

Sunday, July 14, 2024

Rules

Matthew 12:1At 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. 2When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

3He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4He 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. 5Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? 6I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. 7If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' a you would not have condemned the innocent. 8For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

9Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10and 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?"

11He 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? 12How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

13Then 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. 14But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

These are 2 extremes of people: rule breakers and rule followers. As Christians, we tend to gravitate towards rules. Our rules create a safe place for us to live and move throughout our daily life. People who are out of church today hear a lot about the 'Rules' but they may not see much of Jesus.

This is not a new issue.

1. BACKGROUND OF SABBATH AND WHY DID IT MEAN SO MUCH?

Matthew has been making the case for Jesus as Messiah. Up until Chapter 11, He has been accepted by most people. As we crossed over to chapter 11, we started to see negative reactions: DOUBT, CRITICISM and COMPLAINING, INDIFFERENCE and REJECTION. Why are we seeing these negative reactions? Here in chapter 12, we have the Pharisees giving a reason: Jesus is breaking the most important rule of all, keeping the Sabbath.

Background of keeping the Sabbath:

Exodus 20, God gave Moses the 10 Commandments. God is saying to us, these things do not work in life. You can do them, but there are consequences to your life if you do and it will rob you of knowing the full blessing of God on your life. Part of this list is the Sabbath.

God created a model for us in the creation story.

Genesis 2: 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Then it is followed in Exodus:

Exodus 20: 8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Sabbath does not mean Saturday or Sunday, it means 'rest.' God has given us a model to follow to show us how our bodies are made. This allows our body to re-create itself through rest. Our Sabbath is designed to be a day that we are to honor God, set aside time to worship and serve Him.

Paul says in Romans 14:5 One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

The gift God gave us is we were created to need a day of rest. This is a guideline, and a gift from God. We are to give back to Him time on this day to honor and worship Him. The Pharisees had elevated the keeping of the Sabbath to the very top of the list, for two primary reasons:

1. God created the Sabbath in the creation story.
2. In Exodus 20, the 4th commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,' is followed by the most detailed rationale.

They then expanded it to such extremes that it would be impossible to live it. From the Jewish Talmud:

- You could not travel more than 3000 feet away from your home, unless on Friday you put some food less than 3000 feet away then you could go another 3000 feet because that place would become a home for you.
- You could not carry something that weighed more than the weight of a dried fig. But you could carry something that weighed half of a dried fig twice.(technicalities)
- If you threw something in the air and caught it with your other hand, that was a violation of the law, but not if you caught it with the same hand you threw with.
- They taught that you should not look in a mirror on the Sabbath because you might be tempted to pluck out a grey hair and that would be reaping.

Lest we think was only back then:

- If one does have to suspend Sabbath rules for a higher principle, such as care of the very ill, one must do so with the least possible intrusion into the Sabbath laws. Also, one must perform any act that would otherwise transgress the Sabbath in an unusual manner thus acknowledging Sabbath law. For instance, a doctor may drive on the Sabbath if he must go to an emergency, but he should start the engine by turning the key with two

fingers, not the usual thumb and forefinger. As to the vehicle driven to an emergency, the doctor must leave the motor running, as turning off the engine is not necessary to save life. If a doctor has to write, he must write with his left hand if right-handed (and vice-versa), use the minimum number of words possible, and sign with his initials, not his full name. A nurse or doctor applying an antiseptic to the skin on the Sabbath must use a nonabsorbent (i.e., nylon) swab as opposed to cotton which could absorb the medication and thus, presumably, be classified as working under the rubric of "dyeing." A Comprehensive Guide to Medical Halachah, Dr. Abraham Abrahams These are supporting scripture passages.

2. LETTER OF THE LAW VERSUS SPIRIT OF THE LAW

Jesus did not put up with all these burdens being put on the people. He was focused on the concept of 'The Letter of the Law vs The Spirit of the Law.'

Jesus, when asked which law is most important, sums up the full list by saying: Luke 10: 27-29 'Love the Lord God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. The second is this, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Everywhere Jesus went, he broke down that 'Letter of the Law' mentality and refocused it on the 'Spirit of the Law.' We see the heart of God as it pertains not just to the Sabbath, but to 'The Law' in general:

Matthew 12: 1 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. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

Jesus responded:

Matthew 12: 3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 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.

