

Matthew 20-07-19a

Greetings, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. If your taxes are not filed, I hope you put in an extension. We're in a strange year, strange times.

We've been following the teaching and ministry of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, and we're going to continue that this morning at chapter 12. We are also, coincidentally and providentially, going to continue the study that we've been doing on Thursday nights, dealing with the point of application in these strange times. Turbulent times, times of change, times of instability, great uncertainty as to what the future holds, but there's no one more fully equipped to navigate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune than we are because we have the Word of God as our guide.

We have the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ here, His example, as well as the things that we've been looking at on Thursdays. Having looked at the problem, we are now examining how we should then live, and we find just in the course of our study of Matthew here, wonderful scriptural guidance on what our priorities should be, the goals that we should pursue, and the values that we should reflect. And this gives us peace.

It gives us stability. It ensures that our house is built on the rock, not on the shifting sands of cultural fickle changes and what people consider important, what trends, what has a hashtag today and is forgotten tomorrow. Some of these things will probably not be forgotten tomorrow because they are the precursors to those who love and believe the lie.

Selling the great lie is going to be the great achievement of the Antichrist after we leave. So seeing the foundation that is being laid or absence thereof, if you will, for these things is kind of exciting. As my great-grandmother used to say, it's a great life if you don't weaken.

So this is no time to be spiritually weak. This is a time to be spiritually strong, for our light to shine brightly. And we're going to see a really classic example of cultural clash in our passage this morning.

So it's very interesting, and I'll try to draw some connections and parallels to what we face in our own lives today. But let's begin by asking God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll get started. Father, it is such a privilege to realize that our primary identity, our security, our stability, and our peace depend entirely and wholly on You and on the Lord Jesus Christ, on the presence and power of Your Spirit in our lives, on the truth of Your Word, and the tremendous promises and principles and doctrines that we learn as we study the scriptures.

We thank You that, as has been the case many times in the historical past, the people of

God often find themselves at odds with the prevailing attitudes, prevailing culture, prevailing winds of political and social upheaval. And yet they, as we, have been sustained by Your grace and lifted up and have their feet set on a high place. And we pray that, as we study Your Word together this morning and spend time in fellowship and in appreciation through music and through reflection on these wonderful truths and on our place in Your plan, that God the Holy Spirit will find us willing pupils, hearts that are deeply plowed to receive the seed of Your Word so that it will sprout and grow and produce its fruit, which reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and accomplishes Your will, plan, and purpose in us and through us until that day that the Lord Jesus comes and takes us to Himself.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to begin by reading our passage.

I think there is nothing more refreshing than getting a nice, strong dose of Scripture. So if you have not already done so, please turn to Matthew 12. And you will see, as soon as we read this together, why it is so pertinent to what's happening.

Matthew 12. We just had the exhortation to come to the Lord Jesus because His yoke is easy and His burden is light. We exchange the strange and impossible requirements of the world, the heavy ladenness of our lives when we try to do things in our human strength, when we're trying to accomplish human goals, worldly objectives.

It is a heavy yoke and it is a burdensome task. Jesus says, come to Me. You're still going to have a yoke and you're still going to have a task, but what we are assigned from the Lord Jesus is an easy yoke and a bearable burden because we do it in His strength.

Having just said that, we start now in chapter 12. At that time, don't miss your connective tissue here. Any of you that have ever torn connective tissue know how important it is, the stuff that holds your joints together.

This is the seam between what preceded and what follows, and it's important. There's a reason why it doesn't just say now or then or afterward. At that time.

When He says at that time, that means what you just learned in the preceding context, what Jesus just taught. This is pertinent. At that time, the information gets a test.

We started our end time study last fall before the virus, before all of the smoke and fire on television. And at that time, as we learn these truths, here comes application. I'm not saying the world got set on fire just so you and I could have application time for what we're learning, but I do think the Holy Spirit guides us.

I hope He guides us in the timing and the content of what we study so that we can be prepared. And I am grateful that we started this study and have learned these truths and have it available for application in these times. So I don't think the world changed to test us.

