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EASTER MESSAGE

By Pastor Scott Lowther

We are going to start with a familiar Easter passage in *John 20:1-12*:
“*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved..*” Let’s stop there for a moment. Did you ever think this through? This is the Apostle John writing the Gospel of John. Right? And so he calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. So just keep that in the back of your mind as we read the story. “*and Mary said “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him”.* So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first”. So here we have John saying “By the way I’m the one that Jesus loved and I beat Peter in the footrace to the tomb”. So he’s throwing a little bit of insight for you if you care about the way he views himself. Keep that in mind. I am often asked if John is boastful in saying that he is the one that Jesus loved. Well, I’ll read you something from:

Numbers 12:3: “*Now Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*”. Who wrote the Book of Numbers? Moses. Now you’re seeing it. Aren’t you? So God inspires you to write one of his books and you write down “there was nobody as humble as me. In all the world there was nobody as humble as me”. And you think to yourself “isn’t that violating the definition of humility by writing that about yourself? And isn’t John saying “I am the disciple whom Jesus loved” also violating humility?” And the answer is absolutely not. We know from scripture that God isn’t a respecter of persons at all. But here’s what we do know, John put himself in a place to experience more of the Lord’s love than most people did.

And so I took this upon myself to call this church “the church that Jesus loves” and I’m sticking with it so you guys will be the flock that Jesus loves. That’s not boastful “let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”. Right? So let’s continue our story:

Verse 5: "He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in". So here's John saying he beat Peter to the tomb but he was too chicken to go in. "Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes". So they saw the tomb, saw it was empty. They believed but they didn't know what to make of it. They didn't understand that Jesus was to rise from the dead. Even though that is what He said. And they just went home. So they were on their bi-yearly church visit so to speak. But Mary, here's the one that was there first and is still there and was rewarded for her perseverance. Verse 11: "But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head the other at the foot".

So this is where we are going to break from the traditional Easter message. If you read the bible at all, one of the things I would really strongly encourage is every word has great meaning. Nothing is there by mistake. God wasn't trying to write a bestseller with only 4 verses and he didn't have anything else so he just put a bunch of names in there for filler. It's not the way it is.

And so when scripture says this "Mary looked in and saw two angels" and specifically the bible says "one at the head; the other at the foot". I asked myself where have I seen that picture before. Where have I seen a slab with an angel at each end, one at the head and one at the foot. It's the Ark of the Covenant. So today we are going to look is the mercy seat of Jesus Christ. And how what was once a type in shadow and a piece of furniture in the Old Testament - has become a spiritual reality in the New Testament. And everything in the Old, points to the New. Everything that was written beforehand, scripture said "was written for our learning through the comfort and endurance of scripture we have hope". What we have here is a picture of a piece of furniture that God used throughout Israel's wilderness wanderings and Israel's established nation that was very descriptive and insightful in what God was doing and what He would do in the future.

In we have a description of this Ark in *Exodus 25:17-19*: "You shall make

a mercy seat of pure gold” which was the lid. The Ark was wood with gold over it. The mercy seat was the lid. *“and make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other”*. And so the Ark of the Covenant, if you saw Indiana Jones- because most people have - that’s what they were pursuing. The Ark of the Covenant was significant to Israel. It was God’s throne in the midst of the people. It was their source of comfort, it was their source of hope. It was a piece of furniture that as it was carried most people never saw it. Because when it was moving in the wilderness, it was covered. When they set up the Tabernacle they put into what was called the Holy of Holies, covered by a thick veil that obscured it from view. It was symbolic of where God was. It was symbolic of God being with them. All the mystery around it, all the veils and walls that obscured it from people’s view, the requirements of how you would handle it - made it very clear that that though God was with them, they could not draw too near.

So what was inside the Ark. There were 3 things that were put inside the Ark. Each one of them has tremendous significance. There was the table of the law, the Ten Commandments - God’s Top 10 list if you will. It was the law that God gave Moses at Mount Sinai. There was Aaron’s rod that budded in there and also there was this jar or pot of manna. Each one of these is connected to a rebellion on behalf of the people of God.

