

Jesus – The King of the Jews #31

Lord of the Sabbath

Matt 12:1-14

Introduction:

1. The events recorded in [Matthew 12](#) mark a major turning point in Jesus' ministry, focusing on the rejection of the Messiah by His own people.
 - a. [Vs 1-21](#) depict the mounting unbelief of Israel turning into rejection
 - b. Vs 22-50 depict the blasphemy that follows the rejection.
2. After the King was presented and attested, He was then rejected and blasphemed before finally being put to death on the cross.
3. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry the Jewish leaders were skeptical of Him, and that rapidly escalated into criticism, hostility, and opposition.
4. As Jesus increasingly attacked the man-made religion of rabbinical tradition, the leaders of that religion increasingly attacked Him.
 - a. They accused Him of blasphemy ([9:3](#))
 - b. They accused Him of fellowshiping with tax-collectors / sinners- v11
 - c. They even accused Him of being demon possessed ([v. 34](#)).
5. Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders with their internal sinfulness and their external emptiness, the more they hardened their antagonism to Him.
6. Criticism / indifference grew into sharp rebuke and then into furious rage.
7. One of the primary causes for opposition centered on observance of the Sabbath, the problem with which the present text ([12:1-14](#)) deals.

I. The Incident – vs 1

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

A. The Sabbath

1. **Sabbath** observance was the heart of the Jewish legalistic system
2. When Jesus violated the traditions as to how that day should be honored, He struck a raw nerve.
3. *shabbāt*, which has the basic meaning of ceasing, rest, and inactivity.
 - a) *At the end of creation "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work... (Gen. 2:3).*
 - b) *God declared it to be a special time of rest and remembrance for His people and incorporated its observance into the Ten Commandments*
4. When Jesus began His ministry; the Old Covenant was still in effect and all of its requirements were binding on Jews
 - a) *Jesus observed every demand of Scripture, because it was His own Word, which He came to fulfill and not destroy (Matt 5:17).*
 - b) *But for several hundred years the rabbis had added regulation after regulation, going far beyond the teaching of Scripture*
 - c) *In no area were those additions more extensive and extreme than in regard to Sabbath observance.*
5. Most Jews had little idea of the original purpose of the Sabbath or of how God intended it to be honored.
 - a) *Instead of being a day of rest it became a day of incredible burden*
 - b) *Because of the thousands of man-made restrictions the Sabbath was more tiresome than the six days devoted to one's occupation.*
 - c) *It was harder to "rest" than to earn a living.*
6. Jewish tradition had even caused the Sabbath to be dangerous.
 - a) *The Jews would not fight battles on the Sabbath*
 - b) *Even if they were being attacked they would not defend themselves on the Sabbath*
 - c) *When Antiochus Epiphanes and the Greeks attacked on the Sabbath, the Jews did not fight*
 - d) *When the Romans attacked on the Sabbath, the Jews did not defend themselves*
7. One section alone of the Talmud, the major compilation of Jewish tradition, has twenty-four chapters listing Sabbath laws. →

One law specified that the basic limit for travel was 3,000 feet from one's house; but various exceptions were provided. If you had placed some food within 3,000 feet of your house, you could go there to eat it; and because the food was considered an extension of the house, you could then go another 3,000 feet beyond the food. A Jew could not carry a load heavier than a dried fig; But if an object weighed half that amount he could carry it twice.

You could eat nothing larger than an olive; and even if you tasted half an olive, found it to be rotten and spit it out, that half was considered to have been eaten as far as the allowance was concerned.

Tailors did not carry a needle with them on the Sabbath for fear they might be tempted to mend a garment and thereby perform work.

Nothing could be bought or sold, and clothing could not be dyed or washed.

No fire could be lit or extinguished—including fire for a lamp—although a fire already lit could be used within certain limits. For that reason, some orthodox Jews today use automatic timers to turn on lights in their homes well before the Sabbath begins. Otherwise they might forget to turn them on in time and have to spend the night in the dark.

Baths could not be taken for fear some of the water might spill onto the floor and "wash" it. Chairs could not be moved because dragging them might make a furrow in the ground, and a woman was not to look in a mirror lest she see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out.

