Lord of the Sabbath
Matthew 12.1-21
August 02, 2026

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. [2] But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

The issue was not the legality of taking grain from the field:

- *If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.* Deut.23.25

But doing so on the Sabbath:

- *…but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.* Ex.20.10

[3] He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: [4] how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it 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 how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? [6] I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. [7] And 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 of the Sabbath."

Jesus' response shows times when the greater good supersedes the ceremonial law:

- David and men eating the bread of the Presence:
    - *Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due."* Lev.24.8-9
- The priests working on the Sabbath:
    - *On the Sabbath day, two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering: this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.* Num.28.9-10 (see Ex.20.10)

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

- *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1.14
    - The word dwelt comes from the Greek word meaning to *reside* (as God did in the tabernacle of old) **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible**
- He Who gave the Tabernacle/Temple laws is now present
- *For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*

- He Who is Lord of the Sabbath has authority to interpret laws pertaining to it
- He desires the emphasis to be on mercy and not cold rule keeping

9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Question: *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"*

- The question is insincere – looking for accusation not desiring to honour the Sabbath

Jesus' response:

- Rescuing a sheep from a pit will require work, yet they will do it so as not to suffer loss
- If showing mercy to a trapped sheep is deemed as doing good on the Sabbath how much more so to a person!
- Pharisees' hypocrisy exposed: They won't suffer loss on the Sabbath yet a crippled man would have to wait until Monday

The healing:

- Jesus did nothing physical but simply gave a command – He could not be accused of "working"

The Pharisees response:

- They conspired how to destroy Him
- Upset that someone was healed on the Sabbath but no qualms about planning the destruction of Someone on the Sabbath
- So taken up with their concept of not doing work that they sacrificed the concept of doing good on the Sabbath, of showing mercy

15 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all 16 and ordered them not to make him known.

Jesus' life was in His and the Father's hands alone:

- *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.* Jn.10.17-18

[17] This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

> ***[18] "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. [19] He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; [20] a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; [21] and in his name the Gentiles will hope."***

Quote from Is.42.1-4 - Prophecy gives picture of the Messiah:

As the Father's Son with Whom the Father is pleased:

- *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased."*
- …and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Mt.3.17
- *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* Mt.17.5

As a gentle Messiah:

- *He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; [20] a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench…*
- *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Mt.11.28-30
- *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* Jn.3.17

As a Messiah whose mercy expands to the Gentiles as well:

- *…and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*
- *He says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* Is.49:6
- *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.* Acts 9:15

Jesus' claim that something greater than the temple is here and that the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath are validated by:

- The man's restored arm, having been restored simply by Jesus commanding it to be so
- The pharisees desire to destroy Him because they understood His claim to be greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath as equating Himself to God
    - They interpreted these claims as blasphemous and this worthy of the death penalty

Thus we are assured that Jesus truly is the Messiah!

Communion:

But Jesus also has another purpose as he answers the Pharisees' criticism. When he says "something greater than the temple is here, Jesus means he is here. The temple merely *represents* the presence of God. Jesus is greater than the temple because he *is* the presence of God with us. Again, the temple *represents* the sacrifices that reconcile us to God, whereas Jesus *is* the sacrifice that reconciles us to God. **Dan Doriani, Matthew, p.496**

The temple and all its ceremonial laws and practices looked forward to God's great salvation. We still use symbolism in the bread and the cup but we now celebrate what has been done for us. We no longer look forward as provision for salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is an historical fact.

As we can be assured that Jesus is the Messiah, we can be assured of our salvation:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. Jn.6.37