

The Ark of the Covenant: In God's Sanctuary

Part I

by Roy Hession

The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God's presence and holiness, and it foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, showing the importance of mercy and truth in God's dealings with humanity.

Duration: 53:59

Scripture: Exodus 25:22, Matthew 6:33, John 1:17, John 8:32, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Ark Of The Covenant"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the combination of grace and truth found in Jesus. He refers to John 1:17, which states that while the law came through Moses and condemned people, grace and truth came through Jesus. The preacher highlights that Jesus offers both grace, which is good news for bad people, and truth, which reveals the reality of our sinful nature. He also mentions the story of Joshua and the Ark of the Covenant, illustrating how God's presence brings peace and new experiences to believers. The sermon concludes with gratitude for God sending Jesus and the recognition that we do not deserve His grace.

Transcript

Now, this week, we're going to look at the history of the Ark that Moses constructed in the wilderness. To give it its full title, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the Earth. This Ark was the holiest and most important thing to Israel.

It was the central symbol of that divinely revealed worship that came through Moses. And it merits our very close attention, because it is one of the most glorious types and foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ to be found in the Old Testament. The Bible is full of Christ.

In the beginning, he was there. The Word was in the beginning. And if you have eyes to see, you'll find him right the way through your Old Testament.

When Jesus joined those two on the road to Emmaus, he went through the Old Testament, the Psalms and the Prophets, showing where he was spoken of in the Old Testament. Sometimes in prophecy, sometimes in incident, and sometimes, as here, in symbols. Whereas the full revelation of Jesus Christ is in the New, some of these symbols reveal things about him that are not so clearly stated in the New.

And therefore we need the whole revelation of the Son of God contained in both the Old Testament and the New. I have no preference for the New to the Old. It's one book because it all speaks of one glorious Lord.

We get a look then at the story of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the Earth. The incidents in which it figured, and the vicissitudes through which it passed, and its ongoing relationship to Israel. We should first, this morning, look at the Ark of the Covenant itself.

Then tomorrow we should go on to see at that Ark, going before Israel, and parting Jordan, that the people might go over on dry land, into their promised land. Then we shall see the Ark, encompassing Jericho, and achieving the downfall of that mighty city. Then we shall see the astonishing spectacle of the Ark, in Dagon's Temple, if you please, and all that happened there.

And lastly, we shall see the Ark brought up to Jerusalem by David, with great joy. After a sojourn, first in the house of Abinadab, and then in the house of Obedidah. And all these incidents and vicissitudes are full of the most practical application of Jesus to our souls, and to our situations.

So this morning we are going to look at the Ark of the Covenant itself. Will you turn to Exodus chapter 25. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart.

You must understand, of course, you understand that this is said at Mount Sinai, in the wilderness. Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart, ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering that ye shall take of them, gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goat's hair, and ram's skins dyed red, and badger skins, and chitin wood, or acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense.

Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And, this is the purpose, let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee after the patent of a tabernacle, and the patent of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

And they shall make an ark of acacia wood, two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth, and a cubit and a half the height. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and thou shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof, and two rings shall be on the one side, and two rings in the other side.

And thou shalt make staves of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be born with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark, they shall not be taken from it. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee, because at that time the two tables of stone had not yet been, the law had not been enunciated, and of course it had not been written on the two tables of stone.

But that testimony which I shall give thee, that thou shalt put into the ark. And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold, two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and thou shalt make two cherubins of gold. Of beaten workshop thou make them in the two ends of the mercy seat, and make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end, even of one piece with the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubins on the two ends thereof.

And the cherubins shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another toward the mercy seat, and their faces shall look one to another, toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubins be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee, and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubins which are upon the ark of the testimony of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel. Then when you turn over to chapter 40, all further instructions about the tabernacle have been given and they have all been executed, both the ark and the tabernacle.

