

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Scripture Reading — Matthew 12:1-8

“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”

—Matthew 12:7—

Although the Pharisees had condemned him for working on the Sabbath, Jesus reminded them that the temple priests also worked on the Sabbath, yet no one condemned them.

The ceremonies the priests performed daily in the temple were so central to Israel’s religious life that no one would even think of reproaching them for working on the Sabbath. The rituals they practiced and the sacrifices they offered were all intended for Israel’s good! The smoke that rose daily from the altar of sacrifice reminded those who came to the temple that God’s promise of forgiveness was for all who would simply seek him with a believing heart.

Sacrifice was important. God had taught from the beginning that his forgiveness required the shedding of blood. That’s why the shedding of Jesus’ blood was so significant. He became the sacrifice “once for all” to save us from our sin (Hebrews 9:26).

But the ritual of sacrifice was never first and foremost what God was after. It was the heart. God doesn’t want hearts that have become numb by simply going through motions. He wants hearts that have been softened. He wants hearts that have turned away from self-centeredness and see the needs of others. In other words, he wants to see mercy in us.

Prayer

Father, help me to extend your love to others. Open my eyes to the needs around me so that I can be a person whose life is marked by mercy. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Printed on March 20, 2019

