

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 12:1-8 | Jesus The Christ: Lord of the Sabbath
Sunday December 10, 2023

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 12.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Notes in the foyer—take home with you.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday we listened to Jesus give part three of his sermon that started in Matthew chapter 11.

His sermon started in response to a question that John the Baptizer had.

Jesus answered John's question, proceeded to preach to the crowd on the price of unrepentance, and then by His grace presented the Gospel to them in hopes that they would repent of their sin and believe that He is their Lord and Savior.

LW KEYPOINT:

Eternal life is solely (exclusively) a gift of grace from God.

We as sinners will never "find" the truth.

God reveals His truth to us in His timing.

God gives a general revelation of Himself using His creation.

Painting was a painter, Building was a builder, Creation was a creator.
But God gives His personal revelation only to those He chooses.

LW KEYPOINT:

We don't choose God—God chooses us.

The doctrine of salvation is offensive —unless it's true.

And if it is true—it's the greatest gift we'll ever receive.

That's a short review—the sermon and my notes are on the website.

INTRODUCTION:

As we turn the page to Matthew chapter twelve, we reach a significant turning point in Jesus' ministry.

Last week we saw how Jesus moved from a corporate call /national summons to repentance—to a much more personal focus on each individual listening in the crowd.

Chapter twelve begins to reveal the corporate/national hostility of the Jewish Leaders towards Jesus.

The Pharisees and Scribes will not accept Jesus as their Messiah—and tensions between them come to a head as we study Matthew's Gospel.

For the next several weeks we'll see the conscious rejection of the religious leaders — and then we'll witness the blasphemy (disrespecting God) that follows their rejection.

One of the primary causes of opposition towards Jesus centers on observing the Sabbath Day.

The Sabbath Day (Shabbat) is a day of rest.

For the next two weeks, we'll watch two events unfold—both happening on the prescribed day of rest.

We'll take each event one at a time.

The first event occurred spontaneously, but the second was no accident.

Three questions to consider as we begin:

1. How do these events impact your life today?
2. How important is rest to God?
3. How important is rest to you?

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 12:1—At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain.

Matthew 12:2— When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:3— He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry:

Matthew 12:4— how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests?

Matthew 12:5— Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent?

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

Matthew 12:7— If you had known what this means, **I desire mercy and not sacrifice**, you would not have condemned the innocent.

Matthew 12:8— For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."



PRAY:

*May your faithful love rest on us, Lord,
for we put our hope in you. (Psalm 33:22)*



EXEGESIS:

Matthew 12:1—*At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain.*

So our Gospel writer, Matthew sets the scene.

Jesus and His disciples are walking through grain fields.

Instead of sidewalks, they are walking on well-worn paths that criss-crossed all over Galilee.

Matthew makes it a point to tell us what day it is—the Sabbath—the national day of rest for Israel.

Obeying the Sabbath Day is one of God's top ten—it comes in at number four within Ten Commandments.



Exodus 20:8—*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:*

The Sabbath Day

It was a part of Israel's national identity because it set them apart from the Gentiles.



Matthew 12:1(b)—*His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain.*

Question: Why were the disciples hungry?

Answer: They are following Jesus!

Even foxes have holes to live in—and birds have nests, but Jesus has nowhere to lay his head. (Matt. 8:20.

And neither do His disciples—so they're hungry.

Please note that the disciples are not stealing food.

God allowed people to walk through the fields and help themselves to some of the crops.

Our God is merciful, and we see His mercy throughout the OT laws.

Deuteronomy 23:24 NLT— *When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, but you must not carry any away in a basket.*

So you can eat until you're full, but you can't take any home and store it for tomorrow.

Deuteronomy 23:25 NLT— *And when you enter your neighbor's field of grain, you may pluck the heads of grain with your hand, but you must not harvest it with a sickle.*

Once again, you can eat your fill, but you can't farm someone else's land.

What a great example of depending on God for their daily bread.

Remember, there are no fast food restaurants, so if you have a long journey, didn't bring enough food, or ran out of food, you are at the mercy of other people.

And that's why God ~~says~~ tells land owners...

Leviticus 19:9 NLT—*When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop.*

So, Jesus' and His disciples were not trespassing or stealing—they were in fact following the Law.

Matthew 12:2— When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." ^{Jesus}

Time out! We just read the law and learned that nobody is breaking anything.

Question: What are the Pharisees doing?

Are they spying on Jesus and the disciples?

Were they hiding in the fields?

Maybe Pharisees are walking with them—probably a better guess.

It's almost as if the Pharisees are having a conversation with Jesus and then they blunt this statement out.

We don't know because Matthew doesn't say.

What we do know is that the disciples just poked an angry bear (the Pharisees) with a stick.