Do you remember that the 10 Commandments were given on the top of Mount Sinai when Aaron and all the people were at the bottom of the mountain having a wild and crazy party. Right? And so they made a golden calf. Moses is talking with the Lord on top of Mount Sinai and God said to Moses “you better get down there. You’re people are having a wild and crazy rebellion”. So Moses goes down there. All the people are dancing and partying around the golden calf they had made after the image of the ones they had seen in Egypt. Moses asked “what are you doing”. Aaron goes “well, we threw gold in the fire and this jumped out!” So he refused to take responsibility. This is a rejection of God’s word, which was on the tablet. And it’s in the Ark. This is the 1st item.

The 2nd item was Aaron’s rod that budded which is reminiscent about Korah’s rebellion. Korah was one of the Israelites. What he decided was to rebel against God’s leadership. He said to Moses “we are all God’s people and hasn’t God spoken through all of us. What do we got to listen to you for? And Aaron, can we have a priest from any old tribe?

What's the deal." And so Korah led this rebellion against Moses which caused great calamity on them. And so it was a rebellion on God's ways. There is a way that seems right to a man but ends up in death. But God has a way that you can walk in that will lead to blessing and peace.

The last item was the manna. This is very indicative as they wandered the wilderness they were hungry. And the Lord provided them this manna, which literally means in Hebrew "what is it". So it snowed everyday with this manna. You could collect it on 6 days but you could not collect it on the Sabbath because God wanted them to rest. So what the people gathered on the day before the Sabbath they kept for 2 days, they were allowed to keep it. They could not collect a whole bunch on Monday and think it would last all week because God gave them provision day by day. And that principal is simply this. God provides for his people day by day. Don't worry about tomorrow, each day has enough trouble of it's own. The mercies that greeted you this morning are sufficient for you today and tomorrow morning when you get up, God will give you more. So don't think you'll need to stockpile it for Friday's misery, you will get mercy as you need it as you move through life. God wanted his people to be dependent upon Him. So again that was a violation of God's will.

And so those 3 areas: God's word, God's way, God's will. Sums up in essence what sinning is. Sinning is falling short of God's glory. Failing to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Sin is such a word that it becomes taboo for some people. They say "oh, you are saying I'm a bad person". It's like "No". God says there is nobody righteous, not one. And when you are talking about God's standard, he has standard that isn't on the curve of human being behavior. God's standard is absolute perfection. Jesus said this "be perfect as your Father is perfect". One time He was talking to the disciples and they came to Him and said "who will then be saved" for they were so amazed by His teachings. He said unless your righteousness is more than that of the most religious person you know, you can not enter the kingdom of heaven. So the disciples were freaking out asking "then who then can be saved?". For they looked at what they saw in behavior patterns of other people and said "that person there is pretty good, so if Mother Teresa isn't in - than what hope do I have". Would be the modern analogy. Right? And Jesus' answer was "with men it is impossible but all things are possible with God". And so it meant that in order for a person to be right with God he must look outside himself and outside his own abilities. Because what God required and what God

demanded, a human being was incapable of doing.

And the Ark was containing those things which showed the violation of God's word, His ways and His will. And upon that Ark was a lid. And the lid was what was called the mercy seat. On that mercy seat, which by the way says the cherubim were hammered out. They weren't molded from molten gold then somehow glued on. Think of the capability of the people to take a solid piece of gold, which by the way was very large - it was 3 feet, 9 or 10 inches by 2 feet 4 inches wide and probably at least 2 inches thick. And you got to figure, solid gold, right? And from that you are going to hammer out, with a hammer, 2 cherubims whose wingspans come up and touch. Think of the skill. Think of the weight of this piece of gold. I figure it was about 560 lbs. Now here's where our flesh jumps in. 560 lbs. of gold at \$1500 an ounce - we're talking \$13,440,000.00! That's a lot of bank. Right? That's what we're thinking. That's not the reason why it is listed like that. It was listed like that to show that it was heavy. And the Greek word for glory "kabod" means weight. So the Israelites knew the priests as they carried it - that God was glorious- because of the weight. The obviously application is how much weight does God carry with you.

