

## I DESIRE MERCY, NOT SACRIFICE

Matthew 12:1-21

Key Verse: 12:7

"If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent."

In the last passage we studied the true meaning of repentance. Repentance is the first [step](#) in becoming the children of God. Mark 1:15 says, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Repentance is the way to the kingdom of God. Repentance is to live for the glory of God. Repentance is to stop living a selfish life in this limited world. Repentance is to live to please God whatever we do, whether we eat or drink. Repentance is not to live for ones sinful nature. True repentance must produce the fruit of repentance. For example, a person who lived a pleasure-seeking and immoral life in the past must stop living for fleeting pleasures on earth and work hard for the glory of God and become great and wealthy, as Abraham did when he obeyed God's word.

Jesus also taught us true rest. The people of the world want true rest, even for one weekend. One servant of God drove a fellow woman missionary's car to Florida and enjoyed one weekend. It was to rest on the weekend. But when he came back, he remembered the rudeness of the [motel manager](#) and the poor meals and tiredness from the long drive, and how this had caused him not to sleep. When he drove back to North Carolina, where his [apartment](#) is, he was so upset he didn't say anything to his wife. Then his wife was upset and they did not speak to each other for ten days. Worldly rest is like driving to Florida, sleeping in a motel, and coming back by driving. But rest in God is overflowing happiness and joy and peace in our souls. Most people think rest or happiness is for their physical bodies. But that is not true. True rest or happiness is in our soul. Therefore, we must please God. We must take the yoke of Jesus and learn of him. Then we can have true rest. Today we are going to learn the character of the Messiah and what God really wants us to do. God does not want us to become legalistic or self-righteous. God wants us to be merciful and sacrificial.

First, Jesus defends his unlawful disciples (1-8). Let's read verses 1-2. "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them." One of the characteristics of Jesus' disciples was that they were always hungry. Other than that, they were always sleepy. And they were champions of snoring, because they were tired enough after hanging around Jesus. One day Jesus was going somewhere with his disciples. But they didn't carry a lunch box. Already 1:00 p.m. was about to pass and the disciples' stomachs began to growl. Peter's stomach growled loudly. Next, Philip's stomach growled quietly and sharply. Then Matthew's stomach growled noisily, while Bartholomew's stomach growled quietly. When they began to suffer from a hungry feeling, sudden fortune appeared before their eyes: there were many grainfields. The disciples unintentionally began to pick some heads of grain and eat them at one grainfield. Soon the grainfield looked as if it had been raided by mountain animals. Passing through the grainfields, they busily picked heads of grain, rubbed them with their hands and put them in their

mouths. After they passed through several grainfields quite a few acres looked haggard. The Pharisees were watching over Jesus and his disciples and said, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

From the Pharisees' point of view, Jesus' disciples were unlawful in three ways. First, they violated the Sabbath. On the Sabbath they should not work. But they worked. The Pharisees thought the disciples worked by picking heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and putting them in their mouths. They regarded this as work on the Sabbath. Second, the disciples picked heads of grain that belonged to others and devastated a few acres of grainfields. Third, they were disciples of Jesus but their deed seemed to be that of mischievous youngsters. Usually the Pharisees did not rebuke Jesus to his face. But this time, pointing their fingers right at Jesus' face they rebuked him: "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." At that time, working on the Sabbath was a great crime. And to the Jews, eating pork was also unlawful. Sometimes Jewish young people wanted to eat pig meat. Later they made sausages with pig meat and ate them behind their parents' backs. Not only Jesus disciples, but most young people cannot endure suffering from hungry feelings. They want to eat a lot and play a lot, enjoying many games.

Jesus knew his disciples had violated the Sabbath law at that time of legalism. Jesus knew he had nothing to say to defend them. Jesus should have said, "I'm sorry, you teachers, my disciples are young and hungry and they made a mistake." But he did not apologize for his disciples' mistake. Rather, he rebuked the Pharisees with the story about David and the priest Ahimelech. One time David was running for his life from King Saul. He had nothing in hand and he was very hungry. So he went to the priest Ahimelech at Nob. Ahimelech sensed David was in trouble when David asked for some food to eat. At the moment, he did not have food in his kitchen. But he gave him consecrated food from the altar which only the priest could eat. Ahimelech could not give him ordinary food, because David seemed to have been in a hurry. So he gave him consecrated bread. David also asked for a spear or a sword, saying, "I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent." Then the priest Ahimelech gave him Goliath's sword, which David had taken from him during their duel, surrounded by the army of Israel and the army of the Philistines (1Sa 21:2-9). At that time, as a priest it was absolutely impossible to give consecrated bread to an ordinary man. It was the traditional law of the Israelites, and they thought of it as the way of keeping the law of God. But Ahimelech violated the traditional law of the Israelites and satisfied the hungry stomach of David, and for his safety he gave David Goliath's sword. It was indeed a terrible violation. But the priest Ahimelech was merciful rather than legalistic toward David. The priest Ahimelech loved David and honored him as a servant of God and commander in chief of the army of King Saul. If Ahimelech had thought he was violating the law of God, he would not have done this. But he thought that loving is better than demanding legality. So Ahimelech gave David consecrated bread unlawfully and the sword which should have been kept in the house of God.

With this story Jesus well defended his disciples by developing his case logically. Jesus defended his disciples knowing the mind of God

deeply, that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Let's read verse 7. "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent."

