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SERMON TITLE: Mercy Me, Jesus Changes Attitudes
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 9:11-17
DATE: March 21, 2021
View online service at www.fpcc.org/live-stream

Read also Micah 6:3-8

When I was in seminary I was in a small group with a young couple who had a young son. We sang a song called Micah 6:8. It goes like this: (sing song)

*He has shown thee, O man,
what is good and what the LORD requires of thee;
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God.¹*

The father said, “Hey, our son’s name is Micah,” then quipped, “We call him “6-8” for short.” That made us laugh.

Having a child is a good way to enact or imbibe the attitude of Micah 6:8. Don’t we all want our children to do the right things and have a good attitude toward others? God casts this vision for us: *Do what is right, love kindness, walk with God.*

This has a great deal to do with attitude. It has to do with heart.

The Old and New Testaments are closely tied. We see threads that run through the Old and then they are expanded or explained in the New. We see that thread by putting them together. Today I will speak on both.

God said what he wants: *Do what is right, love kindness, walk with God.* To show them why, God points to two things he did for Israel:

If you have been reading your One Year Bible, you just read one of them. It contains a talking donkey:

“Don’t you remember, my people, how King Balak of Moab tried to have you cursed and how Balaam son of Beor blessed you instead?” (Micah 6:5)

That story is from Numbers 22-24. Balaam was commissioned by King Balak to curse Israel. They were right on the edge of the wilderness, ready to enter the Promised Land. Remember, these were people who had struggled to believe God. Now they were camped in Moab right near the Jordan River, soon to cross into the land. The king of Moab saw them and hated them. He sought to stop them with a curse. He bribed Balaam, a known diviner.

But, what was on God’s mind? *Blessing them*, even though they weren’t the greatest.

They needed mercy and kindness. Here’s how God works: **God takes intent to curse and turns it into blessing.**

When you are in a tough place, can you see that God intends to bless you? When troubles come, it is a stretch to cling to that faith, I know. It’s easier, sometimes, to look away from God. Remember, Israel had a long stint in the desert and they often turned away from God. They tried to substitute other things. What was the result? **WANDERING AIMLESSLY.** But here they were again, given a second chance. So God continues his kindness:

“And remember your journey from Acacia Grove to Gilgal, when I, the LORD, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness.” (v. 5b)

Acacia Grove was the last place they camped in the wilderness. Gilgal was the first place in the Promised Land. It is on the road to Jericho. This refers to the Lord’s defeat of Jericho under Joshua, to whom the Lord said, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.” (Joshua 1:3)

God was showing mercy, kindness, and victory. So, would a response to God of rote sacrifices be sufficient? No! (sing song)

*He has shown thee, O man,
what is good and what the LORD requires of thee;
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God.*

Jesus understood God’s vision. It’s not about you trying to impress God. It’s not about you being the perfect candidate for a disciple. That’s what the Pharisees were trying to do. But they reduced faith to rote sacrifice. The results were not good. They had bad attitudes toward others.

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites.

Hypocrite has been around for centuries. It comes from the Greek word ὑποκριτα, meaning “actor.” It literally translates “an interpreter from underneath.” Ancient Greek actors wore masks to portray each character. Thus they interpreted the story from underneath their masks. The word also means “pretending to be someone or something they were not.” Today’s meaning of hypocrite is: “a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.”²

¹ Micah 6:8, by The Maranatha! Singers, Maranatha Music, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJlqwCIPcw>, accessed March 17, 2021.

² Word History, “The Origin of ‘Hypocrite’ at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/hypocrite-meaning-origin>, accessed March 18, 2021.

So the Pharisees acted righteous. But underneath was a different story. Think of them like this. To them God was a taskmaster who required sacrifice, so God never touched their hearts. But, they could impress others and gain status by pretending to be pious.

But Jesus likes, accepts, and listens to those who were your average Joe. Not so righteous; in fact, sinners. (Remember, we are all sinners who fall short of having faith and doing the right thing.) Sinners liked Jesus—he was kind; fair; respectful. He awoke faith in them.

According to the Pharisees, Jesus' disciples were a motley, scummy crew who did not reflect anything religious.

- There were four fisherman: brothers, Andrew and Peter, and James and John. Thomas, Nathaniel, and Philip were also from their fishing village, Bethsaida, so likely fishermen too.
- Nathanael was prejudiced against Jesus' hometown ("What good can come from Nazareth?")
- James was Jesus' cousin, so he was probably poor.
- Simon was a Canaanite and a Zealot, a political activist.
- Judas was a thief. As treasurer, he embezzled money from the other disciples.
- Matthew was a tax collector who worked for the Romans. Tax collectors were notorious cheats, extorting money from the Jews.

Jesus called each one. His love inspired them to commit everything. As he awoke their hearts, they would grow to change the entire world.

In our story, he had just approached Matthew at his tax collector's booth and said, "Follow me." Matthew did and then threw a party for Jesus. He invited his friends. READ Matthew 9:11-13

Notice, Jesus said,

For I have come to call not those who *think they are righteous* but those who *know they are sinners*.

When you are living by duty and not from the heart, you tend to judge others but not be able to judge yourself.

The Pharisees were still disgruntled. The complaints about Jesus' disciples continue. READ Matthew 9:14-17

There's the Pharisee attitude. They fasted to look good. But it was a mask. And the mask was clouding their vision! Let's put it this way—they had a bad attitude toward non-fasters! But let's change that attitude by looking at Jesus' attitude toward his motley, scummy crew of disciples.

When Andrew and Peter first met Jesus, he took them out fishing. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Because Jesus was present, they caught so many fish that—whoa, they knew this was someone extraordinary. "Get away from me," Peter said, "I am a sinful man!" But Jesus was kind. *You are fine Peter. Follow me and I will make you a fisher of men!* (Lk 5:1-11)

When Philip introduced Jesus to his friend Nathanael, Jesus complimented Nathanael's faith, even though Nathanael had insulted his hometown. Nathanael was amazed and said, *You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!* Jesus told him, "You will see so much more as my disciple!" (Jn 1:45-51) Jesus embraced this prejudiced man.

Jesus does not take a census; give you a background check; do a drug test; make you fill out an application; force you to sign papers that say you will pay all the cost. You are not signing on the bottom line a huge mortgage commitment before you get to live in the house!

He says simply, "I saw you. Come follow me!" This is pure joy. But the Pharisees missed it because there was no mercy.

You can't take the old wineskin of sacrifice to make you acceptable to God and then fit Jesus into it. You cannot make Jesus a taskmaster. No, Jesus himself *is* the sacrifice. He came to take that on. So now, things would change. We now relate to Jesus as a bridegroom. He is the Beloved. He lives as close to us as marriage. We relate to him through love, commitment, and joy. That's the new wine. It won't fit into the old wineskin of sacrifice. You can't mask it. That will never work because it comes from the heart.

How is your attitude? Does it flow from the heart? Sing with me:

*He has shown thee, O man,
what is good and what the LORD requires of thee;
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God.*

Go, with that attitude.

AMEN

Matthew 9:11-13

¹¹ But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" ¹² When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor-- sick people do." ¹³ Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

9:14-17

¹⁴ One day the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked him, "Why don't your disciples fast like we do and the Pharisees do?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Do wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ "Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before. ¹⁷ "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved."