

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

January 26, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 12:1-8**, 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. [2] But when the **Pharisees** saw this, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.” [3] But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, [4] 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? [5] Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? [6] But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. [7] But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. [8] For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”
- B. **Matthew 12:9-14**, Departing from there, [**Jesus**] went into their synagogue. [10] And a man was there whose hand was withered. And the [**Pharisees**] questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”— so that they might accuse Him. [11] 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? [12] “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” [13] Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. [14] But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.
- C. From **Matthew 12:1-45**, we have four stories that expose the critical, fault-finding attitude, derogatory speech, and evil intentions of the scribes and Pharisees towards Jesus, **and** the ways Jesus dealt with them. The **first two** stories deal with keeping the Sabbath law. The **third** story deals with the blasphemy of saying that something good God is doing is actually being done by the devil. The **fourth** story is about people wanting Jesus to prove He has been sent from God and is doing God’s will by having Him perform a sign of their choosing. Today, we will look at the first two stories.
- D. Pray

II. Two stories, two lessons to learn

A. **Matthew 12:1-8**, While traveling on the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples passed through some grainfields. Being hungry, the disciples picked some grain and ate it (*lawful–Deut. 23:25*). The Pharisees deemed this as harvesting (*working*) on the Sabbath – which was forbidden by the Mosaic law and their traditions (*the way their Rabbis interpreted the Law*). They brought this to Jesus’ attention (*most likely to make Him look bad*) since it was His disciples who were breaking the Sabbath Law. Jesus responded to their accusation with two examples from scripture, a principle from scripture, and a fact about Himself that they willfully overlooked.

1. Though this first story only alludes to how intensely the Pharisees’ disliked Jesus, Matthew goes on to give three examples that confirm this.
 - a. **First**, according to **vs 10**, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (*a form of work*) in order to trap Him into admitting He was a law-breaker – and in this case the Sabbath Law – which according to **Exodus 35:2** says, “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.”
 - b. **Second**, in **vs 14**, we read that “the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him (*turn the people against Him, kill Him*).”
 - c. **Third**, according to **vs 24**, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons. By saying “**only** by Beelzebul,” they were saying that Jesus was working for and empowered by the Devil.
 - d. Given these three examples of the intensity of the Pharisees’ dislike for Jesus, it seems reasonable to assume that in this first story they communicated their ill-will through their tone of voice and attitude with which they spoke to Jesus about His disciples.
2. Yet in spite of their unjust criticism of Him through their wrongful condemnation of His disciples, Jesus remained meek and humble in heart – and gave them **four** reasons why they were wrong.
 - a. **First reason** (example from God’s word): When David and his companions were fleeing Saul and were hungry, David, under false pretenses, took Showbread from Ahimelech the priest – which was consecrated to the Lord and to be eaten only by the Temple priests – and fed himself and those who were with him. Yet God did not punish David and his companions for breaking the Showbread law.

- b. **Second reason** (example from God's word): The priests were on duty seven days a week, which meant they worked on the Sabbath. Yet in spite of working on the Sabbath being against the Law, God did not condemn them, and they were not put to death.
- c. **Third reason** (principle from scripture): Jesus quoted the Septuagint translation of the first part of **Hosea 6:6**, "For I delight in mercy (*NASB: loyalty*) rather than sacrifice." Mercy is one manifestation of love – love that seeks the good of the one being loved.
 - (1) The biblical principle Jesus used to show the Pharisees they were wrong can be stated this way:
 - (a) First and foremost, God wants us to love those around us, which in their time of need requires mercy or compassion. This is what delights God.
 - (b) Should we fail to love, then God wants us to do the next best thing, which is to repent, make things right with God (*sacrifice in OT times*), make things right those we have wronged, and return to loving as we ought to love. Failure doesn't delight God, but He has joy when we repent and return to doing what we know we ought to do.
 - (2) Just as a reminder, **Romans 10:13** says, "Love does not wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."
 - (a) The practical reality of love is in doing good for anyone who is in need of having good done for them.
 - (b) The practical purpose of the law is to ensure good is done for everyone who needs good being done for them – which is why **Galatians 5:14** says, "The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 - (c) It is this principle of love that the Pharisees ignored by making something in the law more important than loving those in need as they, themselves, would want to be loved.
 - (3) Interestingly, Jesus preceded His OT quote by saying, "**If you had known** what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent."
 - (a) Back in **Matthew 9:11-13**, Jesus had an encounter with the Pharisees over eating with tax collectors and sinners. During that encounter, He said to them, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- (b) Apparently, the Pharisees did not go and learn, because they were continuing to treat the Law as if it inhibited or even negated the practice of love.
 - (c) It is my opinion that in reminding the Pharisees what they should have known, Jesus was showing them that though they were upholding part of God's word (*Sabbath law*), they were ignoring another part – that if included in their thinking would have led them to conclude that mercy was the right response in this situation. (*Knowing God's word in the fullest way possible is a great benefit to living a godly life.*)
 - d. **Fourth reason** (truth about who Jesus is): Jesus concludes His reasoning with the Pharisees with, "For the Son of Man (*Jesus*) is Lord of the Sabbath."
 - (1) The disciples were with Jesus, and as the Lord of the Sabbath, He would have corrected them if they had been doing something wrong on the Sabbath.
 - (2) But since He did not stop them, it means that the Lord of the Sabbath approved of what the disciples were doing.
3. Things to think about and learn.
- a. The Pharisees measured spirituality and godly living by one's adherence to religious activities and traditions – even when it resulted in making love secondary to participation in the activity. God measures spirituality and godly living by how we love Him and those around us – in thought, attitude, word, and deed.
 - b. The Pharisees demonized Jesus because His view and practice of religion threatened their position of superiority and power. This form of black and white, all good or all bad thinking makes it easy to see those we deem bad as unworthy of love, or basic human kindness, or mercy, or forgiveness which in turn makes it easy to justify despising, mistreating, and even killing them.
 - c. The Pharisees did what they could to stop Jesus rather than doing what they could to understand Him, and upon understanding Him, they decide how they would deal with Him.
 - d. Jesus remained meek and humble in spite of being wrongly criticized and unjustly condemned. He remained faithful to God and godliness in dealing with the Pharisees' unkind, unloving, unmerciful treatment.
 - (1) How do you handle deserved / undeserved criticism?