Here we learn from Jesus that we must defend our disciples with the love of God. We must embrace their mistakes with the love of God. We must understand their hungry situation and their difficulty in doing homework. We must understand their family backgrounds, and sorrowful situations. We must shepherd them, understanding the despaired hearts of our disciples. There are two ways to look at people: One is to legalistically condemn them; the other is to defend and embrace them with the grace of God. In the world the most ugly people are those who criticize others, looking at their mistakes and weaknesses with legality. Beautiful people are those who understand broken and helpless people and defend them with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How funny it is to see that Jesus defended his disciples' act of picking grain in others' grainfields, though the fields looked like a harvest that had been poorly done. But Jesus quoted the Old Testament and defended their mistakes so perfectly and sweetly. The world is full of evils. And the world is full of evil people. We are living among evil people. But we are chosen servants of God. We must defend and embrace others with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Jesus did for his disciples.

Second, Jesus helps a man with a shriveled hand (9-14). Look at verses 9-10. "Going on from that place Jesus went into their synagogue. A man with a shriveled hand was there." Let's think for a minute about a man with a shriveled hand. Hands are the symbol of hard work. God gave us two hands so that we might work hard with two hands. When we go to Russia, we see so many thorn bushes in the places where lawnmowers should have been used. Russia is a big country with many people. So they must work hard with their hands and make a beautiful country. But it is indeed a wild country to our sight. On the other hand, Alaska was Russian territory. But Secretary of State William H. Seward bought Alaska from the Russian government for \$7,200,000. The land price was two cents for each acre. The Secretary of State was badly criticized for buying such a wasteland. But the American people began to cultivate the land. Now it has become a most beautiful land which is called an animal's paradise. It was the same Russia. But the hands of Russians and the hands of Americans were so different. So mainland Russia is full of thorn bushes, but Alaska has become a most beautiful land and an animal's paradise. With his hands a man can play piano beautifully, even Beethoven's concerto number five. With hands one can play the violin and flute. Our second-generation missionaries had an orchestra performance in Korea and in Deutschland. I don't know if young people today write love letters with their hands, but in the past with their hands they wrote love letters, poems and many great works. Indeed, hands are the symbols of hard work. Suppose God did not give us hands? How ugly it would be to look at any person! He would be like a bus without a steering wheel. At night this man with a shriveled hand worked hard and won boxing matches and played basketball better than anybody else--but only in his dream. During the daytime, with his shriveled hand he was the object of ridicule. When a mischievous boy hit him two times with a one-two punch, he only hit back one time. Because of his shriveled hand, he did not have even a beautiful dream

of marriage.

The Pharisees knew that Jesus wanted to heal his shriveled hand. And it was a Sabbath day. So, looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal this man on the Sabbath or not?" How nice it would have been for the Pharisees, because they were called to be the chosen servants of God, to ask Jesus, "Lord, please heal this shriveled hand so that he can get married October 9." But they had no love. Their hearts were dried up with legalism. So they wanted to use this man with a shriveled hand as bait in accusing Jesus. Jesus was sorry that the chosen servants of God were so cold-hearted and filled with condemnation. In addition, they were political tools of the devil. What did Jesus do for them? Jesus loved them and told them a beautiful story.

Look at verses 11-12. He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Jesus' statement provoked the Pharisees, who were the rulers of the time. Jesus didn't mind doing so, for he wanted to teach them the mercy of God. And regardless of the risk, he wanted to heal the man's shriveled. Look at verses 13. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. What was the Pharisees response? Look at verse 14. "But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus." Here we learn that Jesus risked his life in order to restore the man's shriveled hand. Shepherding is life-giving. Shepherding is loving helpless sheep. What a beautiful thing to do. One Congressman became the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee recently. But he had had an illicit affair and nobody knew it. Recently his double life was revealed. Even though he is a Congressman, he is nothing but a double-minded man and an evil man. He should not be the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. We cannot say that his life and job are beautiful, but very ugly, uglier than an ugly duckling. But Jesus restoring the man with the shriveled hand before the eyes of the Pharisees, risking his life, is indeed beautiful and life-giving. In this way Jesus showed them God's heart--that he desires mercy, not sacrifice.

Third, God's chosen servant (15-21). In this part, Jesus explains more in detail how God's chosen servant should take care of the flock of God's sheep. Look at verses 18-19. "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations." God's chosen servant must have a deep vine and branch love relationship with God. God's chosen servant must have the Spirit of God in him. And God's chosen servant must proclaim justice to the nations. Wow! The mission of God's chosen servant is so beautiful and great. The mission of God's chosen servant cannot be traded for anything. God's chosen servant's job cannot be traded with that of a policeman or a talk show host or even with the man in the oval office.

Verse 19 says, "He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets." God's chosen servant is so gentle and quiet and lovely that he never wants to quarrel. Look at verse 20. "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out..."

God's chosen servant has great compassion on the broken-hearted and helpless and despaired and poor and sick, as if they were his own children. God's chosen servant does everything with the grace of God so that he may lead all men to justice, to victory and so that all people of all nations may have hope in his name. In brief, God's chosen servant must be like Jesus.

Today we studied mainly about Jesus' life-giving shepherding of the helpless and brokenhearted. Most of us are judgmental like the Pharisees. May God help us repent and learn Jesus' broken shepherd heart.