② The Pharisees didn't have a problem with the disciples eating—

① **Matthew 12:2(b)**— "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

③ It was that they were eating on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees accused the disciples of breaking the law.

Sermon in a sermon:

This is a perfect example of making sure that our Biblical hermeneutics are correct—that our interpretation of God’s Word is in fact God’s interpretation and not our own.

The Pharisees claim that the Disciples are breaking the Law
So let’s look at God’s law for ourselves:

Exodus 20:8—Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy:

Exodus 20:9— You are to labor six days and do all your work,

Exodus 20:10— but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates.

Exodus 20:11— For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

Holy is a crucial word.

Holy means to “set apart—different.”

Holiness is the only attribute of God that is mentioned three times in a row in Scripture.

KEY POINT 1

Meaning, that God is so different from us—and He commands that the Sabbath Day also be different for us.

God reiterates

Exodus 35:2(a)— For six days work is to be done, but on the seventh day you are to have a holy day,

A day that is set apart from the rest of the week.

+ **Exodus 35:2(b)**—*a Sabbath of complete rest to the Lord. Anyone who does work on it must be executed.*

Why is resting so important to God?

Because God Himself rested after creating the cosmos.

+ **Genesis 2:1 NLT**—*So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed.*

+ **Genesis 2:2 NLT**—*On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.*

+ **Genesis 2:3 NLT**—*And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.*

So God clearly puts a lot of emphasis on rest—^{holy}so much so that if someone doesn't choose to rest—capital punishment is involved.

The problem throughout Israel's history is that they ignored God and His specific command to rest.

There's an old saying that says, "If we don't learn from our history we're doomed to repeat it."

So let's learn from Israel's history this morning—

One of the primary reasons Yahweh God allowed Israel to be captured during the Babylonian exile was because they refused to rest on the Sabbath Day.

They did not keep it holy or treat it differently than the other six days.

They kept working, and they kept working the land day after day, year after year.

They didn't rest and they didn't let the land rest either.

God doesn't like to be ignored, but God is so rich in His mercy, He sent a prophet in hopes of waking Israel up.

Jeremiah 17:19 NLT— This is what the Lord said to me: "Go and stand in the gates of Jerusalem, first in the gate where the king goes in and out, and then in each of the other gates.

Jeremiah 17:20 NLT— Say to all the people, 'Listen to this message from the Lord, you kings of Judah and all you people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 17:21 NLT— This is what the Lord says: Listen to my warning! Stop carrying on your trade at Jerusalem's gates on the Sabbath day.

Jeremiah 17:22 NLT— Do not do your work on the Sabbath, but make it a holy day. I gave this command to your ancestors,

Jeremiah 17:23 NLT— but they did not listen or obey. They stubbornly refused to pay attention or accept my discipline.

Jeremiah 17:24 NLT— "But if you obey me, says the Lord, and do not carry on your trade at the gates or work on the Sabbath day, and if you keep it holy,

Jeremiah 17:25 NLT— then kings and their officials will go in and out of these gates forever. There will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem. Kings and their officials will always ride in and out among the people of Judah in chariots and on horses, and this city will remain forever.

Jeremiah 17:27 NLT— “But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames.”

Did Israel listen?

No, and God is not only a God of incredible mercy but also a God of perfect justice.

God is also a God of patience, but please know that His patience does run out.

And this is a great example of not taking the Lord seriously—even when it comes to rest.

There are severe consequences (eternal consequences) when we choose to ignore God.

The book of 2 Chronicles reveals those consequences.

2 Chronicles 36:11 NLT—Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years.

2 Chronicles 36:12 NLT—But Zedekiah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and he refused to humble himself when the prophet Jeremiah spoke to him directly from the Lord.

Now we just heard what Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah.

2 Chronicles 36:13 NLT—He (Zedekiah) also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had taken an oath of loyalty in God's name. Zedekiah was a hard and stubborn man, refusing to turn to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Zedekiah has a bad case of the normals—refusing to listen to anyone.

And since he's king, look at what happens to his administration.

2 Chronicles 36:14 NLT— Likewise, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful. They followed all the pagan practices of the surrounding nations, desecrating the Temple of the Lord that had been consecrated in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36:15 NLT— The Lord, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple.

2 Chronicles 36:16 NLT— But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the Lord's anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.

2 Chronicles 36:17 NLT— So the Lord brought the king of Babylon against them (Jews). The Babylonians killed Judah's young men, even chasing after them into the Temple. They (Babylonians) had no pity on the people, killing both young men and young women, the old and the infirm (crippled). God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar.

2 Chronicles 36:18 NLT— The king took home to Babylon all the articles, large and small, used in the Temple of God, and the treasures from both the Lord's Temple and from the palace of the king and his officials.

