

6/21/20

It's Fathers Day! It also happens to be my birthday. One might expect to receive some really nice gifts. However, I am not expecting much – I have already received my big gift from the family – a nice comfortable work chair that I have been using for a while. Maybe a few smaller ones are coming – cheese and sausage, etc.

We as fathers deserve some rewards – right!? For years we have worked hard to provide for the family – sometimes a lot of extra hours. Perhaps, helping to put our children through school. Sometimes we have made sacrifices so that they could enjoy some things that we never could do. Oh, yes, sometimes we have been overly harsh in dealing with our children. Sometimes we could have been there more to be supportive. Sometimes we could have encouraged them more in their faith. But how often we have we been disappointed. The child that is now estranged – doesn't want to even speak to you. The child that has turned his/her back on the Jesus. Don't we deserve better? After all we tried to do our best.

The Psalm writer speaking of God says, **“He does not treat us as our sins deserve...” Ps 103:10** He reminds us that in the words of the hymn writer taken from Lamentation 3, **“Every morning mercies new, fall as fresh as morning dew...”** Forgiveness for all the sins of the day. Undeserved! He reminds us that it is not about our effort, our sacrifice but all depends on God's MERCY. His undeserved kindness – both in the area of material blessings, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY in spiritual blessing. Do we understand that? What is our attitude? And so we meditate on this thought in our text:

THEME: WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE – MERCY OR SACRIFICE?

I. SACRIFICE MEANS NOT UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MERCY

II. MERCY FLOWS FROM GOD'S MERCY

Sacrifice. It reminds me of the story of the chicken and the pig that were asked to contribute to a special breakfast. It was to include eggs and bacon. The pig said, 'It's all fine for you to promote contributions. For you it is an 'offering' for me it's a 'sacrifice'! Sacrifice – digging deep for someone else's benefit. For our 'sacrifices' don't we deserve better?

In our text, Jesus asked Matthew for a sacrifice. Matthew was a tax collector. He collected taxes for the hated Roman government. In his chosen occupation he had most likely become quite wealthy. Tax collectors were granted something like a franchise – collect this amount from this area. A reasonable amount of “profit” was acceptable but more often than not they would cheat and force people to pay more. Now Jesus invites this thief, this cheat, clearly undeserving, to follow him and wonder of wonders – Luke in his account tells us that he not only follow Jesus but he left everything behind. He quit his day job! Called to sacrifice! Why? Because he had found something in Jesus that money could not buy! The mercy of God – his undeserved kindness!

Jesus reached out to others who were likewise clearly undeserving! He was not ashamed to associate with sinners, to share the Word, to call to ministry, and to have a party of celebration! Listen, **“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples.”** “Sinners” is the term that was used to describe those who had lived openly wicked lives in the past: adulterers, thieves, violent men/women. MANY! And then we hear the complaint of the Pharisees (the Jewish religious leaders), **“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?”**

Now make no mistake the Lord warns against sinful associations – a warning that is too often ignored. **“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong...do not pervert justice.” Ex 23:2** And concerning the wicked who call themselves Christians but live in open sin, **“You must not associate...with such a man do not even eat.” I Cor 5:11** We need to choose our friends wisely. But Matthew had left his life of sin – he had repented and now the greater sin was that of the Pharisees. In their world there was no room for the repentant sinner – no room for mercy! Oh, they were careful to follow the laws of Moses – the sacrifices, the fasts, and to give to the poor. To do everything required by the Law (or so they thought) – But no mercy! Their philosophy was the only good tax collector or adulterer or violent person was a dead one! No mercy! Sacrifice, yes! Mercy, No!

This was a way of life for the Pharisees. They threw the man born blind, who was healed by Jesus, out of the temple because he confessed Jesus. They brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus to stone her until Jesus said, ‘Sure – the one who is without sin should cast the first stone.’ When Jesus and his disciples walked through the grain fields and picked grain to eat on the Sabbath, they accused him of breaking the Sabbath command for rest. No mercy!

