

# Matthew 12:1-21

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Date: 20 January 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do open your Bibles to Matthew 12. Matthew 12, which in the Church Bibles is on page 817.!

The one point is don't miss the point. Don't miss the point. Last Sunday we looked at Matthew's Gospel and we looked at Matthew 12.

Come to me, all of you, while weary and heavy laden. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me. And with this gracious invitation you get this incredible promise, don't you?

And I will give you rest, Jesus says. I'll give you rest and you will find rest for your souls because I'm gentle and I'm humble in heart. And Jesus says, my yoke living for me has a sense in which it is easy and my burden is light.

Well, chapter 12 begins in this way. It says, at that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And his disciples were hungry and began to eat.

[ 1 : 17 ] They began to collect herds of corn and eat. When the disciples saw it, when the Pharisees saw it, and the religious leaders, they said to him, look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful for them to do on the Sabbath.

It's a really interesting problem. And the Sabbath was extremely and enormously significant for Jewish people. For the Jews of that day.

And so it should be. The Sabbath day had been given by God and it's way, way, way back in the days of Moses. It was to be a weekly reminder. A weekly text.

Every week. A day which spoke of the reason why you and I had been created. It was to tell the people of Israel that they were not to live their whole of their lives for work.

Work wasn't the big thing. They had to work, of course, each day. But they would take one day to remind them that God had made them. And that God has chosen them.

[ 2 : 27 ] And that God has redeemed them. And God had promised to bring them into rest. It was the most wonderful promises on the Sabbath day. And the end of suffering.

And the end of pain. The end of hardship. Sometimes, in the Old Testament, it was expressed as rest from your enemies. Deliverance from. The end of war.

No more hostility. No more conflict. It was to be a day of peace and a day of rest. Of peace with God and rest with God. And those who believed God believed that He would bring His people to that promised rest.

It was a weekly foretaste of what was to come. And the Sabbath day. Sabbath is the Hebrew word for rest. The Sabbath day was a weekly reminder that this is where the world is heading.

This is what the whole of creation is for. The goal of creation. The goal of redemption. A world at rest. Where everything was heading. And it was not about human achievement.

[ 3 : 36 ] It was not that humans were going to work for it. It wasn't development. It wasn't progress. But it was God's rest. And that's where it was heading. And so it's no wonder that Jewish people and Christian people throughout the ages have taken the Sabbath day very, very seriously.

But we come to the beginning of Matthew 12 with the end of Matthew 11 still ringing in our ears and we're forced, I think, to ask how does Jesus promise all who come to rest relate to the Jewish Sabbath?

And the Sabbath day? And all that is sad for? Are they connected at all? So here in Matthew 12, verse 1 we see Jesus and His disciples after they've just heard that invitation to come to Jesus and find rest.

And we see Jesus and His disciples on a Sabbath day and they're walking through cornfields and they feel a little bit peckish. Perhaps they knew Deuteronomy 23, verse 25 but it may well be that this was familiar to them.

Because it says in that verse Deuteronomy 23, 25 if you find yourself walking through a neighbour's cornfield it's quite okay for you to pick a few corns by hand as long as you don't take a side to it or kind of drive your combine harvester into their field it's fine if you're just walking through it to grab some grains of corn.

[ 5 : 01 ] Whether or not they realise Deuteronomy 23, 25 we don't know but they pick some corn and they munch away. Well there are some Pharisees nearby and they saw what Jesus did and their mood is very swift let me miss you and the Pharisees saw it they said to him look your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

Now by unlawful they meant that there was a direct law from God that explicitly forbade picking an ear of corn on the Sabbath day. But of course when we go back and look at actually what the Bible says the law of God does not say that.

You shall do no work on the Sabbath day yes and the purpose of the Sabbath day was to rest and that God promised rest for which the whole world was being made and into which God is going to bring his people but the Pharisees they're concerned is a long long way from that.

What happened was that the Jewish traditions had developed and a whole lot of things had been added onto God's law that a good Jew must not do on the Sabbath day.

Not only must you not do any work but you must not do anything vaguely approaching work even if it looked like work you must not do it. And picking an ear of corn when you think of it well to them it was harvesting.

[ 6 : 34 ] And harvesting will not certainly work. Now I don't want to caricature it I think it's very easy to caricature the Pharisees they were sincere they had a reputation they were serious about life and about the Bible and about their traditions and they wanted to be very very careful ever so careful not to break God's law and still they created a whole lot of other laws to put around God's law and so you would never even get close to breaking God's law but I wonder if you begin to see something that it would be hilarious if it wasn't so tragic in this passage.

