

15th July 2018

The Spirit of the House part 4

Today is part 4 of our series about the 'spirit of the house'. In our previous messages, we saw Jesus addressing people who were in the 'house' but did not have the 'spirit of the house'. We see Jesus taking charge of His house again and teaching them and us:

- 6 things that define the spirit of the house,
- then 3 very important values of the house.
- 2 weeks ago, we looked at the value every person has in the sight of God. God values souls (that was the focus of the ministry of Jesus).
- Today, we are going to talk about 'mercy' and of God's house as being a 'house of mercy'.

Opening Text: Matthew 9:8-13

Introduction:

10 "Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house" ... - Some scholars believe that the setting where this happened was the actual house of Jesus in Capernaum. Reading verse 1, it seems that this city was the place where Jesus based Himself from - so this was most likely His house. It is important to observe the house of Jesus in order to learn 'the spirit of the house'.

In this passage, we see Jesus revealing the spirit of His mission: to be a physician to the sick and to lead sinners to repentance (repentance is better than judgement). Present there were also Pharisees, the religious elite, the kind of people who, as we saw in previous weeks, were in the house but didn't have the spirit of the house:

- They were never compassionate, didn't rejoice in miracles and had no empathy or interest in other people's circumstances.
- Their focus was strictly the letter of the Law, with no regard for the actual 'spirit of the law'.
- They saw themselves as guardians and enforcers of the Truth (or at least what they believed as 'truth') but blindly disregarded the most important matters of the Law. Jesus also confronted them about this:

Matthew 23:23-24 - ²³ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. ²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"*

Among the more important matters of the Law, we find **mercy**. This was not a peripheral matter but central, weighty, more important. That is why Jesus said, "*But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'.*"

1. Learning Mercy

“But go and learn... I desire mercy” - We need to learn what God truly desires. We need to learn mercy. We were not born naturally merciful: this value is foreign to how most of us have been brought up, it is foreign to the world we live in, it is foreign to our experience with others. We were not born with a disposition towards mercy – quite the opposite.

Even the religious people in the story had no inclination towards mercy. To them, what they perceived as being the truth of the Law was all that mattered.

2. Learning the balance between Truth and Mercy

For people who wanted defended the Law, the Pharisees failed to understand that mercy was in fact, one of the most important matters of the Law.

- a) Truth is important but has to be balanced with mercy.

Psalms 85:10 - *Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.*

- b) Truth is important but needs to be spoken in love

Ephesians 4:15 - *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*

- c) Jesus brought grace and truth - together

John 1:17 - *¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Grace is an expression of mercy.

3. Learning from Jesus

We need to learn mercy from Jesus. The way Jesus dealt with the woman caught in adultery exemplifies that: He had mercy on her first but then He also spoke the truth (*go and sin no more*).

In **John 5:1-9** we read a wonderful story of mercy: a man by the pool of Bethesda was healed. Bethesda means literally “House of Mercy” (the ‘spirit of the house’ is mercy!)

Jesus displayed mercy and also spoke truth:

V.14 - *¹⁴Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”*

Jesus never compromised or approved sin but He also never failed to show mercy.

The Pharisees would have probably told the man that he deserved to be sick because he was a sinner. Jesus didn’t do that: He was a physician first and then showed the man the way out of sin.

In His house, Jesus knew that the tax payers present were sinners, but He came with the solution to their sin: repentance. Jesus said that He came *to call sinners, to repentance.*”

4. The warped sense of justice of the Pharisees is not the spirit of the house

In the accounts of the gospels, we see them always busy pointing the wrongs in others and trying to find fault at every turn -even in Jesus, on several occasions. We see them always ready to execute their version of justice – instant and without mercy. Here’s God version of justice:

Zechariah 7:9 - *8 Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, 9 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.*

Also, the judgments of God throughout scripture are hardly ever immediate. God allows time for people to repent. We see that even with Jezebel in Revelation 2:21 - ... *“I gave her time to repent” ...*

Ecclesiastes 8:11 - ... *‘the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily’...*

Psalms 103:8 – *‘The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy’.*

Psalms 75:2 - *“When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly”.*

There were also many times when God withheld judgement because someone interceded on behalf of the people (Genesis 18:16-33). One crucial part of the house of God in the OT was the Mercy Seat (once a year sins were atoned by the High Priest).

It is in that sense that we understand **James 2:13**: *13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Conclusion

Jesus told us to go and learn mercy (we need to grow in this revelation). So much more remains to learn about mercy. However, for the sake of today’s message let us retain the following:

- God’s house is to be like Bethesda - a “House of Mercy” – that is the *spirit* of His house.

Romans 12:6-8 even lists a ‘gift’ or ‘ministry of mercy’ in the church.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

- In the house of God, truth and mercy meet: a good balance of uncompromising truth and unrelenting mercy.
- Finally, a couple of statements that Jesus made that we need to retain:

Matthew 5:7 - *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

Luke 6:36-38 - *³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.³⁶ Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. ³⁷ “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”*

That is what ‘being merciful’ looks like and mercy will always have a good reward!

Extra material:

Some of the ‘rewards of mercy’:

- Mercy from God – **2 Samuel 22:26** - “With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;
- A blessing for future generations – **Psalms 37:26** - *He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed.*
- Good to your soul - **Proverbs 11:17** - *The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.*
- Life, righteousness and honour - **Proverbs 21:21** - *He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honour.*