



“The Sabbath Controversy”

Matthew 12:1–4

The Commission of the King

Introduction: Controversy can lead to enlightenment or destruction.

Matthew 12:1–14 – “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’ Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.”

History of the Sabbath

Genesis Story – Genesis 2:2–3 – “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

The Hebrew word “Shabbat” means “to stop” but is also referred to as “rest” and “delight”.

Story of the Fourth Commandment: Remember and Observe the Sabbath

The Importance of Remembrance – Exodus 20:8–11 – “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 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. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The Importance of Observation – Deuteronomy 5:12–14 – “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.”

The Incident in the Grainfield (vv. 1–8)

“At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’” (vv. 1–2)

A Jewish History Lesson – “But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?’” (vv. 3–5)

Jesus is the master teacher. “*Have you not read...*”, “*...have you not read in the Law...*”, “*...if you had known what this means...*”

The Sabbath Lord – “But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (vv. 6–8)

The Incident in the Synagogue (vv. 9–14)

The Sabbath Setup – “Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—so that they might accuse Him.” (vv. 9–10)

The Sabbath Confusion – “And He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?’” (v. 11)

The Sabbath Clarification – “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.” (vv. 12–14)

The Sabbath Today

“God’s purpose in the Sabbath commandment is *the good of human beings*, to give them rest, time to “be” and not just “do,” and time for worship, which is the world’s most healthful reality.”—Fredrick Dale Bruner

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever had a change of heart while wrestling with a controversial issue? If so, what led to the change?
2. What do you think are some of the things that led to the Pharisees severe misunderstanding of God’s purpose for the Sabbath? Do we see misunderstandings in other areas happening in the church today?
3. The disciplines of devotions and personal evangelism are extremely important. What are some of the more obscure that the church sometimes neglects in the communities to which we are responsible?
4. What ways might you expound upon including “rest” and “worship” into your regular rhythms and routines of life?