



24: The Sabbath Showdown (Matthew 12:1-14)

Today we discover a statement of Jesus that forced His audience to CROWN Him or KILL Him. Welcome to **the Sabbath Showdown!**

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teachingnotes

Catch the Context

Jesus warned unrepentant towns about the future judgment that awaited them if they continued to reject Him (Mt 11:20-24). We also heard the compassionate cry of Jesus offering rest in Him (Mt 11:28-30).

As we've seen, Jesus had several confrontational talks with religious leaders. Some of them had even said Jesus performed miracles by the power of the devil (Mt 9:34). And it's about to get even worse between Jesus and the Pharisees, at **The Sabbath Showdown**.

Shabbat (Sabbath) has always been Friday night sundown to Saturday night sundown, a time of rest.

Sabbath Rest

Exodus 20:8-11 (LSB) **Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.** "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but **the seventh day is a sabbath of Yahweh** your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female slave or your cattle or your sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore **Yahweh blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.**

After creating all that exists, Yahweh **rested**. God wasn't tired. The work was complete. And Yahweh commanded His Hebrew people to follow His example - to work diligently then take a break. *What a blessing this was!* The people who had been in bondage in Egypt for 430 years had never had a day off! Now Yahweh gives everyone a day off - men & women, children, indentured servants, and even animals. Beyond rest, the people would gather to worship God together.

Working on Sabbath = Death

Exodus 35:2-3 (LSB) Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, **a sabbath of complete rest to Yahweh; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.** You shall not kindle a fire in any of your places of habitation on the sabbath day.

There were no fires in the camp on Sabbath, as they were to prepare Sabbath meals the previous day. When a man disobeyed and picked up sticks for a fire on Sabbath - the people were told to stone him to death (Numbers 15:32-36).

Why do Christians gather on a Sunday instead of a Saturday?

- *In Acts*, the Jewish leaders of the early Christian church continued to go to synagogues on Sabbath - per their Jewish tradition, but it's also where they attempted to persuade other Jews that Jesus was their Jewish Messiah. (Acts 13:14, Acts 17:1-2; 18:4).
- From Acts-Revelation, there is NO command regarding what Gentiles are to do on the Sabbath. There are a couple of passages that take the focus off a particular day as more sacred than another (Ro 14:5; Col 2:16).
- There are 2 references to the church meeting on Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) - the day that Jesus rose from the dead (Mk 16:1-2).
- John writes that he was on Patmos when he saw the revelation visions **on the Lord's Day** (Rev 1:10).

☀️ **Ignatius**, an early church father who died as a martyr sometime between ad 110-117, wrote these words:

"If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, **no longer observing sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day**, on which our life also arose through Him and through His death..."¹

☀️ **The Didache**, ("The Teaching"), is an early text dating somewhere between the late 1st and early 2nd century, with instructions about moral conduct and church gatherings.

"And **on the Lord's own day** gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."²

¹ Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 145.

² *Ibid.*, 234.

✓ While having a day of rest and gathering with believers is still necessary, Hebrews 4 teaches that our Sabbath rest is found in what Jesus did on the cross. **Our spiritual rest - our peace with God - is found through the death & resurrection of Jesus.** This is the ultimate fulfillment of what the Old Testament Sabbath pointed to. *The principle to rest one day out of the week is still vital and practical, but the New Testament puts no focus on WHICH day that should be* (Ro 14:5; Col 2:16).

✦ The Jews took Sabbath observance so seriously that enemies took advantage of them by attacking on the Sabbath. Over one hundred years before the time of Jesus, in the days of the Maccabees, the Jews to be slaughtered rather than break the Sabbath by defending themselves (1 Macc. 2:31-38).³ Men, women, and children died rather than 'break the Sabbath' by fighting back on that day.

🔍 By A.D. 200, the **Mishnah** - a written collection of Rabbinical Rules - **named 39 different kinds of work** that profaned the Sabbath. This included: plowing, hunting, and butchering, tying or loosening knots, sewing more than one stitch, or writing more than one letter (m. Shab. 7:2).⁴

🕒 *God intended this to be a BLESSING for people, NOT a BURDEN* (The Sabbath wasn't meant to be a long checklist of what you couldn't do).

Hungry Disciples Breaking the Law?

Matthew 12:1-2 (NIV) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is **unlawful on the Sabbath.**"

2 words give us insight into why the Pharisees were questioning Jesus: **Sabbath & unlawful**. What were they doing that was **unlawful**? *Were they stealing?* **NOPE**. According to Deut. 23:25, travelers were allowed to pluck grain from neighbors' fields as they passed through, but they couldn't use a sickle to harvest another person's land.

✗ Evidently the Pharisees believed the disciples were **doing what was unlawful on the Sabbath** - reaping harvest by plucking it & preparing food by rubbing it in their hands to separate the grain from the husks.

King David & Temple Priests Breaking the Law?

Matthew 12:3-5 (NIV) He answered, "Haven't you read what **David** did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was **not lawful** for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that **the priests** on Sabbath duty in the temple **desecrate the Sabbath** and yet are innocent?"