A Jew could not pull off even a handful of grain to eat on the Sabbath unless he were starving—which, of course, is often a difficult thing to determine and would be cause for considerable differences of opinion.

If a person became ill on the Sabbath, only enough treatment could be given to keep him alive. Treatment to make him improve was declared to be work, and therefore forbidden.

8. The Sabbath was anything but a time of rest.
 - a) *It had become a time of oppressive frustration and anxiety.*
 - b) *The people were sick to death of this system that had been imposed on them by ungodly, worldly legalists, and they were indeed "weary and heavy-laden" [Matt. 11:28](#).*

B. The Eating

1. That Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields was itself a violation of Jewish tradition, though not of Scripture.
 - a) *And the fact that they became hungry shows that they were not in the fields for the purpose of finding something to eat.*
 - b) *They were simply passing through.*
2. Roads were few and much travel was done on wide paths that went from town to town and passed through many pastures and grainfields.
 - a) *As travelers walked along, they passed within an arm's length of the crops on either side.*
 - b) *Inns were rare even in small towns and villages and were nonexistent between them.*
 - c) *If a traveler did not take enough food with him or found his trip extended for some reason, he had to live off the land.*
3. The disciples were not reaping on the Sabbath, which was forbidden by Mosaic law ([Ex. 34:21](#)), but simply satisfying their hunger according to the provision of [Deuteronomy 23](#).
 - a) *Rabbinic tradition, however, had ridiculously interpreted the rubbing of grain together in the hands (which the disciples were doing; see [Luke 6:1](#)) as a form of threshing; and they regarded blowing away the chaff as a form of winnowing.*
 - b) *The Talmud said, "If a person rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is sifting. If he rubs the heads of wheat, it is threshing. If he cleans off the side adherences, it is sifting. If he bruises the ears, it is grinding. And if he throws it up in his hand, it is winnowing."*
4. The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus and had no source of income other than occasional gifts from their families and fellow believers.
 - a) *When **they became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat**, they were perfectly within their scriptural and social rights.*
 - b) *They lived by faith, and the divine law of the land provided for just such sustenance.*
 - c) *Jesus did nothing to discourage the disciples and probably joined them in eating the grain.*

BYZ **Matthew 12:1** Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἐπορεύθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς σάββασιν διὰ τῶν σπορίμων· οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπέινασαν, καὶ ἤρξαντο τίλλειν στάχυας καὶ ἐσθίειν.

τίλλειν verb infin pres act from **τίλλω**
- *pluck, pick*; of heads of standing grain
pick or pluck off

BYZ **Matthew 12:2** Οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι ἰδόντες εἶπον αὐτῷ, Ἰδοὺ, οἱ μαθηταὶ σου ποιοῦσιν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ποιεῖν ἐν σαββάτῳ.

II. The Indictment – vs 2

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

1. One wonders what the Pharisees were doing out in the grainfields themselves or what the vantage point was from which they saw Jesus and His disciples.
2. It may be that certain exceptions were made for these self-appointed guardians of tradition, just as policemen have the right to temporarily break certain laws while performing their duty.
3. Rabbinic tradition was not legitimate Jewish law, but many centuries of observance had given it that status in the minds of most Jews, especially the legalistic scribes and Pharisees.
4. God's Word was honored in name and was the supposed basis for the traditions.
5. But Scripture was not studied and obeyed directly; it was rather used as a means to justify the traditions, many of which actually contradicted and "invalidated the word of God" [Matt. 15:6](#).
6. The Pharisees indicted the Lord and His disciples for disobeying their distorted, man-made traditions

III. The Instruction – vs 3-8

- “Have you not read what David did...?” was deep-cutting sarcasm
- The account of David was from Scripture, about which the Pharisees considered themselves the supreme experts and custodians.
- They must have winced in anger as Jesus said to them, in effect, "Don't you teachers of Scripture know what it says?"
- Jesus instructed them about God's purposes for the Sabbath, particularly about three things it was *not* designed to do.