This Ark was the throne of God. God spoke to them from it. The way it was set up in the temple or tabernacle or as it was moved - it was hidden so often that people understood that there was something that God wanted separation between Himself and us. He wanted to be near but there was something that caused it to be separation from us. And that quite frankly was sin. Sin separates people from God. *Isaiah 59:2: But your iniquities have separated you from your God, your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*"

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord".

Ezekiel 24 "But the soul of sins will die".

And so sin separates us from God. And God established a way "A holy God would use walls and veils to keep sinners out". And you ask "why didn't he just stay away then?" If He is so holy why didn't He just stay away? Because there is something in God's heart that He wants to draw near His people. He wants to be near but He can't help who He is. He

can't help the fact that He is holy and righteous and his holiness and righteousness wells up with great wrath against sin. Because He is perfect. And so if you are going to be perfect and you are going to be loving and you are going to be holy, then your passion would be for things that are righteous and holy and true. And your anger or wrath would flare up against things which aren't. And you say "well that seems so illogical". Really. Well if you love children don't you get angry when you hear of somebody who kills them? Don't you want justice to be served on somebody who would have attacked them? Of course you do. And so God is the same. His justice requires penalty to be paid. But His heart wanted to be near the people. And so He gave this mysterious Ark that symbolized His presence with them.

On top of the Ark was the mercy seat. You've heard of "Yom Kippur" the Day of Atonement. Right? It's the one day of the year that the high priest of Israel would go into the Holy of Holies. There was a veil that was 4 inches thick, it was 60 ft tall, it was 30 ft. wide. It weighed about 4 tons. How would you hang a 4 ton curtain without a crane? Think about it. How would you make a 4 ton curtain? This curtain hung on one day a year, on the Day of Atonement. The high priest would go in and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. So that when God looked down and saw those 3 objects instead of becoming angry with Israel's rebellion and their constant straying from His ways, an atonement would be made. And He would turn away His wrath.

And you would say "didn't He have all those other sacrifices too". Yes, they had a sacrifice for everything. If you did such and such a sacrifice would be required. If you wanted to have fellowship with God, you would have a fellowship offering. You could have a burnt offering, a sin offering, a drink offering, a grain offering. You could have all these different kinds of offerings. But the Day of Atonement was specifically for sins that you committed that you didn't know about. And so the bible says "that whatever is not of faith is sin". So it's not just the breaking of God's Top 10 - its sinning. If the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength - then the sin we would commit often is the sin of failing to love Him. Isn't that true? The sin of failing to consider Him when we make decisions, the sin of failing to say "what is it that would most honor Him".

1 Corinthians 10:31: "What you actually do in word in deed you do it for

the glory of the Lord”.

And so sin is failing to glorify Him. God defines sin as “all have sinned and fall short of glorifying Him”. So it is not just whether you have killed your neighbor or whether you stole his car or his girlfriend or his dog. It matters how is God viewed in what you have done. Has He been honored or has He been slandered. And for that reason scripture says “all of us have fallen short”. So that offering on the Day of Atonement was “God are we still your people in spite of the fact that we fall short? Are we still yours? And would you receive this offering and would you make atonement for the things that we have done that we don’t even know what we have done?”.

The high priest went in with fear and trembling. The mercy seat in Hebrews is called “kapporeth”. It comes from the word “kippur”. Now you see where “Yom Kippur” comes from. It meant the day of covering or the day of atoning or the day of mercy. Mercy - giving us what we don’t deserve while withholding from us what we do - mercy. No man is owed mercy and yet God in His love wanted to offer it. So this was His system.