Notice carefully how Jesus responds from what we've seen in Matthew's Gospel I wonder how you'd expect him to respond he might have said it might be look here fellas there's nothing in the law about picking ears of corn on the Sabbath day stop being ridiculous what they're doing is not lawful what are you talking about he could have said something like that in fact anyone could have said something like that but Jesus said something far far more radical than that he said something that only Jesus could say look at verse 3 he said to them have you not read remember when Jesus speaks he requires you and I to think about what he says sometimes it's not obvious but the pieces fall into place so Jesus said to them in verse 3 have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him how he entered the house of God and he ate the bread of the presence which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him but only for the priest Jesus is not only one not to mince words or play games he is faced with the highly respected religious leaders the scholars of the scriptures the theologians of the day and if anyone knows their bible the Pharisees know their bible scrupulously and Jesus responds to their accusation have you not read of all the people to say that to read your bible he says to them and he refers to that to what he says in 1 Samuel 12 where the great king David is on the run for his life from Saul and David his family and his companions come to a little town called Nob where the tabernacle was and they eat the consecrated bread in the tabernacle and only the priests were allowed to eat that according to the book of Vertigo and the assumption is that Jesus says what David did is ok you could say it was an awful but what is his point how is he arguing is this what Jesus is saying is Jesus saying it's ok to break the letter of the law in extreme circumstances that's how some people do it if you're starving well it's ok to disregard

God's law I don't think he said that it's not ok for you and I to break God's law just because we think we need to on the other hand if David's companions were starving and they certainly were very hungry that wasn't true of Jesus' companions were they the disciples were not starving it's not as if they were about to drop it's they're on a Sunday afternoon walk in a field and they feel a bit packaged that's all for what's his point what is the connection between the unlawful act of David and the act of Jesus' disciples that the Pharisees called unlawful it's not obvious so think with me keep that question in mind but hear the next provocative statement look at verse 5 again or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless and are innocent that's to say there is a law from God that says you shall not do any work on the

Sabbath but the priests they've got to work haven't they the priests have to do work the same law of God required the priests to do work on the Sabbath day and it requires the priests to make extra sacrifices on the Sabbath do you remember Numbers 28 last week and the priests have to double the amount of sacrifices so if they were making two lamb offerings normally every day on Sabbath they made four and so it was a busy day it sounds like work to be but again what is the point was he saying that if you look carefully it's obvious that the law is not absolute on these matters but the law allows for exceptions the priests have to work on the Sabbath well again I don't think that's the point it's the point you can make but it's not the point that Jesus may be here Jesus himself is not a priest his disciples were not priests and you could hardly compare what they were doing plucking an ear of corn on a

[11:59] Sabbath afternoon walk and munching away to offering sacrifices in the temple it's different but we begin to see the point of verse 6 where he says this he says that I tell you something greater than the temple is here and by implication I take it something greater than David is here and the point is this that even in the Old Testament there were greater things than the Lord greater things than the Lord considering the consecrated bread there were greater things than the Lord concerning no work on Sabbath namely King David and the temple and not working on Sabbath not working on Sabbath was very important but it's not an end of itself it points to something greater that's the point this morning and now that something greater than David is here it's not entirely clear yet so

Jesus runs the same argument by them again instead the insult he uses is not have you not read but if you'd only known look at verse 7 if you'd only known what this means what the words mean if you'd only understood what you read and he quotes from Hosea God says in Hosea I desire mercy not sacrifice if only you'd understood those words you would not have condemned the innocent now it's the same kind of point as before the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament are important they are given by God you can't dismiss them you can't say they're nothing but just like the Sabbath day laws were not themselves the reality these were signs and symbols keeping the sacrificial law keeping the Sabbath law to the letter or even way beyond the letter as the Pharisees did and then failing to understand what the sacrifices were all about and failing to understand what the Sabbath day pointed you to is to miss the point and so no matter how precisely you keep the laws if you don't see what they were pointing to you miss the point well now comes the crunch where he said a moment goodly he said someone something greater than the Sabbath as the temple is here look what he says in verse 8 he says for the son of man is lord of the Sabbath he said a moment ago something greater than the temple is here and now he says verse 8 for the son of man is the lord of the Sabbath up until this week I used to think that what Jesus was saying there is I am the one who decides what you can do and what you can't do on the Sabbath that's how it's often interpreted it's as if Jesus said I'm the boss of the Sabbath I can say what is acceptable on Sabbath day and I can say what is not acceptable and that would be a very big claim for him to make but I saw this week that what he was claiming is even more than that isn't it absolutely obvious I don't know why I've not seen it before is it absolutely obvious that Jesus was saying I am the lord of the Sabbath because I am the one who will give you rest I am the lord of the Sabbath because it's when you come to me when you learn from me when you take my yoke upon me that then you will find rest for your souls there is nothing magnificent Jesus is the lord of the Sabbath because he is the one who gives what the Sabbath promises and for centuries and centuries and centuries they have kept the Sabbath and it was promising something and now that's something the lord of the

Sabbath has arrived the one who is to give them what the Sabbath promised is there I think there's even more here the son of man is lord of the Sabbath we hear Jesus say and again I don't think and we can hear that without hearing an echo do you remember Matthew chapter 9 verse 6 where he said the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins and you see they are not two things but one thing the forgiveness of sins is at the heart is at the heart of the rest that Jesus gives as lord of the Sabbath now but I wonder if it's coming as focus for you can you see the tragedy do you see how they missed the point before their very eyes was the one who says come to me all you are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest and these Pharisees they were so taken up with keeping the Sabbath with their dues and with their don'ts they couldn't hear him they couldn't hear him and what you can find is tragically in churches like ours is that people can be hugely taken up with good things church leaders can be hugely taken up with church order people can get very very

upset sometimes about the way something is done and the way something is done in church life and often here when the streets

