

I Desire Compassion, Not Sacrifice (Hos. 6:6)

Intro:

Twice in Jesus' ministry he quoted the same verse from the OT.

A Banquet at Matthew's house

The first time Jesus quoted this verse he had just called Matthew the tax-collector to be one of his disciples. Apparently Matthew used his influence as a tax-collector to bring others to spend time with the Lord. *And it happened that as He was reclining at the table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Matthew 9:10-13) Notice that Jesus urges His critics to learn the meaning of an OT text found in our Bible at Hosea 6:6.

In the grain fields of Galilee

The second time Jesus quoted this verse He and His disciples were passing through the grain fields on a Sabbath journey. The disciples, having become hungry, reached out and pick some of the heads of grain and rubbing them in their hands freed the kernels to eat to satisfy their hunger. The Pharisees, seeing the disciples do this, insisted that they had done something unlawful, that is, that they had violated the Sabbath by their "work". Notice Jesus' response: *But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. (Matthew 12:3-7)*

Again Jesus urges these Pharisees to consider the teaching of Hos. 6:6. But why was this verse so important to Jesus? And why did He feel the need to quote it on these occasions? When we find the answer we may also learn an important lesson about our service to God.

Hosea 6:6 in context.

This week we've read together in our Daily Bibles the book of Hosea. It was written during a time of apostasy in Israel. Hosea was charged with bringing before Israel the solemn warnings of God's judgment by the coming of the

Assyrians. The verses Jesus quotes are a part of an oracle from the Lord by Hosea to the Israelite people. Consider His message:

God begins by expressing His hurt and sadness at Israel's superficial love: What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early. (Hosea 6:4)

God's observation about the people of both the northern and the southern kingdom is that their love is superficial and unenduring. In the same way that fog burns off in the sky or dew burns off the ground in a short time, so is the love of Israel for her God—quickly dissipating! Consequently God has sought to discipline His wayward people.

Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. (Hosea 6:5)

God as Israel's father has sought to correct them in both word and deed. The prophets came with warnings of the need to repent; ignoring these, God in His providence sent His judgments to punish them and bring about their repentance. Thus, in the verse that follows God indicates what He most wants from them:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

This is a powerful statement of what God really wanted from His people. He wanted them to know Him; that is, He wanted them to appreciate who He was, to understand His character which had been manifested to them in His law. He wanted this knowledge of who He was to win their love and devotion so that there was loyalty in their hearts for Him that grew out of their knowledge of Him. This was His delight, not sacrifices and burnt offerings. The Jews had come to God's temple with their sacrifices and burnt offerings thinking that by these they could atone for their many acts of wickedness. Yet what was clear was that their offerings were not the evidence of a penitent spirit but an attempt to buy God off while they continued their sinning.

But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me. (Hosea 6:7)

Just as the first man broke faith with Lord in eating of the forbidden fruit and surrendered the covenant of life God had made with him, so Israel had done. God is not saying merely that they committed inadvertent sins or engaged in sinful acts out of the weakness of the flesh. He means to say, they deliberately cast aside their pledge to obey God making them guilty of "treachery", a word reserved for those who willingly defy the will of God.

God leaves no doubt about this as He describes their sins:

Gilead is a city of wrongdoers, tracked with bloody footprints. (Hos. 6:8).

This portion of Israel beyond Jordan is likened to a place of where there is no law and order, where the people walk through the blood of those they've slain and their bloody footprints are follow them wherever they go! And even the priests, the teachers of the Law, were also guilty:

And as raiders wait for a man, so a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem; surely they have committed crime. (Hos. 6:9)

Israel has become like an unfaithful wife who has forgotten her covenant to love her husband, the Lord and now commits fornication with idols of every kind!

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's harlotry is there, Israel has defiled itself. (Hosea 6:8-10)

It is a sorry picture of what Israel had become. And Judah was no better: *Also, O Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you, when I restore the fortunes of My people. (Hosea 6:11)*

In the face of clear idolatry and immorality, Israel had convinced itself that God's favor could be kept by the sacrifice of animals while they continued in their disloyalty to God. God's desire was clear:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

But why did Jesus quote these verses to the Pharisees in the texts we noticed at the beginning of the lesson? What was it about them that made Jesus think of these verses and quote them?

Where the Pharisees went wrong!

The Pharisees error in Mt. 9

The Pharisees were so intent upon being ritually pure that they had invented a clever system of avoidance of the immoral. To avoid being contaminated ceremonially they simply disassociated themselves from people of moral inferiority. What they were doing would somewhat comparable to a doctor refusing to enter the hospital because his hatred for diseases. Jesus' analogy of the physician drives the point home: *But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. (Matthew 9:12)*

But, what does a doctor do when he really hates disease? He goes where the sick are and treats them and helps them. If he really cares, he'll not sit around talking about what a pity it is that there are so many sick people; he'll roll up his sleeves and get to work trying to cure somebody. The Pharisees were a spiritual version of this same attitude; and Jesus' answer got to the heart of the issue.

What God wanted from His people was to know of His love and mercy toward humanity; and in that appreciation, go out and show the same love and mercy. Instead of doing that, the Pharisees criticized Jesus for His love and adopted a smug moral superiority to Him, when in reality they were nothing like Him and His Father!

The Pharisees error in Mt. 12

In Matthew 12 the Pharisees made a similar error. Once again, they prided themselves on their strict obedience to the Law. They did not want to violate the Sabbath; so they concocted all kinds of nit-picking rules about Sabbath violation and looked down on those who violated them.

So here are the disciples of the Lord in the service of the Lord Himself, traveling along with Him and helping Him in His work of healing and teaching the people. They are legitimately hungry and have every right to grab a few handfuls of grain to eat from the fields as they pass through. But all the Pharisees can do is congratulate themselves on their moral superiority while doing nothing and condemning the disciples for what they were doing, even though it was right to do.

In this case, the Pharisees because of their narrow interpretations of the Law had become unmerciful judges of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus wanted them to see that in their attitudes they had placed themselves in the company of Jews who would shed innocent blood and then offer sacrifices to cover it. They no doubt felt the sting of His words.

Where we need to go right!

We too need to “go and learn what this means”.

We cannot substitute seeking forgiveness for practicing holiness.

Salvation is by the grace of God. None of us have hope of eternal life without access to the sacrifice Jesus made; but the NT is equally clear that that sacrifice is not a substitute for genuine repentance! To put it another way, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? May it never be!” (Rom. 6:1).

Don't let access to God's grace become a justification for immoral living.

We need the mercy of God too much not to show it to others.

If we truly see the abhorrent condition of the sins of others, what does it call for us to do? To withdraw ourselves or to engage the sinner?

If we see someone doing what we think is morally or doctrinally inappropriate, what is our response? To condemn or to teach?

If we see someone truly in need, what is our inclination? To condemn for laziness and ineptitude or to lovingly lend a hand?

Conclusion: A verse this important to Jesus ought to be important to us too! Let's try to make sure we practice the mercy of Hos. 6:6 while appropriately trusting the sacrifice of Jesus for our transgressions. One thing is for sure, on the day of judgment we will want the mercy of the Lord; but to have it there, we must practice it here!

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13)