A. Sabbath Does Not Restrict Deeds of Necessity – vs 3-4

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

1. David was the supreme hero of Judaism, loved and honored even above the patriarchs and prophets.
2. He was the great king, poet, and warrior.
3. Jesus reminded the Pharisees of a familiar story about David and his companions as they fled to escape jealous /vengeful Saul
 - a) *When they came to Nob, where the Tabernacle was then located, they asked for food.*
 - b) *Abimelech the priest gave them the shewbread which was not lawful for him to eat, but for the priests alone, because there was "no ordinary bread on hand" in the Tabernacle ([1 Sam. 21:4](#)).*
 - c) *The shewbread could be eaten only by the priests.*
 - d) *On that particular occasion, however, an exception was made on behalf of David and his men, who were weak from hunger.*
 - e) *God was not offended by that act, and He did not discipline either Abimelech or David.*
 - f) *The Lord was willing for a ceremonial regulation to be violated when it was necessary to meet the needs of His beloved people.*
4. If God makes allowances for His own law to be broken under certain circumstances for the welfare of His people, Jesus said, He surely permits foolish man-made traditions to be broken for that purpose.

B. Sabbath Does Not Restrict Service to God – vs 5-6

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? 6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

1. Jesus did not have to explain what He meant by saying that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath.
 - a) *The Pharisees knew that priests not only were allowed but required to do many things on the Sabbath that otherwise would have violated God's Law of rest, not to mention rabbinic tradition.*
 - b) *On the Sabbath the ministering priests had to light the altar fires, kill the sacrificial animals, and then lift up the carcasses and place them on the altar.*
2. The most legalistic Pharisee considered the priests who ministered in the temple as innocent of breaking the Sabbath
 - a) *Similarly, even the most legalistic Christian does not consider preaching, teaching Sunday school, leading a youth group, or any other such work as profaning the Lord's Day, despite the fact that those activities require a great deal of effort.*
 - b) *Jesus embarrassed and angered the Pharisees by pointing out the inconsistency of their legalistic thinking.*
 - c) *But their anger turned to rage when Jesus then said, But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here.*
 - d) *Even if the Pharisees did not immediately understand that Jesus was referring to Himself, they were horrified—because nothing, other than God Himself, was greater than the temple.*
3. In vs 8 He removed all doubt in their minds about what He meant
4. In light of His deity, Jesus had the right to abrogate Sabbath regulations as He saw fit

BYZ **Matthew 12:3** Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε τί ἐποίησεν Δαβὶδ, ὅτε ἐπέινασεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ.

BYZ **Matthew 12:4** πῶς εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως ἔφαγεν, οὓς οὐκ ἐξὸν ἦν αὐτῷ φαγεῖν, οὐδὲ τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν μόνοις;

YZ **Matthew 12:5** Ἡ οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ, ὅτι τοῖς σάββασιν οἱ ἱερεῖς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τὸ σάββατον βεβηλοῦσιν, καὶ ἀναίτιοί εἰσιν; **βεβηλοῦσιν**, verb ind pres act 3pp from **βεβηλώω** - as disregarding what is to be kept sacred or holy *desecrate, violate, ritually defile* (MT 12.5) **ἀναίτιοί** adj nmp no degree from **ἀναίτιος** - innocent, without guilt, not having done anything wrong; substantively **οἱ ἀναίτιοι** *innocent people* (MT 12.7)

BYZ **Matthew 12:6** Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι τοῦ ἱεροῦ μείζων ἐστὶν ὧδε.