Verse 20 of chapter 40, And Moses took and put the testimony into the ark, and set the staves on the ark, and put the mercy seat above upon the ark, and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the testimony as the Lord commanded Moses. Verse 34, Then, then, a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation because of a cloud that abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the children of Israel went forward in all their journeys, and if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not to the day that it was taken up.

For the cloud was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys. And so in chapter 5, you have the early instructions with regard to the building of this tabernacle. This word tabernacle, that sounds rather auspicious, sounds rather imposing, especially if you've seen Spurgeon's Tabernacle in London.

But this wasn't imposing at all. Tabernacle simply means a tent. And what this was that they constructed at God's command was simply a portable place of worship, which they could gather up and carry to the next place where they were travelling and set it up there.

Actually, it was far more than a mere place of worship. It was God's sanctuary, and let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among. Symbolically, it was going to be God's dwelling place right in the midst of his people.

And it was symbolic of the fact that God had always planned to dwell with man. And so here it is in simple, God with us, right in the midst. Now, in describing the arrangements for the building of the tabernacle, it is interesting to note that the first matter to be spoken about was not the tabernacle, but the Ark of the Covenant.

That's the first thing because it was the most important. That tabernacle with all its beauty and glory and gold and embroidery work and much else was nothing apart from the presence of the Ark in the Holy of Holies. For that Ark symbolized for Israel the very person of Jehovah.

And for us in New Testament times, as I've said, it is a beautiful type and foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom that Jehovah has been fully revealed. Alright then, let's consider the Ark itself. It was simply a box about four feet long, two and a half feet broad, and two and a half feet high.

And we're told it was to be made of acacia wood and overlaid within and without with gold. That's the first matter in which we see the Lord Jesus foreshadowed. The wood speaks of his humanity and the gold speaks of his dear deity.

Sometimes Jesus called himself the Son of Man, and other times he called himself the Son of God. He was both. He was human and still is, as well as divine.

And he was and still is divine as well as human. The two-fold nature of the Son of God since the Incarnation. And then secondly, Moses was to put the testimony that God would give him inside that Ark.

That testimony was the commandments, thou shalt, thou shalt not, inscribed on the two tables of stone. One stone relating to man's relationship to God, and the other stone relating to God's commandments with regard to his relationship to his fellows. Later, other things were put into the Ark.

There was a specimen pot of manna, so that they might know that with which God fed them when they were in the wilderness. And also Aaron's rod that budded. But the main thing, transcending everything else inside that Ark, were the tables of stone.

Indeed later, in the Book of Kings, when the Ark is described there, we read there was nothing in the Ark, save the two tables of stone. I suppose the writer, for him that was all that really mattered. And what a significant word that is.

There was nothing in the Ark, save two tables of stone. Here we are, getting to the central mystery of deity. And you find utter simplicity.

Thou shalt, thou shalt not. In fact, the simplicity is just a little bit too uncomfortable. There's no getting around it.

And our complexities in our theologies and thinking and message is so often, did we but know it, a way of avoiding the uncomfortable simplicity that is in the heart of deity. Our God is a moral God. And inasmuch as Jesus is the full revelation of that God, he is for us the embodiment of the holiness of God.

And wherever Jesus comes, he cannot but challenge sin, and show us wherein we have broken the tables of stone, in thought, word, or action. Indeed the challenging of sin is ever to be regarded as a sign of his presence. If you go to church, and your heart is never challenged, and your soul is never convicted, I wonder if we dare say that in that church there's the manifested presence of Jesus.

For wherever he truly comes, he cannot but challenge sin, and show us wherein we have broken God's holy law. I wonder how often that is the case, in your experience. Oh yes, you're having a little fellowship, meeting people, giving testimonies, saying things and so on, it's quite nice.

And then someone becomes starkly honest, and all hearts are searched. Jesus has come. Jesus, stand among us.

I know what it's going to mean, Lord. But my needs are so great, I'm willing to expose myself. If thou hast anything to say to thy servant, say on.

And in thereby he has. This is Jesus. He challenges sin, in thought, word, motive, deed, in the past, or in the present.

