

The Church of the Servant King

Thursday Night Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Thurs_Matt12A)

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH (12:1-8)

1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (12:1-8)

Opposition to Jesus had already surfaced (9:3 – accused of blasphemy when He healed the paralytic; 9:11 cf. 11:19 – questioned accusingly when He ate with tax collectors and sinners; 9:34 cf. 10:25 – accused of casting out demons by the ruler of demons). However, as we shall see, the Pharisee's perception that Jesus violated the Sabbath generated enough hatred to lead Jesus' enemies to contemplate murder (12:14).

Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath with a focus upon one's true attitude and relationship toward the heavenly Father was one of the primary points of contention between Him and the Pharisees. Every Jew recognized the Sabbath as the sign of the Mosaic covenant (Ex 20:8-11; 31:12-18).

8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 "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. (Exodus 20:8-11)

12 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 14 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. 16 '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." 18 When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God. (Exod 31:12-18)

To do anything on the Sabbath that might be considered a desecration of the Sabbath was tantamount to flaunting one's disobedience to the entire Law of Moses (Num 15:30-36).

30 'But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. 31'Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.'" 32 Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; 34 and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36 So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Num 15:30-36)

Israel took this very seriously since obedience to the laws concerning the Sabbath was the basis for blessing in Israel. However, the problem became the distorted perception of the Law and its purpose by an increasingly self-righteous Israel. Matthew does a masterful job under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of tying together Jesus' teaching on this very issue (11:28-30) with a practical illustration from Jesus' life.

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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." (Matt 11:28-30)

The Law forbid reaping for profit on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21), but it allowed for grain to be picked to eat immediately (Deut 23:25). Therefore, the disciples were not breaking God's law.

21 "You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. (Exod 34:21)

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. (Exod 23:25)

The event to which Jesus refers in verses 3-4 is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and the regulations concerning the consecrated bread are found in Leviticus 24:5-9.

1 Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" 2 David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' 3 "Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." 4 The priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women." 5 David answered the priest and said to him, "Surely women have been kept from

us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels be holy?" 6 So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away. (1 Sam 21:1-6)

5 "Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. 6 "You shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. 7 "You shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, even an offering by fire to the LORD. 8 "Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. 9 "It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, his portion forever." (Lev 24:5-9)

It is very likely that David and his men ate the shewbread on the Sabbath since 1 Samuel 21:5-6 sounds as if the consecrated bread had just been changed. Both David and his men ate what should only have been eaten by the priests and did so after veiling his true mission to the priest. Note that Jesus makes nothing of David's hiding of his true mission. Rather, Jesus' point is that the Scriptures did not condemn David for his action; therefore the legalism of the Pharisees is not consistent with Scripture. Also, Jesus uses this example of an apparent or perceived violation of the Sabbath in the life of David as if to say that He is at least as special as David – something that is very consistent with Matthew's theme that Jesus is the son of David and the rightful claimant to the Messianic throne of Israel.

The phrase "profane the Sabbath" in verse 5 refers to the work of the priests in carrying out their ministry and official duties on the Sabbath. These duties required more labor and physical effort than allowed by the Pharisees in the other 39 categories of actions that they listed as forbidden. They had to change the consecrated bread (Lev 24:8) and offer a double burnt offering (Num 28:9-10). Their official service had priority over the normal Sabbath observance. So, Jesus is offering an a-fortiori argument (from the greater to the lesser) in a reverse fashion. However, such an argument is only valid if "One greater than the temple" existed. So Jesus' point is that if it is acceptable for the priests to violate the Pharisaic restrictions every week, then it is certainly acceptable for Jesus Who is the embodiment of the Temple (Jn 2:20-21) and the kingdom itself to violate Pharisaic restrictions.

20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (Jn 2:20-21)

Jesus concludes His reprimand of the Pharisees with a quote from Hosea 6:6 just as He had done on a previous occasion in Matthew 9:13 where Jesus had been criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. The principle in this setting is the same as in Matthew 9:13, i.e. when mercy is lacking, then religious formalities are meaningless.

HEALING ON THE SABBATH (12:9-14)

9 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"--so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was

restored to normal, like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees was in effect asking the Pharisees if the Sabbath was a day for evil activity – like their evil intentions in questioning Him – or for honoring God – like His healing which pointed to Who He was. No mention is made of the faith of the man who experienced the healing. That is not the issue in this healing. The issue is the Pharisee's distortion of the purpose of the Law as illustrated by the distortions regarding the Sabbath. It was possible for the Jew to keep the Law as attested by Moses (*"For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. – Deut 30:11*) In the gospel narratives, the Sabbath-controversy pericopes have a coherent theme, i.e. the dispute is not over the legality of various Sabbath activities but over Jesus' authority. The Sabbath conflicts are not the cause of the plotting but its occasion. Therefore Sabbath disputes were not mentioned at Jesus' trials since in themselves they were never the real issue. The real issue at Jesus' trial was His claim to be the Sabbath's Lord.

JESUS WITHDRAWS TO MINISTER TO THE MULTITUDES (12:15-21)

15 But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16 and warned them not to tell who He was. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

- 18 "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN;
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED;
I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM,
AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.
19 "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT;
NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.
20 "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF,
AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT,
UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.
21 "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

Until His appointed hour, Jesus withdrew from opposition on many occasions (e.g. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; 16:5). Jesus knew there is a time for everything and that He could lose the war even though He would win battles. At this stage in Jesus' public ministry, He was still reconnoitering the nation. (A reconnaissance team is not tasked with the mission of engaging the enemy. A reconnaissance team is simply an intelligence-gathering unit). Jesus was still assessing the volitional temperature of the nation of Israel, so to speak. He was providing the nation with an opportunity to make a decision for Him and the kingdom or to reject Him and the kingdom.

