

Matthew 12:1-14: At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." ³ He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it 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 how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And 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 of the Sabbath." ⁹ He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" - so that they might accuse him. ¹¹ He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Intro: Matthew 11:28-30: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Come to Jesus for rest! Come to Jesus for help! Come to Jesus for salvation! Come to Jesus to learn & rest in Him! Sadly, in our passage today, we see the Pharisees took one of God's laws that point to this rest in Jesus Christ that was supposed to be a blessing, & they turned it into a burden. It was meant to point Israel to Christ where true rest is found, but these leaders rejected Christ! Jesus shows us today that He is the greater David; He is the greater temple; He is LORD of the Sabbath! He alone gives rest! And we see the rising opposition to Christ: leads to death

1. The Pharisees Accused Jesus' Disciples Of Breaking God's Law About The Sabbath Day

Matthew 12:1-2: At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

a. Plucking the grain to eat it was lawful: Deuteronomy 23:25: If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.

b. The Sabbath: Exodus 16:22-30: On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'" ²⁴ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." ²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹ See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

- Exodus 20:8-11: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

- **Exodus 31:14-16:** You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.

- **Numbers 15:32-36:** While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. ³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. ³⁴ They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. ³⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." ³⁶ And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the LORD commanded Moses.

R. T. France: the Sabbath, which was to the Jews not just a ceremonial regulation, but a witness to God's creation, a sign of Israel's special covenant relationship with God, a gift of God to make Israel more holy, and a promise of the joys of the world to come.

c. The Pharisees & Jewish traditions added many burdensome regulations for Sabbath keeping: Mishna: Considered to be a cornerstone of Judaism; it provides the background for every subject of Halacha (Jewish law) found in the Oral Torah; it supplemented the laws found in the Pentateuch; provides interpretations . .

The Sabbath was so important, the Mishna listed 39 kinds of work that showed you were breaking the Sabbath.

Don't sew more than one stitch; don't write more than one letter; a woman couldn't look in the mirror because she might see a white hair and try to pull it out; and of course there should be no harvesting of grain!

John MacArthur: In the Talmud [Jewish commentary on the law of God] – in one section of the Talmud, and there are at least two such sections, but in one of them, there are 24 chapters listing all the Sabbath laws. One rabbi spent two and a half years trying to understand one of those chapters. If you just extrapolate that out, you have a lifetime of one man just trying to figure out the stuff he was supposed to do on the Sabbath . . . Here are the following 39 things that were commonly forbidden: Sewing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sifting, grinding, sifting with a sieve, kneading, baking, shearing the wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning, putting it in the weaver's beam, making two threads, weaving two threads, separating two threads, making a knot, undoing a knot, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, catching deer, killing, skinning, salting it, preparing its skin, scraping off its hair, cutting it up, writing two letters, scraping in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, extinguishing fire, lighting fire, beating with a hammer, carrying from one possession to another, and it goes on and on.

Now you want to know what the Sabbath was? A pain in the neck. I mean it was impossible to rest. You couldn't do anything. No wonder they were laboring and heavy-laden. No wonder they were sick to death of the system that had been imposed on them by the legalists. The Sabbath was the focus of everything. Edersheim says if a woman were to roll wheat to take away the husk, she would be guilty of sifting. If she were rubbing the ends of the stalk, she would be guilty of threshing. If she were cleaning what adheres to the side of a stalk, she would be guilty of sifting. If she was bruising the stalk, she would be guilty of grinding. If she was throwing it up in her hands, she would be guilty of winnowing. And the people were under this incredible burden. Now do you understand what it meant when Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest"? That's what the Sabbath was supposed to be, but as far as rest was concerned, it was a joke. And so Jesus came along and paid absolutely no attention to any of that stuff, and it infuriated the religious leaders. This became the final act that crystallized their rejection. **(Israel today: my trip there, elevators)**

The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, were accusing Jesus' disciples of breaking the Sabbath because they were picking heads of grain and eating them. They were focusing on the traditions men, not on God's Word!

