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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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## **Lord of the Sabbath**

**Matthew 12:1-14**

### **I. The Merciful King Rejected by the Merciless**

***Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.***

- A. Christ's Appeal Begins to be Rejected
- B. The Gentle King Hated by His Own People
- C. All Out of Mercy!!
  - 1. Christ's Mercy "Broke the Rules"
  - 2. Their mercilessness exposed the rules as ungodly

### **II. Sabbath Laws and Regulations**

- A. The Commandment from God
  - 1. In six days, God created heaven and earth... unfolding all the magnificence of His creation
  - 2. On the seventh day, God rested from all His creation work
  - 3. He sanctified the seventh day, setting it apart as holy from the beginning

***Genesis 2:2-3 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.***

- 4. In the Law of Moses, God ordained the Sabbath day as holy for Israel:
  - a. first in the regulations about the manna

**Exodus 16:23-30** *He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" 24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." 27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.*

b. second in the Ten Commandments

**Exodus 20:8-11** *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

c. third in severe punishment for Sabbath breakers

**Exodus 31:14-17** *"Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. 15 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. 16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. 17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested."*

**Exodus 35:1-3** *Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them, "These are the things the LORD has commanded you to do: 2 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death. 3 Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."*

***Numbers 15:32-36*** While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, 34 and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." 36 So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.

d. fourth: in strong statements from the prophets

***Isaiah 58:13-14*** "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

***Jeremiah 17:21-23*** This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. 22 Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. 23 Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline.

e. fifth: in strong enforcement after the restoration from Babylon

***Nehemiah 13:15-22*** In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. 16 Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. 17 I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing--desecrating the Sabbath day? 18 Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath." 19 When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Once or twice the

***merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21 But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. 22 Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.***

All of this evidence shows that the Sabbath laws established by Moses and enforced by the prophets were essential to Old Covenant religion. This was not a minor issue in the Old Covenant.

#### B. Jewish Response: Total Seriousness, Even to Death

In time of Maccabees: Jewish enemies attacked on the Sabbath, and the Jews, hiding in a cave, allowed themselves to be slaughtered, even to the man, woman and child, rather than break the Sabbath rules by defending themselves

Josephus: when the Romans were attacking the walls of Jerusalem under Pompey, he succeeded by building up immense siege ramps against the walls on the Sabbath when the Jews would not fight him

Later on, however, one of the Jewish leaders taught the Jews that they could defend themselves on a Sabbath and not violate the Sabbath laws... this shows how the Sabbath laws were constantly in flux

#### C. The Jewish Regulations

Because of its importance, however, Jewish teachers of the Law began to erect protective rules and regulations

1. Long lists of regulations about what constituted work and what didn't
2. Detailed descriptions of acceptable journey one could take on a Sabbath
3. One whole chapter devoted to this issue in the Halakoth... rabbinic instructions about everyday life

Thirty-nine prohibited actions:

Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding, threshing, winnowing, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching/dyeing wool, spinning, weaving, tying or untying a knot, sewing or tearing two stitches, writing or erasing two letters, hunting, building, demolishing, kindling/extinguishing fire, hammering, carrying objects from one place to another, & SEVERAL MORE

The list was no exhaustive by any means!! Individual rabbis judges constantly the activities of the Jews to discern what was not permitted on the Sabbath

4. Thus the regulations focused on what you COULD NOT DO on the Sabbath, and did not list any exceptions

5. These human regulations were the very things Christ was challenging... Christ sought to focus on the POSITIVE aspects... what you COULD DO on the Sabbath

***Matthew 12:12 "Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."***

6. On the basis of Christ's behavior, some Jewish religionists absolutely concluded Christ was from the devil. Others were torn because of Christ's astounding miracles:

***John 9:16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.***

In John's gospel, when Jesus healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were outraged because the man carried his mat... thus the issue of healings of the Sabbath was extremely controversial

This issue is first brought to our attention here in Matthew 12

#### C. Christ Provokes Change

1. Nine different times in Gospels: Christ healed on the Sabbath
2. Seven times in the Gospels: Sabbath healings discussed and defended
3. This was not a minor issue at all!!
4. This is the first time the issue arises in the New Testament (although Mark 1 records first example of Sabbath healing)
5. In these examples, Christ in no way minimizes the importance of the Sabbath... actually quite the opposite
6. The greatest change Christ instituted in the Sabbath: opening a way for sinners to enter God's eternal Sabbath rest...[more in a moment]