The blood on the cover turned it from a judgment seat into a mercy seat. *Leviticus 16:14 “He is take some of the bull’s blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the mercy seat; then he shall sprinkle some of it 7 times before the mercy seat.”* And this was the heart of the temple. This was the pinnacle of their worship experience. This was the climax of their “holy week”. Everything rose and fell based upon this day.

I want you to see the history of this because this mercy seat, God the Father says, is now my Son. All the things that it implied in the Old Testament in type and shadow come to reality in the new.

Exodus 25:22 “And the Lord spoke to Moses from above the mercy seat” So if you were God what would you call your throne? Some guy last night yelled “the king of bling”. What would you call it? If you were the creator of the universe, all-wise, all-knowing, all-holy, all-powerful - what would you call it? It’s hard to imagine, isn’t it. But the term that God used for it is “The Seat of Mercy”. Justice and mercy coming together in this one place.

When I first came to know the Lord, I expected all I would ever find from Him would be a judgment seat. I only expected I would receive wrath, anger, frustration from Him - that I had done so many things that He would reject me and turn me aside. I believed in my head that He was righteous and holy but I knew that I wasn't. So I always thought that if I came to Him, I would be put aside. "You're not good enough for me, you're not righteous enough for me, who would want you". And so for many years I bought that lie and I stayed far from Him. Always believing in Him but hiding from Him. Much in the same way that many of the people in Israel must have felt about their sacrifice to the priest and said "I wonder if it worked. I don't feel any different. I'm not sensing God's presence with me. I feel like I just got rid of one of my cows. I'm at a loss. What now. I know I got to keep walking in obedience and I know that I am running out of animals to sacrifice - then what then? What do I do?"

So this mercy seat became something that is very important. The cherubim was over it and provided a covering of the mercy seat. Frequently in scripture you hear the term "under the shadow of its wings". Right? And we think of that as the chicken gathering its hens. But it is more than that. The Israelites understood it as this: God dwelt and spoke above the mercy seat. And on that seat was the cherubim with their wings up touching and beneath the shadow of those wings is where somebody wanted to be. You feel it now, don't you. People who couldn't go there, wanted to be there. They were like talking to the high priest "man, I wish I was you. I would like to go in and be in the presence of God somehow". And the high priest would probably say "more power to you, it's scares me to death every time that I do. Because I don't know if I am coming out. What about my own sin that God sees right to my heart. What about that. Who has made atonement for me?"

So there was this desire to be with Him but the fear of His response to you that kept this group of people very frightened, fearful, anxious. But longing for something. And this is where I think our story today is going to get very interesting.

After the time of the Ark about the 2nd or 3rd Century B.C. the Old Testament is translated into Greek, it's called the Septuagint. The Septuagint was also translated in the New. But it is also what the 1st century Jews were familiar with, the Koine Greek. So they would have this book, the Septuagint, and they would read it. So the mercy seat in there in

Greek is hilasterion All throughout the Old Testament it is used. But in the New Testament it is used twice. Where they are used is super significant. One is in the Book of *Hebrews 9:5*: “above it, the ark, were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail” If there ever was a bible study that you wanted to hear - it’s that one. To be sitting with the writer of the Book of Hebrews and say “hold on buckeroo, I would like to speak in some detail”. Because Jesus said the whole of the book is written of him. And I think there is something wildly crazy left untapped there. And so as I read the Book of Hebrews I wish those guys would have got it. The writer is saying to them “by now you should be teachers but you need elementary teaching all over again. You are not mature enough to understand what I am saying to you, so I am not going to!” What couldn’t you have written to a different group of people who got it so that we would have some really good meat to chew on.