2. Jesus Gives Two Illustrations Vindicating The Disciples' Actions

Matthew 12:3-5: He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it 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 how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?"

a. Have you not read: This is like saying "Do you not know what 2 + 2 is?" to an electrical engineer or a rocket scientist! They have read, but they don't know! They don't know God, and they don't know the God-Man!

b. The example of David: King Saul was trying to kill David. David fled for his life. He & his men were hungry. - David went to Ahimelech the priest (1 Samuel 21), and the priest gave David the holy bread only priests could eat

Daniel Doriani: The priests faced a decision. The bread belonged to the priests, yet it also belonged to God, and David was God's anointed servant. The priests deliberated, then gave the bread to David to keep the Lord's anointed king from going hungry. Technically speaking, everyone knew this was illegal. The law clearly stipulated that none but a priest could eat the consecrated bread. But the priests understood the true purpose of the law: to lead the people to love and worship God. As the Lord's anointed, David led the people in their spiritual service. He was God's agent, just as the priests were. Which was better?: to feed God's anointed servant or observe a rule about priests and bread while sending the hope of Israel away hungry? The priests gave David the bread; Jesus approved and drew a lesson from the event. Just as the needs of God's king and his servants outweighed sacrificial regulations in David's day, so the needs of King Jesus and his servants outweigh Sabbath regulations. The needs of God's ordained leaders take precedence over ritual law. The king's men have a right to eat, whether those men belong to David or Jesus. Jesus says the Pharisees should have seen this as they read the Old Testament and considered Jesus' work as Israel's true king.

Jesus is the Greater David: Jesus created the grain fields they walked in & upholds them all by the Word of His power! He made the legs everyone used to walk through the grain fields!

He created the eyes the Pharisees used to see this supposed infraction of the law!

He made the Pharisees' vocal cords used to accuse His disciples of wrong doing!

He created David and the consecrated bread he ate!

He was before David! He was with David!

And He's forevermore after David and the greater Son of David!

Jesus wrote the law! He obeyed the law perfectly! He's the fulfillment of the law! He's the law come in the flesh!

He's greater than the law! And He's the Lord of all laws!

c. Jesus gives another example: the example of the priests in the temple: Verse 5: Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?"

According to the Pharisees' wrong view of work on the Sabbath & what can and can't be done, the priests profaned it. The priests worked hard – they taught, prayed, sacrificed animals, etc. Yet, it was all done in service to God!

Dan Doriani: Clearly then, the law knows priorities. David's case shows that human need supersedes Sabbath regulations. The priests show that worship and service to the Lord do too.

3. Jesus Is The Something Greater Than The Temple That's Here!

Matthew 12:6: I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

If priests are allowed to do so much work in service to God in the temple, how much more right do Jesus' own disciples have to do work in service to Him (Jesus is God!) and to serve Jesus Who is greater than the temple?!

Dan Dorinai: The temple merely represents the presence of God. Jesus is greater than the temple because he is the presence of God with us. Again, the temple represents the sacrifices that reconcile us to God, whereas Jesus is the sacrifice that reconciles us to God.

John 2:19-21: Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

John Piper: "Kill me, and I will become the global meeting place with God." That's the way I would paraphrase John 2:19-21. They thought Jesus was referring to the temple in Jerusalem: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But he was referring to his body. Why did Jesus draw the connection between the Jewish temple and his own body? Because he came to take the place of the temple as the meeting place with God. With the coming of the Son of God in human flesh, ritual and worship would undergo profound change. Christ himself would become the final Passover lamb, the final priest, the final temple. They would all pass away, and he would remain. What remained would be infinitely better. Referring to himself, Jesus said, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6). The temple became the dwelling of God at rare times when the glory of God filled the holy place. But of Christ the Bible says, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). The presence of God does not come and go on Jesus. He is God. Where we meet him, we meet God. God met the people in the temple through many imperfect human mediators. But now it is said of Christ, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). If we would meet God in worship, there is only one place we must go, to Jesus Christ. Christianity has no geographical center like Islam and Judaism. Once when Jesus confronted a woman with her adultery, she changed the subject and said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus followed her on the detour: "Woman, . . . the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." Geography is not the issue. What is? Jesus continued, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:20-23). Jesus changes the categories entirely. Not in this mountain or in that city, but in spirit and in truth. He came into the world to explode geographical limitation. There is no temple now. Jerusalem is not the center. Christ is. Do we want to see God? Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Do we want to receive God? Jesus says, "Whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Matthew 10:40). Do we want to have the presence of God in worship? The Bible says, "Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Do we want to honor the Father? Jesus says, "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:23). When Christ died and rose again, the old temple was replaced by the globally accessible Christ. You may come to him without moving a muscle. He is as close as faith. **GOSPEL!**

4. The Merciful Lord Of The Sabbath

Matthew 12:7-8: And 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 of the Sabbath.

a. V. 7: I desire mercy, & not sacrifice: God desires that we show mercy, love, and grace to others, not that we merely participate in religious rituals in a vain, heartless way. Sacrifices are good, but not done in vain. & God desires that we obey His commandments (the two greatest commandments) more than offering sacrifices for sins.

