priest from the tribe of Levi, could go into the Holy of Holies, and only one time a year. Now what is the new way? It is one sacrifice and many people.

Let's read another paragraph in Hebrews Chapter 9 because I want you to see that 'once for all' is found in this passage in Hebrews over and over again. Let's start in verse 23: ***"Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."***

"Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him."

This is the new way and this is the way that Christ has for us. It is this new Mercy Seat and it is a Seat where all are welcome. There is a beautiful picture of the Mercy Seat in the New Testament in John Chapter 20 where someone approaches the tomb of Jesus. And just as there were two cherubims facing each other on the Mercy Seat, at the empty tomb there were two angels sitting on either side. And it wasn't the High Priest that approached that empty tomb - it was a woman.

It was a woman that at one point in her life had been possessed by seven demons. We don't know much about Mary Magdalene's former life, but I can guarantee that at the point where she met Jesus her life had not been rainbows and lollipops. She had had a rough life, a hard life and a dark life until she met the Master. And what we see in John Chapter 20 and verse 12 is a woman, not a man, and someone not of the tribe of Levi, someone who had not been purified by the ritual washings. She was someone who had baggage and a history, but she approached the Mercy Seat.

Do you know what that shows us? It shows us that the Mercy Seat is open to all, and it is for all. So what does that mean for you and I? It means that every single one of us needs to come to the Mercy Seat. It also means that not one of us has done anything that disqualifies us from meeting with God. God wants us. He invites us to come. Christ has made the way. Christ has torn the veil and He invites everyone in now to encounter Him, the Son of God.

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We need to understand that to make our way into the Mercy Seat we do not work our way into it. We don't have to go through a cleansing ritual. We don't have to come to church for a few weeks to make sure that we can approach God. No, what He wants you to do is come to Him in the fullness of your brokenness, in your sin, in your darkness. God invites you through and under the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the invitation for you this morning.

If you have never experienced the love and the forgiveness of Christ, I am telling you right now that what needs to be done for you has already been done for you by Christ on the cross. Do not wait. Do not try to work for it. So for some of us when it comes to this Mercy Seat and ultimately encountering Jesus, the question we need to ask ourselves is - have you done that? Have you really encountered the person of Jesus Christ at the Mercy Seat? Not at church, not in a way that feels comfortable to you, but at a place where you know when you are fully confronted with the Law that you have broken it. That is where Christ wants to bring you. He wants you to be fully aware of the Law that you have broken and fully aware of the love He has for you and the blood that has been shed for you. The invitation is open.

We also need to understand that the Mercy Seat is not just for us to initially come to God. The Mercy Seat is also for those of us who have been washed, who have been cleansed, because later on Scripture tells us we can come boldly to the throne of grace. And here is what I know, many times those of us who have been washed and cleansed and are underneath the blood of Christ lose our confidence to approach the Mercy Seat and to keep meeting with God. And that is because we feel like we have to earn it again, or prove ourselves to God.

So one of the things that we have to ask ourselves is - do I have any hesitancy to approach the throne or to approach the Mercy Seat? The blood of Christ has cleansed us, not just for the sins up to the point we accepted Christ, but we also have to understand that it is one sacrifice for all. It covers everything - past, present and future. What that means is that for those of us who have been cleansed we are underneath the blood of Christ and we are to keep going to the Mercy Seat. We keep recognizing who we are.

And this is why we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. We don't just need the gospel for salvation; we need the gospel every single moment of our lives to remind us who we are. I love what it says in I John Chapter 4 and verses 17 and 18: ***“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”*** Therefore we need to understand that we can have confidence in the day of condemnation because we don't have to fear anything because we are fully loved by God.

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So the Mercy Seat is for those who have never been to the Mercy Seat and it is for those who have met God at the Mercy Seat. The Mercy Seat is for people who are still out there. And people who have met with God want other people to meet God. When we discover what is possible, what is real, the forgiveness and the healing, and the propitiation that is at the Mercy Seat what are we waiting for?

There are people that need this kind of love, people that need to hear that there is something transcendent in this world. They need to know that they don't have to earn it and they don't have to work for it. The people that are craving genuine love need to know that it is there and it is accessible for them through the blood of Jesus Christ. So why are we keeping the Mercy Seat to ourselves? We should be taking the Mercy Seat with us wherever we go.

So first we have to meet God at the Mercy Seat, and obviously the Mercy Seat is where we commune with God. So we meet God at the Mercy Seat and then secondly we speak at the Mercy Seat. Now why is this important? I think this is important because God doesn't just want to amend the relationship. God told Moses that He wanted him to meet with Him and He would speak with him at the Mercy Seat. God wanted to speak to Moses the commandments He had for the people.

God was saying that He didn't just want to amend this relationship with us, but He also wanted to commune with us. He wanted to talk with us and give us directions. I think this is very important because all of us need to keep hearing from God. All of us need that communion. Just like Moses needed to receive the commandments from God, we need to receive God's directions as well. God directions are not bad; God's directions are good.

Notice the order in which God says He was going to give Moses His commandments. He gave the commandments from the Mercy Seat. Here is what we need to understand. If we try to obey God without first coming to the Mercy Seat, we will try to obey Him for love and not from love. And the way that we obey God more is not by learning more about what is truth, but the way we really learn how to obey is by understanding how much we are loved. Love is the greatest motivation to obedience.

I love that picture that God gives to us. He said He would give the commandments at the Mercy Seat. So when you and I receive God's instructions each week when we open up His word, you have to understand where you are receiving instruction. He is not telling you to do something so that you are acceptable. You have been made acceptable under the blood of Christ. Now in the freedom you now have we are to go and obey.

