

The Gospel of Matthew

Text: Matthew 12:1-14

Introduction: Chapter 12 begins to mark the turning point in Jesus' ministry, as the people move to rejection and eventually the cross. Truth does this. It moves people to make a decision either to believe or to reject the truth.

- Herod and his wicked plan
- The hostility toward John the Baptist, cf. John 3:7-8
- As Jesus condemned man made religion, hostility grew and it escalated into criticism
- He was called a drunkard, one with a demon, accused of blasphemy, and fellowshiping with sinners and tax collectors
- The most egregious cause for opposition was what He did on the Sabbath

POINT 1 - THE INCIDENT (Vs. 1-2)

The observance of the Sabbath was at the forefront of the Jewish legalistic system. Jesus violated this tradition (12:1), and He struck a nerve. Let's get a definition of Sabbath. Both English and Greek translate the Hebrew word the same, which has the meaning of "ceasing, rest and inactivity." Genesis 2:3, "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." The lord declared a special time of rest and remembrance for His people, and incorporated this into the Ten Commandments, cf. Exodus 20:8-11.

NOTE: this law is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is nonmoral and purely ceremonial: and it was unique to the old covenant and to Israel. The other nine commandments, pertain spiritual and moral absolutes that are repeated in the New Testament.¹

1A - Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill, cf. Matthew 5:17. For several hundred years, various schools of rabbis had added regulation after regulation going far beyond the teaching of Scripture, and in many instances actually contradicted the Scripture. In Matthew 15:6 concerning the "washing of hands" Jesus said to the Pharisees, "And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition." One must be careful not to assert your Christian liberty or tradition over the truth of God's word.

Keeping of the Sabbath was a binding ceremonial obligation for Israel, but most didn't have any idea what it was originally about. Or how God intended to honor and keep it. Instead of being a day of rest, it had become a day of burden. Because of the endless regulations added to this command, the day had become actually more burdensome and work oriented, than actual rest. It was harder to "rest" than to earn a living.

¹ The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 281

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APPLICATION: tradition says that many battles were lost because they would not defend themselves against enemy attacks on the Sabbath. Attack on the other six days and they would fight, but on the Sabbath they would do anything.

1B - The rules added by the Rabbis. You were limited to travel from your house to less than 3,000 steps. But there were exceptions to this, you could place food within 3,000 feet of your home, and go eat it, and go beyond that food another 3,000 feet because food was considered an extension of your home. A Jew could not carry a load heavier than a dried fig, but if the object weighed half that, then he could carry it twice. You could eat nothing larger than an olive, and even if you bit into an olive and it was bad, that counted. Throwing an object into the air and catching it with one hand was prohibited. Tailors did not carry a needle with them on the Sabbath for fear they may work. Nothing could be bought or sold, dyed or washed. A letter could not be dispatched. No fire could be lit or extinguished. You better light your candle before the Sabbath and make sure it stays lit so you won't be in the dark. Baths could not be taken for fear water would be spilt on the floor and work to clean it up was done. Ink could only be used for two letters of the alphabet to be written. You could not pull a head of grain to eat, even if you were starving, and there was no clear cut agreement on what starving was. If you became sick on the Sabbath, you were in trouble. Only enough treatment to keep you alive was administered, if treatment given to make you improve was given that was considered work and forbidden.

Here are some other activities that were forbidden: sewing, plowing, reaping, grinding, baking, threshing, binding sheaves, winnowing, sifting, dying, shearing, spinning, kneading, separating or weaving two threads, tying or untying a knot, and sewing two stitches. The Sabbath was anything but rest, but had become a time of oppressive frustration and anxiety. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, “**come unto me all you who are weary and heavy-laden.**”

1C - Jesus and His disciples were just passing through the grain field. They became hungry. There were no “roads” just paths through the fields. If a traveler didn't take enough food he had to live off the land. Even when making this commandment, God in His infinite wisdom make a provision, Deuteronomy 23:24-25, “**When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket. When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.**” In other words, get what is needed don't make a harvest off someone else's field. They weren't “reaping” on the Sabbath, they were simply eating.