That’s the 1st use. It’s very clear that the writer in the Book of Hebrews is talking about the old covenant system of sacrificing and how Jesus is the fulfillment of all those roles. The 2nd time this word is used is mind boggling. It’s in *Romans 3:25*: “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins there were previously committed”. So what this is saying is “in case you don’t get it, in case you think that John 20 with the 2 angels in the tomb is a stretch, let me put it to you clearly. I put forth my Son as a mercy seat”. So the word means a place to bear wrath. The mercy seat was a place where God would look down and see all the violations of his word and his will and his way and his justice would demand payment. And He provided a system before Christ where they could pour out the blood of a sin offering, or the lamb offering or anyone of the offerings. And on that mercy seat blood would be put and God would avert his wrath. He’d say “I see the blood and I will avert my wrath. You’re OK for another year”.

And that was a tentative system to live under. And God says point blank in the New Testament “I’m moving from a piece of furniture where my glory dwells to moving to My Son. And in Him dwells all the deity. And in Him is all my mercy and in Him is all my compassion. And I will make a way so that you don’t have to be fearful about drawing near for I will take your sins and lawless deeds and I will remember them no more. And I will separate them from you. You need to trust in Him. And He will not only

be your seat of mercy, he'll be something more".

What we have learned from that is the blood of the bulls and goats in Hebrews says it doesn't please God. He wasn't into it - he wasn't sadistic. He was trying to give a picture and that picture was that one day another high priest would come, Jesus Christ, and He would offer His own blood, not that of a bull, in the Holy of Holies of heaven and He wouldn't make a covering for sin. He would make a payment for sin. And that payment would remove it with its penalty, its power and ultimately one day, its presence from you. So that you would be spotless and blameless.

That should make you happy. Scripture says *2 Corinthians 5:19*: "*that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them*". That's where we are going to go. That's the introduction.

Let's look at a couple of other things that would be helpful for us to understand that. We had a Good Friday service. I've got a picture of the veil here. And the veil as I said was enormous - 4 inches thick, 60 ft tall, 30 ft wide, 4 tons. I read some old historic documents that said when they tried to hang it, it took 300 people. And scripture says this "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And a centurion that stood in front of Jesus and heard his cry and saw how he died said "surely this man was the Son of God". And we say "Ok, I understand it". The basic understanding of this is in that Holy of Holies was the Ark and the mercy seat. Nobody could see it, nobody could go in there. And God tore the veil from top to bottom indicating that it was now free access to come in. Right? And that's a good way of looking at it. And it's true. But there is another way of looking at it.

There is a Jewish custom when you hear of someone's passing, you rend your garment. You tear your clothes. If you are a father who just heard his son has died, you tear your garment above your heart and you expose your heart. What you are saying is "I am lamenting and mourning over the death of my beloved". On Good Friday, I think of more than any other day, this thought really hit home with me. We have a tendency to say something good with Jesus because he is a cool guy. He's mellow, he rails on the religious guys but he's the common man's hero. Everybody is good with Jesus. Nobody is going to say the stuff that Jesus did was bad. Everyone is going to say "I'm good with him - but his dad. His dad is a

whole different ballgame! He's got the earth opening up swallowing people, fire coming out. Rampaging, hard, scary, terrifying kind of God". Right? You've got Aaron's sons waving incense one day, and fire comes out and consumes them. It just seems way off the cuff! He's like if you're in high school and you are going to go on a date with a girl that you know and you meet her dad when you pick her up. And the dad turns out to be a 25-year in Marine. You know the feeling, don't you. He gives you the one up and down and he makes it clear that if you mess up he'll hunt you down and kill you! And we think of the Father like that. We think of Him as this mean-spirited, hard, super-demanding type A infinite personality that has no room for grace and no room for error.

And so we think somehow there is a distinction between the way Jesus feels about us and the way His Father does. And on Good Friday I saw this heart of God like I've never seen it. Jewish custom says the veil in the temple represented the robe of the father. *Isaiah 6:1: "I see the Lord and the train of his robe filled the temple"*. Their understanding was that the veil was the robe of the father. The Ark was the heart of the worship. And when Jesus died the veil was rend. And for the first time in my life I felt the pain of God over the death of his son. I didn't look at him as a mean-spirited, hard-hearted man. I looked at him as somebody who rips his garment in public, grieving over the death of His Son.