I think God has prepared us for the test. Same thing here. Jesus has just been teaching about the authority of the Lord Jesus, about what service with and for the Lord Jesus entails.

And at that time, here's what happens. Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath, which you don't know in this first verse is going to come up a few verses later, but Jesus and the disciples didn't just wake up on a Saturday morning and say, well, let's wander around. They are going somewhere.

They have a destination and we'll find out what that destination is shortly. But Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. This is His journey.

He is headed toward the synagogue. So they are on their way. They have a destination.

And as He passes through these grain fields, His disciples were hungry. Why? It's breakfast time. But they didn't have a chance to stir up a bowl of oatmeal or whatever it is disciples eat in the early morning on a Saturday.

Jesus said, let's go. I want to get to the synagogue. I've got something to say down there, something to do down there.

And so the disciples grabbed their gear and head out, but they're hungry. So they begin to pluck heads of grain and to eat. They're walking through the grain field.

And this is sort of predicated on the idea that those who are in need, when you leave the corners of the field uncleaned, this is not theft. It's not robbery. You're not decreasing someone's profit or inventory on grain.

This is a few guys grabbing a few handfuls of grain to sustain themselves because they're on this short trip to the synagogue and they haven't had a chance to have any breakfast. So when the Pharisees saw, and this is what tickles me, when the Pharisees saw, they said to him, look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. Jesus is residing in a small village and he's heading to the synagogue.

How did the Pharisees see him? Do Pharisees live in grain fields? No. Where have they been? They have been lying in wait for him to emerge. And they're watching everything that he does, looking for an excuse to accuse.

Now, do you ever feel this way? Do you ever feel as a believer or as a conservative or as any other piece of identity you want to name, that people are just looking for an excuse to accuse and to condemn and to belittle and to shame and to try to change your behavior or worse? Well, here you go. He hasn't gotten to the synagogue. He's nowhere near the synagogue.

He's in a grain field and the Pharisees see what he and the disciples are doing. And I

think, boy, talk about a dedicated Pharisee. He's gotten up early on the Sabbath and he's made a journey from wherever he lives to go hide out and watch and see what Jesus and the disciples do, because he's hoping that he can find something to accuse and condemn.

This isn't an egregious crime against nature or mankind. They're having breakfast, a little snack, on the way to synagogue, on the way to worship, on the way to be with the people of God, talking about God in the scriptures of God. But it's the method, it's the journey, it's getting there and there's criticism.

So you just have to smile. The Pharisees see the disciples in the grain field and I'm asking myself, how did that happen? That's a motivated Pharisee right there. And they find this basis of accusation.

Look, look, Yeshua, look, look behind you. Your disciples are pulling heads off of these grain stalks. It's not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

So Jesus said to them, have you not read what David did when he was hungry? He and those who were with him. This of course is from 1 Samuel chapter 21. David is fleeing the persecution of Saul and he's afraid.

This is the statue in the bed from Saul's daughter. He sneaks out. He's fleeing.

He goes to Nob and he's asking for bread. He appears to be alone. And when the priest says, well, where are your men? And David says, oh, I've got them secreted back behind the hill.

We're on a secret mission for the king. And he kind of bends the truth pretty substantially here. And we don't really know from the 1 Samuel 21 account if there were actually men with David or not.

A noble, a prince, if you will, of his standing would normally not travel unaccompanied. It's celebrities that always have a retinue of hairdressers and security and drivers and personal assistants. In those days, someone of David's rank would almost always travel with at least a bodyguard, if you watched, I never can remember the name of the thing, Downton Abbey.

And there were a man servant that would help a guy dress and help the ladies dress and a woman servant to help the ladies dress. And there's always somebody there, a butler to buttle or whatever it is they need. There's somebody there.

And it is likely that David did, in fact, have at least a few, although they're not mentioned when he sneaks out. But otherwise, how do you communicate? They don't have cell phones. And very soon his location will be reported and people are going to gather to him in the cave of the Doel and so on.