2 Chronicles 36:19 NLT— Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value.

2 Chronicles 36:20 NLT— The few who survived were taken as exiles to Babylon, (Story of Daniel) and they became servants to the king and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

2 Chronicles 36:21 NLT— So the message of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled. The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate until the seventy years were fulfilled, just as the prophet had said.

You may not want to rest but my land is. All those consequences due to not resting on the Sabbath Day.

It's because of the Babylonian captivity that the Scribes and Pharisees are hyper-sensitive to resting on the Sabbath Day.

The Pharisees did not want to suffer those terrible consequences again.

But the problem that the Scribes and Pharisees had with God's Law regarding the Sabbath was that God did not specify with great detail what was defined as 'work' or 'rest.'

So to help God out, these religious leaders created hundreds of rules for the Sabbath Day.

They defined what work was (not God).

KEYPOINT 2:

Vagueness is always a problem for legalists.

Legalists don't see God's vagueness as an act of grace or mercy.

They see it as an opportunity to spiritually abuse people into submission.

Example: God's Law said

Exodus 16:29—Each of you stay where you are; no one is to leave his place on the seventh (Sabbath) day."

So instead of reading the other verses around this particular passage to get the full context, the Pharisees created man-made laws on traveling.

They developed the concept of a *Sabbath day's journey*—roughly one thousand yards.

They SA. ↓

A man could walk 1,000 yards on the Sabbath—but, one yard more, and it was sin.

The problem with their interpretation is that it has nothing to do with God's heart.

The context of this verse deals with God's provisions and food.
Ex 16:29

The Israelites were to gather twice as much food (manna and quail) only on the day before the Sabbath so they didn't have to pick food on the Sabbath Day itself.

God was giving them the gift of rest.

The Pharisees completely missed the point—which is what bad Biblical interpretation always does.

We may be one degree off in a certain part of our theology—big deal!

But what happens when you multiply that one degree of bad theology over time?

Whether it's your view on apostolic miracles, baptism or the End Times?

What happens a year from now, ten years from now?

It's like only being one degree off in an airplane—well you'll never make the destination.

And talk about completely missing the Pharisee's spiritual destination—

These guys divided and defined “work” into thirty-nine categories, each having subcategories.

Examples:

You couldn’t take a bath on the Sabbath! Why?

The Pharisees feared that some of the water might spill on the floor—and cleaning it up was considered “work.”

More serious—

If a person became sick on the Sabbath, only enough medical treatment could be given to keep him alive.

Treatment to make him improve was considered “work” and therefore forbidden.

If a building fell down on the Sabbath, only enough rubble could be removed to see if people were dead or alive.

If alive, they could be rescued, but if dead, the corpses must be left until sunset.

But that’s the way Pharisees were.

They would go out of their way to spiritually abuse people.

The Pharisees were the self appointed moral police—but by doing so they would end up contradicting themselves!

And that’s why Jesus called them hypocrites.

So if Pharisees were walking with Jesus and the disciples this day—they were breaking their own rules by traveling on the Sabbath!

All that to say—the Sabbath was anything but a time of rest—it was a day of incredible burden.

It was harder to “rest” on the Sabbath Day than to earn a living throughout the week!

Now,

Because of these extra-Biblical rules and regulations, it was also harder to run the nation.

The Jews took this idea of resting on the Sabbath so seriously that they were willing to die rather than violating the Sabbath.

There is a Jewish historian named Josephus.

He wrote a book called, *Antiquities*.

In it, he writes how the Jews refused to defend their country on the Sabbath Day. They considered not fighting on the Sabbath Day a sign of national honor.

So, if you're an enemy of Israel—what would you do?

Wouldn't you attack Israel on the Sabbath? *Knowing that they're not going to fight?*

That's precisely what the Roman General Pompey did in 63 BC.

Pompey captured Jerusalem because they wouldn't fight. *-And this is what happens when we have bad Bible teachers teaching bad theology.*

Matthew 12:1—At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain.

Matthew 12:2—When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees accused the Disciples of working and farming on the Sabbath simply by plucking grain and eating it.

Jesus knows this, and rather than getting into a debate about splitting hairs, look at what He does...

+ **Matthew 12:3**—^{Jesus} He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry:

+ **Matthew 12:4**— how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests?

To understand what Jesus is referring to we have to ask, *what is the 'bread of the Presence'?*

Let's find out.

The story that Jesus is referring to is in 1 Samuel 21.

+ **1 Samuel 21:1 NLT**—David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he saw him. "Why are you alone?" he asked. "Why is no one with you?"

+ **1 Samuel 21:2 NLT**— "The king has sent me on a private matter," David said. "He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later.

David is lying.

David's on the run from King Saul.

