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## **READING ASSIGNMENT FOR STUDENTS TO BE READ BEFORE MEETING FOR LESSON 6**

### **This Weeks Reading**

### **LET'S LEARN ABOUT- A Salvation Army Distinctive: The Mercy Seat. From SA 101 Soldier Training, Strickland & Court**

Every Salvation Army hall in the world has a Mercy Seat.

The Mercy Seat is not merely a place, but an idea, an idea that had birth in the heart of God, as revealed in the Old Testament (Exodus 25:17). The Mercy Seat was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, and a place where God promised to meet with His people. In its essential meaning it is a purely spiritual concept. The Mercy Seat is a meeting place set up by God.

The Mercy Seat is always open in Salvation Army meetings for sinners to find the experience of sins forgiven. Literally millions have come, in public confession, to acknowledge their need, and lay hold upon God's promise of new life in Christ.

The Mercy Seat is also a place where God's people can come for cleaning, renewal, and dedication. It is a place where God prepares His people for battle, and empowers them to be warriors (Nigel Bovey's THE MERCY SEAT has more information).

You can determine the theology of a people by the emphasis of their meetings. For some denominations, the act of communion is the featured part of the service. For others, it is the preaching, and still others, the worship. Emphases vary theologically from the written Word of God, to worship of God, to appeasement of God. For The Salvation Army, the Mercy Seat is the central focus of its meetings. It is the response to and transaction with God that is the focus of both our meeting and our theology. This is not to belittle the role of the Word or of worship. In the sense of engaging those who are often merely spectators as participants in communion with God our founders may have been the proto-post-moderns.

### **Doctrine 6:**

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world, so that whosoever will may be saved.

God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross in our place for our sins. Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost. God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

### **Doctrine7:**

We believe that repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.

Salvation story: The doctrine of the Atonement

The cross of Jesus Christ stands at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is the greatest revelation of the love of God. Through the cross, God overcame the separation caused by sin. Once and for all, Jesus' death and resurrection opened the way for humanity to be reconciled to a loving God. This reconciliation is called the atonement, literally making at one, or 'at-one-ment'.

God has taken the initiative in providing the way. It remains with us to respond to the divine provision in repentance and faith in order to experience the personal benefit of reconciliation to God and fellowship with him.

The Atonement foreshadowed

The writings of the Old Testament are the first powerful witness that God is the author of our salvation. He is

the God who saves. This theme is woven into the story of his relationship with his people from the beginning. If the story of the Fall describes the separation from God caused by sin, the Old Testament moves very swiftly to offer hope through God's gracious intervention.

In the book of Genesis, the rescue of Noah from the flood provided an example of God's saving activity. The call of Abraham signaled the making of a people committed to God by covenant and promise. Exodus is the book of redemption, for it describes the release of God's people from slavery in Egypt by the mighty act of God. By his covenant, the holy God provided a means of reconciliation for his sinful people. In spite of their sin, they could come to him. Through the system of sacrificial offerings that God had himself ordained, the covenant relationship was maintained.

The Old Testament revelation comes to a climax in the messages of the prophets. Many of them spoke clearly of a coming day when God would act definitively to deal with sin and bring peace to his people. They spoke of the transformation of the heart through a new, inward relationship and a new, redeemed community. Some began to look forward to the coming of God's Messiah who would inaugurate a new age of peace and justice.

The New Testament records that Jesus fulfilled his mission as Savior and Messiah that was both prophesied and defined in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He taught his disciples to find in Hebrew prophecy the key to unlocking the meaning of his death. Consequently the first Christians used texts from the Old Testament to confirm the validity of their message that the risen Jesus was both Lord and Christ. Exodus 6:6-8; Isaiah 9:6-7; 35:3-4; 53:4-6; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 33:14-16; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 8:32-35.