So but it's the reason I belabor this a bit is what Jesus is about to say has come under fierce criticism, because in the 1 Samuel 21 account, it appears that there's no one with David. And yet Jesus mentions those who are with him twice here. Have you not read where David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests.

And this was a decision that was made by the high priest at Nob. And of course, they're going to pay dearly for this. You remember the whole betrayal, Doeg, the Edomite, the slaughter of the priests at Nob and only one or two escape and there are repercussions after that.

So this is Jesus example. Have you not read what David did in apparently bending the rules about showbread? Notice that it's not a Sabbath point. It is a lawfulness point.

David did what was not lawful. Jesus says he entered and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat. But if David had not gotten that bread, there's a fair chance that he would have been caught by his pursuers.

And there would be no King David, there would be no Solomon, there would be no monarchy and wonderful victories and all the rest of the things that happened under David could have all been snuffed at that point. So the law is in its symbolism and in its ritual demarcation of purity and sanctity and holiness is briefly set aside for a greater good, which is the preservation of the Lord's anointed. So what's more important, the anointed showbread or the anointed future King of Israel? And you could name several other instances in scripture.

Soldiers come trying to take the prophet Elisha and they are blinded and told that they're going to be taken one place and they're taken to another. Rahab, of course, protecting the spies by lying directly to the police, if you will, who are coming to the house to try to find those men. And she's got them hidden under the flax on the roof.

And she says, oh, they went that way, which is a bald-faced lie. They didn't go that way. They're upstairs.

But there comes a point where the priorities and the intent are in view rather than the letter of the law. The letter of the law kills, the spirit gives life. So now this is something to apply rather cautiously.

We don't just say, well, I had a good intention, so I didn't have to follow the rules. But it doesn't change the fact that there are occasions where there are exceptions. For example, let's say you're in China.

Let's say it's Sunday morning and you want to meet as a church. Are you going to sneak and be surreptitious and go to a secret meeting in a secret place so that you can worship

God? Now, the Bible says, fear God, honor the king, obey the laws, don't lie. But it's a form of deception to hide what you're doing.

And it's unlawful. It's an unlawful assembly of Christians. And if found out, they can be arrested and worse.

So right or wrong? Well, you can talk about that all day long. You can go back to the American War for Independence from Britain and ask, violating the laws of the king and overthrowing the authority of the king, was that right or wrong? Well, we like to think it was right because of the country that resulted and the freedom that resulted and the unfairness of those laws. And there comes a point and the founders wrestled with this.

And this is why you've got the Federalist Papers and you've got the Declaration and the Constitution and the letters that were exchanged amongst the fathers. John Adams and Hamilton and Jefferson and the rest of them have extensive correspondence about the morality of that, those acts of disobedience. So Jesus is going to talk about that.

And he says, look, have you not read what David did when he was hungry? He and those who are with him. I will tell you that because Jesus mentions this twice, those who were with him, when he says, have you not read? It seems that maybe they had not read because if they had read they would have said, well, you know that there wasn't anyone with David. But the decision of the priest was based on what David told him.

David said, I've got men and I need as much bread as you can spare. And whether he actually had them or not is kind of an open question. We don't have any documentation that there were.

It seems that he was alone. But the decision by the priest was made based on the exigency of that need. So he entered the house of God and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests.

So it's an appeal to scripture and to precedent in scripture when there is a human need in the service of God's plan and purpose, then these things are not necessarily inviolable, especially lesser requirements. He didn't do an egregious thing. This was a symbolic requirement.

And you will remember that in those days, the tabernacle was largely in rags and tatters and the formalities, a lot of them could not be observed. The law said that all kinds of things were supposed to take place at the tabernacle. Remember what's left of the tabernacle and its accouterments won't get moved to Jerusalem until much later.

So there's a lot of the law requirements that weren't being observed. Or have you not read verse five, the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless. In other words, your prohibitions against work.

