



# Mercy Trumps Sacrifice

**“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13).**

Bulletin VCM-MT10

27 February 2019

Every body has his or her idea of how things ought to be, and these could be far different from those of God, who declared “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). This scripture emphasises the need to always approach God with a clean sheet of paper, and a mind willing to learn, if we are to discover, follow and serve Him in an acceptable manner.

“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. 10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:9-13).


“And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. 15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? 17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:14-17).

**“They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. (Luke 5:31).**

“And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. 28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. 30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? 31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:27-32).

This story on the call of Matthew (Levi in Mark's and Luke's account) teaches us important principles on the ways of God and His priorities in life and ministry:

- 1) Matthew's account records the call of Matthew to be a disciple of Jesus. Mark's and Luke's account refer to him as Levi. It was normal at the time, for the same person to have two names, just like Simon was also called Peter.
- 2) The “road” from being a publican to becoming an apostle may be a long haul, but it is made possible by the grace of God.
- 3) Matthew's prompt and whole hearted response to Christ's call is worth emulation.
- 4) Matthew celebrated his call with a feast, which brought his friends to Jesus. What a lesson about bringing our friends to Jesus.
- 5) Matthew used his house as a mission field, and his connections for soulwinning.
- 6) The holier than thou attitude of the scribes and pharisees was not only a barrier to evangelism but also the reason for their rejection by God in divine service.

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- 7) Jesus' friendship and socialisation broke down cultural and traditional barriers enabling Him to achieve His goal of salvation of souls. This illustrates that building relationships is a vital requirement that create access routes to the salvation of souls; because people respond more to love than rigorous rituals.
  - 8) Jesus focused on his calling "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). He did not wait for the sinners to come to Him, but rather He built bridges that enabled Him to get to them.
  - 9) The scribes and pharisees focused on religious rituals, most of which were external observances, and ended up losing sight of the true purpose of their existence. A person can be so engrossed in religion that s/he misses the God of the religion.
  - 10) Jesus' response to their questions enlightens us that in divine priorities mercy trumps sacrifice, though the latter is also a divine requirement.

It is obvious throughout scriptures that God requires a life of decisive commitment, sacrifice and consistency with His word. Many through lopsided interpretation have taken this to one extreme to the neglect of the balanced teaching of the word of God. While answering a question on which is the great commandment in the law, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 **This is the first and great commandment.** 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**" (Matthew 22:36-40).

Rebuking the scribes and pharisees of lopsided religion Jesus declared unto them "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, **and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone**" (Matthew 23:23).

A similar rebuke came upon old testament religious elites through the prophet in Isaiah 58:1-11 "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my

ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. 3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: **ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.** 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: 11 And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not".

We must be very careful not to fall into similar errors today by exonerating sacrifice over mercy. **Long fasts, prayers and significant sacrifices do not remove the requirement for love, mercy and justice.** The God who demands sacrificial living from His followers is also described in His Word as the God of Mercy. **In His dealings with mankind we find that often He allows His mercy to triumph over sacrifice, and we are called to follow in His steps!**