



### Matthew 12:1-8

#### Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath

**Matthew 12:1** 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.

**2** And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

**3** But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:

**4** "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?"

**5** "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?"

**6** "Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

**7** "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

**8** "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

In the 1950s, the Connellsville, Pennsylvania Area School District placed a Ten Commandments display on the property of Connellsville Junior High School. At the time, of course, it caused no controversy, citizens back then were glad that their children would have a reminder of God's Moral laws every day before they entered the school building. Generally speaking even non-Christians were happy to have the Ten Commandments, displayed and they became common in public buildings all over the USA.

But of course today it's a different matter, In September 2012, the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation demanded that the school district remove the Ten Commandments from the middle school and now the matter is making its way through the courts. Local Christians are upset about the attempt to remove the commandments and they recently held a rally at the school . Ewing M. Marietta, pastor of local Baptist church had this to say: *"As a citizen of the United States and former U.S. Army soldier, I enjoy the freedoms guaranteed by the*

***Constitution. Those freedoms would not happen without the Ten Commandments. Thus, the Ten Commandments have both religious and secular significance. They are significant as one very important root of our government. If our young people do not understand where we have come from as a nation, they will not be able to understand where we need to be going.***

Obviously there has been a profound shift in attitude of the non-religious regarding the Ten Commandments since the 1950s, but it occurred to me that there has been almost as profound a shift amongst evangelicals about how the Ten Commandments are to be applied. For instance, in the 1950s in America, there was general agreement that Sunday was the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, and that work and organized recreation shouldn't occur on that day. The stores and restaurants were closed, youth sports leagues didn't meet, in many states you couldn't even fish or hunt on Sunday. That was how they keep the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep it Holy" But today, while Evangelicals are fighting to keep the fourth commandment on a stone outside a school, if you mention the abiding importance of keeping the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment in a church, there is a good possibility your are going to be called a "legalist" or a "moralist".

Let me give you an example of four ways religious people in the USA might observe the Sabbath, the first is a father who attends church in the morning, but as it gets close to noon, he is itching to leave, he knows that if he and his sons are not on the road by 12:05 they are going to miss the kick-off of the game he has tickets for, he begins fidgeting at around 11:55 when he realizes the pastor still hasn't hit his third point, finally at 12:03 he breathes a sigh of relief as the pastor finishes and the congregation stands to sing, he meanwhile hustles the boys out and they head for the parking lot.

His wife meanwhile is irritated by her husband's impatience, as she drives her girls to brunch at a local restaurant she comments, ***"I wish your father hadn't rushed out, it's so embarrassing, so what if he misses a few minutes of the beginning of his game!"***

Meanwhile the manager of that restaurant, who would also describe himself as a Christian, didn't go to church, he and his staff have been at work all morning getting brunch ready, this is after all the second most lucrative day of the week for him.

Meanwhile, down the street the Orthodox Jewish owner of a diamond store, is showing a diamond to a couple hoping to get engaged. His Sabbath was yesterday, and on that day the strict observance of Rabbinic law meant that next to NOTHING occurred in his home. No food was cooked, no clocks were wound. Even the simplest of tasks did not occur. His wife did not add fresh water to the vase of cut flowers (sowing), the spoiled orange was not removed from the basket of fruit (winnowing, sifting), the mud she noticed on her shoes was not removed (grinding). She did not cut her nails (shearing) Apply makeup (dyeing) braid her daughters hair (weaving) And although she wanted to go and read at the patio table outside, she couldn't, the sun was too

bright and although the patio table had an umbrella, opening it would have been building.

Which of those four individuals was really keeping the fourth commandment? *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* Well the answer according to Christ is ***none of them.***

Now wait a minute, somebody might say, isn't Jesus getting rid of the Sabbath here? Showing us that it no longer applied by violating it? No the Lord of the Sabbath is not eliminating the Fourth commandment or showing us that God has taken back His gift and we no longer have a day set aside for rest and worship.

Christ does not do that here or anywhere else in the gospels. Instead our Lord proves from the Scriptures that his disciples were not violating the Sabbath by their actions, and then he painstakingly tries to show the Pharisees that it was they and not the followers of the Son of Man who did not understand the Sabbath and by their invented rules and restrictions had made it into an unbiblical burden rather than the blessing it is intended to be. As JC Ryle puts it ***“The plain truth is, that our Lord did not abolish the law of the weekly Sabbath. He only freed it from incorrect interpretations, and purified it from man-made additions. He did not tear out of the decalogue the fourth commandment. He only stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had incrustated the day, and by which they had made it, not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where he found it, a part of the eternal law of God, of which no jot or tittle was ever to pass away. May we never forget this!”***

In these verses we see Christ and his disciples passing through a grain field on Sabbath. The disciples are hungry, and because they had no food as they passed through the long rows of grain they broke off a few heads and after rubbing the grain from the husk, they ate it. This was the first century version of collecting and shelling a few peanuts.

No you may be thinking at this point, "Wait a minute how is it ok to go into a farmer's field and start eating his crops?" Forget the fourth commandment whatever happened to the eighth commandment and "Thou Shalt not Steal!" Well in doing what they did, the disciples were not stealing from the owner of the field. Deuteronomy 23:25 had made provision for the poor saying ***“If you enter your neighbor's grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.”*** Any of you who have ever seen a grain field will know that allowing the poor to break off a few heads of grain is not going to lead to any financial loss. The disciples are poor and hungry, and they are merely doing what Scripture told them they were allowed to do.