- (2) The reality is, who you love the most and who's good you are seeking (*self or God/others*) has a powerful influence on how you handle both deserved and undeserved criticism.
4. Finally, in **vs 6** Jesus says, "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here." **Note**, Jesus does not say someone greater, but something greater. What is the something greater? It is the Kingdom of God – with the presence of God at work in its midst.

B. **Matthew 12:9-14**, It appears that on the same Sabbath, Jesus went into their synagogue. A man was there with a withered hand. The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking, "**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**" Jesus responded with one every-day example, one logical statement, and changing the topic from the law (*working on the Sabbath*) to doing good on the Sabbath. Then, without using medicine or any medical procedure or even touching the man, Jesus healed him. Nevertheless, the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy (*kill*) Him.

1. Again, we see the ill-will and the double-standards of the Pharisees.
 - a. They saw the man in need of healing as an opportunity to trap Jesus into flagrantly breaking the Sabbath laws, rather than as an opportunity to help a person in need.
 - b. And though they wanted Jesus to uphold the Sabbath law, they were willing to ignore the law of love and break the law against murder in order to remove Jesus and the threat He was to their position of importance and power in the community.
2. Yet in spite of the Pharisees' hardness of heart, double-standards, and evil intentions, Jesus remained meek and humble in heart in His responses.
 - a. Jesus' first response was a reminder that even though it was the Sabbath, they would help one of their trapped animals get free of the trap. To do so was merely an act of common-sense, and no one would condemn you for that.
 - b. Jesus' next response was a value comparison coupled with logic. (1) A person is more valuable than an animal. (2) Helping a person in need is more important than helping an animal in need. (3) Therefore, if it is within the law to help an animal in need on the Sabbath, then even more so it is within the law to help a person in need on the Sabbath.
 - c. Jesus appealed to wisdom in His final response. He changed the topic from keeping the Sabbath law in relation to work, to doing

good on the Sabbath. In other words, Jesus changed the topic from a restrictive and misapplied interpretation of the law to what is loving. Why?

- (1) Because no God-given law is intended to limit or negate love in any way, and this includes the Sabbath laws.
- (2) It is the wise who see that the intent of the law is to secure the common good, and it is the meek and humble in heart who find the common-sense ways to live according to the intent of the law.

3. Things to think about and learn.

- a. When we are self-centered and self-protective, and then become hurt by and/or angry at someone over how they are treating us, we tend to abandon common-sense and think in black or white ways – thus making the person out to be all bad – which makes it reasonable in our present state of mind to set aside love, meekness, and humility in heart, and treat the person in as aggressive or hurtful or stubborn or sarcastic of a way as to make it clear to them that we want them to stop doing what they are doing and start doing what we want them to do.
- b. I know you can see the Pharisees in what I just described, but the more important question is, “Do you see yourself in this?”
- c. I doubt you appeal to the OT law to free you from the demands of love when faced with treatment or behavior you don’t like. And it is possible you are still learning the grace of meekness and the ways of humility in heart.
- d. Therefore, what do you allow to get in the way of loving as you want to be loved?
- e. What reasoning do you use to justify an unloving or even hurtful response when being mistreated or loved less than you want to be loved?
- f. Are you regularly on the lookout for opportunities to convince or push another person into treating you the way you want to be treated? Isn’t this kind of effort nagging, and isn’t nagging a form of control, and isn’t control an unproductive form of encouraging another adult to change their behavior?

III. Conclusion

- A. May we not be like those who appeal to the ways of the world or use the word of God to justify any behavior that ought to be loving, yet isn’t. God knows our hearts, and those we hurt or mistreat know what we are really like. Therefore, let us not hide the truth about ourselves from ourselves.