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Pastor Dan Esh
Calvary Chapel Central Phoenix
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MATTHEW

Mercy Over Sacrifice
Matthew 12:1-14

I. Perspective
   a. Something about loss that provides perspective and clarity
      i. Reminds us of what is truly important
      ii. Easy to lose sight of those things in the busyness of daily life – distraction, loss of focus – wrapped up in lesser pursuits
      iii. We can do the same thing with the Word of God
   b. We often shout where scripture whispers and whisper where scripture shouts
      i. Major in the minors and minor in the majors
      ii. We tend to obsess over secondary issues and ignore the things that scripture clearly emphasizes
   c. In Matthew 12, Jesus confronts those who were experts in the scriptures
      i. They knew the written texts better than anyone else – yet in their studies they missed the most important thing – Jesus
      ii. That should be a sobering reality to all of us – it's not just what we study, but why we study it
         1. What are we ultimately pursuing when we approach the living Word of God

Mat 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. 7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." 9 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him. 11 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

II. Eating and Healing on the Sabbath
   a. The Pharisees' response to Jesus
      i. They are at a point in Jesus' ministry where they can't deny His power, so they have to attack His character
      ii. Matt 9 – they accuse Him of casting out demons with the power of demons

1. Now we see them following Jesus around and trying to discredit Him and His disciples

b. They witness Jesus and His disciples snacking on some grain
   i. They were not stealing, it was lawful to eat your neighbor's grain
   ii. ***Deut 23:25 When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.***
   iii. The accusation - they were working on the Sabbath
c. In verse 10 their intentions are even more plain – ***He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him.***
   i. "so that they might bring a charge against him"
d. Are they confused or are they calculated?
   i. Are they really misunderstanding the law and misapplying it or are they manipulating it and twisting it to get what the outcome they want
   ii. The misuse of scripture, the overemphasis on open handed issues, the majoring in the minors, the shouting where scripture whispers – these are often not because of a lack of knowledge, it is a condition of the heart
      1. Scripture becomes a trap
      2. Truth is used to control others, not care for them
   iii. satan quoted scripture when he tempted Jesus in the desert, demons have correct theology about Jesus (Matthew and James) – the Pharisees could run circles around the common when it came to reciting the law
      1. But you can know the Bible and not be transformed by it
      2. You can be biblically accurate and spiritually bankrupt
e. What is really happening underneath all of that? How do we guard against it?
   i. It all comes back to the question of "why"
   ii. And that is exactly what Jesus exposes

III. Jesus Exposes Their Hearts
a. First Jesus appeals to history
   i. ***"<u>Have you not read</u> what David did when he was hungry" (1 Sam 21)***
   ii. At this point in David's life, he had already been anointed as king but Saul still sat on thrown
      1. David was on the run from Saul because Saul had determined to take his life
      2. He ends up at the house of God in Shiloh and he is given the holy bread that is reserved for the priests to eat
b. He appeals to the law itself (Numbers 28)
   i. ***<u>Have you not read</u> in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?***
      1. ***Num 28: 9 'And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering—10 this is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.***
      2. By the letter of the Law, the priests were "breaking" the Sabbath rest but because they were doing it in the temple under the direct command of God, they were blameless

ii. Temple service superseded the Sabbath rest. The Temple and the priests duty within the temple are so holy that the priests are allowed to "break" the Sabbath and remain blameless.

1. ***6 Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.***

c. The point

i. Jesus identifies Himself as the true King – like David in 1 Sam 21, anointed but not yet on His throne

ii. He is far more important than the temple itself

1. Jesus' presence and His mission not only supersede the laws surrounding the Sabbath but He is the ultimate fulfillment of what they were pointing to

IV. The Story of Redemption

a. The Pharisees had lost the plot. They had lost sight of central theme of the story that God was weaving throughout human history

i. That is why the full counsel of God's word is so important – knowing the complete story

ii. From creation, to the fall, to the promise, to Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, to the mission of His church, to restoration (New Heavens and New Earth)

b. We can dissect the Bible so much that it becomes unrecognizable

i. Isolating verses without context, building entire religious movements on individual scriptures detached from main story

1. Groups that fixate on one law (dietary laws, Sabbath regulations) and make that the ultimate pursuit
2. Prosperity teaching: isolates blessing texts, ignores suffering and the cross
3. Legalistic systems: elevate external behavior
4. Obsession end-times events that overshadow the work of the gospel

ii. These movements don't usually start with rejecting the Bible, they start by dissecting and isolating pieces of the whole

V. Keeping the Important Things Important

a. Solution – The Bible is for us, but not primarily about us

i. It is one unified story that glorifies our great and merciful God – it tells His story

ii. That is why we must approach it with humility, asking first – what are communicating about yourself

1. Pride is the enemy of understanding – knowledge puffs up – When we place ourselves at the center, we often read God's word to justify ourselves at the cost of others.

iii. ***if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.***

1. Earlier in Matthew 9, Jesus was eating with the tax collectors and sinners

a. The Pharisees ask the disciples, *"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

b. Jesus tells them, *"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."*

iv. They must not have done their assigned homework - ***But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.***

1. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. You are arguing the meaning of the Sabbath with the one who created the Sabbath
2. That is the deeper issue here – when we are no longer anchored to the story of scripture, we ignore what is truly important to God
    a. Mercy – and that directly impacts how we treat others

b. The Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful to heal?" not in hopes that Jesus would heal, but so that they would have something to accuse Him of
    i. Jesus' response – your theological framework gives you license to rescue a sheep but doesn't allow you to rescue a man
    ii. ***Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.***
        1. This is what happens when Scripture is disconnected from the heart of God.
        2. If your reading of the Bible hardens your heart for the lost, you are reading it wrong.
            a. As has been said. "Where there is no mercy, there is no true knowledge of God."
        3. You are probably bringing your pride with you and filtering it through the lens of self
        4. Good indication of that, we use scripture to elevate ourselves and our holiness above others – "I am so glad I am not like them"
    iii. We become better at avoiding sin than loving people
        1. We are great at personal purity and horrible at compassion
            a. That isn't purity at all.
        2. ***Mat 12:14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.***

c. How do I know I am reading the Bible correctly? How do I know I am approaching it with humility knowing how deeply I need mercy myself?
    i. First – look at the fruit
    ii. The fruit of the Spirit – ***Gal 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.***
        1. What do these all of in common? They are relational.
        2. ***Gal 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."***
    iii. The words of Paul - ***"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar." - And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.***

VI. Communion