### III. The Lord of the Sabbath Claims His Authority (vs. 1-8)

#### A. Context: A Sabbath Stroll by Hungry Disciples

***Matthew 12:1-2 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."***

1. Action permitted by Scripture... issue not the eating, but the Sabbath

***Deuteronomy 23:25 If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.***

This was a form of welfare for the poor in Israel

By the same regulation, Ruth was gleaning in Boaz's field

It shows how poor and needy were the disciples of Christ

***Matthew 8:19-20 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."***

2. Sabbath regulations tested: "What is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

- a. Christ not the one picking and eating
- b. however, Pharisees attack Him... His disciples were under His authority
- c. just as they had earlier attacked Him about fasting
- d. at issue... strict Phariseic regulations

Plucking grain with the hand interpreted as reaping

Rubbing grain in hands interpreted as threshing

Blowing the husks away interpreted as winnowing

All of it put together interpreted as preparing food on the Sabbath day

## B. Christ's Defense

1. Appeal to Authority of Scripture

- a. striking rebuke: "Have you not read about David...?"
  - i) Pharisees spent whole lives doing nothing but studying & teaching Scripture
  - ii) still missed the point

These are the people who gave tithes on their spices—mint, dill, cumin—but who neglected the weightier matters of the law... justice, mercy, faithfulness

- iii) meticulous study can lead to pride and power

Spurgeon: on counting letters

"THE scribes and Pharisees were great readers of the law. They studied the sacred books continually, poring over each word and letter. They made notes of very little importance, but still very curious notes as to which was the middle verse of the entire Old Testament, which verse was half-way to the middle, and how many times such a word occurred, and even how many times a letter occurred, and the size of the letter, and its peculiar position. They have left us a mass of wonderful notes upon the mere words of Holy Scripture. They might have done the same thing upon another book for that matter, and the information would have been about as important as the facts, which they have so industriously collected concerning the letter of the Old Testament. They were, however, intense readers of the law. They picked a quarrel with the Savior upon a matter touching this law, for they carried it at their fingers' ends, and were ready to use it as a bird of prey does its talons to tear and rend." ["How to Read the Bible", Sermon #1503, on Matthew 12:3-7]

Simply to read or even diligently to study the Scriptures does not save our souls... UNDERSTANDING, DELIGHTING IN, BELIEVING, and OBEYING the truth of Scripture does save our souls!!

b. Christ's view of the sufficiency of Scripture

- i) Scriptures sufficient to settle the matter
- ii) Christ constantly does this... resorting to texts to answer the hardest problems
- iii) modern church practically rejects the sufficiency of Scripture

- On controversial topics, we think that Scripture has no answer for us... we compromise and look elsewhere for unity
- On church growth matters, we think simple preaching and teaching of the word of God is not enough... we need big glitzy productions every Sunday, family life centers, infinite church programs to meet every need of every category of person
- In counseling, Scripture not sufficient... we need the latest concepts in psychology to address deepest issues of the soul
- Even in preaching, Scripture not held to be sufficient... we need a blend of current events, folksy wisdom, enthralling stories, pop psychology, and moral directives... simply to teach through a passage of Scripture will not get the job done

Christ was so different... His answer is always the same: "Have you not read...?"

c. variety of levels to Scripture

- i) precept: what Scripture clearly commands or prohibits
- ii) principle: theological themes in the Bible whose truths can be brought to bear on an issue

iii) pattern: examples of people in the Bible whose actions are either praised or rejected

Jesus uses all three:

Precept: the fact that priests were commanded to work on the Sabbath

Principle: the fact that humans are of greater worth than sheep; and that God desires mercy, not sacrifice

Pattern: the fact that King David acted a certain way and was praised as a man after God's own heart

Jesus finds everything He needs in the words of Scripture

However, ultimately, Jesus defends His actions on the basis of an appeal to authority

## 2. Appeal to Authority of a Future King

***vs. 3-4 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread-- which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.***