Yes, *Isaiah 53:10* said "*it pleased the Lord to crush Him and cause Him to suffer*" for on the one hand it did. But on the other hand it's the broken heart of a Father who lost His Son.

We have 2 explicit pictures: the Father grieving for the loss of His Son and the other more powerful "I will no longer dwell on this mercy seat, ever again".

After the destruction of the temple in 87 AD, the Ark has been never seen since. It was never found, it never will be. How do we know that? Because it is worthless now for God won't dwell on it again. Because John 20 says "Jesus Christ is God's own mercy seat".

I started realizing that God wants me to walk in forgiveness for my sin, he wanted me to walk in His blessing to feel his pleasure. I think many people, especially at Easter, come in 3 groups of people. They are the CEO's (Christmas, Easter, Only) that come twice a year. They basically

come because somebody invites them and offers them a free meal after service. This is you - away from the Lord. You may think what I saying is true but you say "I'll think about it some other time. Right now all I am worried about is what I am going to eat. What I'm going to drink. What I'm going to wear". The seat you will find if you stay that way is only a judgment seat.

Then there are other people here who know the Lord and walk in the forgiveness He has, but they think that is all that God has for them. And they walk around discouraged with their head down thinking "maybe there is something more, and I feel that even though my sin is forgiven, I still feel far from Him". And being far from God is likeness, not distance. Where can you go from His spirit - no where. Where can you hide from His presence - no where. You say "I feel far from Him". You are far from Him in likeness because you've backslidden or you've wandered from Him. But God wants you to come back to that mercy seat. Be reconciled from your wandering and then go on to the throne of grace and receive His blessing. And that's where God wants you to be.

In the rending of the garment, here's another aspect of Jesus that people don't see. Remember, Jesus had a garment too. Right? Specifically scripture says his garment was one-piece, sewn from top to bottom. Whenever you see in scripture the same phrase, you wonder why the holy spirit uses the same phrase in 2 different passages that don't seem to make any sense. *John 19:23-24* "This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom" There we have the veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom, here we have the same Greek word usage of Jesus' robe, top to bottom. Exact same phrase. "so they (the Roman guards) said "let's not tear it. Let's decide by lot who will get it". So why didn't they tear it? Because scripture forbid it. What did scripture forbid it? *Leviticus 10:6*: "And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not let your hair become unkempt and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the Lord will be angry with the whole community". So Jesus according to Hebrews 9 was our high priest. Jesus' baptism was more than getting wet. He wasn't repenting of sins, he was ceremonially washing himself for His role as high priest. His garment was important. The high priest robe cannot be torn. So even though the centurions were like "hey, let's casts lots for who gets it", they normally would tear stuff up, but for some reason they did not do it. Why? Because God, even though they were unbelieving, still fulfilled the word.

Signifying that Jesus was not only the sacrifice but He was also the priest.

And so we don't need a priest anymore because we have one intercessor between God and man - the man Christ Jesus. And that is another side of Easter we could explore some other time.

As you begin to look at Easter there is so much here. Jesus' propitiation for our sin, the wrath bearer, Jesus as a sacrifice for our sin, the Passover Lamb. And even in the Passover Lamb there's such great symbolism and it was said "the lamb you offer for Passover can't have any blemish". It had to be perfect. So how do we know that Jesus was perfect? Because as he was examined by Pilate, Pilate said "I find no fault in him". So you have this continuing parallel of everything old, everything new, all pointing to the same thing - that Jesus Christ, the whole of the book, is written of Him.

Romans 3 said Jesus Christ is the mercy seat. That God put forth His Son as a mercy seat. So where can a sinner go to find forgiveness? The mercy seat of Jesus Christ.

It's amazing when I first came to the Lord, I only thought of Him as a judgment seat. That's a lie I bought that if you come to the Lord you would only find judgment. What's true if you come to the Lord you would only find forgiveness. You will only find mercy, you will only find hope, you will only find strength, you will only find encouragement. No good thing will he withhold from his children. But if you are not in him, then scripture says "you are in sin". What you get when you are in sin is what sin can do for you. It's wages is death, it's penalty is damnation, it's a lie and it continually corrupts. But if you are in Christ you get what Christ has done for you.

