

Jesus and the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-14

January 21st, 2018

Big idea: Jesus opposed misusing God's laws that intended to bless people in order to suppress people.

Intro:

Imagine that you are a farm laborer several thousand years ago. Your day was a grind from before the sun rose until late evening. Every day was the same. The only rest you could carve out was some time right before you slept in the evening. For a woman it was the same. She helped with the fields but also prepared food for the family. The process was slow so she was always cooking, always preparing something for her hungry family. But then a law was introduced that on one day of the week you must rest. That day was to be different. Don't perform your normal labor in the field. Prepare food the day before so that on that day you could rest.

Would you find that to be restrictive or a blessing? You would probably rejoice!

What started out as a blessing for people was turned on its head to become a heavy burden.

1. Sabbath laws did not restrict meeting needs. (12:1-4)
 - a. "At that time" – connects this to the previous section of those who are weary and heavy laden by the burdens of over restriction.
 - i. You might read that and think, "Ok, what type of burdens is he talking about?"
 - ii. He now gives a specific example of Jesus confronting those whose yoke is not easy and burden is not light, in contrast to Him.
 - b. In this scene you can picture the disciples walking ahead while Jesus walked with the Pharisees. It's a Saturday, probably early spring when the grain would have been ripe. They are likely headed to the synagogue to hear the scriptures read. The Pharisees saw the disciples grab the heads off the wheat, rub it in their hands to separate the grain, probably blow the husk away, and eat the small kernels.
 - c. The edges of grainfields were left for the poor and travelers to pluck as they walked past, so the issue is not stealing.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 23:25** "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.
 - ii. Not what they were doing but when they were doing it that was the problem.
 - d. The Sabbath laws were to restrict work in order to provide rest and time to worship, but there was little Biblical instruction on what was considered "work."
 - i. **Exodus 20:9-11** "Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.¹¹ "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.
 - ii. **Exodus 31:16-17** 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.'¹⁷ "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."
 - iii. **Exodus 16:22-23** Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,²³ then he said to them,

"This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning."

- iv. **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** 'Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.
 1. Humanitarian motive behind the Sabbath as well. They were slaves, they know the experience, and now they should not require their servants to work 7 days a week.
 - v. Gathering wood prohibited (Number 15:32-26), carrying a heavy load (Jer. 17:21), buy and selling (Neh. 13:16-19)
 - vi. Because the instruction was scarce on what constitute work, a rule upon rule was added to clarify what was considered work.
 1. "The rules about the Sabbath ...are as mountains hanging by a hair, for [teaching of] Scripture [thereon] is scanty and the rules many" (M Hagigah 1:8).
 2. That which was intended to bring freedom and rest, began to be bound up with so many regulations it made a lot of work out of not working.
 3. Restrictions not just about plowing a field or butchering an animal (that make sense, they are people's livelihoods) to restrictions on tying or loosening a knot, sewing more than one stitch, or writing more than one letter.
 - e. Jesus appeals to a story they would have known from the life of David.
 - i. 3 times in this section he uses a version of this question –
 1. V. 3 – have you not read? (references 1 Samuel 21)
 2. V. 5 – have you not read in the law? (Numbers 28 and others)
 3. V. 7 – if you would have known. . . (and quotes from Hosea 6:6)
 - a. Side note – this is a religion of the Book. He expects us to know what He has inspired and preserved for us. How tragic to hear Him say, "Have you not read? Have you not known?"
 - ii. 1 Samuel 21 – David was the anointed king but not yet reigning as king. He was being pursued by King Saul and found himself hungry and in need at the tabernacle. The only food on hand was the 12 loaves of bread that was set before the Lord in the tabernacle for a week and then replaced with fresh bread. The old bread was to be eaten by the priests. And yet the priest gave it to David and his men and was not rebuked by God.
 - iii. The situation was different because it wasn't the Sabbath. The correlation is that human need took precedence over ceremonial law.
2. Sabbath laws did not restrict **service** to God. (12:5-6)

