

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 3: 25a

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue reading Romans Chapter 3, verse 25 first half portion.

Yesterday, we saw the most basic definition of justification by faith: that the righteousness of God is credited to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Grace is the source of justification by faith; the redemption of Christ Jesus is the basis and foundation of it. In order for us to be justified by faith, Jesus Christ paid the price of His life. We are neither required to—nor could we—pay any price. For us, it is entirely a free gift of grace; the only condition is to believe and accept the redemption that Jesus Christ has accomplished. Yet even this believing is actually the faith of Jesus Christ entering into us and beginning a good work.

One characteristic of Paul's epistles is that, when it comes to crucial truths, his wording is extremely precise. Often with just a few simple words, he conveys profoundly rich meaning. We might read through them quickly and think we understand. However, as we grow in life, we begin to realize that every word Paul uses carries deep significance. If we are willing to take the time to dig deeper, we must connect many Old Testament verses in order to truly understand the truths Paul is speaking of.

"Justification by faith" is the most important truth for every New Testament believer. So let us slow down and enter into the depth of Paul's thoughts, so that we may understand the historical origin of justification by faith and recognize that this is God's redemptive plan, ordained before the foundation of the world. Today, we are reading just the first half of verse 25—which is really just four short phrases.

Verse 25a: “Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness.”

It begins by saying, “God set forth Jesus as a propitiation.” I think the first question many believers would ask is: What is “propitiation”? This actually points to a challenge in reading the Chinese Union Version. When encountering a special term for which there is no suitable equivalent in Chinese, the translators of the Chinese Union Version often coined a new term, “propitiation” is such an example. At first glance, it might seem to refer to one of the Old Testament sacrifices.

However, in Leviticus, when God instructed Moses on the offerings that the Israelites should present, there were five basic offerings: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. In addition, there were three supplementary offerings: the wave offering, the heave offering, and the drink offering. The term “挽回祭” does not appear in Leviticus, so we need to return to the Greek. The Greek word translated as “propitiation” appears five times in the New Testament and appears in three different forms. The first form is *hilaskomai*, which is a verb. In English, it means “to reconcile,” “to appease,” or “to propitiate.” In Chinese, this would mean “to calm anger” or “to restore to peace.”

Hebrews 2:17 says, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” The phrase “to make propitiation” is *hilaskomai*. As we mentioned before, “sacrifice” is not the best translation. The Chinese New Translation by the United Bible Societies renders it as “to atone for the people’s sins.” In fact, the real meaning here is that Jesus, as the merciful and faithful High Priest, appeased God’s wrath and reconciled people to God.

The second form is *hilasmos*, a noun meaning “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice” — that is, the offering that appeases wrath and restores peace with God. It often refers to the sacrificial object that accomplishes reconciliation. This word is especially favored by the Apostle John and appears twice in his first epistle: 1 John 2:2 — “And He Himself is the propitiation (*hilasmos*) for our sins, and not for ours only but also

for the whole world.” 1 John 4:10 – “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (hilasmos) for our sins.” In both verses, the Chinese Union Version translates “hilasmos” as “propitiation.” This phrasing emphasizes the reconciliation of man with God—looking from the human perspective. However, reading in context, John is emphasizing Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—rather than focusing on man being reconciled.

The third form is hilastērion (ἱλαστήριον), which literally means “the place of propitiation,” and specifically refers to the mercy seat—the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. This word appears twice in the New Testament: Hebrews 9:5 – “and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat (hilastērion).” The CUV translation of “mercy seat” here is fully accurate. Romans 3:25 – “whom God set forth as a propitiation (hilastērion) by His blood, through faith...” A more accurate translation would be: “God set forth Jesus as a mercy seat.” Paul intentionally chose this word, drawing from his deep grounding in both Hebrew scripture and Greek rhetoric, to lead readers back to the Old Testament concept of the mercy seat.

In Exodus 25, when Moses received the blueprint of the tabernacle on Mount Sinai, the first item God revealed was the Ark of the Covenant—also called the Ark of the Testimony. It was the central and most important object in the tabernacle, meant to be a testimony to God’s presence. The mercy seat was the gold cover placed on top of the ark. It had the same dimensions as the ark, completely covering it. On each end of the mercy seat stood two cherubim made of gold, with wings stretched upward, overshadowing the mercy seat, and faces turned toward it. The cherubim's wings, outstretched, signify guarding God’s holiness, righteousness, and glory. Their faces toward the mercy seat indicate that everything done there must meet God's holy, righteous, and glorious standards.

Underneath the mercy seat, inside the ark, were three items: The tablets of the Ten Commandments – representing God’s righteousness. The golden pot of manna – representing God’s holy provision and life. Aaron’s rod that budded – representing resurrection and God’s glory. Together, these three elements align with the

cherubim's protection of God's: righteousness (Ten Commandments), holiness (manna), glory (resurrected rod).

After understanding the structure of the mercy seat, let us now look at the function of the mercy seat. This is found in Leviticus chapter 16, which speaks of the Day of Atonement, when the high priest must offer a sin offering. From the recorded rituals, we can understand the function of the mercy seat. The high priest could enter the Most Holy Place—before God—only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The high priest had to first offer a sin offering for his own sins, and afterward offer another sin offering for the sins of the people. Through the high priest's offering, the sins of the people were removed before God, but only for one year. Therefore, the high priest had to offer this sin offering on the Day of Atonement every year.

Let's look at the verses in the ritual related to the mercy seat. After the high priest slaughtered the sacrifice, in Leviticus 16:14–15, it says, "He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the east side of the mercy seat; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat." After slaughtering the sacrifice, the high priest had to bring the blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle it seven times on the mercy seat.

