

I Desire Mercy Not Sacrifice

By Greg Baker –

This week in my daily quiet times with the Lord I have been reading the Gospel of Matthew. It has been a few months since I have read through one of the Gospels and I really wanted to take a closer look at how Jesus interacts and responds with different people. Overall, Jesus had a great amount of compassion for the lost and needy. What stood out to me the most, is how important people acting out in faith was to Him. He constantly rewarded and healed people just for their faith, regardless of their sin. **Jesus said it was mercy He desired, not sacrifice.** It caused me to reflect on how often I put an emphasis on the sacrifice rather than the faith and mercy.

Throughout the Bible, we see a special relationship that develops between the Lord and those who act out in faith. In Hebrews 11:6 the Bible states, *“**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him**”* The chapter teaches that Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were rewarded because of their faith, not their actions. King David was far from perfect, yet reading Psalms you see his great faith. In fact, the Lord said David had a heart that beat after His own.

Because Jesus and the Father are one, we see this relationship between God and those who act in faith in the New Testament as well. In Matthew 8, Jesus heals a Roman Centurion’s servant because of his faith: *“I tell you the truth, **I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith...Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.**”* (Matthew 8:10, 13).

However with the Pharisees, we see a completely different story. **The Pharisees put a great emphasis on the law.** They acted as if it was these laws, traditions, and rules that

saved a man rather than God's mercy. The Pharisees turned their relationship with God into a religion of rules and laws.

In Matthew 9, the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus responded, *"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"* (Matthew 9:12-13). God said the same thing in the Old Testament when He was getting frustrated with the Jews who were just going through the motions when they offered sacrifices. The Lord said, *"I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."* (Hosea 6:6)

Sometimes I need to ask myself: **am I more like a Pharisee or am I more like Jesus?** It can be so easy to forget that we too were sinners and if it was not for Christ's mercy, we would be lost and going to Hell. Thankfully, Jesus came for us. It is so easy for me to want to make God into a checklist that I must complete, and rules I must follow. "Greg, you must read three chapters of the Bible a day, pray for 30 minutes, share the Gospel with so many people a week, and read a daily devotion. If you do this, then you will be right with God." Even though these have helped me with my spiritual growth, sometimes I find myself reading and praying out of guilt.

Even worse than that, sometimes I will find myself holding other Christians to my own standards! As I have grown, I have seen the purposes and benefits of those personal disciplines, but it is not the actions alone that God desires. The Lord is looking for joyful love and mercy, not begrudging sacrifices.

Jesus told us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11). We are the ones that make it heavy and difficult by loading it with our own rules and check lists.

The Lord wants us to follow Him with all our heart and give Him everything. He desires us to act out in faith, like the many sick that came to Him for healing. Faith is the empty hands by which we receive His grace and mercy. That is what

He will reward us for. There is no guilt and condemnation in Jesus. That does not mean there is no pain and suffering, but we do not go through those alone. The Lord is right there with us. He is not far away. He just asks us to submit and be faithful. He will do all the hard work for us. The hardest thing we truly have to do is trust in the Lord. The reason why it is hard, is it is against our prideful nature.

We want control and independence. That is often why we make checklists and rules. It is something we can follow and give ourselves credit for. The problem is, we often break our own rules and checklists and can find ourselves frustrated, humiliated, and guilty.

Jesus is just there patiently waiting, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rests for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30).