- a. story found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6
- b. David fleeing for his life from insane King Saul
- c. David en route to becoming king... a long, torturous path
- d. he & his men stopped at Nob south of Jerusalem, to the tabernacle of God
- e. famished, he enters the tabernacle and takes the consecrated bread which ordinarily only the priests would eat
- f. probably the incident occurred on a Sabbath, which was the day the old bread was taken away and new bread put in its place

Christ's point: David's role as future king of Israel, and the mission he was on, fleeing for his life, made his eating of the unlawful bread acceptable. The Scripture commends David as a man after God's own heart and says nothing against David's actions

Therefore, some laws and regulations may be set aside to preserve life if an authority figure like future King David requires it

This was true of something unlawful... eating of consecrated bread

BUT the law says nothing about picking heads of grain and eating them for hunger's sake

How much more is what Christ's apostles have done acceptable to God!!



### 3. Appeal to Authority of a Priest

**vs. 5 *Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?***

- a. direct appeal to the Law to limit Sabbath regulations
- b. what Law? Sacrificial regulations and other works done in the temple

***Numbers 28:9-10 On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. 10 This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.***

- John 7:22-23 Jesus appealed to the fact the a child could be circumcised on the Sabbath
  - c. Christ's statement: priests "desecrate" the day
    - i) very strong word... means to pollute or defile
    - ii) just as strong is the word Christ uses to describe them: INNOCENT

Same word He uses to describe His own disciples as the plucked heads of grain and ate them:

**vs. 7 *If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.***

Here Christ appeals to the authority of a priest: a priest accomplishing his mission can "work" on the Sabbath

### 4. Appeal to Authority of a Prophet

**vs. 7 *If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.***

- a. very important quote from Hosea
- b. deals with prophet's assessment of religious Israel
- c. God has a priority structure:

I place mercy above the offering of sacrifice!! To show mercy to a suffering human being is of greater importance to God than to keep the minutiae of the law... especially if those laws are human interpretations only

***Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."***

NOTE: Christ does not overthrow the minutiae of the law... He just sets the Law up in a priority structure... not everything is equally important in the Law

For Christ to feed a hungry man or to heal a suffering human being, created in the image of God, on the Sabbath is actually very pleasing to God

#### 5. Conclusion: Appeal to His Own Authority

In effect: I am a greater King than David, and my men on a greater mission than David's were that day

I am a greater priest than any in the temple, for

***vs. 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.***

I am greater than any prophet... for I am come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets

In fact, I am greater than the Sabbath itself

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

This is a stunning claim... a claim to final authority over Sabbath

There were human leaders squabbling constantly over what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. Christ said, "I settle all matters of Sabbath regulation. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Christ makes a staggering claim here. But no greater than the claim He made in John 5:

***John 5:16-18 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.***

Our King is the Son of God, and He has the right to rule over the Sabbath... to decide what He will and will not have us do to keep the Sabbath!!

#### IV. The Lord of the Sabbath Exercises His Authority (vs. 9-13)

##### A. The Context: Hostile Accusers Ready to Pounce (vs. 9-10)

**vs. 9-10** *Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*

1. The Pharisees were like birds of prey with their talons extended
2. Hosea said "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," but they are utterly merciless
3. In many instances, Jesus' enemies set Him up to see if He would defy their authority
4. In this case... a man with a withered hand
  - a. Greek same as "dry", "withered" like a dead tree branch
  - b. Luke tells us it was his right hand
  - c. probably very difficult to earn a living
  - d. BUT not of the emergency healings permitted by the Pharisees

**Luke 13:14** *Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."*

##### B. The Lord of the Sabbath Reasons with Hardened Sinners (vs. 11-12)

**vs. 11-12** *He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

1. Our God is a reasonable God... reasoning with our minds as wooing our hearts

**Isaiah 1:18** *"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord..."*

2. Christ here appeals to reason and to their own accepted practice
3. A farm animal can be rescued on the Sabbath without breaking command
4. Arguing from lesser to greater... "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep"

Note: Biblical worldview places higher essential value on humans than on animals; modern groups like PETA have an evolutionary or Eastern religious viewpoint which sees essential unity to all life, no life higher or more valuable than the other

Christ rejects this: we are "much more valuable than the birds of the air" (Matthew 6:26) "worth more than many sparrows" (10:31)