C. Sabbath Does Not Restrict Acts of Mercy – vs 7-8

7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

1. Jesus' third point regarding the Sabbath was that its observance was never meant to restrict acts of mercy, as the Pharisees would have known had they understood and honored Scripture as they claimed.
 - a) *Sacrifice here represents the entire Mosaic system of ritual and ceremony, which was always of secondary and temporary importance in God's plan.*
 - b) *Sacrifice was never more than symbolic, a means pointing to God's gracious and future provision of what no man, and certainly no animal, could provide.*
2. Observing the Sabbath was a kind of sacrifice, a symbolic service to the Lord in obedience to His command.
 - a) *It was a reminder of God's completion of creation and a shadow of the perfect rest His redeemed people look forward to in salvation and in heaven.*
 - b) *Sabbath observance was not a substitute for the heart righteousness and compassion*
 - c) *God is merciful, and He commands His people to be merciful.*
 - d) *Because the Sabbath was the Lord's special day under the Old Covenant, a faithful Jew should have been especially concerned to follow his Lord's example of compassion on that day.*
3. To substantiate His authority for saying what He had just said, Jesus added, For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.
 - a) *That statement must have rendered the Pharisees speechless.*
 - b) *What He had implied by "something greater than the temple" (12:6), He now made unambiguous.*
 - c) *Jesus stood before them and claimed He was greater than God's Temple and greater than God's Sabbath.*
 - d) *He was God, the Son of Man, the divine Messiah whom the Temple honored and the Sabbath served.*
4. From the days of the early church Christians have set aside Sunday, as a special day of worship, fellowship, and giving offerings, because that is the day our Lord was raised from the dead.

IV. The Illustration – vs 9-13

A. The Problem – vs 9-10

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: 10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

1. Without waiting for a response from the Pharisees, Jesus immediately went to their synagogue, into their very lair as it were, and gave them a living illustration of the true meaning of Sabbath observance and of His authority over both man and the Sabbath.
2. When the Pharisees saw a man with a withered hand there, they thought they had the perfect trap for Jesus.
 - a) *Completely unaffected by Jesus' reminder from Scripture that God desires "compassion, and not a sacrifice" (v. 7), they questioned Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*
 - b) *Their only purpose in listening to anything Jesus said or in watching anything He did was that they might accuse Him.*
 - c) *They were not looking for the truth but for a way to dispose of this upstart young rabbi who dared to make a sacrilege of their revered traditions and blaspheme God with His claims.*
3. The man's healing was not a life-or-death issue, which according to their tradition was the only justification for giving medical help on the Sabbath.
4. They reasoned that, if Jesus were truly of God, He would respect that tradition and wait until the next day to heal the man.

BYZ **Matthew 12:7** Εἰ δὲ ἐγνώκετε τί ἐστίν, ἢ ἔλεον θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν, οὐκ ἂν κατεδικάσατε τοὺς ἀναιτίους.

BYZ **Matthew 12:8** κύριος γὰρ ἐστὶν τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

BYZ **Matthew 12:9** Καὶ μεταβάς ἐκεῖθεν ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν αὐτῶν.

BYZ **Matthew 12:10** Καὶ ἰδοὺ, ἄνθρωπος ἦν τὴν χεῖρα ἔχων ξηράν· καὶ ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτόν, λέγοντες, Εἰ ἔξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν θεραπεύειν; ἵνα κατηγορήσωσιν αὐτοῦ.

ξηράν adj afs no degree from ξηρός - dry, dried (up); (1) literally, of land *dry* (HE 11.29); substantively **ἡ ξηρά** *dry land* (MT 23.15); of plants *dry, parched*; used proverbially by Jesus in reference to a coming judgment on Jerusalem (LU 23.31); (2) of a damaged member of the body *paralyzed, withered, useless* (MT 12.10)

κατηγορήσωσιν verb subj aor act 3pp from **κατηγορέω** - (1) predominately as a legal technical term *accuse, bring charges against* (MT 12.10); (2) in a nonjudicial sense *accuse, reproach* (RO 2.15)

B. The Properness – vs 11-12

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? 12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

1. The illustration of the sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath dealt with an economic justification for breaking the Sabbath that was probably provided for in the traditions.
2. In any case, Jesus' question was rhetorical, and the answer was obvious and assumed: Any Jew, including a Pharisee, would find some way to rescue his sheep in such a situation.
3. If there were a regulation permitting him to do such a thing, he would certainly take advantage of it.
4. If there were not, he would find some way of circumventing or bending the law in order to save his sheep.
5. Either within the tradition or in spite of it, he would find a way to take hold of the sheep and lift it out.
6. The Pharisees did not argue the point with Jesus, proving the assumed answer was correct.