The Pharisees, at this point have turned against Christ and are watching Jesus like a hawk. They're hoping he'll slip up and give them some violation of God's Law or Roman Law that they can use to destroy him. And they think this is one of them. They weren't upset about what the disciples

were doing, but they were furious about the day on which they were doing it, because they had added their own traditions to the commandments of God creating no less than 39 different kinds of “work” that constituted a violation of the Sabbath. These were the same kind of petty restrictions that stopped that Jewish housewife from throwing away a rotten orange on the Sabbath. The intent of the pharisaic restrictions was to create a “hedge” around the Sabbath so that men would be dissuaded from breaking it. So in their eyes the disciples were guilty of “reaping” when they picked the grain and threshing when they rubbed the grain from the husk.

It never even occurred to them that spying on people you hated was exactly a pious way of keeping the Sabbath either. But one of the things you have to remember is that hypocrites don’t understand spiritual religion, they don’t GET heart religion, because their hearts haven’t been changed. So they make religion into a matter of ceremonial observances and minutia. When Christians do this its usually by making Christianity into a long complex list of man-made rites, days, and ceremonies, bowing, kneeling, vestments, garments, liturgies, candle lighting, processing up and down aisles, saying the same things again and again, and everything has to be done according to the tradition or you’re not doing it right. It’s a religion of the flesh, a “farrago of useless observances” as Calvin put it.

Now when you are accused of sinning by not observing the traditions of men in church, you should do exactly what Jesus does here – take the person back to the word of God and show them the truth of what it teaches. He points out here that there three kinds of works that are always lawful on the Sabbath, works of Mercy, works of Necessity, and works of Piety,

First we see how Jesus points out a work of Necessity - The Disciples picked grain because they were hungry and had nothing to eat, and Jesus immediately draws a parallel between their actions and those of his great ancestor David, whose life pointed forward to that of Christ. When in 1 Samuel 21 David and his men were on the run and hungry they entered into the tabernacle and ate the shew bread which was not normally lawful for them to do, only the Priests could eat this bread after a new set of loaves had been set out. The high priest Ahimelech who gave that bread, gave it to them because he understood, that the ceremonies and sacrifices that he presided over according to the Law of God weren’t intended to be an end in and of themselves. The sacrifice of Goats, and Bulls, and Lambs didn’t take away sin, they pointed towards the mercy that God would show by sending the Messiah. He also knew that God desires that his servants show the same kind of mercy HE shows. They needed the bread so Ahimelech gave them the bread out of mercy.

God never intended his law to be used as excuse for not doing deeds of necessity or mercy. The law of God was never intended to be construed as compelling men to starve. In the same way, the Sabbath should not be construed as requiring that the disciples go hungry and become faint in order to abide by the made-up rules of the Pharisees. The Pharisees didn't care, how well an extremely hungry man could concentrate on keeping the Sabbath “Holy Unto the Lord”.

Jesus also says that the Sabbath is a day for works of piety. He points out that the Priests in the Temple worked on the Sabbath, the slaughtered animals, cooked the sacrifices, circumcised children, and did a host of things that were part of worship that would normally have been forbidden He's saying you just don't get it. Don't you see that if they who were working in the temple which with all of its types and shadows pointed forward to Messiah weren't breaking the Sabbath, then the MESSIAH who is the reality that the Temple could only foreshadow CAN'T be breaking the Sabbath. He even goes as far as to say, that's me, I'm the one greater than the Temple. It points to me. How can my servants be breaking the Sabbath when they are serving ME on the Sabbath?

Finally he points out that Sabbath itself, was his. It too was something that's meant to point to Jesus. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls**. It is in Jesus that we find the only true rest for our weary souls. The Sabbath day pointed forward to Him, and only in Him do we have a REAL SABBATH.

That is why the Author of Hebrews says to Christians, **Heb. 4:9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;**

**10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.**

**11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.**

This Sabbath then is Christ's day, He is the Lord of it, and it is meant to point us to the Rest that we can only have when we come to him by faith.

Now by His completed work and resurrection he has changed the day, but it remains a perpetual memorial of his completed work and a gift for us:

*VII. As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He has particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him:[34] which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week: and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week,[35] which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day,[36] and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.[37]*

But no one will ever find rest on this day unless they have come to faith in Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, all others will find it to be an empty day, or a wearisome day, a day of heavy burdens,

like the Pharisees did. Kids, many of you, I know find no pleasure on this day... It's a day of "thou shalt nots" {Ferguson example}. But it should be a day of "You shall"

*Is. 58:13 " If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

**Application:** "Prize the Lord's Day. The more that others despise and trample on it, love you it all the more. The louder the storm of blasphemy howls around you, sit the closer at the feet of Jesus. "He must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet." Diligently improve all holy time. It should be the busiest day of the seven; but only in the business of eternity. Avoid sin on that holy day. God's children should avoid sin every day, but most of all on the Lord's Day. It is a day of double cursing as well as of double blessing. The world will have to answer dreadfully for sins committed in holy time. Spend the Lord's Day in the Lord's presence. Spend it as a day in heaven. Spend much of it in praise and in works of mercy, as Jesus did." - **McCheyne**