- a. The priests “break” the Sabbath because Sabbath is their “work day.” They dress in their priestly clothes, light candles, gather wood, build a fire to break loaves of bread for the showbread, offer sacrifices. Are they guilty? No! That’s part of their worship, their service to God.
 - i. Like a pastor today, when other’s work is winding down on Friday, my work peaks on Sunday morning as that tends to be my busiest day.
 - b. In other words, it’s not as rigid as “no work at all on the Sabbath.”
 - c. If they can do that work in the temple, and now “something greater than the temple is here” (Jesus himself), then surely he can show compassion on the Sabbath.
 - i. Arguing from the lesser to the greater
 - 1. This was ok for David and now one greater than David was here.
 - 2. This was ok in the temple and now one greater than the temple is here.
3. Sabbath laws did not restrict acts of compassion. (12:7-14)
- a. Chastises them for not knowing what the word really means because they weren’t applying it to their life.
 - i. They probably could have quoted Hosea 6:6 but they weren’t acting on Hosea 6:6.
 - b. To return to our side note from earlier, tragic to hear Him ask, “Have you not read?” but we can’t take pride in our knowledge if it isn’t flowing out in transformed living.
 - i. If one is proud that they read the Bible every morning and yet they are harsh, unforgiving, and brutal with others, this verse is for them.
 - ii. “I desire compassion.”
 - iii. People do not drift naturally toward transformation; they retreat toward information. That’s why you can attend a Bible study and still not experience transformation. Retaining information is “safe” — less intrusive and not as messy. Brad Bigney
 - c. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. (12:8)
 - i. It was His idea! He’s in charge of it!
 - ii. He doesn’t challenge the Sabbath law but the rigid and burdensome interpretation they were giving to it.
 - 1. He is the one who can give an authoritative interpretation of the purpose of the Sabbath and the appropriate behavior for the Sabbath.
 - 2. The idea of authorial intent – what the author intended his or her writing to mean is what is important, not merely how we want to take it. Jesus is essentially arguing for His authorial intent as Lord of the Sabbath.
 - d. He follows this statement with an incident in the synagogue.
 - i. A man with a deformed hand became a tool for the Pharisees to trap and accuse Jesus. They didn’t care about this image bearer of God and his need. His value was as a pawn in their religious game they were playing to trap Jesus.
 - ii. But Jesus won’t play their game. He turns it on them with another argument from the lesser to the greater.

- iii. They help a trapped animal on the Sabbath, either out of compassion for the animal or out of concern for their profit, but they won't help a fellow human? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep!
 - iv. How did they respond to this miracle? Outrage.
 - v. **Luke 6:11** But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.
- 4. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)
 - a. **Mark 2:27** Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
 - b. The purpose was to bless people, provide rest, give them time to set their attention on their Creator. They turned it into a burden, squelched compassion, and twisted the purpose.
 - i. Not that God wanted to set apart this day and then had to figure out what to do with it – Ah! I'll make people who I could then tell not to work on this day!
 - c. Analogy – our backyard and the wear spots in the grass under the swings. The yard is for the kids. Value the kids over the yard.
 - d. No wonder He said at the end of chapter 11 – “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
 - e. What a shift in our thinking when we begin to see that God's commands are good and kind.
 - i. Whether sexuality or marriage or honesty or forgiveness, they are boundaries that result in human flourishing.
 - ii. And yet in our rebellion we push back against them and suspect God's motives.
- 5. Christians and the Sabbath
 - a. We are no longer required to observe the Sabbath.
 - i. Don't tie up heavy burdens
 - ii. **Romans 14:5-6** One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.
 - 1. Room for freedom of conscience. I've known students that do all their studying by Saturday night so Sunday can be totally free. Would be wrong to require that of others but not wrong for them to make that convictional choice for the Lord.
 - iii. **Colossians 2:16-17** Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- ¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.
 - 1. In what way is the Sabbath a shadow of the substance that belongs to Christ?
 - iv. **Hebrews 4:9-10** So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
 - 1. The Sabbath provided a day of physical rest and worship of God. Jesus provided true spiritual rest, rest from working for God's approval.
 - b. We should intentionally set aside weekly time to gather with the church, worship, and rest.

- i. Just because it isn't a command to set aside the Sabbath in the same way as in the Old Covenant, there are principles that we would do well to consider.
- ii. Set aside a day to rest from a hard week's work.
 1. You may be in a job that requires you to work 60-70 hours per week. Carve out Sunday to rest, to set your affections on Christ, to enjoy your family and church body.
- iii. Set aside a day to assemble and worship.
 1. **Hebrews 10:23-25** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
 2. Sometimes this requires discipline and intentionality to make happen. But it's worth it.
 3. Set a goal to gather every Sunday with your church family. It provides a touch-stone throughout the rhythm of the week. It keeps us as a body on the same page. Christians began meeting on Sundays instead of Saturdays because that was the day Jesus rose from the dead. Although we refer to it as the "weekend" it is actually our "week beginning."
 4. Don't feel a need to come in with a happy face pretending everything is great when you've had a hard week.
 - a. Last week I mentioned my week was rough. We should have freedom to say that to each other without people going into panic mode.



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