I think it's very, very important that today we have a different perspective. There are churches that rejoice in the fact that we have a mercy seat. And we do. But they walk around as if that is all that God has to offer. The Lord wants us to not only walk in his forgiveness but also to walk in his blessing. He wants us to walk in the fullness of joy. Jesus said he came "so that we would have life and have it more abundantly". This day more than any other, I fear that churches put out there is: "There's horrible sin, there's horrible sin". Well, there is but there is a tremendous remedy. And all who come to Him will be received. None will be cast out. You're

not too good, you're not too bad. As a matter of fact, if you think you are too good, you're sinning right now thinking you're too good because Romans said "there is no one good"! That's how you have to be to think. Not what you think - what God thinks.

As I close I want you to think what seat do you stand before today. Maybe you are an unbeliever and you stand before the judgment seat. That's a terrible place to stand. You don't want to be there because there will be no defense. Maybe you are a Christian on your bi-yearly visit. And you've been out doing your own thing. You say "I received the Lord when I was a little kid and I've been doing my own thing and me and J.C. are good". I'm glad you feel that way, let me ask you this "how are you doing with His dad?". That could be you. That's the mercy seat you need. But maybe you are a Christian and go "I come here all the time and I've been in church my whole life and I've walked with the Lord but I still feel there is something missing". Then exchange the mercy seat for the throne of grace. And see perhaps there is something more than forgiveness that God wants you to have.

I'm going to tell you a story about my life and I hope this is helpful. When I was 13 years old, my mom has been a Christian her whole life. Back when she was just a little kid she had the worse kind of life you can imagine. She's the most godly woman I ever met. Ever. She had 7 children, none of them believed. She had a husband who didn't believe. My dad was a godless man. He's still alive, he's godly now. He treated her bad. He never told his children that he loved them. He was a good provider but he was never home. It seemed like anytime he did talk to us, we bothered him. And so we were afraid of him. And he never showed us any affection or any compassion or anything. She knew the Lord but he wouldn't even drive her to church because he made fun of her for even believing. She had a piano and she read her bible and sang the songs to the Lord. And all of her children grew up mocking her and making fun of her. Saying "oh, come on Mom," and we would send her Ozzie Osborne Cds and things like that saying "this is awesome". She was always gracious, always telling us about the love of the Lord. And how much the Lord had done for her. We were looking at her life going "how much has the Lord done for you?". We looked at her life like there wasn't anything we would want. This is how unregenerate people think.

So one day she convinces me to go on this "retreat". I thought it was

running away from something. I thought “well, as long as it gets me out of the house”. She butters it up - she tried to upsell you on the Christian experience. Some Christians go “If you receive the Lord, your life will be so much better, you’ll never have trouble”. Really, let me change that now. Once you come to know the Lord, you’ll find out the spiritual reality of life. You’re life will get much more difficult but “be of good cheer he has overcome the world”. You’ll just go from death to life. A dead fish floating down sea to one swimming up stream. But there will come distinctive differences so I’m not trying to upsell you!

So I listen to my mom and go on this retreat. I met this lady, I’m like 13 years old, she’s like 30. No, it’s not a Mrs. Robinson thing so don’t go there! I thought she was ancient because she was 30. She was very godly but she scared me. I was one of the youngest guys in the group. I went with my 16 year old brother so I got to tag along. They are all sitting there praying and I’m listening and I’m getting very uncomfortable about the way that they pray. And this lady comes up to me and says “you know what, Scott, I love you”. I totally freaked out. I never really heard that except from my mom but who wants to be a momma’s boy! I’m like “why, what did you say that for?” She said “I really love you and I have been praying for you. And I want you tonight to come up in the midst of our big meeting and I want you to talk a little bit about your life”. I’m not even a Christian. So I ran and hid behind a bunch of trees. And she comes and finds me and so goes “is this how you live your life? Hiding behind trees.” I’m like “not usually but you freaked me out and I want to go home”. She said “you are not going home, you are going to come with me”.

