

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others what Jesus meant when He said to take His yoke. Jesus wants to free all people from their burden of sin and exchange that burden for eternal life and blessing. In this topic, we will see that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus had rebuked the religious leaders several times for their unbelief. As a result, the Pharisees were always looking for an opportunity to condemn Jesus or His disciples. Matthew 12:1-2 says, “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’” Here, we see that the Pharisees thought that they had an excuse that they could use to condemn Jesus and His disciples.

In the time of the Bible, the Jews often had narrow paths that passed through the grainfields and divided the fields of various owners. These paths were used by people to get from where they were to the nearby villages and cities. Jesus and His disciples were walking along one of these paths one Sabbath. They were probably on their way to the synagogue since the next recorded event happens in a synagogue. The disciples were hungry and so they began to break off heads of grain from the grain along the path, rub the heads of grain together, blow on them to remove any loose pieces of straw and then eat these heads of grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “‘When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.’” This verse shows that the law explicitly allowed people walking through a grain field to break off heads of grain and eat them as they walked along the path. This verse only made it clear that it was against the law to use a sickle to cut part of the field of grain so that they could sell a part of the grain that belonged to someone else.

This was a Sabbath day and so that was the reason why the Pharisees thought that they could use this law to condemn Jesus and His disciples. Exodus 20:9-10 says, “‘Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.’” The Pharisees were accusing the disciples of working on the Sabbath because they broke off a few heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands and then blew on them. Jesus used three illustrations to show the Pharisees that their attempt to twist the law to condemn the disciples did not agree with the Old Testament.

First, Jesus showed that the law allows needs to be met on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:3-4 says, “‘But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?’” In 1 Samuel chapter 21,

David and his men were fleeing from Saul and they had a need of food. As they fled, they came to the tabernacle and David asked the high priest if he had any bread available. 1 Samuel 21:3 gives us the question of David when that verse says, “Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give *me five loaves of bread* in my hand, or whatever can be found.”

We see the response of the priest to David in verse 1 Samuel 21:6 where we read, “So the priest gave him holy *bread*; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* on the day when it was taken away.” Normally, only the priests were to eat the bread that had been on the table of showbread for the previous week because it was considered holy bread. However, the priest recognized that David and his men were hungry so he made an exception to the law to meet the need of the men with David. He gave them the holy bread to eat to give them strength as they went on their way. This is an example of the fact that we fulfill the second great commandment which Jesus summarized in Matthew 22:39, “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself...’” by showing love to those in need and meeting those needs.

Second, Jesus showed that the law allowed the priests to work on the Sabbath as they carried out the work of offering sacrifices at the temple. Matthew 12:5-6 says, “Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple.” Exodus 20:9-10 says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.” At the same time, Exodus 30:7-8 says, “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.” Here, we see that Aaron and all of the priests that followed him were to work on the Sabbath just as they did every other day as they offered the morning and evening sacrifices, burned incense and tended to the lamps by putting oil in them to keep them burning. Jesus said that the priests were blameless even though they were involved in this work on the Sabbath.

Then, Jesus made an even more important statement when He said that there was One standing among them at that very moment who was greater than the temple. This was a clear statement to the religious leaders that He is the Son of God. Jesus made a similar statement early in His ministry to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The religious leaders asked for a sign to show that He had the right to cleanse the temple. Jesus answered in John 2:19-22, “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” Even His disciples did not understand His statement at that time. However, they remembered and understood after Jesus rose from the dead.

Third, Jesus showed it was right to do acts of mercy on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:7-8 says, “But

if you had known what *this* means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” The Pharisees thought that their sacrifices made them right with God even though their hearts were in rebellion against Him. Saul had that same problem when he was the first king of Israel because he kept the animals God told him to destroy when he fought against Amalek. God sent Samuel to tell him the consequences of his disobedience. 1 Samuel 15:22-23 says, “So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king.’” God knows when there is inward rebellion and He will judge that rebellion.

Then, Jesus explained what was needed in the hearts of the Pharisees instead of their inward rebellion. Jesus said, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” This was a quote from Hosea 6:6. The whole verse says, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” The Pharisees had condemned the disciples of Jesus for breaking off heads of grain and eating those kernels of grain to satisfy their hunger that morning. We saw earlier that was clearly allowed by the Old Testament law. As a result, Jesus went on to tell the Pharisees that if they would have shown mercy, they would not have condemned the guiltless. The word translated “guiltless” means *blameless or innocent*. The only other place where this word is used in the New Testament is here in verse 5 where Jesus said that the priests were blameless when they served in the temple on the Sabbath. As a result, Jesus made it clear that His disciples were as innocent as the priests when the priests served the Lord.

Then, Jesus again told the Pharisees that He is God. Verse eight says, “For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” This caused the Pharisees to become very angry because they refused to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew 12:9-10 says, “Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—that they might accuse Him.” Here, we see that they followed Him to the synagogue and immediately looked for an excuse there to condemn Jesus. In the process, they also rejected the verse that Jesus had just quoted to them from Hosea. They saw a man with a withered hand but they did not show any kindness or mercy to that man. Instead, they used the disability of the man to try and find an excuse to condemn Jesus because of their hatred for the fact that Jesus said He was the Son of Man. They especially did not want to admit that Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath.

Here, we see that when people have rebellion in their hearts, they seek to condemn rather than show mercy. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that there will be people who will condemn them for sharing the Word of God or for showing mercy to others. Such individuals just show their heart attitudes. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand these heart attitudes.