The first 'insight' into the heart of God is: God never created a law that would limit, restrain or create HUMAN NEED.

God is a God of compassion and mercy. He would never create a law that would inherently put us in need. This story is found in 1 Samuel 21. David is fleeing from King Saul, who is trying to kill him. David comes to the village of Nob and asks the priest Ahimelech for food. Ahimelech explains that all they have is the bread in the temple set before The Lord called the Bread of the Presence. After a brief conversation, Ahimelech gives the bread to David for him and his men. God understands human need and wants to be merciful to us and to provide for us. He would never create a Law that would CREATE a human need. That is not God.

The second insight is: God never intended for the Sabbath Law to restrict SERVICE TO GOD.

Matthew 12:5 Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? 6 I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Mark says:

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The leaders were so focused on the Letter of the Law that they totally missed the Spirit of the Law. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. The Sabbath is to be a day not only of rest, but also of recognizing, remembering, worshiping and serving God.

The third insight into the heart of God is: God never created a law that would limit MERCY.

Matthew 12:9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 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?"

The Pharisees are following Jesus, not to learn from Him, but to come up with a reason WHY. They are focused on keeping their position, keeping their RULES and did not consider the benefits of healing this man. Jesus makes a public point:

Luke 6:8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking...

Matthew 12:11 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? 12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. This puts the leaders in a tough spot. They say nothing. Today, when we see something that we do not agree with, or maybe someone will come into the church and they will not look like we look or act like we act, are we going to be willing to overlook these things and keep the main thing the main thing?

3. BEARING FRUIT AND SHARING THE GOSPEL!

Matthew 12:13 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. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

As you read the Gospels, there are times when Jesus gets angry at the RELIGIOUS PEOPLE at their stubborn hearts. There is no mercy or compassion. They care only about their rules.

Mark 2:5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

People who are 'de-churched' and 'un-churched' also (sometimes) say 'They don't care about me'. They think we are playing a game, putting on airs. We are not

perfect. The question is, are you willing to help? Can we overlook the letter of the law and go to the spirit of the law? Do you see needs? FILL THEM!

After the miracle, the leaders were not rejoicing at the healing they witnessed, just anger over a 'broken rule.' Is that the heart of Jesus? No.

Matthew 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

What is this saying to us today?

1. The Commandments of God reflect the Heart of God. The purpose is to help us know better how to walk with God. The purpose is not to restrict but to give you fullness of life.

Deuteronomy 30:19

19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life,

2. Being a Christian is about YOUR HEART, not keeping the rules. Walking with God is not about keeping the rules, it is about your heart. The condition of our heart is more important to God than the keeping of certain rules because God knows that if our heart is right, the guidelines he has set before us will naturally follow. 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.'

If all you ever do is focus on the commands of God, eventually you will resent God.

QUESTIONS:

1. Are you a rule maker, keeper or breaker? Do some rules matter more to you than others? Why? Who makes the rules you care most about? Do you keep all their rules? What does it mean to follow the rules: in totality or maybe “in spirit”? Does your thoughts about following rules change based on the context/situation you find yourself in? Should it? Can the rules ever change? Have you changed your mind on rules that you used to think were “non-negotiable”? If so, why?
2. Have we ever thought it would be good for someone to be ruined or destroyed? Why – that is, what were our thoughts or motives in that situation? How similar or different were our motives to those of the Pharisees in v14? What explains those similarities or differences, do we think? What are the implications of our answer?
3. How have you approached the Sabbath in the past? How have you thought about the Sabbath in the past? How does Jesus’ teaching about the Sabbath in these last few passages challenge your practices and your thinking? What are you doing now on the Sabbath that is not “good”? What are you omitting from the Sabbath that would be “good” for you to do? How has Jesus been teaching you to make progress in calling the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13)?
4. What do we learn about the Pharisees’ motives from their reaction to Jesus’ healing (v. 14)? What do we learn about the genuineness and depth of the Pharisees’ spirituality from this reaction? Why do the Pharisees think themselves righteous in spite of the murder in their hearts? How might we convince ourselves of the same foolish lie when we “care more about the law than the person”? Have you found yourself there? What matters most as we walk out our faith?