Christ's basic lesson: Phariseic law allows the rescue of a sheep, as does common sense and mercy; how much more should we show mercy to a suffering human being, even if his illness is not life threatening

#### 5. Hardened opposition remains silent

***Mark 3:4-5 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. 5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...***

One of the occasions in which the emotional life of Christ is revealed

Their sullen silence exposes their wicked hearts, and their hatred not just for Him but for this suffering man

Christ gets ANGRY at their sin... He does not merely feel compassion for the man

B.B. Warfield, "The Emotional Life of Our Lord" said "What is meant is simply that the spectacle of their hardness of heart produced in him the deepest dissatisfaction which passed into angry resentment.... The hardness of the Jews' hearts, vividly realized, hurt Jesus."

#### C. The Lord of the Sabbath Shows Mercy on a Suffering Sinner (vs. 13)

***vs. 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.***

Miraculous display confirms Christ's final claim to authority... He is Lord of the Sabbath!!

He restores what is withered and makes it new again

#### V. The Lord of the Sabbath Despised and Rejected (vs. 14)

***vs. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.***

##### A. Christ's Enemies Exposed: Religious Exterior, Murderous Interior

1. Appearing the very picture of piety externally... seeking to please God on minutiae
2. Inside, however, they are full of poisonous murder

## B. Merciless Hearts Remains Silent

***Mark 3:4-5 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. 5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...***

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## C. Ultimate Result: A Murderous Plot

***vs. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.***

1. Ironic: they thought you couldn't heal on the Sabbath... it might displease God
2. BUT you could go out and plot to kill someone
3. Exact same mentality when Jews would not enter Pilates palace when seeking to have him kill Jesus... they wanted to be able to eat the Passover!!

## VI. The Lord of the Sabbath Invites You to Rest

### A. Greatest Change in the Sabbath: Opening to Eternal Life

***Hebrews 4:3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"***

Christ's death on the cross has opened a perfect Sabbath rest for all people to enter... all who believe that Christ is Lord of the Sabbath

Christ's resurrection marked forever a change in the Sabbath observance

### B. Move from Seventh to First Day of the Week: New Creation

1. God's rest after creating first heaven and earth marked by Old Covenant Sabbath
2. Christ's rest before creating New Heaven and Earth now marked by Lord's Day... First Day of the week

C. Lord of the Sabbath Invites You to Enter His Rest

***Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

1. Rest in Justification: Saving Faith in Christ
2. Sabbath Rest one day in Seven
  - a. not Sabbatarian legalism... long lists of what you must not do on the Sabbath
  - b. rather a true seeking of rest IN CHRIST, in His word, in worship, in fellowship with other Christians, in time spent in spiritual pursuits both with family and by yourself
  - c. clear out your life to do it... secular employment not compatible

Six main areas to concentrate on each Sunday: [Doorposts, "A Day of Delight: Making Sunday the Best Day of the Week"]

- 1) Rest from normal, weekday activities
- 2) Meditate on God and on His Word
- 3) Fellowship with God and other believers
- 4) Acts of mercy and justice
- 5) Remembering/praising God's work in creation
- 6) Remembering/praising Christ's work in redemption: His sinless life, atoning death, mighty resurrection
  - Perhaps you may want to prepare food ahead of time so as to minimize meal preparation on Sunday
  - Go to church!!! Do not neglect assembling yourselves with other Christians
  - If in a family, have a time of family worship: sing hymns, read Scripture, talk to each other about Christ
  - Set aside a time for quiet meditation **NOT JUST SLEEP!!!** Take a Psalm or one of Paul's epistles and chew on it in meditation... refresh yourself in the word of God
  - Do acts of mercy for others... think of others (perhaps homebound, perhaps ill, perhaps lonely) and do acts of mercy to encourage them
  - If the weather is suitable, go for a walk in God's creation... praising Him for what He's made
  - Have a fellowship meal with other believers and be sure the conversation is focused on God, His Word, and His Kingdom work

All of these ways and so many more will help you make New Creation Sabbath rest a delight

Avoid legalism... a harsh sense of God's judgment on how you spend a Sabbath day

### **3. Eternal Rest Yet to Come**