The sacrificial animal was a type of Christ. The sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat signifies that the sin which violated God's righteousness, holiness, and glory had been paid for by the substitute. The animal was killed, and its blood sprinkled seven times on the mercy seat to show the cherubim—who uphold God's righteousness, holiness, and glory—that the debt of sin had been paid. Of course, the blood of the sacrificial animal could not truly remove sin; it only temporarily covered sin and appeased God's wrath for one year. So the high priest had to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat every year on the Day of Atonement, until the true Lamb who could atone for sin—Jesus Christ—offered Himself on the altar. The blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on the mercy seat alone

could once and for all satisfy the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory. The mercy seat is the meeting point of God's love and God's righteousness.

Therefore, the mercy seat forms a realm, and in this realm, God's wrath is appeased, reconciliation with God is made, and man can again be brought into God's presence. That's why Hebrews 4:16 tells us, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." With this background in mind, let us return to Romans 3:25.

God set forth Jesus as a propitiation—perhaps a more direct translation is: God appointed Jesus to be the realm in which His wrath is appeased, and He is reconciled with man; man can come into this realm to encounter God and commune with Him in His presence.

What Paul is emphasizing is that after Jesus Christ completed the great work of redemption, Christ became a realm into which the saints can enter and enjoy God's presence. Because Paul had this kind of vision, he wrote in Colossians 1:13 that our salvation is God transferring us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son; and this kingdom of the beloved Son is the realm that Christ has brought into being.

When Jesus Himself was fulfilling His ministry on earth, He repeatedly told His disciples to abide in Him. For example, John 15:4 says, "Abide in Me, and I in you." John 15:7 says, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." When Jesus prayed for His disciples, in John 17:24, He said, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me." God appointed Jesus to be a realm in which His wrath was appeased, and reconciliation with man was made; man was thereby redeemed and could be brought before God. The Chinese Union Version translates this as "atoning sacrifice," which only expresses the final result. But the establishment of this realm was based on the blood of Jesus and received through man's faith to manifest God's righteousness.

Brother Wang Guoxian once gave a very good interpretation, calling this God's "three-step process" of redeeming man. The first step is through the blood of Jesus,

because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; and the wages of sin is death—only the shedding of blood can resolve the problem that sin brings. God absolutely cannot count the guilty as innocent, and man himself cannot afford to pay the price for sin. The blood Jesus shed on the cross paid the debt of sin on man's behalf. This is the first step. The precious blood Jesus shed became the most essential foundation.

The second step is through man's faith. Jesus has already shed His precious blood, and the work of redemption has already been completed. This is a historical fact. If a person wants to receive the effect of redemption, it must be through faith. Faith is to acknowledge that one is utterly worthless, has nothing, and can do nothing—in other words, man cannot save himself and is in need of salvation. After acknowledging this, he must also accept what Jesus Christ has accomplished. Jesus Christ paid a tremendous price, and for man it is a free gift—but man must be willing to receive it in order to obtain this free gift. Man does not need to pay any price; he only needs to believe. As we said yesterday, even man's faith originates from the faith of Christ. That is to say, man's faith is passive—it is God's word entering in and enlightening man's spirit that causes faith to arise. The only responsibility man needs to bear is to believe in his heart and confess with his mouth, and he will be saved. This is the second step.

The third step is to manifest God's righteousness. When a person, through faith, receives the salvation accomplished by Christ, he receives God's righteousness, and he is declared righteous by God. His identity is changed, his status is changed, and his relationship with God is changed—he is called a child of God. God's righteousness is then manifested in him, making him a new creation, and restoring him to the purpose for which God originally created man.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we can all see that justification is not only for our benefit, but also to manifest the righteousness of God—that is, to take a person who is utterly corrupt, and through a righteous and legal process, make this person one who can manifest God's righteousness. Of course, for the Christian life, this is only the beginning. God has given us a new identity, a new status, and also a new life, giving us the ability to begin a new life.

So what is the first step of this new life? Let us return to Leviticus chapter 16. After the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, what did he do next? Let's read Leviticus 16:18–19: “Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.”

After the high priest reconciled man to God at the mercy seat, he would come out and cleanse the altar. If the saints remember the layout of the tabernacle, the first item encountered upon entering was the bronze altar. That means after a believer is saved by grace, the first thing he must do is offer himself on the altar. Just as Paul said in Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

The first step of serving is to present oneself as a living sacrifice on the altar. This living sacrifice is a burnt offering—it means allowing oneself to be burned into ashes on the altar, transformed into a sweet aroma to satisfy God. This is our most reasonable service. Our service begins with consecration, and we must continue forward to the laver, where we are enlightened and cleansed, allowing our person to be renewed—only then can we enter the Holy Place.

Once inside the Holy Place, we first come to the table of showbread to enjoy God's Word as our life supply. Then we come to the golden lampstand to be shaped by God in His light, allowing us to be formed. From there, we go forward to the golden altar of incense, where we pray and co-work with God, bringing us into the Holy of Holies—to the mercy seat—where we have intimate fellowship with God.

Dear brothers and sisters, justification is the beginning of our Christian life. It begins with the mercy seat, where we are reconciled to God. Then we consecrate ourselves to serve Him, and eventually, we are brought back to the mercy seat to have intimate fellowship with Him. This mercy seat is a realm, established by the blood

of Christ and entered through our faith, in which the righteousness of God is manifested.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank and worship You for the mercy seat. Today we can come boldly before the mercy seat to seek the Father's mercy and grace as our timely help because You have shed Your precious blood for us. Let us, by faith, come before the mercy seat and manifest God's righteousness here. We were once utterly depraved sinners, yet we have now become the righteousness of God—what an immense grace this is! Help us not only to know this grace, but to experience it, enjoy it, and come often before the mercy seat to meet with the Father and have intimate fellowship. Let this become the salvation we live in all our lives. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!