And we need to understand that we do need this daily interaction. We need to hear from God every single day. We need to meet with Him every single day at the

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Mercy Seat. Why do we need to meet with God at the Mercy Seat every day? It is so that He can speak to us every single day. God's word is powerful and we need to receive this instruction from Him, because you and I go astray all the time. We bring in our own ideas about what is good, and what is true, and all these things, so we need God's word.

A couple of weekends ago I was in western New York celebrating with my grandparents for their 70 years together, for their 70th wedding anniversary. It was an amazing time. I don't get to go up there to see them very often because I live here, but I knew I needed to be there for this special celebration. And there were 49 out of the 54 family members there, which included their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. So we were glad to be there and celebrating with them.

Friday morning was a very special time because I got to go over to my grandparents' house and we had breakfast together. I had eggs, toast and coffee with them which is what they have had every day of their lives together. They have the same breakfast every day. So I was eating and visiting with them, and I asked them how they had made it this long together. I think it is important to listen to people who have been married that long because they are bound to have some wisdom to give.

And my grandmother said this: *"On our wedding day my father (he was a farmer and an itinerant pastor) told us if we started every single day with God's word that we would do all right. So for 70 years every single morning we read a section of God's word and we pray together."*

So what is so interesting about that story is that for 70 years they have read God's word. At first my grandmother led that daily. She was the spiritual leader in their home for the first 20 years of their marriage. Then when my dad came home from Bible College, he told his mom that she needed to let her husband do it. So my grandmother told my grandfather that he should take the leadership, and he did. And when I think about my grandmother doing something for 20 years, and then being able to hand it over so willingly, I don't believe she would have been willing to do that if she had not already been hearing from God. But my grandfather stepped up and for 50 years he has led the Bible study every single morning.

I think in America today we are looking for the home run hit. We want that secret key to what is going to unlock life for us. But I just love the idea that there are just these simple truths that we need every single day to hear from God in His word. What kept my grandparents together for 70 years was not going to some marriage retreat and everything changing after that. No, it was just every single day opening up God's word together. And that is powerful.

I want us to look at II Timothy Chapter 3 and verses 16 and 17. Many of you know this passage, and it is the reason why we need to hear from God every single day.

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Here is what it says: *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

Listen, you and I need to hear from God every single day. Do you know why? It is because there are days when we need to be comforted by His truth and by His love. There are days that we need to be confronted by His truth and by His love. Where do we get it? We get it ultimately from God’s word. It says, *“for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training.”* God’s word is able to give us that voice that we need to hear every single day.

One of the questions I ask when I disciple people or coach leaders is this - what is the number one voice you hear every single day? And you know what the number one voice is that most people hear? They either hear themselves, or they hear the enemy. I do this exercise with them, and then I ask them to write down all the voices they hear. Maybe it will be their own voice, or their spouses, or their co-workers, or social media, or the news media. They hear all these things and for most of us the voice of God is way down on the list of who we hear every single day.

And the primary way in which we hear God’s voice is through His word. If we are not in God’s word, we are going to miss His voice. Now I don’t want to get into a theological treatise on how God speaks to us. But we have to understand that the primary way God speaks to us is through His word.

I want to share with you a true story that my pastor friend told me. There was a family in his church that came to him and asked him to pray for them. They told him that their mother was 84 years old and she had started dating this gentleman that was 20 years younger than her. They didn’t feel like it was a good situation, so they asked the pastor to pray about it. They come back to the pastor a couple of weeks later and told him that their mom had stopped seeing the gentlemen.

The pastor asked what had happened and they told him they had talked to her and pointed her to God’s word to see if this was a good thing or not. And one morning she was eating cantaloupe for breakfast in her little kitchen, and she starting thinking *‘cantaloupe, cantaloupe - can’t elope.’* And she decided that God had told her not to marry that man and she broke off the engagement. She really thought that she had heard God’s speak through a cantaloupe.

Listen, can God speak through a cantaloupe? I doubt it. When we hear that God spoke to someone through fruit we start wondering if Fruit Loops would work as well. Many people want this experience, this thing that is outside the box. They want to hear a voice and attribute it to God. But this is what we have - we have the word of God. And

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if we want to hear God's voice beyond this we are probably going to be out of luck. I don't think God is interested in us hearing from Him other than from His word.

But we need to hear from God every single day. And we need to understand that He speaks to us through His word. When we open up His word here is what I want you to think about - do you read God's word from the position of God speaking to you from the Mercy Seat? I have three quick questions and then we are done.

The first question is this - have you truly encountered God at the Mercy Seat? Some of you in this room may have never had that encounter with God where you knew your sins were forgiven, where you knew you were accepted by God. And this morning is a time where you can meet with Him. There is nothing special about this church service, there is nothing special about this altar, but there is something special about the blood of Jesus, and we invite you to respond to Him this morning.

The second question is this - is there anything that is making you hesitant to meeting with God? Is it sin, or maybe misunderstanding the gospel, because it is the gospel that gives us the confidence we need to approach God.

And then lastly - what do you need to do to make sure that God's voice is the number one voice you hear? What are the changes you need to make to your daily schedule to make sure it is God's voice that you primarily hear beyond any other voice? Listen, the Mercy Seat changes us. It transforms us because God meets us at the Mercy Seat to give us His mercy, to show us His love, and to tell us that we are accepted. Let's pray.

Father God we thank you for your grace, your goodness. We thank you for your power and your love and for your mercy that is present in this moment. God, I pray that we would meet you here. Father, I ask that you would open up our eyes and our hearts to understand and comprehend the depth, the width, the breadth and the height of your love. God, I just pray as we respond now this morning in worship that you would captivate our hearts by your goodness. I pray these things in your name. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.