

Discerning His Presence

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the importance of mercy over sacrifice, urging believers to recognize their need for God's grace and to extend that mercy to others.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8, Matthew 9:9, Matthew 9:12

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the powerful message of Jesus calling Matthew, a wealthy tax collector, and dining with sinners, highlighting the importance of mercy over sacrifice. Jesus challenges the Pharisees, emphasizing that He came for sinners in need of a physician, not the self-righteous. Bieber warns against forming rigid standards of righteousness and judging others based on external criteria, urging for hearts filled with mercy and acknowledgment of personal need for God's mercy. He emphasizes the transformative power of showing mercy, forgiving enemies, and interceding, reflecting God's love and leading to true self-denial based on joy and love.

Transcript

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:9-13

We've seen the heavy emphasis all through scripture on how the Spirit of the Lord's mercy goes out seeking the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. Today we see Jesus going in another direction looking for sinners. He calls a wealthy tax collector, and Matthew is overjoyed. The parallel accounts of this passage tell us that it's Matthew himself who prepared this magnificent dinner in his house and invited to it all his friends who were themselves tax collectors and sinners. It's like a Mafia reunion. All kinds of shady characters are there to celebrate their joy with Matthew as he now starts out his new life with Jesus. And here in the middle of all these sinners Jesus reclines by the table eating, with his disciples. Keep in mind that this is not a prayer meeting, not a service, it's a feast. And it has all the aroma of compromise with sin.

Near by are men who are very pious, and who know their scriptures from A to Z, and who are very busy performing their righteous deeds. And they know, as they look at Jesus that He doesn't know the rudiments of holiness.....

Depart thee, depart thee, touch not the unclean thing. Go thee out from thence,

that's what scripture says. They don't have the guts to talk directly to Jesus about this, so they talk to His disciples.

"How come your master eats with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answers,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Of course, the Pharisee's complaint with Jesus was solidly "based on scripture." So Jesus comes back with words to this affect:

"So you know your scripture. You search the scriptures for in them you think you have life, but it is they that testify to Me. And until you understand what Hosea 6:6 means, you won't be able to make head or tail out of what scripture is saying. First, go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

And who of us is not in danger of falling into the spirit of the Pharisee, forming in our minds clear-cut standards of what it means to be righteous, what it means to be a true disciple, and how you can really tell if somebody is walking in holiness. And if people don't measure up to these standards they're either going to have to shape up or remove themselves from the circle of the righteous.

We've taken what we believe is true discipleship and we've formulated from it external standards by which we judge each other. If we happen to live in the city, to be a true disciple you'd better live in

the city because if you live in the suburbs.....you re not committed to Jesus. You have a good job?.... you're not committed to Jesus. You have a new car, and I have an old car? You spend too much time with your children, while I'm busy running around saving souls and neglecting mine you're not committed to Jesus. You read too many books while I read the Bibleyou re not committed to Jesus. You got a suit that costs more than \$99.50, with two pair of pants get out of here! We could go down the list of ridiculous standards which are no less ridiculous than the standards that the Pharisees tried to apply to Jesus.

The result of this has been that we have driven from our midst people who have hungered and thirsted for the Kingdom of God. But because they did not express their hunger for the kingdom in the approved way, we say, "Good riddance! They're not committed!" Moreover, we have dumped on top of people who are already bent over with loads of guilt, more condemnation; because they don't come up to our standards. And while we've been doing this, we have been drawing our satisfaction and comfort and assurance, not from the cross of Jesus, but from that fact that we are "true disciples" who love and follow scripture. But what about the One to whom scripture points? Do we love Him? So that now Jesus says to us:

"Go and learn what this means. 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

"But Lord, sacrifice is the basis of our approach to God. Didn't the priests offer the lamb and haven't we developed in holiness as we have sacrificed. Are you telling me that all my self-denial, and all my sacrifice is in vain?"

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Because the sacrifice has already been made."

And what do you think you can add to it? And by what presumption do you think you can offer to God anything that's going to compare with the innocent suffering and death of His only begotten Son?