Principle: We must know when to engage our spiritual opposition and when to allow them to go their own way. Otherwise, we risk losing spiritual focus and constantly being distracted by every opportunity to engage spiritual error.

In Jesus' case, His conduct was the fulfillment of Scripture. Even though the Pharisees plotted to kill Him (v. 14), He did not quarrel or cry out (v. 19) in an arrogant or brash manner. In these verses, Matthew is showing the servant side of the Messianic King of the Jews Who had the legal right to the throne of David.

Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4. In doing so, Matthew begins to tie the rejection of Jesus by Israel to the blessing that will come to the Gentiles. This is not a prediction of the Church since Gentiles will be blessed with Israel during the Messianic reign of Christ. However, it is almost a certainty that Matthew wrote his gospel account after the present dispensation of the

church age body of Christ had begun; therefore, his account reflects certain parallels between the blessings to the Gentiles in the newly inaugurated age and the fact that Gentiles will be blessed in the Millennium. Even so, while we acknowledge the similarities, we can't ignore the differences.

"A bruised reed" refers to the weak, the poor, and the needy. Christ would not break, but He would mend and restore (see Mt 11:5 cf. Is 41:17 and 42:7). "Smoking flax" is a reference to a smoldering wick as used in an oil lamp. This analogy represents those who were on the verge of losing their faith and hope of a coming Messiah. Jesus would fulfill that hope.

A HOUSE DIVIDED CANNOT STAND (12:22-30)

22 Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." 25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 27 "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. 28 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (12:22-30)

In this section, Jesus acknowledges that some of the religious leaders of the Jews cast out demons (v. 27). They no doubt claimed that it was accomplished by the power of God. However, if Jesus cast out demons in such a decisive way by the power of Satan, how could Satan's kingdom stand? The conclusion that Jesus wanted His hearers to reach was that He cast out demons because He was the Son of God, whereas the religious leaders (who were unbelievers) cast out demons via the power of Satan. Jesus was a threat to the kingdom of Satan; however, the religious leaders were not a threat, but as unbelievers, they advanced the kingdom of Satan.

Principle: Satan can and does use unbelievers to do "good" things that on the surface seem to work against his kingdom, e.g. casting out demons and performing miracles. Today these manifestations of power can even be done in the name of Jesus. It is a case of sacrificing a battle in an attempt to win the war.

Jesus' question in verse 29 is designed to focus attention upon the nature of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' ministry through his life, death, and resurrection are all designed to lead to His one day 2nd Coming to rule and reign while Satan is bound in the Abyss for the duration of Jesus' Messianic kingdom on earth. Remember, the focus of Jesus' gospel was "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." During the period that His kingdom is in place on earth, Satan will be bound. Jesus' life and ministry is all preparatory to that eventuality.

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN AND JESUS' TEACHING RELATED THERETO (12:31-37)

31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 "You brood of vipers, how can you,

being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (12:31-37)

The multitude of problems that have resulted from faulty interpretations and applications of this passage are numerous. This passage is a good illustration of the principal that Bible doctrine is **organic** in nature, i.e. the position taken on one doctrine influences conclusions drawn in other areas of Scripture. In this passage, if one fails to properly interpret its context in view of the purpose of Jesus' public ministry during what was a *kingdom proximate* portion of the Age of Israel, one will see application to the Christian of this Age. However, the following points are critical to a proper interpretation and application of this passage:

- Setting – Matthew has documented that Jesus has been performing miracle after miracle up to this point in His public ministry.
- These miracles were for the purpose of authenticating the messenger and His message.
- John the Baptist's message and Jesus' message (and of His disciples) was the gospel of the kingdom (e.g. 3:2; 4:17, 23; 9:35; 10:7).
- Jesus' teaching up to this point in His ministry has related exclusively to the kingdom of heaven (e.g. chps. 5-7; 8:11; 11:11-19).
- To this point in His ministry, Jesus has not even uttered a single word of prophecy, much less direct instruction, related to the Church.

Therefore, this passage must be interpreted in this context. Jesus has just been accused by the religious leaders of performing these miracles in the power of Satan and not the power of God. Jesus is simply stating the principle to these religious leaders that to reject the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit with regard to the source of these miracles is unforgivable, i.e. to attribute the power behind Christ's miracles to Satan was tantamount to rejection of Him as the Messiah and unbelief. Since Jesus is not present today performing miracles while proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of heaven is at hand, the circumstances do not match those which existed during Jesus' ministry.

This interpretation of verses 31 – 32 helps us to **organically** connect to the interpretation of the following verses (33-37 as well as other passages) in a consistent and non-contradictory manner. In verse 33, Jesus is instructing His hearers to be consistent in the manner in which they interpret His works. They should either make Him (the tree) good by recognizing His miracles (the fruit) as good or they should make Him (the tree) evil by concluding that His miracles (the fruit) were evil. Of course, they would not be able to legitimately reach the latter conclusion since no one was claiming His works to be evil.

Then in verse 34, Jesus affirms the principle that even an apparently good thing done by an evil person is evil.

Verses 36 and 37 bring to mind the judgment of unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. At the GWTJ, unbelievers will be judged by their deeds written in the "books" (plural). See Revelation 20:11-15.