

Jesu Juva

“Mercy, Not Sacrifice”

Text: Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 9:9-13

Go and learn what this means . . .

Jesus saying that to the Pharisees was like waving a red cape in front of an angry bull. Go and learn! That’s exactly what the Pharisees had done and committed their lives to. Learning. Learning the Word of God and Law of God and doing it better than most. ***Go and learn***. That was a pretty insulting thing for Jesus to say and made their blood boil.

Especially because of where He said it! Reclining at table, eating and drinking and celebrating with tax collectors and various other kinds of sinners. ***Go and learn***, the Pharisees probably thought, is what He should be saying to those people who either didn’t know the Word and Law of God, or they knew it and weren’t doing it. And in fact, ***go and learn*** is what Jesus Himself should be doing, they probably thought, too. ***You go and learn***, Jesus, how unclean those people are. ***You go and learn***, Jesus, that yucking it up with them is no place for a respectable Jew to be. ***You go and learn***, Jesus, what it means to be a “man of God” Jesus!

But Jesus was doing this, He said, because ***those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick***. And to that the Pharisees would have heartily agreed. Yes, those people are sick - sick with sin, and yes, they do need a physician to heal them of that sickness. So tell them to go to the Temple where the physicians are. Tell them to go make the sacrifices. Tell them Jesus, these raging bulls snorted, to get up, shape up, and clean up, and stop their carousing.

But here’s the thing the Pharisees didn’t realize: *the Physician was making a house call*. The Pharisees wanted those tax collectors and sinners to go to God in the Temple; but God had come to them in His Temple of flesh and bone. The Physician was going into the homes of all people to give them the medicine they needed: the mercy and forgiveness of God. He went to the tax booth where Matthew was sitting. He was in that house filled with tax collectors and sinners. He went into Samaria to meet the people there. He went to Tyre and Sidon, He went to Jews and Gentiles, He even went *into Pharisees houses* - because He wanted to give all people the mercy and forgiveness of God.

And when He did, and wherever He did, there was great joy and rejoicing. The same joy you feel when the pain you’ve been suffering with for a long time is suddenly gone. When your fever breaks and you feel better. At such times, you’re like a new person. And that’s what Matthew and his friends were: new people. Like they had been born again . . .

which, in fact, they had. Through the forgiveness of the Great Physician, who had come to them *and mercied them*.

This is what the Pharisees needed to learn, and perhaps what their great learning had actually made them blind to. **That God is a God of mercy.** And so Jesus quotes from the Old Testament prophet Hosea: *Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.* Sacrifice was necessary, but never what God really wanted. He wanted mercy. To be a God of mercy and for His people to be a people of mercy with His mercy.

For when it came to sacrifice, all those sacrifices weren't really what it was all about. All those sacrifices were simply faith-pointers to the real sacrifice that not man, but God was going to do. That Jesus had come to do. He came to take care of the sacrifice, the shedding of His own blood on the cross, so that we could be all about mercy. Or as Paul told the Romans: *He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Now when the Pharisees saw that mercy in action, they didn't like it. They wanted the tax collectors and sinners to earn their place because that's what they thought they had done. Sometimes we make that mistake too, thinking some people more worthy, more deserving of God's mercy than others because of what they have done. But that's not the way it is. Mercy is never deserved, only given. Mercy comes from the heart *of the giver*. And with Jesus' great mercy, we see the heart of God for us. That He would lay down His life for us. For us who may not be tax collectors, but who certainly are sinners. But like Matthew and his friends, Jesus has mercied us, made us new, and gave us a new life. That receiving such mercy we might give that same mercy to others.

Go and learn what this means . . .

It's not an easy lesson to learn! To learn to see ourselves as sinners. To realize that we deserve nothing from God. To confess that all that we have is an undeserved gift from Him and that we are totally dependent upon Him. That rubs us the wrong way. We want there to be something, *anything* in us that sets us apart from others, that would make God sit up and take notice of us. But if there is, in Abraham, in Paul, in Matthew, or in us, *it is only this*: that we are more needy than others. More lowly, more desperate, more sinful. And then to learn this good news too: that God regards the lowly, has compassion on the desperate, and dwells with sinners. Coming to the likes of us in mercy, to die for us and then raise us with Himself to a new and everlasting life.

But once that lesson starts to sink in - and I say *starts* because our sinful nature keeps trying to get us to think the other way! - then we become like Matthew and his friends. Joyful! Joyful in the forgiveness, mercy, and life we have so graciously received. And then givers of that same mercy and joy to others.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.