

“Why We Come Together”

Matthew 12:1-14

Well here we are one last time (I pray) doing our Zoom church in our individual homes. Next week Sunday we will be back together on Father’s Day – Lord-willing outside socially distanced or inside doing the same spread out throughout the building. It’s been a difficult 3 months and while we want to be back together, we may have gotten complacent. Let’s face it; listening to a sermon on a screen in your own home has a nice feel to it. You can do it in your bathrobe if you want. And perhaps, some of you would rather do ‘church’ that way. Of course, in saying that we understand watching a sermon at home is not church. Church is people. Listening to a message or bible study and doing nothing about it, because there’s no accountability and no immediate community to follow God with, is self-deception.

James wrote that in James 1:22

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James of course got this from Jesus who said in Matt. 7:24 after preaching one of His best sermons (Sermon on the Mount),

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

For all the times I’ve read, listened to and preached on this myself, I just realized Jesus says I’m a fool when I only listen to the Word spoken and do nothing about it. Ouch.

So as we gear up for being back together I want us to think again about why we come together to worship and serve and learn from God’s Word. And we’ll do that from Matt. 12:1-14 and look at what the Pharisees thought coming together as God’s people on the Sabbath was all about and what Jesus said it was all about. But we no longer follow the Sabbath, you might be thinking. Yes, we don’t come together on a Saturday but the Sabbath is not a day, it’s a principle instituted by God when He created the world. So let’s learn what God always wants from us when we rest and worship together one day each week in our local congregations.

Matthew arranges his gospel in large teaching units. The Sermon on the Mount (5-7) is the first large unit after the introductory material in Ch.’s 1-4 and Ch. 8-12 is the next larger unit. In Ch.’s 8-12 we read about His miraculous power (8-9) followed by His calling the 12 and assigning them their roles in the ministry of the kingdom message (10). In Ch. 11 we begin to see opposition against Jesus’ teaching. He announces judgment on Sea of Galilee coastal cities of Korazim, Bethsaida and even Capernaum, Jesus’ unofficial headquarters. Then He ends Ch. 11 with the well-known

‘Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

And if we could read between 11:30 and 12:1 Matthew is essentially saying 'Speaking of burdens and rest ... *'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.*

And the Pharisees are watching (just happened to be there I'm sure) and accuse them of acting against the Law on the Sabbath. Now, the Pharisees were following the traditional teachings that interpreted the Law (which had 39 works forbidden to do on the Sabbath; one of them 'harvesting' grain). While deep down their intentions were to keep the Sabbath holy, their methodology was opposite to what God intended the one day of rest/worship to look like. The whole point of the Sabbath was summarized by Jesus in 11:28-30 and is for God's people

To Rest our Souls and Find Relief from our Burdens **(11:28-30; 23:4)**

God initiated Sabbath rest when He rested from creating the world on the 7th day. This later became a commandment (Ex. 20:8-11) for which Israel was commanded not to work (word meant their regular work during the week) and set apart as holy to God. When God speaks the commandments again in Deut. 5 to the next generation of Israelites who will enter the land of Canaan, He says,

¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

So it was a day to commemorate and look back at how God worked in their life. We also read in Ex. 31

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 rested and was refreshed."

And then in Lev. 23 we also read

³ "There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly.

So God instituted Sabbath/one day of the week principle that involved stopping your regular work so you can be rested and refreshed, and to take time to remember God's work in your life through worship by assembling with His people. Later as the church began the move from Saturday to Sunday took place as the day that is set aside for all the same things. So this is why we can apply these things as God's people to our Sabbath. But for the Pharisees it became a legalistic observance that was more about how you looked on the outside that made you acceptable to God. Something God never intended.

So they invented rules to protect them breaking the Law. Sounds commendable but it replaced the Law. For example: the disciples broke 4 laws when they picked and ate the grain.

