

The Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14)

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Date: 26 September 2021

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[0 : 00] So please, if you haven't already, get your Bibles open, and they're going to read for us from Matthew chapter 12. At that time, Jesus went to the grain field 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.

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?

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.

[1 : 09] For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Going on from that place, he went into the 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 heap and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, would 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. Thank you so much.

Before we get into our passage for tonight, let us just pray for some wisdom.

[2 : 11] And then we'll dig into our passage. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, you are all-knowing and wise. Teach us your ways.

We seek your wisdom so we can walk in the path you lay before us. With COVID prowling around, help us to operate and navigate through these difficult times.

Remind us to rejoice because you are sovereign and in control. Father, by your Spirit, help us find rest in your Son and to place our identity in him, the Lord of the Sabbath.

Amen. Thank you so much again for the reading of the scripture. So, yep. Our passage for tonight is Matthew 12, verse 1 through to 14.

So, yeah. So last year, I participated in a cover ceremony that was held at the Oakland Museum. And it was to celebrate their new self-atrium within the museum.

[3 : 21] A traditional cover ceremony is done to mark a special occasion involving participants who sit in a circle and are past a coconut shell that contains cover.

A plant root in the form of a drink. As you can see. Nice. At this particular occasion, there were many community leaders representing different Pacific nations sitting in a circle which also included the Maori king.

Each participant was given the opportunity to pay tribute to either their ancestral chief of their village or their old gods before consuming the cup of cover.

With respect to traditional protocols, I also gave homage to my ancestors. Here's a bit of a thought-provoking question.

Like, what would you have done if you were in my position? Are there times where you get caught up in the festivity that you forget your identity in Christ?

[4 : 39] Or are there perhaps family traditions in which you had participated in and you pay tribute to an ancestor or an old god?

There is a clear distinction between you and I. However, this does not negate that you may have cultural heritage.

And if so, rituals and traditions that you may follow or observe. A holiday that you may celebrate to mark a special occasion.

If you are like me, there may be that one traditional protocol you respect or, dare I say it, are loyal to a fault that you take part in.

Regardless of what this may be, we may inadvertently be blinded to our cultural colorfulness. So today we come to a passage where Jesus too is challenged about observing rituals and traditions.

[5 : 51] But amidst this cultural controversy, there are deeper and important truths about who Jesus is and his authority over the Sabbath.

So there are three main parts to this section of Matthew's gospel. We see in these verses. So point one, the misunderstanding of the Sabbath.

So that's verses one through to two. And this is basically the Pharisees missing the point on the Sabbath. Point two is the purpose of the Sabbath.

This is verses three through to seven. This is Jesus interpreting scripture correctly. And the last point or point three. This is verses eight through to 14.

Jesus is the Sabbath and we will find our rest in our identity in Christ. So let's kick it off. So first point, misunderstanding of the Sabbath.

[6 : 52] As we dig into our passage for this afternoon, we will see from the get-go, the Pharisees have misunderstood the Sabbath.

So let us read Matthew chapter 12, verse one to two. At that time, Jesus passed through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, see, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

This is interesting. So let us truly analyze what is actually happening. So Jesus passed the grain field with his disciples.

Well, this is not an offense according to the law. His disciples were hungry. Well, hunger is not a sin.

[7 : 56] And as we saw in the prayer points, a lot of people were hungry for lockdown. So it seemed that it is their action, their behavior and mannerism in which they satisfy their hunger.

And it is by Pharisee standard, an act that is lawless towards the Sabbath. But is this true? So reflecting back into the Gava ceremony, I would have been scrutinized for not following ceremonial protocols if I had refused to drink.

I would have, in turn, let my village down and family. Oh, yeah. And by the way, I have royalty in my blood. Hence why I was part of the cover ceremony.

So was the manner and behavior of Jesus' disciple to satisfy their hunger unlawful on the Sabbath? Well, before we can answer that, like a prerequisite question to help us answer the Pharisee's accusation would be, so what is the Sabbath?

[9 : 11] Well, the Sabbath or the Sabbat in Hebrew basically means to cease from all works or to stop laboring.

In Genesis 2, verse 2, it says, On the seventh day, God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

God rested from his work that he had completed. He completed creating. God ceased from creating. Now, this concept is important to understand and the establishment of the Sabbath day and the role of Christ as our Sabbath.