The rabbis had interpreted this text so that rubbing the grain together in their hands was a form of threshing. The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. They had no source of income. When they became hungry they began to pluck and eat. They were wishing the scriptural rights to do what they did.

POINT 2 - THE INDICTMENT

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This indictment was not a violation of God's law. It was a violation of the rabbinical tradition that had been rooted for centuries. The law elevated itself above the actual scriptural commands given by God, cf Matthew 15:6. The Pharisees indicted the Lord and His disciples for disobeying their man made, distorted traditions. Their law prevented man from a day of rest, and instead made it a law of burdens.

POINT 3 - INSTRUCTION

The Pharisees considered themselves experts in Scripture. Jesus' question was deep cutting because what Jesus was referring to was written in Scripture. There is no doubt they were angry about Jesus asking them why they didn't know Scripture. They were legalistic functionaries, trapped in their own system of futile, relentless rules, instead of loving their neighbor.

3A - The Sabbath does not restrict the deeds of necessity. In the example Jesus gave of David, which the Pharisees should have known, David and his companions fled for their lives from Saul. They were hungry but the only bread in the tabernacle was only for the priests. It was called the bread of the Presence. In 1 Samuel 21:4 there was no "ordinary bread" available. Ahimelech made an exception for David because of hunger, and neither Ahimelech nor David were condemned for this. God made some allowances, but the Pharisees wouldn't bend on their ridiculous traditions they made.

3B - The Sabbath doesn't restrict service to God. In all of the man-made restrictions created by the Rabbis, they violated the very things on the Sabbath in order to do what the sacrifices require. They would light fires, work, cut, cook and walk beyond the steps required. The most legalistic Pharisees considered the priests innocent of breaking the Sabbath laws they created, even though they worked twice as hard on that day than others.

Furthermore, Jesus angered and likely embarrassed the Pharisees by these truths. But He points beyond the sacrifice, He talked about Himself being greater than the temple, which they considered nothing to be greater than that. Jesus had previously claimed to be the deity, and He was here claiming Himself to be God.

3C - The Sabbath doesn't restrict acts of mercy. If you know what this means! Wow. That's an indictment on all of us. We should imbed ourselves in the Word of God. If the Pharisees had known what the Bible says, they would not have condemned the disciples for eating on the Sabbath. This partial quotes is from Hosea 6:6. **Note:** sacrifice was never more than symbolic, pointing people to God's gracious and future provision of what no man could do nor any animal provide.

The main point being is God is compassionate. And He commands His people to be compassionate. There are times where, for the sake of mercy, where God sets aside His law. Please note, I am not

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saying God will allow at times for adultery, stealing or some other vile wicked act. But if one is hungry on the Sabbath, he can get something to eat.

POINT 4 - FOR HE IS LORD OF THE SABBATH (VS. 8)

This statement was blasphemous to the Pharisees. And it rendered the Pharisees literally speechless. When our Lord implied there is something greater than the temple, He was referring to Himself. He stood before them claiming to be The Son of God.

The New Testament does not require Sabbath rest observance. But rather allows whether any day is honored above another. The only requirement is whatever position is taken, to be taken for the glory of God. Romans 14:5-6, “One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.” Note: what the disciples did was violate the Pharisees laws they had made and traditions they had. It was a above Scripture to impose their own views upon others and condemn them. Paul warns the Galatians from doing this, “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:9-10). Colossians 2:16, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.”

APPLICATION/CONCLUSION

Vs. 10 is a trap question. They were not a bit interested in a man’s healing, but a violation of their man made rules.

Vs. 11 a sheep was extremely valuable. You wouldn’t rescue that sheep just because a law said you couldn’t work.

Jesus says it’s within the Biblical command to do good on the sabbath.

What the Pharisees missed because of their self righteous legalism was truth. They also missed the miracles of God. The very one they claimed to know so much about. Today, what may be keeping you from salvation is your own ideas about God. Your rules of morality won’t save you. Your condemnation of others because they violate your rules won’t make you righteous.