He is the embodiment of the holiness of God. And then, on the top of this box, there was what in effect proved to be a lid. There was a crown, ornamental crown all the way round, but the ark itself was open, except for the fact that that law, which Israel had so woefully broken, was covered by the mercy seat.

A sort of lid. This too was made of gold, solid gold. And out from the gold of the mercy seat there were fashioned two cherubins of glory, with wings held high up, and they were overshadowing the mercy seat, and looking down on that mercy seat.

Those cherubins, last seen in scripture, were guarding the way with a flaming sword to the tree of life for Adam and Eve. Here's the second occurrence of them. But no sword is there.

They're guarding the mercy seat. The sword has been sheathed, because as they look down upon that golden lid, that mercy seat, they see bloodstains. Once a year on the great day of atonement, as already described in the liturgies, there was an extraordinary ceremony, when the high priest was permitted, on this one occasion of the year, to go into the Holy of Holies, where the ark was kept, and he took with him blood.

The blood of a sacrificial beast, upon whom symbolically had been laid all the iniquities of the children of Israel. The blood had been shed, and he sprinkled blood upon that mercy seat. And presumably those bloodstains remained until the next annual sprinkling of the blood.

And that bloodstained mercy seat was covering the tables of stone, which they had broken. Well here of course, we have supremely a picture of the Lord Jesus, and as I shall show in a moment, this is clearly stated in the New Testament. In Jesus, you've got an extraordinary combination of judgment and mercy.

The law within, which we have broken, and the mercy seat on top. But inasmuch as the mercy seat was on top of the tables of stone, and actually hidden, the supreme impression decidedly, was that of mercy. How true of Jesus.

All our songs are of mercy. It is mercy all, immense and free. For oh my God it found out me.

Mercy rejoices against judgment. But inasmuch as underneath the mercy seat there were the tables of stone, it seems to teach us that the mercy that is found in Jesus for sinners like us, who've broken the law, is nonetheless based on the law. Mercy, not at the expense of justice, but based on it.

My God, to know that thou art just, gives rest and peace within. I could not in a mercy trust, but takes no count of sin. He's just merciful for a while, he'll forget it.

Oh, he's taken account of sin, and the mercy he gives you is based on that fact. You say, well how in the world? Mercy and judgment don't go together. The only way in which this mercy can be based on justice, is because of the blood upon the mercy seat.

At the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ, by divine appointment, exhausted all the curse attaching to the broken law of God. So that God could be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. And that cross had a retrospective value as well as an ongoing value.

One arm of the cross goes back to the dawn of history, the other arm of the cross goes on to the end of history. All the sins that God passed over in Old Testament times, and he did, the believing saints they had their sins passed over, he did so in anticipation of the blood of the Son of God. That should be said.

And our sins are taken away because of that same blood. And so there's the two arms of the cross, backwards and forwards. But the great thing I want to emphasize, this is the only way in which God can be just, and the justifier of the penitent.

This is the only way in that Jesus is not a judge but a saviour. He will be a judge at the end of the age, but right now he's the saviour of all men, especially of those that believe. And there's a wonderful reconciliation in him, between love for the sinner and justice.

Peter Morgan last night sang that great hymn about the cross, and there were the two lines, O Christing place, where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet. And there you see it in the blood of the Lord Jesus. This is the simple meaning of the blood.

It means justice exhausted. That which would exclude you forever from God, finished. And back to the satisfaction of God.

That's the meaning of the blood. Psalm 85 10 has a phrase which is a beautiful anticipation. It says that mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Now as I've said, this mercy seat is a picture, a foreshadowing of Jesus as specifically stated in the New Testament. If you will turn to Romans 3.23, you will see it there. Talking of Jesus himself, 3.25, you have the words, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.

And the Greek word translated propitiation is the same Greek word translated in the epistle to the Hebrews as mercy seat. It is really not propitiation, but a place of propitiation. A propitiatory whom God has set forth as a mercy seat.

And that mercy seat is divinely pointed out as a picture of the Lord Jesus. I'm not happy with the Revised Standard Version's translation of propitiation with the word expiation. And I know that view is shared by many scholars.