So Jesus responded, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’** A simple truth that we see in this pandemic, ‘Healthy people don’t need doctors – only the sick. So it is true in spiritual matters, ‘Those who are sinless/righteous don’t need a Savior – only sinners! Then he quotes, the prophet Hosea, **“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’** The people of Jesus’ day were much like those of Hosea’s...they sacrificed as the Law commanded but their hearts were not in it. The wrong attitude. They continued to take advantage of the poor, to cheat, to steal, and often be violent, but they thought God was pleased with them because they offered the required sacrifices. And the Lord said, ‘Away with your useless sacrifices, this is what I want—*humble hearts that recognized and rely on my mercy!!*

Where is our Mercy? Jesus said, **“The poor will always be with us.”** Have we become so jaded by the constant request for money for those in need and the attitudes of some that believe the world owes them a living -- that we leave it to the government? Have we become so tired of friends or relatives that seem to be constantly troublesome or abusive that we want nothing ever to do with them again? ‘I’ve sacrificed enough!’ Unwilling to forgive? There are about 260,000 people living in Madison, Wisconsin. Do we just laugh at some of the “silly ideas” that seem at times to rule. Or do we have a heart for souls? The wretched poor, the drug/alcohol abusers, those who at times are violent, and those who are confused? Do they, like people in our communities that have the same problems, deserve to hear the Gospel?

These are the words of a great old missionary, ‘If they are to be lost then let us be found on our knees with arms on their legs- begging them to repent and be saved.’ Do we have such a humility and heart for souls or are we content to SACRIFICE? If our attitude is one driven by Sacrifice – it only means that we do not understand God’s mercy for us!

II. You see, Mercy Can only Flow from a heart that understands God’s mercy for us. Jesus knew about MERCY AND SACRIFICE! **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”** Jesus says, ‘Yes, these people are sick – sin sick souls – but what else is a doctor for...to provide healing for the Soul?! Jeremiah, the prophet used the same picture, **“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people?” Jer 8:22** Matthew had the disease that leads to death – Greed, Pride, and Violence! The Pharisees had the same – they polished the outside of the dish – they offered the sacrifices but with the same hands killed the prophets God’s sent and robbed widows! Likewise you and I have that fatal disease – too often what we do at work, church and home can be reduced to DUTY – no more- just SACRIFICE.

But it is for that reason Christ came – for sinners. Not for the healthy – those who have no sin - but for sinners! To call “sinners to repentance” – to call sinners to recognize the greatness of their sin and Jesus as the Great Physician. Jesus knows MERCY! SHORTLY after our text, Jesus saw the crowds, poor, ignorant lost in unbelief and he had compassion or mercy on them – he healed the sick, He preached the Good News. Mercy – undeserved kindness. He would declared later, **“In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”** The mercies of our God – not wanting that anyone be lost!

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians speaks of God’s GREAT MERCY, **“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.” Eph 2:4** Rich in mercy – undeserved love! The Bible is full of the undeserving that came to know the mercy of God. Abraham, who in his early life was an idol worshipper, was called out of darkness to be in the line of the Savior. King David, guilty of murder and adultery, called back to Christ. The Apostle Peter, one who denied the Savior, called back to the mercies of God. And finally, the Apostle Paul, one who persecuted the church of Christ – had Christians put to death, called by the mercies of God-- shown mercy. He describes himself as the WORST OF SINNERS, and then says, **“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”** If there was hope for Paul, surely there is hope for you and me!

Our Gods is RICH IN MERCY. Whatever the sins of the past, they have been washed away in the blood of Christ. Christ did not merely wish all our sins away, He came to face the Cross – to suffer and die in full payment for all our sins. To free us from an eternity in the fires of hell that we rightly deserved. To take us to the joys of heaven! That work is accomplished! Rich in Mercy!

How do we respond? Is it DUTY and SACRIFICE? OR MERCY? If our worship, Bible Study, serving and giving is all about giving until it hurts/ then our response is that of SACRIFICE – We have missed the point.

Dear Friends, it’s Fathers’ day. Perhaps, it’s a good time to recognize and reward our fathers. But thank God that he deals with us in mercy not what we have deserved. As we see the needs that are all around – in our homes and families, our churches and our communities, may we respond with mercy. It may be something as simple as a child that needs a word of encouragement. It may mean giving of our time, our money, our work, our effort. Souls are dying without Jesus. You hold in your hand the cure! Paul urges us, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices...” Romans 12:1** How amazing is the GREAT MERCY OF OUR GOD. May his mercy motivate us to show mercy to those around us!

AMEN