So I went with her and we are sitting around and I’m listening to the group talking about Jesus and I see this big picture of Jesus and I go “I didn’t know that Jesus was a white guy, I thought he was more middle eastern”. I thought that was weird and that the people were weird. So I knew that what they were saying was true and I realized that the tree that I hid behind outside to hide from them was the same tree I was using most of my life to hide from what my mom was telling me.

And here’s what the trees were - some other place, some other time, somebody else. I knew that the things they told me were true. I just didn’t want to do anything with them. And so as the weekend is wrapping up I talked briefly with her (her name was Mary), she followed me

around a lot. And on the day I was leaving she was crying and said “you know what, I love you”. I said “I know, you already told me. Why are you crying then? Are you going to miss me?” She said “No. I’ve been praying for you and the Lord told me you are going to have a rough life. And I want you to write me but I know that you won’t. God made it clear to me that you are going to prodigal out - you are going to wander from Him. And it will only be by his mercy that you don’t die”.

Now I wasn’t very sensitive. (Most 13 year olds aren’t. But be of good cheer if you have children, all 7 of my mother’s children were saved.). I said “no, I’ll write you, wait and see”. She’s still waiting. And from that point on - I went my own way. And I hid behind those trees. I started thinking about what she said was true - that I needed to be saved. That God wouldn’t accept me apart from His Son. That there was a God and He was holy. But I thought that only applied to the people who were 16 and I had plenty of time to figure it out. Plenty of time to reconsider another day. And those 3 trees “some other time, some other place, somebody else” - I hid behind those for a long time.

When I was 16 I ran away from home. I lived in my car sometimes, I lived on the beach sometimes. I did things I was not proud of. All the while I see Mary’s face in the back of my mind saying “I love you but the Lord has made it clear to me that you are going to have a hard life”.

And after you bury a friend or two, after your struggle with a health issue that you brought on to yourself that almost kills you, after you are destitute and have nothing - you figure “why not give it a shot”. The lie of the enemy was “the Father will never receive you, he’ll never love you, nobody would ever love you, look at the mess you made of your life, look at the people who are dead because of you, you have no hope”. And I let that lie foster in me and I hid behind the trees again. Some other day, some other place, somebody else.

Then one day God, who is rich in mercy, called me to himself and he pulled me home. And on that day my life changed in a heartbeat, in an instant. It was death to life. It was something completely different from what I ever had.

And I’m not big on religion at all. In fact I hate it because it is a form of godliness by denying the power of God who is suppose to be in it. But I

will tell you with certainty, the day I met the Lord everything was different. Everything was changed. And the first person I called was my mom. I said "I want you to know, that you were right. I want you know that I am sorry for what I have done. And I sure wish I could find this Mary lady who told me that I would have a hard life because it was the hardness of life that I had that God showed me things about Him I would never have learned any other way". It wasn't an unkindness on His part, it was a great mercy to me.

So my challenge to you is: What trees do you hid behind? I lived my whole life like that. Running away from truth, running away from responsibility, running away from things I knew were right. There's a way that seem right to a man that ends in death. If you are here and don't know the Lord, I'll tell you - I don't hid behind trees anymore. As a matter of fact, the only tree I care about, I cling to. It's this one - the cross. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. And that's the one I cling on. It's the only one I care about. I'll tell you there is such satisfaction for a soul on that tree, than there is hidden behind the ones you make.

So would you consider and let the Lord search out your heart to see where you are at this day. You think "well, some other time". When? "Some other place". Where? "Somebody else". Who? If not now, when? If not here, where? If not you, woe. You do not know what a day may hold. You don't know whether you will have another Easter or Christmas to visit. You don't know. You don't know. Would you consider what I shared with you today?