I don't want to be unjust, but could there have been a liberal predisposition to avoid an uncomfortable doctrine? Expiation is not the same as propitiation. You expiate a sin, you put it right, but you propitiate a person. And perhaps, I wouldn't like to insist on it, it might not be true, it might have been that the thought of God needing to be propitiated because of man's sin was unacceptable.

I don't know. Perhaps I'm not right in saying that, but I'm quite sure. The word is propitiation.

And what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary as he hung there and shed his blood was to propitiate the outraged justice of God, outraged by man's sin, and the outraged love of God outraged by man's attitude. In order that justly and properly, with the approval of the highest principles of heaven of justice, mercy could flow out in abundant pleasure to the sinner and the failed Christian. Because we're all, in one sense, equally in need.

And so it is, in Jesus, you have an extraordinary mixture of grace and truth. Not only grace, but truth too. That's what John says in John 1.17, which I regard as one of the great all-purpose texts of the Bible.

It summarizes the whole thing to me. John 1.17, I'm not turning you to it, it takes too much time, but you can jot it down, look it up yourself, or look it up if you can do so without too much distraction. The law came by Moses, and he condemned the law of us.

But grace and truth came by Jesus, not only grace. Good news to bad people, that's grace. But truth too.

The bad people being shown by Jesus that they are bad, and the bad people confessing it, even if they happen to be converted. And there's a strange mixture in this Jesus, who stands among us, full of grace,

for the weakest and most failing of us, but also full of truth, to show us the truth about ourselves. And very often the mixture varies according to need.

There are times when I know all about grace, all mercy, wonderful, but you know I'm going easy on sin. I'm not seeing things, I'm not calling things by their own name. I'm not seeing things, I'm not calling things by their own name.

And therefore when Jesus stands in the midst, he just alters the mixture a little bit. And the big emphasis is truth. And my, that man from the platform, he shows him my heart.

Or the scripture I turn to, or daily life seems to expose me to view. That's right. And the grace comes after, when you've admitted the truth.

But there are other occasions when you know all about yourself. Well no, not all about yourself, but you know too much. And you've been taking a big stick to yourself, and you've been struggling to get peace by the wrong way.

And then the mixture has changed a little. And it's all grace. All good news for the failing.

And you embrace it and are free. And so that's how it is. And you preachers, swing the changes, won't you? But always keep it to grace and truth.

And don't think preaching the truth is the same as preaching the law. In Paul's terminology, to preach the law is to preach salvation or peace by means of keeping the law. We know that's impossible.

The law wasn't intended to give us peace, even if we kept it. They tend to show us we haven't kept it and are condemned. No, no, truth.

And both have come by Jesus Christ, by the cross. It's grace, mercy there was grace, and grace was free. But so has the truth about me come by Jesus Christ.

What sort of a person does that cross make me to be, if the just had to die for the unjust? And when I'm told that that terrible death was my place, that shows me the truth. But the supreme thing, the supreme thing is always grace, mercy. It isn't mercy all.

That's the purpose of being shown the truth, in order that you might qualify to be a happy recipient of that grace that flows in such abundant measure from Calvary. Grace that pardons and cleanses within and makes all things new. All right then, the ark made of wood overlaid with gold, in which were the two tables of stone, on the top of which was this blessed bloodstained mercy seat.

And it says, going back to Exodus 25, verse 22, where the instructions are given, a lovely verse, and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the cherubins which are upon the ark of the testimony of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel. There, from between the cherubins, I will speak with thee. And again and again God's word came to Israel's kings, leaders, and high priests.

From between the cherubins, there I'm going to meet with thee. And it's only in this Jesus, I say this Jesus because there's so many conceptions of him that you may have, but it's in this Jesus according to which we're trying to see him right now, that God will meet with you. Only at the cross, only as you take the place of the wrong one, or the needy one, or the empty one, will God through Jesus speak.

