

HEAR MINISTRIES

Sermon for Sunday, **June 7th, 2026**

Text: Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13

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Let us Pray: *Lord, open our ears and our hearts to the truth of Your Word this morning so that we may learn from You to live in the forgiveness, mercy and love that comes from our Savior Jesus Christ! And, Holy Spirit, speak through me this morning to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

In all of our readings this morning, I am most struck by this one little sentence buried in Matthew chapter 9 verse 13 where Jesus says to the Pharisees, “*Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.*” (Matthew 9:13)

Jesus is actually quoting the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament. **Do you know the story of Hosea?** Understanding the story of Hosea can help us unlock the message behind what Jesus said to the Pharisees. **Why would we want to do that?** Because **Jesus' words** to the Pharisees in Matthew **are good advice for all of us today as well.**

Hosea was a prophet sent to the northern kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament. Before Hosea's ministry began, Israel's kingdom had split into Israel and Judah after King Solomon's death and a period of deep moral collapse.

In Hosea's time the people were still offering sacrifices to God (Hosea 8:13), but **their hearts were far from God.** Their love for Him was fleeting, “*like the morning mist,*” Hosea says. (Hosea 6:4)

The **people of Israel kept chasing idols** while going through the religious motions towards God. Everything was done “to a tee” outwardly to try and satisfy the Law of Moses, but **they never truly sat down to dine and commune with the Great I Am whom they claimed to worship.** It actually describes the state of many churches and Christians today.

Through Hosea, **God rebuked them for sacrificing to Him without love, mercy or faithfulness.** They honored God with ritual but not with relationship. So, God says to

them in Hosea 6:6, “*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*”

The book of Hosea is one of the most heartbreaking and beautiful pictures of God’s love in all of Scripture because it reveals something many of us forget: **God does not stop pursuing His people simply because they wandered.** The Lord told the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, a woman who would be unfaithful to him. If you want to read a modern-day retelling of this story, read Redeeming Love by Francine Rivers. I have a copy here for anyone to borrow. You won’t be able to put it down. The story feels shocking, painful, and deeply personal because **it was meant to mirror Israel’s relationship with God, and God’s relationship with us.**

Again and again, the people turned away from the Lord. They chased idols. They trusted other nations more than God. They lived divided lives. Their lips honored Him while their hearts drifted far away. And yet, **God kept speaking through Hosea, “Return to the Lord your God.” (Hosea 14:1)** God isn’t just calling out disobedience on Israel’s part. **He’s calling out betrayal. Israel had broken their relationship with God,** not just the “rules” He gave them. To break the covenant wasn’t just to fall short – it was to **walk away from a faithful God who had bound Himself to them in love.**

What is remarkable about Hosea is that the story is not merely judgment. It is about relentless love. A love that confronts sin but still pursues the sinner. A love that refuses to give up easily. **A love that longs to restore rather than destroy.**

And, to be perfectly honest, **this story feels incredibly modern.** Today, people still search for fulfillment in things that cannot save them. We build identities around success, appearance, relationships, validation, money, platforms, politics or comfort. We numb our souls with noise and distractions while quietly starving spiritually.

Modern idolatry rarely takes the form of golden statues. It looks like anything we rely on more than God for security, identity, peace or worth. And slowly, without realizing it, our hearts drift from God.

God says, “*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*” (Hosea 6:6) **How can we understand what that really means?** The Hebrew word “*hesed*” that is often translated as “mercy” is very hard to translate into other languages. Some Bibles may translate it as “steadfast love” or compassion. In other words, there is more to “hesed” than just mercy: it encompasses steadfast love, goodness, kindness, compassion and even loyalty in our English language. So, **God desires all these things from us. Not just sacrifice.**

What does “sacrifice” mean? This goes back to the sacrifice of animals that was an important part of worship in the Old Testament. In that time, tithing was less about giving money and more about giving part of a crop or herd to God. **But what does sacrifice look like for us? What do we give to God?** Not crops or animals these days. **We think about our time, talents and treasure.** They are all important to God. But **not more important than mercy.** None of the things we do can substitute for our steadfast love, mercy, forgiveness, compassion or kindness toward others. Paul said in I Corinthians that love, mercy and kindness always come first. That is what God desires. (*I Corinthians 13:4-8*)

There is another interesting aspect to “hesed.”(mercy, compassion, steadfast love....) **It is used in Scripture just as much to describe God’s relationship with us as it is to describe our relationship with God.** In other words, **God show us** this kind of steadfast love and mercy over and over again throughout Scripture, **before ever asking it of us.** We are not being asked to do something which God has not already done.

This reminds me of a story about wise old Village Leader. He was, of course, a beloved and influential person in His village and throughout the area. One day a mother approached him and asked him if he would talk to her son about the importance of eating right and cutting down, or even giving up, sweets. He agreed to talk with her son about this, and she went away pleased. Several weeks went by and he still had not talked to her son. She became frustrated and approached the Village Leader again. She asked him why he had not yet talked with her son. He said that he still intended to, but that he was having a harder time giving up sweets than he expected. She was puzzled by this for a moment, and then realized that the wise old Village Leader would not ask someone else to do something that he was not already doing. He could not ask her son to give up sweets until he himself had already done it.