[18:05] I've done the church it's not what was done but it was the way that it was done and the whole purpose of the church goes up in flames because people have missed the point and you can miss the point this morning very dramatically first line tells us that going on from that place you see Jesus went into their synagogue isn't that interesting look at the first line whose synagogue is it their synagogue their blind religion which cared so much about the Sabbath traditions that it could not recognise actually the law of the Sabbath it was not theirs it was theirs not his and the synagogue is the place of such religion and there in their synagogue on this Sabbath day there's a man with a shriveled hand and like all the sickness and pain of this world this man was part of a world that is not yet at rest that has not yet entered into that rest and so we've got a rather tight situation you see in the synagogue of the Sabbath the tradition keepers we've got a suffering human being and into that synagogue comes the one who claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath and the Sabbath tradition keepers want to use the suffering man to discredit the Lord of the Sabbath do you see the verse 10 and the man was there with a withered hand and they asked him is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him

Jesus' response shows the brutal emptiness of a tradition obsessed religion look at verse 11 he said to them which one of you is a sheep that falls into a pitch on the Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out of how much more value is a man than a sheep of course it's appropriate in his rights to do good on the Sabbath and to make that point with utter finality the Lord of the Sabbath proceeds to give the poor man a taste of real Sabbath rest that he'd never found in there a synagogue and Jesus did good on the Sabbath so verse 13 he says to the man stretch out your hand and the man stretched it out and it was restored healthy like the other how dare he how dare he what a flagrant disregard for sin in our tradition are you not poor as they say at this irregular action the Pharisees were and they viewed it as wicked so look at verse 14 the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him but what happened then in verse 15

Jesus is aware of this he withdrew from there and many followed him and he healed them all he withdrew from there that is the synagogue and I take it he's withdrawing in more than one sense isn't he it's not just leaving and we read in verse 15 that many followed him there was a separation that took place there were the Pharisees and those who stayed with them stayed with that religion and their Sabbath rules in their synagogue and there were those who followed Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath and we're told that those who followed him in verse 15 he healed he healed them of their sins and their sorrows and their sicknesses he warned them not to tell me what those who came to him he gave rest rest from sickness and pain and suffering over the time being they were told to keep quiet and then we come to

Matthew's really important comment at the end of the section which helps us understand the significance of what we've just heard about Matthew of course is writing from the future he's writing looking back on this after Jesus' death his resurrection and his ascension and from that point looking back he says we're sent to this was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah and he quotes Isaiah chapter 42 and God is the speaker here and in verse 4 18 God says behold my servant whom I've chosen my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased and what you've just heard is the fulfilment of those words the one that you've just heard about is the chosen loved servant of God whom I will put my spirit on him God says that was the mark of God's king in the old testament times God put his spirit on the king and the one you've just heard about the one who you've just read about he is the fulfilment of these words he is the king

God's king and he will proclaim justice to the nations you see he's not just the lord of the Jews or rather better because he is the lord of the sabbath because he is the lord of the Jewish sabbath he is the lord of the sabbath of all creation justice and righteousness and true judgment for the nations of the world it's rest he's describing at last that's his message Jesus came to bring rest but he does not bring it in by bullying doesn't bring it in by worldly power but in verse 19 do you see he will not quarrel or cry out no one will hear his voice in the streets and a bruised reed he will not break and a swoldering wick he will not snuff out until he brings justice to victory do you remember last week [24:29] I am gentle and lowly in heart and those who come to Jesus do not need to fear him and in his name the nations will put their hope that is simply staggering it is simply staggering the earnest zeal and commitment and drive and sincerity of the Pharisees for their religion of the Sabbath meant that they could not and they would not recognise Jesus and they judged him to be

evil and that is a profound challenge to church people like you and I because we can very easily hide behind our good works and our keeping of God's law we can resent others that are not like us and we can be very proud of how we do things and tragically we can miss the saviour and we can hate the liberation and the forgiveness that he brings because the new life doesn't fit with our systems

I can give you easy examples of how the church of Scotland where you saw an organisation which once believed the gospel a church which once followed the teaching of the Bible and gradually it began to follow man's laws and so suddenly those who proclaimed the gospel fully well were brutally treated it we talked about in the church of England but not in the IPC but of course that's the danger isn't it you don't need to worry about the church of Scotland nor the church of England where do I and so what you and I need to realise is that you and I can be caught up with things of religion and church life and our way of doing things and we can miss Jesus you can seek to keep the Sabbath day which I encourage you to keep the Sabbath day to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy but if you don't meet with

Jesus you miss the point you can know the Bible but miss the message of the Bible and so this morning don't miss the point do not be blinded to the one who is inviting us to come to him and promising that as we come to him it is there we will find rest for our souls because there is none so blind as them that will not see let's pray