D. A. Carson: Through Hosea, God said that the apostates of Hosea's day, though continuing the formal ritual of temple worship, had lost its center. As applied to the Pharisees by Jesus, therefore, the Hosea quotation was . . . [telling them] that they were aligned with the apostates of ancient Israel in that they too preserved the shell while losing the heart of the matter

We can do religious rituals: come to church, read our Bibles, pray, check off all the religious boxes and feel really good about ourselves, while we fail to show love, compassion, and mercy toward others in need and really pursue the knowledge of God and a true, vital living relationship with Him that leads to loving others!

b. V. 8: For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath: “Son of Man” is the divine figure in Daniel 7:13 Who has everlasting rule and reign! He is Lord of the Sabbath! Jesus, as the second person of the trinity, is the One Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. He is the one who gave the ten commandments that included the Sabbath day!

He's Lord of the most important day in the creation of the world!

He's Lord of the holiest of the holy days of God's people Israel!

He's Lord of what Sabbath points to: the New Heavens & the New Earth in the fully realized Kingdom of God!

He's Lord of every square inch of planet earth! He's Lord of all creation!

He's Lord of all kings, presidents, rulers, and authorities no matter how good or corrupt they are!

He's Lord of all elections and leaders in public office!

He's Lord of all storms, earthquakes, fires, famines, floods, and frightening accidents!

He's Lord of all sin because He died for sin, turned away the wrath of God from sinners, rose up from the grave, conquered sin and death, and breaks the power of canceled sin and sets the captives free!

His resurrection achievement is so great that it forever changed the day on which His people meet together for worship – we go from Sabbath Saturday to Lord's Day Sunday until He comes back to take us to everlasting rest!

He's Lord of the devil because He came to destroy all the works of the devil!

He's Lord of all the evil that's ever been committed in this world!

And since He's Lord of all evil, though evil people mean evil for evil, He means it all for good!

He's Lord of all the evil in your life, and He means it all for good!

5. It's Right To Do Good On The Sabbath

Matthew 12:9-14: He went on from there and entered their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" - so that they might accuse him. ¹¹ He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

a. The Pharisees seek to accuse Jesus with a question: Jesus goes into their synagogue, the place of teaching, instruction, & community life. A man has a non-life threatening disease. So the Pharisees and their extra laws would say he can wait to be healed another day. They ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

We are told they did this so that they might accuse Him! They are trying to find sin & fault in Jesus!

b. Jesus asks the Pharisees a question, showing them the mercy they have on animals on the Sabbath: Verse 11: He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?"

c. Men are worth more than animals, so it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath: Verse 12: Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. (Jesus' interpretation is final! He wrote it!)

d. How should we view the Sabbath? Westminster Shorter Catechism: 58: What is required in the 4th commandment? **A.** The 4th commandment requires the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy sabbath to himself.

- **WSC 59:** Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath? **A.** From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian sabbath.

- **WSC 60:** How is the sabbath to be sanctified? **A.** The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments & recreations as are lawful on other days; & spending the whole time in the public & private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity & mercy

Of the Christian Sabbath: We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath; and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes, by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public; and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God.

e. The Healer of healers: Verse 13: Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.

Jesus can speak healing into existence. Jesus can speak things into existence, you and I cannot. Jesus is God!

f. The real destroyers of Rest: Verse 14: But the Pharisees went out & conspired against him, how to destroy him.

David Platt: What an amazing picture, as those most devoted to the law turned completely against the One who gave the law in the first place!

Jesus would ultimately allow Himself to be destroyed on that cross where He would bear the wrath of God, die, be buried, and rise again so that we might be saved and have everlasting rest in Him!

Jesus Is LORD Of Sabbath Rest
He's God And Man The Greatest's Best
And Though The Pharisees Would Test
It's He Who Made The Sabbath Blessed
And Gave The Rules That God Expressed
So Follow Him And Don't Be Stressed
He Heals And Frees Those Tired, Oppressed
He Died And Took God's Wrath Expressed
Then Rose Alive To Death Arrest
Come To Him And You'll Be Dressed
In His Righteousness Possessed
By Faith Alone As You've Confessed
Your Sins Are Gone From East To West
So Come To Christ For Saving Rest
To Do His Good Will Be Your Quest
With Him Alone You'll Be Obsessed!