God, out of the heart of mercy that has no limit, no bottom to it, has given us His prize treasure, His Only Begotten. And laid Him on the altar, and pulled back the knife, and slain Him in our place, and caused His blood to be the propitiation for our sins, and opened the door for us to come back to Him. What more can you ask for than that? And now, if we will but look away from ourselves and unto Him,

- not at our achievements,
- not at our constant failures;
- not at our disappointments and all these things that have marred our lives,
- but look to Him....then we'll find peace.

Fix your gaze on the dying Lamb of God, and the power that broke the curse twenty centuries ago, far far away from here, will find its way like a burning torch into your heart and will set you free and heal you afresh.

Now the God who has provided that sacrifice requires of us one thing: mercy.

"I will have mercy. I desire a mercy heart,"

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
a broken and a contrite heart, O God,
thou wilt not despise.

- A broken spirit is always a mercy-filled spirit.
- And a contrite heart always is a mercy-filled heart.
- and that's what He requires.
- That's what He's looking for.
- That's the only thing we can give Him, if we will.

God is looking for mercy hearts. A mercy heart, first of all, is a heart that acknowledges its own desperate need of mercy.

"They that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick,

and who of us isn't sick? But, what physician can do us any good unless we acknowledge that we are sick?

"I came not to call the righteous , but sinners,"

and who of us in this is not a sinner? But what can the Savior do for us until we acknowledge that.

The mercy of God was flowing in Matthew's house as no place on earth that day, you can be sure of it. Wonderful things were going on there. But the Pharisees who were so righteous didn't see a thing. They couldn't possibly recognize what was taking place... The mercy of God that was flowing so freely and so wonderfully was missed by them because they had blinded themselves: they refused to acknowledge their own need of mercy. And the minute we get to that place where we refuse to acknowledge our own daily, hourly, desperate need of God's mercy, we become blind to the operation of God's hand in our lives and in our midst.

God help us to acknowledge our need of mercy. Otherwise, we're going to walk right by the halls of glory and right past the springs of living water and the only thing we're going to see is other people's sin.

A mercy heart, secondly; is a heart that experiences a growing overwhelming need to show mercy.

It looks around and it begins now to find that it has in itself a drive coming from within, from God, to forgive, to pray for its enemies, to return good for evil. Instead of criticizing and tearing apart, to intercede. It's quite possible, for instance, that the day that Matthew had this wonderful feast there was a man there who had grossly wronged him. For a long time perhaps Matthew had full intentions of taking him to court or at least punching him in the face. But now, this wonderful thing has happened to Matthew and to his own amazement there is no bitterness in his heart. He wishes this man well and responds to him with nothing but good. And because this is what's in his heart, Matthew has life --- and the Pharisees have death. Matthew has peace, the Pharisees have an unrest inside their hearts. Nothing is right nor can it be until they begin to show mercy. Because Matthew is offering to God the one thing that God is looking for; a mercy heart.

Isn't it strange, these religious men are looking at a miracle and all they see is a compromise with evil! God looks down on that gathering and He sees one man, perhaps a whole host of men and women who are now putting their feet on a road that will lead them to life and a road that will indeed cost them everything they have. They're not going to be afraid to give up everything they have. It's not going to be some big production, "Look at me, I'm sacrificing everything I have." They never even think of it like that. They do it out of sheer joy because they have found the mercy of God.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that the gospel is soft. I believe that the gospel means self-denial. But it's a self-denial which is based on mercy and not sacrifice. That makes all the difference. Even when we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we do it by the mercy of God. We give ourselves the way a man

and woman who are in love give themselves to each other in marriage for life. If they consider marriage a sacrifice they'd better stay away from it. They do it out of joy!

And when it's a self-denial based on mercy it's never, never self-conscious. It never makes a production out of what it's doing, and it never, never measures other people's self-denial and finds it wanting.

The love, that sheer love of God that was welling up like a fountain in that place, on that day, in Matthew's house, is with you as you read.

The love of God is there,

- when you wake up in the morning,
- when you lie down at night,
- and when you go forth into your trials.

But to discern that love, to live in that love, to mount up on wings like an eagle and soar through that love, one lesson we have to learn: MERCY.

- You want to see Jesus in this Body for all its shortcomings and all its problems?
 - You want to see Jesus,
 - You want to see Him in your home,
- your work,
- your daily walk, and
- even in your trials? go and learn what this means,
- and don't try to learn anything else until you do,
- "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."

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