C. The Performing – vs 13

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

1. The Lord therefore answered the question Himself: It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath—no doubt putting strong emphasis on is.
2. At that point Jesus' righteous anger confronted the Pharisees' unrighteous anger.
3. And after looking around at them with anger, " (Mark 3:5) Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!"
4. And he stretched it out, and it was restored, like the other.
5. Jesus not only *approved* doing good on the Sabbath but *did* good on the Sabbath.
6. As Lord of the Sabbath He demonstrated that, if anything, the Sabbath was the supreme day for doing good.

V. The Insurrection – vs 14

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

1. Because they could not disprove the truth of what Jesus said or the power of what He did, the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.
2. True to the nature of their spiritual father, the devil (John 8:44), the Pharisees sought to destroy what they could not subvert.
3. The Pharisees would have killed Jesus on the spot had not Rome restricted them from inflicting capital punishment and had they not been afraid of the many people who followed and admired Him.
4. The Greek term from which counseled is translated includes the idea of carrying out a decision already made.
5. Jesus' enemies were already determined to destroy Him; the only remaining decision had to do with how.

BYZ **Matthew 12:11** Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τίς ἔσται ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃς ἔξει πρόβατον ἓν, καὶ ἐὰν ἐμπέσῃ τοῦτο τοῖς σάββασιν εἰς βόθυνον, οὐχὶ κρατήσει αὐτὸ καὶ ἐγερεῖ; **ἐμπέσῃ** verb subj aor act 3ps from ἐμπίπτω - literally *fall into* something, e.g. as into a fire or a pit (MT 12.11); figuratively *experience suddenly, be beset by, encounter* as robbers (LU 10.36) **κρατήσει** verb ind fut act 3ps from κρατέω - from a basic meaning *be strong or possess power*; (1) *take hold of* (forcibly), *seize, grasp* (MT 9.25); (2) *take into custody, seize, arrest* (MT 14.3); (3) *take control of, hold (fast)* (AC 2.24); (4) *hold back, restrain from, hinder, prevent* (LU 24.16); (5) of following a doctrine, creedal confession, or course of life *hold fast to, keep hold of, continue firmly in* (HE 4.14); of causing a state to continue *retain, keep* (JN 20.23)

BYZ **Matthew 12:12** Πόσῳ οὖν διαφέρει ἄνθρωπος πρόβατου. Ὅστε ἐξεστὶν τοῖς σάββασιν καλῶς ποιεῖν. **διαφέρει** verb ind pres act 3ps from διαφέρω - (1) transitively, as transporting something through an area *carry through* (MK 11.16); as telling a message throughout an area *spread, tell everywhere* (AC 13.49); passive, of a ship in shifting winds *be driven about, drift about* (AC 27.27); (2) intransitively *differ, be different* (GA 4.1); as differing advantageously *be superior to, be worth more than* (MT 6.26); (3) absolutely τὰ διαφέροντα *the essential things, the things that matter or are of greater value* (RO 2.18); (4) impersonally διαφέρει *it matters, it makes a difference* (GA 2.6)

BYZ **Matthew 12:13** Τότε λέγει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, Ἐκτεινον τὴν χεῖρά σου. Καὶ ἐξέτεινεν, καὶ ἀποκατεστάθη ὑγιής ὡς ἡ ἄλλη. **ἀποκατεστάθη** verb ind aor pass 3ps from ἀποκαθίστημι - strictly *restore to an earlier condition*; hence (1) *restore, establish again* (AC 1.6); (2) as a medical technical term *cure, restore* (to health) (MK 3.5); (3) passive, of persons being reunited *be sent back, be brought together again* (HE 13.19)

BYZ **Matthew 12:14** Οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι συμβούλιον ἔλαβον κατ' αὐτοῦ ἐξεληθόντες, ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀπολέσωσιν. **συμβούλιον** noun ans from συμβούλιον - what is related to consultation; (1) as its result *plan, purpose*; as a Latinism *ε. λαμβάνειν form a plan*; in a negative sense *plot* (MT 22.15); *ε. διδόναι* and *ε. ποιεῖν take counsel, hold a consultation* (MK 3.6); *ε. ἐτοιμάζειν reach a decision* (MK 15.1); (2) as an assembly of councilors *council* (AC 25.12)