David approached the priests asking for food. They had none - except **the consecrated bread** - that was **only for the priests**. Yet the priests gave it to them and David and his men. Jesus poses a question without ever asking it: "*So did King David break God's Law? And if so, why were David and his men not condemned for their actions?*"

They weren't attempting to misuse the bread. But they needed food and this was all that was available. So the hunger of King David & his holy men overrode the written rule; and evidently, *God was good with that*.

✓ Notice the comparison, 1) David & his disciples to 2) Jesus & His disciples. David and his disciples broke the Written God-made Rule, but Jesus' disciples did not; *they broke the Rabbinical (man-made) Rules*.

Aren't **the priests** breaking the **Sabbath** by working in the temple on that day? **NOPE**. God made an allowance for them to do would others could not - work on the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10).

Jesus = Greater than the Temple & Lord of Sabbath

Matthew 12:6-8 (NIV) I tell you that **something greater than the temple is here**. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For **the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.**"

Jesus quoted this passage from Hosea 6:6 earlier in Matthew's writing: "**I desire mercy, not sacrifice.**" (see Mt 9:13) Here again, Jesus is pointing people to the link between *attitude* - **mercy** & *action* - **sacrifice**. Those who bring sacrifices to God without appreciating God's **mercy** are just checking the box, rather than appreciating God's kindness. That's what these Pharisees had done - they quickly **condemned the innocent** - the disciples of Jesus.

What does Jesus mean by something greater than the temple is here? NO ONE in that culture would have said that about themselves - including King David or the temple priests. After all, this temple was the HOUSE OF GOD - where His Presence lived! What is something greater than the Temple? The LIVING TEMPLE of God - the Lord Jesus - God...in skin!!!!

If Jesus, the Son of Man is Lord - MASTER & BOSS - of the Sabbath, this means HE determines how the Sabbath was to be observed. But ONLY YAHWEH GOD could do that! This claim by Jesus is blasphemous, unless it's true!

BIG TRUTH: The Author is the Authority

³ Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 299.

⁴ James R. Edwards, The Gospel According to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 93-94.

The Author is the Authority

❓ **Do YOU recognize Jesus as the Author & Authority of YOUR life?** Do you trust what HE says or have you decided to be your own authority?

Baiting the Trap

Matthew 12:9-14 (NIV) Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? **How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!** Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and **it was completely restored**, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Remember, breaking the Sabbath could result in DEATH. These men were ready to get rid of Jesus.

The Rabbinical Rules taught that it was not lawful to heal on the Sabbath - except in a life-saving emergency. Jews were forbidden to set a dislocated foot or hand on the Sabbath (m. Shab. 22:6).⁵ This is mentioned *NO WHERE* in the Written Scripture. It was a Rabbinical Rule.

Jesus is proving to be **the Lord of the Sabbath** - the authority over all people. But rather than respond to the evidence and bow their knee to the healing King - who extends mercy to others, **the Pharisees plotted how they might kill Jesus.**

BIG TRUTH: The Author is the Authority

🔥 **Tim Keller:** "Either you'll have to kill him, or you'll have to crown him. The one thing you can't do is just say, 'What an interesting guy.' Those teachers of the law who began plotting to kill Jesus at the end of this episode in the temple - they may have been dead wrong about him, but their reaction makes perfect sense."

🔥 **C.S. Lewis:** "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher... You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (Mere Christianity p.56)

heretoseveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives:** Alan & Christy Androski (850-464-1428), Steve & Debbie Bass (850-673-7952), Tim & Joni Hughey (850-464-1156), Mark & Dot Mancil (850-253-5405), Boss & Amelia Mulkey (850-464-6717), or Tom & Martha Waddail (850-973-0011).

discussionquestions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. What challenged or encouraged you *most* from today's teaching?
2. While the practice of having a day of rest and gathering with believers is still necessary, Hebrews 4 teaches that our ultimate Sabbath rest is found in trusting the grace of Jesus. How does this challenge your views of Sabbath? (e.g. Did you grow up being taught Sabbath is Sunday?)
3. Why is a day of rest each week practically important for us? Why is it important to meet with other believers to pray, hear the Scriptures, fellowship together? Read back through your notes and discuss why early Christians focused on Sunday more than Sabbath.
4. **Read Matthew 12:1-5.** What did you find intriguing or challenging in this part of the passage? What argument was Jesus using to demonstrate that He was NOT doing what was unlawful?
5. **Read Matthew 12:6-8.** How significant is the claim of Jesus to be "Lord of the Sabbath"? Consider the quotes from Tim Keller & C.S. Lewis and discuss why there is no middle ground between Jesus being Lord or a lying lunatic.
6. **Read Matthew 12:9-14.** What point was Jesus making and why did the Pharisees want to kill Him after healing the man's hand on Sabbath?
7. What does God want YOU to do with what we studied today? What further questions do you have that we can talk about?
8. Share prayer needs and pray for one another.

⁵James R. Edwards, The Gospel According to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 93-94.