Now, God gave Israel the fourth commandment. That's Exodus chapter 20, verse 8 to 11, as well as Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 12 through to 15, which basically says, Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

[10 : 29] Holy. Holy. FYI, or for your own information, holy means to set apart or to be separated from sin and evil.

Well, God is holy. That's 1 John chapter 1, verse 5. God calls us to be holy. That's 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 16.

And that echoes Leviticus chapter 19, verse 2. And these passages say, But it is important to vitally understand that apart from God, being holy is impossible.

So, now we have a clear understanding of the Sabbath because God declared to remember and keep it holy and established what the Sabbath actually is according to the Bible.

So, another question before answering whether the claims of the Pharisees are true. What exactly did they do that was unlawful to do on the Sabbath?

[11 : 55] Well, his disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. It's the second part of our passage tonight. However, Deuteronomy chapter 23, verse 25 says, Interesting.

So, what are the Pharisees trying to say about not lawful to do on the Sabbath? It seems like God is clear in Deuteronomy with the plucking of the grain.

But, just maybe, we will find our answer in the Talmud, a Jewish commentary book written by rabbis. In it contains the 39 Melchized Sabbat or the 39 forms of work on the Sabbath.

Now, lucky for you, I went through the list for all of you, so you don't have to go and search the 39 forms of work that's in the commentary.

So, here's an interesting thing. Number 16 says, Reaping. So, plucking and reaping the grain, according to the Pharisee, It was something that was unlawful to do on the Sabbath.

[13 : 27] Number 18, freshing. So, freshing grain to remove from its husk, that was considered unlawful. Number 19, and probably the third act that the Pharisee saw that was unlawful, was winnowing.

The grain is thrown into the air, allowing the chaff to blow away. So, you see, these were rules added on to God's law.

The Pharisees have always scrutinized Jesus closely. But here we see that the scrutiny didn't just extend only to Jesus.

His disciples were under the same microscope because of their close association with Christ. This is true for us today.

Any Christian who identifies as a follower of Christ in public may also face the same scrutiny. Now, maybe this is you.

[14 : 43] You who is sitting in the comfortability of your home. Maybe you have been scrutinized for being a Christian. Maybe you have been condemned for not being a Christian according to someone's standards.

Or perhaps you are sitting looking at me right now and have yet to recognize who Jesus is. And we Christians have scrutinized you.

We have condemned you for not following certain un-Christian rights or observe Christian days that we find holy.

You know, we Christians can be zealous that we don't even see our own add-ons to God's law. Not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

Man, this is just God's law versus man's legalistic addition to tradition to God's law. Second point, purpose of the Sabbath.

[15 : 54] Now, now that we've seen the misunderstanding of the Pharisees towards the Sabbath. Jesus will now explain the purpose of the Sabbath.

So, looking at verse 3 of Matthew 12. He said to them, Now, looking closely at this, haven't you read?

Potentially, Jesus here could be incinerating that the Pharisees do not read their own scripture. Or perhaps Jesus could also be reminding the Pharisees of their own scripture.

Haven't you read? What David did meant he and those who were with him were hungry. 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 priest.

Jesus points out the story of David and his men. That's 1 Samuel chapter 21. And their encounter with priest Ahimelech, who had broken the priestly custom, but he didn't break God's law or God's word.

[18 : 02] Ahimelech had a godly understanding that human need was more important than the Levitical observance of the law.

Jesus illustrates that human need is greater than observing ceremonial rituals.

Jesus and his disciples were criticized for breaking religious tradition. Incidentally, Jesus uncovers the lack of understanding from the Pharisees towards the Sabbath observance.

Jesus correctly points out that even the priests break the Sabbath. Verse 5. Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath days, the priests in the temple violate Sabbath and are innocent?

The Jews value their temple and attach their identity to it. A consecrated or sacred place where sacred rites are taking place.

[19 : 22] A place of symbolic holiness. This is the temple in Jerusalem. The Calvary to verse 6. I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

Hear Jesus' voice again. I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. So Jesus asserts that he is greater than this temple to which the Pharisees value and find their identity in.

What do you identify with? Or better yet, where do you place your sense of identity?