How beautiful. There I will meet with thee, and will commune with thee from above the mercy seat where the Lord's been satisfied, where the blood's been shed, and heaven is open to thee. And then yet one more thing.

There were rings in either corner, and in the rings two staves, that the ark might be borne with them as they went through the wilderness. It was to be carried with them on their pilgrim journey. And it especially stated that those staves were to remain there until, well they were ultimately withdrawn, until that ark ultimately found its place in the beautiful temple that Solomon made.

This means that Jesus is a pilgrim saviour for a pilgrim people. This mercy seat, this saviour, always at hand, going with us through all the experiences, sometimes sad, of our pilgrim journey. And only in the millennium, when the Lord Jesus has come, and his kingdom set up, will those staves be removed.

Till then, he's the pilgrim saviour for a pilgrim people, ever available, ever near, ever giving hope to those that don't make it. Only acknowledge that fact, and you become a candidate for the marvellous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, yonder on Calvary's Mount Alport, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt. There then, is the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth.

Now in chapter 40, which we turn to, the ark has been completed, and so has the tabernacle. And I think perhaps they were more interested in the tabernacle, with all its structure, than with this one particular piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant. But that tabernacle is, at the moment, nothing more than a collection of cloth, and gold, and silver, embroidered, such like.

It's really nothing, until Moses, by divine appointment, brought in the ark into the tabernacle, and set it in the Holy of Holies. Then, something happened. A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, so that Moses couldn't stand it.

Take it out! The glory of God was there, what the old rabbis called the Shekinah glory, the supreme token of the manifested presence of God. Only then did the tabernacle have any meaning at all. Oh, it's a wonderful thing when the ark, when our Jesus is really allowed to stand in the midst of the church, or the prayer meeting, or the fellowship meeting, or the holiday conference, or your home.

Till he, this Jesus, is allowed to stand in, and we bring him in. What we're doing, though it's all in his name, and all very worthy, has absolutely no meaning. I want to tell you that deacon's meeting in that Baptist church isn't one bit different from a board meeting in a commercial company.

Nothing! Indeed, they behave better sometimes in board meetings than in deacon's meetings. No, no, that's not to be laughed at. It's solemn.

I believe the wickedest thing is the working of the flesh in the service of God. God is the foe of the flesh! And just because we're doing it for him, we think that's all right. You can be angry, you can be critical, you can be loving, resentful, and split the church, and send the pastor home, and he and his wife try themselves to sleep.

The whole thing's nothing! Sunday services are nothing! Sunday school's nothing! Unless Jesus stands in the midst, and what does he do? He rebukes sin. And what a change! Someone begins to say, Hi fellows, I've had a rather difficult time, I want to tell you I've been wrong. Someone else says it.

Jesus has come. And their faces begin to shine. They'd all been burdened with sin, though they hardly knew it, but now it's been revealed.

And now mercy's speaking to them, their blood is cleansing them, they're at peace with God. And the glory of the Lord fills the temple. And at last it means something.

Your quiet time doesn't mean a thing, it's a routine. Unless the ark is there, unless Jesus is there, dealing with you. And you finding new mercy and new release, for new needs.

Oh my dear friends, the book is a new book! It isn't difficult to have a quiet time, the trouble is you can never get, it doesn't seem to last long enough. There's the train to catch, or something like that. But all those moments, something wonderful.

Glory of the Lord, the manifested presence of Jesus. That's such a kind of glory. Not the presence, but the manifested presence.

And I think that's what we need. Not merely the presence of Jesus taken merely by faith, but the quite clearly manifested presence in our midst. And we don't get it merely by praying, but let him deal with us.

Say, come in, right in. Ask when he's going to say to thy servant, say, ah, deal with me, bless me, I'm in need, I don't know what I'm telling the Lord, I'm in bad shape, I'm a candidate! And when he's allowed in, we're willing for that precious blood to be applied, the glory of the Lord, the manifested presence, fills our hearts and other hearts. I don't always know that because I'm not always real with him.