### **The Atonement completed**

The reconciliation prophesied in the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ. God took the initiative leading to our salvation. A Savior was born who was Christ the Lord. The divine initiative found its complete expression in the self-offering of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Fully open to God in life, he was fully obedient in death and laid down his life for others. By dying on the cross, Jesus made the atonement. The coming together of the Father's dynamic gift and the Son's loving response bridged the separation between ourselves and God. We are reconciled to God in Christ and our sins are forgiven.

### **Understanding the Atonement**

There is no single comprehensive way to interpret the atonement through the sacrifice of Christ. But in the New Testament, helpful pictures, when taken together, provide insight into its meaning.

Jesus himself indicated that he had come as a redeemer to give his life as a ransom. The term 'ransom' was used in the slave markets of the ancient world where a slave was set free through the payment, by another, of a redemptive price. This picture illustrates our captivity to sin. It shows there is a price to be paid if captives to sin are to be set free. Our redemption is costly. Mark 10:45

Another concept was borrowed from the law courts: anyone who breaks the law which is given for our good deserves punishment. Sin has consequences in God's morally ordered world. Jesus paid the penalty and bore the consequence of sin on our behalf: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities' (Isaiah 53:5). Christ voluntarily accepted punishment as a substitute for us. John 10:11-18; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.

Other New Testament pictures of the atonement emphasize that Christ became our once-and-for-all redemptive sacrifice. He gave himself for our sins and so fulfilled the purpose of the great sacrifices of the Hebrew faith, to restore fellowship. The shed blood of Christ provides a way by which all people can be reconciled to God. His was a vicarious sacrifice, one made on behalf of another. It was not made for his own personal sin, for he had none: it was made for us. Luke 22:19-20; Romans 3:25-26; Hebrews 9:12; 10:9-14

The New Testament describes Christ's sacrifice as a victory over sin and over the powers of evil which imprison humanity. By our faith in what he has done for us we participate in the achievement of Christ's sacrifice. The Cross, the place of defeat, is the place of triumph. Christ's victory on the cross becomes our victory. Colossians 2:13-15

The cross of Jesus is at the heart of the reconciling work of God. It is also in itself the most effective picture of self-giving love. We can be drawn to it or repelled by it but when acknowledged, few can remain indifferent to the God it reveals. It is a call to be reconciled to the God of the Cross, and to love as he loved us. Romans 5:8 Our atonement is made possible at the great cost of the sacrifice of Christ. 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). Christ did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He embraced our sin that we might embrace his righteousness.

Our crucified and risen Lord It is through the death of Jesus that our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from death is the ultimate confirmation of God's work of salvation through him. The resurrection is God's great life-affirming act which transcends the boundary between life and death. God's creative power at work here reveals his glory and greatness. In his resurrection Jesus Christ passed through death to a new life in which he reigns with God the Father in Heaven. By the Resurrection his people are led to worship him as Lord and follow him into eternal life.

For that reason the Resurrection provides the triumphant climax to the gospel proclamation of the earliest Christians. The obedient self-giving of Jesus has opened the way to his exaltation and to our salvation. Acts 2:32-36; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Ephesians 1:19b-21; Philippians 2:6-11

### **Death and life for all believers**

By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christians enter into the new relationship with God that is described as 'the new creation'. New life begins when we participate in spirit in this great act of God. To turn away from our sinful life and to come to Christ in repentance and faith is to experience a kind of death. We are called to the same obedience to God and letting go of self that led Jesus to the cross.

When we put our faith in Christ we come into new life by receiving the Holy Spirit. Resurrection is not only something that happened to Jesus Christ, it is also, very powerfully, something that happens to his followers. In Christ, all of us can experience power over the twin enemies of sin and death. We will all die physically, but that ultimate death, which is the consequence of sin, has no more power over us. When we turn to Christ we begin immediately to be part of the new humanity that has been brought into being through his death and resurrection. Because of our fallen human condition, the new life cannot be experienced in its entirety now, but the risen Christ is our hope for the future, guaranteed by the living presence of the Holy Spirit in us. Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:14-18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 2:14-16; 1 John 3:2

### **Grace and free will**

The atonement is God's act of unconditional love for all people everywhere. All who receive Christ in faith, all who bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord, pass from death into life and enter a new relationship with God through his grace. The doctrine of the atonement clearly reveals that God's grace is the basis of our salvation.