Perhaps it's your nationality. The country of your birth. Whether it's China or Tongan. Or perhaps it's your ethnicity.

Your culture. Chinese, Tongan. Or maybe it's your job. It's your job that you may place your identity in.

[20 : 37] What you are worth. Or maybe it's the philosophical view that you have. Or the philosophy. What you value.

Your world view. Or perhaps it's your marriage. Your spouse. Your husband or your wife. Your children.

Maybe it's your family. Perhaps it's your last name. Your heritage or your ancestors. Is where you place your identity. Perhaps it's some superstar out there.

A famous person that you like. And that you adore. You will place your identity in. Or maybe it's your talent. Your natural talent.

Or one that's been nurtured either by you or by others. Perhaps this is where you place your identity in. What did you sacrifice to gain this identity?

[21 : 39] Who have you sacrificed to gain this identity? Well, Jesus speaks. Verse 7. If you had known what this means.

I desire mercy. And not sacrifice. You would have not have condemned the innocent. So, in addition to lagging in their understanding of the Sabbath.

Jesus also draws out their uncompassionate behavior for other humans. Or in this instance, for other Jews. Due to their relentless legalism of their man-made tradition.

Jesus refers here to Hosea chapter 6 verse 6. I desire mercy. I desire mercy. I desire mercy. And not sacrifice. Last point.

Person of the Sabbath. So here. Jesus turns the Sabbath. From a what? A thing?

[22 : 52] To a who? A person. I'll say that one again. So, Jesus here. He turns the Sabbath.

From a what? A thing? To a who? A person. Let us read. Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.

That is verse 8 of our passage. Again. Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus makes direct claim for his deity.

He makes direct claim for his deity. How? Well, the key word is Lord. What is Lord?

What Lord is? Someone with authority, control and power over things and others. People. Here, Jesus is claiming that he has the authoritative power and control of the Sabbath.

[24 : 06] In Mark's gospel, he records the same events. But he puts it this way. This is Mark chapter 2, verse 27. Then he told them.

This is Jesus speaking. Then he told them, the Pharisees. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for Sabbath.

So then, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Again. Then he told them, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

So then, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Another example to showcase Jesus' lordship is Matthew chapter 8, verse 2.

Here, the leper understands who and recognizes who Jesus is. Here, the leper says. So there's Matthew 8, verse 2.

[25 : 13] Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Again, the leper says, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Now, Jesus is Lord. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.

That is Matthew chapter 28, verse 18. He is our only sovereign and Lord. Jude 1, verse 4.

He is Lord of lords. Revelation chapter 17, verse 14. Jesus is our creator and the Lord of the Sabbath.

Now, listen to John in his letter. This is John chapter 1, verse 3. All things were created through him and apart from him.

[26 : 19] Not one thing was created that has been created. Listen to the author of the Hebrews. This is Hebrews chapter 1, verse 10.

In the beginning, Lord, you established the earth and the heavens are the works of your hands. So this is where the followers of Christ and those yet to recognize who Christ is separate. We Christians believe wholeheartedly that Jesus is God, the authoritative creator of this world. Therefore, the Lord of the Sabbath. But the separation is by faith. And by faith alone, in Christ alone, we are saved by God's grace, which can and will extend to non-believers.

We all need to recognize who Jesus is. The Lord of the Sabbath. The one who is greater than the temple that the Pharisees value and attach their identity to.

[27 : 35] The word of God. He is God. Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. Come with me to verse 9.

Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand. And in order to accuse him, they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

He replied to them, Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out?

A person is worth far more than a sheep. So it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath. Then he told the man, Stretch out your hand.

So he stretched it out. And it was restored. As good as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him how they might kill him.

[28 : 53] Well, the summation of verses 9 through to 14 is basically the religious leaders' way of trying to trap Jesus by tricking him to do works in the form of healing on the Sabbath.

Hear what Jesus is saying. Stretch out your hand. Again, Jesus says, Stretch out your hand.

Who is Jesus talking to? Jesus commanded the man to stretch out his shriveled hand. An impossible feat for the man to do, especially in his condition.

This was not impossible for Jesus to heal. Jesus as the creator and Messiah can correctly interpret the meaning of the Sabbath and the laws pertaining to it.