+ **1 Samuel 21:3 NLT**— Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have."

1 Samuel 21:4 NLT— “We don’t have any regular bread,” the priest replied. “But there is the holy bread,

1 Samuel 21:6 NLT— Since there was no other food available, the priest gave him the holy bread.

Holy Bread =

‘The bread of the presence’ was twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

These loaves were placed the sanctuary—that’s a big deal because the sanctuary is where the Lord is present.

The bread of God’s presence— symbolized two things.

First, it symbolized the fellowship that the Jews had with God.

Secondly, it symbolized the fact that God provided their daily bread.

That's the context? background

Back to...

Matthew 12:3— He said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry:

This is Jesus being sarcastic.

Jesus asks the Pharisees “Have you not read?” ten times in the Synoptic Gospels— it’s never good when He does.

Now Jesus knows they’ve read the passage—I mean the Pharisees are the self-appointed experts of the Hebrew Bible.

But Jesus’ point is that they did not understand what they read, and because they didn’t understand it, they couldn’t obey it.

His question is rhetorical.

Jesus basically says to the Pharisees,

Gentlemen, let's see if the Bible can shed some light on your accusation. I assume you have read 1 Samuel 21, which shows what King David did when he and his soldiers were hungry?" What does Scripture say about David's behavior? Does it say, 'Shame on David? No. It says nothing.

Jesus points out that the Sabbath Day—this day of rest— was given for God's glory and for man's welfare, benefit, health, safety, and protection.

God's LAW STATE

Here's the deal—the priests could only eat this bread.

But, at that moment, the priests were in a pickle.

God's

Do the priests double down on the law? Or show mercy by providing an exception to the Law.

Technically speaking, everyone knew giving the bread to David was illegal—including David.

But the priests understood the true purpose of God's law—to love God and love people.

Jesus presses in with verse five because He knows how dense the Pharisees are...

Matthew 12:5— Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent?

Jesus asks the same question a second time.

In other words, how come the priests violate the Sabbath Day every week?

by working?

The Sabbath day was the busiest days for priests.

The priests teach, pray, and physically slaughter the sacrificial animals.

It is hard work, both physically and mentally.

Jesus' point is that the true meaning of the Sabbath is not "You shall never work" because the law also requires the priests to work on the Sabbath.

So, after revealing what awful expositors and teachers the Pharisees are—Jesus drops a bombshell.

Matthew 12:6— *I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.*

We don't get a response from the Pharisee's here, but there had to be one.

They had to be horrified because *nothing*, other than God Himself, was greater than the temple.

It is hard to overestimate the shock value of Jesus' statement.

The temple was more than a place of worship—it symbolized what it meant to be a Jew.

To threaten the temple was to commit treason. *To speak ill of the temple was to betray the nation of Israel. Why?*
Because The Temple is where God's presence is!

And Jesus is saying that He is greater than God's presence.

What the Jews didn't realize is that the temple merely *represents* the presence of God while Jesus *is* God.

Matthew 12:7— If you had known what this means, **I desire mercy and not sacrifice**, you would not have condemned the innocent.

Jesus points the Pharisees to the prophet Hosea.

In Hosea, mercy is the Hebrew word, hesed.

Hesed is a promise of God's faithfulness—not based on human conditions.

In other words, love for people (no matter what day it is) is love for God.

Today, If we become more concerned with the means or the mode of worship—~~rather than~~ *- The how.* ~~by the God we worship~~, we'll miss the God we think we're worshipping.

If we're too focused on the style of music, the length of the sermons, or the programs that a church has or doesn't have—we're acting just like the Pharisees.

The trouble with the Scribes and Pharisees is that they had zero compassion for people.

They lacked pity—they did not love kindness.

KEYPOINT 1:

Compassion always trumps ritual.

And because Jesus wants love and not legalism He says...

Matthew 12:8— For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

In declaring Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus affirms equality with God because God established the Sabbath in the first place.

And because Jesus established the Sabbath Day, He determined what its rules were.

Next week, we'll see Jesus prove that claim of being "The Lord of the Sabbath" by healing a man with a paralyzed hand on the Sabbath day.

PREACH:

Illustration: Guest speaker in seminary class.

Spiritual Rest vs. Physical Rest

- Do your Sunday's typically look like every other day of the week?
- Are you doing the same activities? (Watching TV, surfing the Internet)
- Are you working (to make a living) when you don't have to?
- And if you have to work—what other day are you resting?
- How are you making your Sunday's different?
- Are you doing the opposite of what you normally do?
- Are you able to accept God's gift of rest? Or are you too restless?

These are great questions to take to the Lord.

Jesus Christ  *our Sabbath.*

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

And let the peace (and rest) of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. (Col 3:15)

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