God wanted three things from Israel.....and He wants three things from us:

1. To return to Him
2. To truly know Him **more** than what we can do for Him
3. To know what He know: that we are sinful and that He loves us anyway

In fact, He loves us so much that He came to earth in the human form of Jesus so that **humanity could experience forming a personal relationship with Him.** Jesus was very relational in His ministry on earth.

Now, **let’s bring all that we have learned to our Gospel text for today**, where Jesus walks by a tax booth, sees Matthew, and says, “*Follow me.*” (Matthew 9:9) The tax booths were set up right there along the lake so the taxes could easily be collected from the fishermen as they came off the lake with their catch for the day. Here’s a little insight into

how the Jewish culture in Biblical times viewed the tax collectors. In Jesus' day the tax collectors were like the pedophiles of our day. A pedophile is probably the worst thing that we can imagine in our culture and society today. **A tax collector was the worst thing that could be imagined in Jesus' day.** Pedophiles in Jesus' day were a dime a dozen as it was common for rulers to have children as slaves for whatever they may have wanted. **Tax collectors were traitors who were Jewish and worked for the Roman government.** A tax collector would often rat out his fellow Jew who hadn't paid so that the Romans could go and arrest the person who hadn't paid their taxes and take them and their children as slaves until their taxes were paid in the time that they were slaves. **The tax collector, like the pedophile in our culture, was the lowest of the low on the totem pole of society.**

So, **here is Jesus, calling a tax collector to follow Him.** The Pharisees (religious leaders of the synagogue, the Jewish church) were **scandalized.** When they saw Jesus having dinner with a group of tax collectors and other "sinners" at Matthew's house, they asked, *"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11)*

As an aside, this just kills me every time I read this part of Matthew. The Pharisees were talking about Jesus eating with "sinners" and mortified that He would associate with "sinners" **like they weren't sinners!!** I mean, that tells you right there how the Pharisees and religious leaders saw themselves and others. They were all about the outward appearances of keeping the Law of Moses and the many other "laws" they had come up with themselves. Mostly ritualistic laws. They were so self-righteous and arrogant; very much about putting people into classes and boxes and **judging from the outside in.**

Some Christians tend to be judgmental toward others and take pride in their own perceived goodness instead of remembering and displaying the mercy Christ offers. Jesus taught us to forgive as we have been forgiven and show the same kind of mercy that was shown to us by God. **Jesus spent time in the company of "sinners" and welcomed those who repented and followed Him. He wants us to do the same.**

This reminds me of a discussion I was part of in a class I took at Bethel. We were talking about doing ministry and reconciliation work in prisons. The speaker saw that some in the class were not comfortable with the idea of bringing together murderers with the families of those who were murdered, in a gesture of forgiveness and healing. The speaker reminded us of this: each one of us is capable of committing the sin of murder (or any other sin) because we all have a sin nature. In other words, we are ALL sinners saved by grace and the ground at the foot of the cross is level. There is not a list of "good" sins and "bad" sins. Sin is sin. Now, most people do not choose the sin of murder....but we are all capable of it because of our sinful human nature.

The Pharisees had turned the Scriptures into a list of rules and regulations instead of understanding what the Law meant and why it had been given. The self-righteousness of the Pharisees prevented them from seeing their spiritually sickened condition and their need for God and His mercy. **Jesus wasn't just confronting their judgmentalism; He was confronting their self-deception.** The covenant wasn't only broken by the people they looked down on. It had been broken by them, too. They were just as blind as everyone else!

In Matthew chapter 9, **Jesus is reclining at a table full of "sinners."** He's eating, sharing space, being present. **The Pharisees are watching from the outside, appalled that someone claiming to be God would fellowship with such people.**

Instead of explaining Himself, Jesus tells them: Go learn the Scriptures you think you know so well. He says, "Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." (Matthew 9:13) The Pharisees knew what Hosea 6:6 said. They were schooled in all the Old Testament prophets and writings. Jesus is telling them: **You missed the heart of God. He's not after your performance. He's after mercy. That's what He's always wanted. You just forgot and you still don't know it.**

Jesus isn't impressed by religious performance or fooled by ritual done without love. He's after hearts that remember the mercy they've been shown. He's after those who are willing to commune with Him, to connect with Him and sit down to be with Him, not just those who show up to play a part for Him.

I'd like to end with these thoughts from Caroline Hanna Guirgis in her study of Hosea:

God is not after performance alone.

He wants our hearts.

Not polished Christianity without surrender.

Not outward appearances, while inwardly disconnected.

Not an occasional acknowledgment, while other things rule our lives.

He wants a real relationship.

And the beautiful thing about God is this:

Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful.

Even after failure, His mercy still calls us.

Even after wandering, His grace still invites.

Even after seasons of distance, the door home remains open through Christ.

Perhaps today, some hearts feel spiritually numb.

Perhaps some are exhausted from striving, hiding, pretending or running.

The message of Hosea still speaks:

Return to the Lord.

Not because He is eager to shame you –

*But **because He longs to heal you.***

Amen.