At last, hopefully we can come to a conclusion upon our question we asked earlier. Was the manner and behavior of Jesus' disciples to satisfy their hunger unlawful to do on the Sabbath?

[30 : 26] No. No. They acted in accordance to the Bible. And when you continue on into Matthew's gospel next week and week after, you will see that the disciples place their identity onto Christ and find their rest in Christ.

Here's a foretelling of this by Jesus at the end of chapter 11 of Matthew. Starting at verse 28. Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take up my yoke and learn from me because I am lowly and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, going back to the cover ceremony.

When the cover cup reached the moldy king who was present at the ceremony without any hesitation at all, he proclaimed and I quote, this cup is to the king of all kings, Jesus Christ, unquote, and then poured out his cover.

[32 : 03] Here's a king recognizing the true king. I tried to have an audience with the moldy king, but because he was heavily guarded, I at least got to ask him one question.

I asked, what made you do what you did? He answered, it wasn't me. My conviction in Christ and God's spirit worked in me.

Again, here is a king who absolutely, unequivocally, without a doubtful faith, proclaims Jesus as the king of all kings, even over him who is a king.

There's a moldy king I'm sitting on the chair. Through this action, it severely convicted me.

As one who claims to be a Christian, I failed to proclaim Christ as king on top of failing to recognize my identity that is in Christ because I was blinded to the cultural obligation I had for Pacific tradition.

[33 : 31] As an Aucklander, I am mere stranger to many of you. As a Christian, what binds me to some of you is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you had a moment where you neglected or failed to recognize who Christ is and to bear witness about our Messiah as I did.

Fortunately, these moments are covered by grace a gift from God through our repentance. Some, they intentionally reject who Jesus is as the case of the Pharisees.

One of the greatest blessings about our identity in Christ is the grace we are given in order to grow into the spiritual maturity that truly reflects our new repentance.
our lives in light of our identity in Christ are filled with a heavenly father and a large, loving Christian family.

[34 : 48] So, how does this all apply? Well, we must be careful not to add our own traditions onto the teaching of God's word.

These traditions can cause bondage and legalism instead of a heart to serve God. At the same time, be very careful not to judge others for things which the Bible doesn't condemn. Example, well, deciding what to study or career path to take. How often do we condemn someone for taking up a subject we disprove of or a career we just do not that doesn't align with family tradition that's outside of our family tradition and we verify it by injecting God's words onto it. Perhaps it's relationship. We have a tendency to offer advice on dating or marriage outside of the Bible but then in turn use God's word as our voice of authority when we condemn someone upon their chosen spouse.

Perhaps it's church policies. How often do we fall into the temptation of the world and rather looking at scripture for guidance, we look for the best seller book on political science, philosophy, psychology, we look at trends or we even covered our neighboring churches on policies instead of coming to God's word and then we condemn those who do not cohere to the policies that we created.

[36 : 50] But learning from Jesus, he uses the example of David to show that sometimes the spirit of the law is more important than the letter.

This doesn't mean that we can just chuck aside any law which we don't like at the moment because of the greater heart motivation. Jesus is God and can make this comparison but we should be careful before doing likewise.

Cultural and legalistic religious man-made rules crush people and turn them off from following God. God's commands are not burdensome but ours very well could be for this is what love for God is to keep his commands and his commands are not burdened.

That's 1st John chapter 5 verse 3. Let me conclude the sermon for tonight. Matthew chapter 11 verse 28.

Come to me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me because I am lowly humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[38 : 43] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the opportunity to gather once again even though it's on Zoom but we're so thankful that you are sovereign and not us.

Father, grant us and all our loved ones true rest in your Son, the Lord of the Sabbath, Christ Jesus. May your presence drive out from among us anger and fear, worry and regret, anxiety and despair. Father, as we wrestle with your word, we come to fully understand that our identity is in Christ and Christ alone.

Our identity is in Christ and in Christ we find true rest. Forgive us for adding our own desire and ambition to your word.

Forgive us for condemning others and their actions and their actions that you do not condemn. Help us to welcome anyone who is weak in faith.

[40 : 06] Help us to rest well in your Son, for his yoke is easy and your law is not burdensome. we anticipate your Son.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. I pray this prayer in your Son's precious name. Amen. Thank you.