God is constantly at work by his grace to draw all people to himself. And yet response to God's grace is an act in which we ourselves are involved, in that we have been given free will and can accept or reject the new life that is offered to us. Grace and free will are not easily harmonized, and this has led some Christians so to emphasize the grace and sovereignty of God as to teach a doctrine of predestination that disallows free will. Such a doctrine implies that God alone determines who will be saved without the need for any co-operative response from us. Free will, in this case, is undermined. On the other hand, it is possible to forget that our God-given free will is itself flawed by sin. It cannot operate in true freedom without the grace of God.

We believe that God destines to salvation all who believe in Jesus Christ. Without the grace and mercy of God, we have no hope. But it is possible for grace to be resisted or abandoned. The grace of God does not compromise the freedom God himself has given. The love of God is such that, with profound sorrow, he allows us to reject him. Luke 15:11-31; John 3:14-16; 5:24; 12:32; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; 2 Peter 3:9.

### **Repentance and faith**

If we are to experience personally the saving effects of the atonement, we must respond to the grace of God as revealed in Christ's sacrificial act. That response is repentance and faith, which are linked together so as to be twin elements of one action. They are porch and door at the entrance to life in Christ. They may be distinct or woven into one experience, but each is indispensable and neither is possible without the accompanying grace of God. Our repentance is a gift of grace through the Holy Spirit. Although often accompanied by sorrow, it is essentially joyful, not morbid, because it is our response to the good news of salvation. The Spirit stimulates within us a desire for a change of direction. We become more aware of our sinfulness and this moves us, not down into despair, but upward towards God. We long to turn away from our selfishness and sin and towards the self-giving love of God. We are drawn to confess our sins, renounce selfish life-styles and to make restitution for the sins of the past.

True repentance, however, must always be accompanied by faith in Christ. We can be sorry for acts of transgression and want to leave them behind. We can bear deep guilt over past sins and want to have our conscience cleansed. We can even make a major change and turn in a new direction. All this may be called repentance, but it is not the repentance that leads to life in Christ. Salvation results only when repentance is combined with faith in Christ as savior.

Faith is focused on Jesus the Christ, the full expression of God's grace and mercy. Faith sees the crucified Jesus and is assured of forgiving grace. Faith sees the resurrected Jesus and is assured of life-changing grace. Sorrow for sins is profoundly deepened when we see Jesus through the eyes of faith. Our change of purpose and direction is given substance when in faith we see the obedient and self-giving Christ and decide to call him Lord. Faith transforms the longing for change into genuine repentance that sees the Christ, experiences his forgiveness and follows him unconditionally.

The outcome is justification. We are justified by grace through faith alone. Such faith is not just an assent to the truth of Scripture, but involves a trusting acceptance of God's grace in Christ and confidence in a pardoning God. By faith we know that God in Christ loves us and has given himself for us, and that we are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. This is the joyful experience of those who are saved. This is the essence of the scriptural truth that we are justified by grace through faith alone. Jeremiah 31:18-19; Matthew 3:1-10; 21:32;

Luke 13:1-5; John 3:21; 16:8-10; Acts 16:31; Romans 4:1-5, 16.

**A gospel to be proclaimed**

The love and mercy of God are mysteries beyond human comprehension. In the story of our salvation we recognize the astounding generosity of God's love towards us and all people. We realize the depth and gravity of our sin and discover the joy of our salvation in Christ. The Church's mission is to share the story of this generosity, to lift up the atoning Cross for the entire world to see, to proclaim the gospel's inclusiveness, to demonstrate its saving power, and to pray urgently that people everywhere will know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**A summary**

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died to save the whole world and was raised by the glory of the Father so that whoever turns in repentance to God and has faith in Jesus Christ will be saved.