But oh, may we be so. May the so in this conference, may the glory of the Lord, the manifested presence of Jehovah be in our midst, because each one of us is letting that ark speak what he wants to speak to us. And give in mercy those things we've been otherwise struggling to attain by our efforts.

Thereafter, the Shekinah glory always was associated with the ark. It always hovered over the ark. And if it hovered over the tabernacle, which of course it did, it was only because the ark was there.

And if it appeared that that cloud of glory was guiding them, it was only because it was over the ark. So it is said in Numbers 10.33, the ark of the covenant went before them to find them out a resting place. It was over the ark.

Ark and the manifested presence of God went together. And that's beautiful that this ark, this Jesus, goes before us in all the vicissitudes of life and changes of circumstance to find a resting place for you. Yes, to find a house for you.

Not easy, but he can. To find that place in which you're going to work. Jobs aren't always easy these days.

To find out that church where you're to worship. Or that piece of service you're to do. And you know it's his place by the manifested presence of Jesus as you get there.

Of course, to judge anything merely by the manifested presence could be too subjective. Do I feel his presence, don't I? Perhaps we should say by that sense of peace. Let the peace of God arbitrate in your hearts.

And you say, this is the place where the ark has gone before to find a resting place for me. And now, lastly, I want to look with you, I don't quite know how to put this, at two men and how they acted with

regard to the ark. Perhaps I pick up these just two, quite arbitrary, but they've got such a meaning for me.

The first is Joshua. He resorted to the ark in his hour of need. If you'd like to turn to the book of Joshua, chapter 7, verse 6. Israel have had that ignominious defeat at Ai, when it should have been a walkover.

But they were put to flight before that small company. And in verse 6 we read, and Joshua, chapter 7 verse 6, and Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the even time. He and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

What happened, he said? Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? Falling before the ark. He fell before it. God had said, dare I will meet with thee and commune with thee from between the mercy seat, and he desperately needed a word from heaven.

Why? Why have we been put to the worst before the enemy? And he fell down to the event before the ark. And from between the cherubim there came the voice. Giving him exactly what he needed to know.

Israel has sinned. And they have taken of the accursed thing. Therefore you were not able to stand against your enemies.

Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from you. Well that was quite a relief to Joshua, strangely, because he thought God had died or something. Has something gone wrong up there? No, no, says God, I'm alright.

Just one thing. Oh, he says, what a relief. It's a wonderful thing to know that the only thing that's gone wrong is sin.

But for some people, they aren't able to make it. They can't make the Christian life work. Perhaps the whole thing's a hoax.

Perhaps there's really nothing in it. I can't get what others can. What a wonderful bit of good news.

It's all true. Jesus is still Jesus. It's earth-born clouds that have come.

When you go in an aeroplane, the sky's overcast, but as you go up, zoom up, get above the clouds, you have the brightest sun and the bluest skies you can imagine. It's still there all the time. The sun isn't shining today.

It's shining alright. It's clouds. And we think something's gone wrong with the sun.

What relief? Only clouds. Really, this is good news. It's only sin.

And provision's been made for sinners. Something you can do about it right within your reach. Oh, thank God for that, you say.

But you've got to be willing to fall down before the ark when things go wrong and he doesn't seem to be with you. You're put to the worst before your enemies. Oh, dear ones, let us fall down before the ark.

Let him speak to us from between the cherubim and he will be a faithful witness to us. He won't fail to show us if we're willing to be shown. You'll be surprised what it will be.

It's not the thing you thought, perhaps, but there will come home to you an understanding of an area where things have gone wrong. I've seen it so often. And people who've had these first-hand dealings with God have come up with the most extraordinary analysis of what was wrong.

No psychiatrist could have put their finger on it, but God has, as they fell down before the ark at the foot of the cross before Jesus and asked him. And you know, you can bear to be told, because the voice is coming from the mercy seat. It's mercy that's speaking to you.

It's mercy that's intended. It's good that God has for us. And as I say, what a comfort to be told.

For I know now we're in to get right. I just didn't know, do I repent of this, that and the other? Oh, how beautiful, we have an authentic word from heaven. And you get it.