- They reaped by plucking the grain
- They threshed the grain when they rubbed it in their hands to
- Winnow the grain by separating the wheat from the chaff
- And that was defined as preparing food

Now we see why Jesus said come to me all you who are

weary and burdened by trying to keep up with all these rules. It's about rules its about growing in your relationship with Jesus and following Him. Which the disciples were doing. Jesus is going to show us that God intended for us to use our 1/7 day rest/worship day

To Serve People According to Their Needs **(12:3-8)**

What the disciples did was perfectly fine with the Law. Deut. 23:25 said,

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

Farmers were instructed

Lev. 19:9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.

So the disciples were hungry and did what they were allowed to do according to the Law, This also tells us the disciples were poor and that Jesus didn't produce food as a miracle every time they were hungry. Trust God.

The Pharisees turned the Sabbath into a day to point out how everyone else wasn't worshipping God according to their standards. That's a good reminder for us. Gathering together as God's people should be a time of serving people to meet their needs

Not criticize them for failing to meet your standards (v.1-2; Lev. 23:22; Deut. 23:24-25)

And yet it happens. God's people criticize others because they don't sing the right songs, they don't use the right translation, they don't wear the right clothes, etc. Years ago I can recall seeing one person staring daggers in another's back because they raised their hands during a song. I've seen older people cross their arms and refuse to sing new songs and I've seen younger people stand indifferently while we sang old songs. I saw a visitor one time say something unkind to a young parent whose child was off that morning about 'controlling their children'. I've been criticized by visitors in the past because I didn't wear a jacket during the summer or a tie during communion or because I didn't begin every sermon with 'Let's open the Word of God to ...' This is restful? This is holy? This is worshipping God? Let's be careful when we point our finger at the Pharisees that we remember there's four pointing back at us.

Jesus comes to the defense of His disciples and corrects the Pharisees theology about Sabbath. When we come together as God's people, Jesus points out, its about

Encouraging them in their relationship with God (vv.3-6; 1 Sam. 22-23)

To these experts in the Law Jesus said,

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.

Jesus was a good Jewish Rabbi. He made His point from the text, the Law, the Word of God. He cites 1 Sam. 21-22. He says remember when David was fleeing from Saul and arrived at the Tabernacle in Nob. There Ahimelech was serving as priest and David approached him asking for bread for him and his companions. Ahimelech said all he had was the 12 consecrated loaves in the Holy Place. Every Sabbath the priest replaces the 12 loaves with 12 new loaves and the priests are allowed to eat the other loaves. It was a flat bread w/o yeast so it was edible. The priests actually gave David his own bread. Later when Saul confronted Ahimelech in 1 Sam. 22 and accused him of conspiring against Saul Ahimelech defended David's innocence, indirectly acknowledging David's right to the throne. How are these two situations connected?

David and his men are doing God's work and needing bread to eat on the Sabbath. They eat the consecrated bread from the Holy Place and God nowhere rebukes David for this in Scripture. Jesus (son of David) and His disciples are doing God's work and needing to eat on the Sabbath. They do what is lawful, yet David did was technically unlawful yet was not rebuked? There's a greater principle here: man's need overrides ceremonial adherence. David was built up in his relationship with God by Ahimelech, not torn down.

Illustration # 2. Jesus says in v. 5,

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

The priests have to work on the Sabbath. Why? So the people of God can be encouraged in their relationship with God? I've never butchered a whole animal but they did more than one on the Sabbath. They are working. They are breaking the Law. But not according to God; the need of the people supersedes ceremonial adherence. The Word gives the priests the authority to work on the Sabbath. Jesus, the Living Word is greater than the Temple and is telling the Pharisees that He gives the disciples permission to eat the grain on the Sabbath. And they get this as we'll see.

Jesus has quoted the former prophets (1 Sam), the Law (Num. 28:9-10 where it talks about the priests' work on the Sabbath) and now He's going to refer to the latter prophets (minor) by referring to Hosea 6:6, which already quoted to them in 9:13.

⁷ If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Back in Ch. 9 the Pharisees rebuked Jesus and His disciples when they attended Matthew the tax-collector's 'I just got saved party', where a lot of his tax-collecting buddies were.

¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

He told them to go learn what Hosea 6:6 means and here in Matt. 12 He rebukes them because they didn't do what He said. The Sabbath or whatever our worship/rest day is, is a day we should be

Showing Jesus-like compassion (vv.7-8)

Not nit-picking brothers and sisters because they are not meeting our standards. As the Son of God Jesus establishes what constitutes good Sabbath-keeping principles. When we come together we should grow together. We should be encouraged in our relationship with God. We should be

burdened to extend compassion to those who've been hurt by the world this week. Or are just tired from the everyday work schedule or need rest from their household schedule. If we truly believed in this we would show compassion to young moms by volunteering to teach Sunday School, Junior church or take a turn in the nursery so their Sabbath can feel like a break – even if its only for a couple of hours. Or invite them over for a meal so they don't have to cook this day. Or to take your hard-working friend out on the boat fishing or go golfing in the afternoon because you never have time during the week to do those things.

But I've heard Christians say 'I already did my time' at those ministries. I'm sorry it was a prison sentence for you. You obviously did it with the wrong attitude. And maybe shouldn't have done it at all. Or you wore it as a badge that 'you and you alone did this ministry.' Maybe the reason why we have a hard time finding others to take over from us is because we weren't biblical and didn't train someone with us in the process.

Our ministry when we gather together is to serve one another for the purpose of meeting needs, encouraging spiritual growth and showing compassion where needed so we all can rest and be refreshed knowing we did the will of God.

In Jewish thought back then and even today, there is a Hebrew phrase that refers to when two laws seem to conflict how do you choose the right one? *Pikuach nephesh* which means 'preserve a life.' Hospitals, police, ambulances are all open for business in Israel on the Sabbath because these are needed or might be needed to preserve a life. This is the background for the next incident recorded in vv.9-14,

⁹ 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?"

¹¹ 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."

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

In the miracles on the Sabbath Jesus points out again that when we come together for rest/worship we need look for ways to

To Do Good by Providing Relief to the Hurting **(12:9-14)**

The man with a withered hand would not have been allowed in the Synagogue because his deformity made him unclean. He was a social outcast but a pawn for the Pharisees to trap Jesus. But Jesus healed lepers and the blind and the bleeding woman and all kinds of socially unaccepted people. This is a good reminder to us as God's people to

Show acceptance to the socially rejected (vv.9-11; Luke 13:10-17)

Not just on our day of meeting but everyday.

Jesus argues that all of these men would not consider it work to rescue their animal from a pit on a Sabbath. In Luke 13:10-17, on a different Sabbath occasion Jesus said to the religious leaders,

You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give

it water? ¹⁶ Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

Every one would naturally make sure his animal got water on the Sabbath, even though they didn't need to work. Yet they criticized Jesus who 'untied' this bent-over woman on the Sabbath, whom they had ruled unclean and therefore unacceptable to God.

Then Jesus invokes pikuach nephesh, the principle of preserving a life takes precedence over all matters.

¹² How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

This is a human being. They have been ostracized because of racial and cultural biases and ignorance. Only a very few of the people Jesus healed were infirm or diseased because of sin. Most were victims of living in a sin-filled world that brings disease and sickness to any. Jesus says,

Valuing people the way you want to be valued (vv.12-14)

If you'll help your neighbor get his ox out of a mud hole on the Sabbath why wouldn't you help your neighbour whose only crime is being a victim of terrible circumstances or born in a different country or with a different colour or with a disease of infirmity? Shouldn't the people of God and the house of God be a haven for the unacceptable in our society where they know they will be valued like we all want to be valued?

Jesus heals the man and the rulers get all upset. And this is the first time they say they plan on killing Him.

We're coming back together next week. This is a good time to remember why God calls us to meet together. It's not about what we want or don't want. It's about doing good for others. About praying for and watching who God wants us to serve. To show compassion to. To give relief to those tired from the week. To encourage in their walk with God and remind them God is with them when on Tuesday or Wednesday they will be tempted to think God has abandoned them. Will you and I look at how we approach our sacred assembly here and repent of our selfish attitudes of looking to be served and not to serve? Of criticizing others because they didn't meet our unbiblical standards?

Jesus is still calling disciples to come travel with Him and help others see He is alive by the way we show His compassion. Let's preserve life, not tear it down. Let's encourage one another in our walk with God. Let's show everyone God values them and wants them to worship Him too.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net