If in honesty, we fall down before the ark, as dear Joshua did. And when he'd obeyed God and put things right, ah, they went in the old time victory again. Now the other person who had a special relationship with the ark, doubtless there are others, but I'm just picking on these two, is David.

Will you look at 2 Samuel 6 verse 14. 2 Samuel 6 verse 14. I remind you that this chapter is dealing with an incident which we'll look at later on in greater detail.

When he brought back and at last found the right way to bring back the ark into the centre of the nation, into Jerusalem, after its long sojourn, only on the circumference. And he's thrilled to bits as they bear the ark in God's appointed way into Jerusalem and David danced before the Lord with all his might. Danced before the ark with all his might.

Oh yes, the ark isn't only for falling down before and hearing the solemn word that brings the repentance and peace. But it's that which so delights our hearts that we dance before the Lord with all our might for sheer joy that he's this sort of saviour. I believe that's what Charles Wesley was referring to when he said, my heart it does dance at the sound of his name.

Whether that such joy is expressed in actual dancing is neither here nor there. That's not important. It's the dancing heart.

Sometimes dancing feet follow, sometimes they don't. It doesn't matter. Neither here nor there.

It's a dancing heart. Joying in God, says Paul, we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now this dancing heart, this joying in God, is not something, a sort of unaccountable joy that you just had.

No, it's rational. And it's based, or should be based, on a new objective sight of Jesus. Who he is and what he is for people like ourselves.

Coupled with a subjective experience of his grace. That's why it is so often in some glorious objective hymn that you feel like dancing. Because you're given, as you sing that hymn, beautiful bible-based revelations of a God with grace, of goodness for the worst, of a Jesus who's knocked off the big stick, who's taken it for us all, and the utter freeness and availability of all that I need on street level.

And if you've had a new experience of that, that makes it even more so. And really I can tell you, sometimes as I've led services from the platform, and looked at the people singing, not only here, at all sorts of places, it looks to me as somebody's going to take off for glory. You should see their faces, they're completely unconscious.

To be conscious of being praising is terrible. That's one of the reasons why I think expressing it in some outward way can make you a little self-conscious. Look, I'm rejoicing in the Lord.

If you can do it un-self-consciously, just go on. Oh no, they're quite un-self-conscious. They're just seeing Jesus.

They're so happy to hear what the world are worrying about. What a God, what a Savior, what a salvation. All that I need, and heaven too.

And I trust that we're so going to see Jesus that we're going to dance before the Lord. With all our might, falling down before the Lord, but dancing before him in spirit. My heart is to dance at the sound of his name.

I don't think the joyous expressions of last night were an exaggeration. Indeed, they fell far short of the reality. When it all comes home more and more to you, you won't know where to put yourself.

You will learn to live a dancing Christian life. And if it isn't always so, then you know I'm going to fall down before the Ark about something. No, no, let me say, don't judge your state by joy, but rather by peace.

Not let the joy of the Lord rule or arbitrate in your heart, Colossians 3.15, but let the peace of God arbitrate in your heart. And this peace is something moral. It's to do with the conscience.

And when something's happened and we say we lose our peace, we mean that the candle of the Lord, the conscience, is not happy. Maybe after that conversation you went away, you exaggerated, and the referee disturbs your peace. But when you get right with God, the blood of Jesus cleanses and you've got that one-time sense.

And then peace is the basis. And then every now and then you have beautiful new experiences of joining God as new sights are given you. And so this is something, something of a picture of the Lord Jesus we have in this Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the Earth.

Thank you, God, for sending Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, that you came, not only historically, once for all, and did what you did do once for all, but you've come to us in our plight. Some of us have been in such a state we didn't think you'd ever would come.

We didn't deserve it all. We hadn't got it right. But Lord Jesus, thank you that you've come.

Thank you for the privilege of falling down before thee, our Ark, and hearing from thee deep words to our souls. And thank you, Lord Jesus, for the joy and privilege of dancing before thee with all our might. Amen.

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