And I'll, I'll share some of those with you here in just a moment, but the priests doing their work on the Sabbath, the work of sacrifice and so on are breaking the law against doing no work on the Sabbath as they engage in worship on the Sabbath. And this is actually a more pointed reference because Jesus and the disciples are on the way to the synagogue to participate in worship. And indeed, Jesus is going to, in a sense, lead that worship.

And he is in essence, functioning as a priest of the word of God, if you will. And so he's on the way to make that worship meaningful. And so in the same way that priests who are making worship meaningful do things on the Sabbath that are generally considered to be work, that is an exception.

So the priests work on the Sabbath, but they're blameless because they are an exception. And it's a necessary exception. Jesus and his disciples are making a necessary exception, if you will, but you have to have a heart to understand.

If you're just going to read the letter of the law, you're, you're just going to use the law as a noose around their neck and try to hang them with it. So Jesus continues and says in verse six, yet I say to you that in this place, there is one greater than the temple. There's something greater than the temple.

Those who recognize who Jesus is, that's his house. Those are his laws. Those are his rules.

If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. You would not have condemned the guiltless. So even though the law says do no work, and even though the disciples are pulling heads of grain on the Sabbath, Jesus declares them guiltless because there is a principle of mercy above sacrifice.

The high priest at Nob had mercy on David and his alleged men and mercy trumps the details of the regulation. In the same way, the priests minister at the temple because that is God's mercy. It's a merciful communication.

It's a merciful example. It's a merciful shadow of God's mercy in atonement and reconciliation and propitiation. And it is necessary for the priests to work on the Sabbath and on the high feast days to make that clear, to communicate God's mercy.

And God's mercy defines the rightness and wrongness of the situation. Was it merciful for Rahab to shield the spies? Yes, it was. Was it merciful for the prophet to lead the attacking soldiers blinded to a place where they were given a meal and sent home? It was a mercy.

I desire mercy more than sacrifice. If you knew this, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Now verse nine, when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue. And this is the man with the withered hand that he's going to heal. And they ask him again, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? He's pretty well silenced them on, is it lawful to have breakfast on the Sabbath? Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him? And he says, what man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? What is the principle there? What did he say in verse seven? Mercy.

Are you going to stick to the rigor of the rule and leave your sheep in the pit until sundown on Saturday? It's a mercy. And if you do it as under the Lord and say, Lord, I know I'm not supposed to work today, but here's this helpless animal. Is God going to be displeased that his people are merciful and sensitive and caring and are doing something out of a good heart? Jesus and the disciples are spreading the good news of the kingdom.

So do you want to be malicious and attack them for trying to keep their strength up as they do that? Or do you recognize the mercy that is involved as a principle? Verse 12, of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a celebration of God and his goodness and a worship of God for his goodness. So to do good on the Sabbath, how can that be a bad thing? Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand.

He stretched it out and it was restored as whole as the other. Now there is no Sabbath regulation that says you can't stretch out your hand. Jesus doesn't touch him.

Jesus doesn't spit in the mud and smear it on his arm. He just says to him, stretch out your hand and the man stretches it out and it's healed and it works great. The musculature, the muscle tone, the coordination, just as with healing blindness and deafness, everything associated with using that hand instantly comes.

All of the missing experiential programming is filled into his brain. It's a greater miracle to me than just restoring a twisted or withered limb is that he's instantly able to use it. It's just like when Jesus heals the lame and they don't have to learn how to walk.

They leap. The lame leap like a deer. They've got balance.

They've got coordination. They've got all of the programming in their brain instantly filled in so that they can walk and jump and run around with the best of healthy people. Restored as whole as the other.

That means equal function. Man might've even been ambidextrous. Who knows? So the Pharisees went out and plotted against him how they might destroy him.

Of course, this is a threat to civil peace and prosperity. And well, we can't have sick people being made well. So we've got to destroy this man.

And you just see and begin to understand the reaction against the presence and the power and the glory of God manifest in the life of his representative person or people. Jesus went about doing good and they hated him for it. And when they see him, they can't get him on any detail of the law here.

It doesn't say that Jesus pulled any heads of grain. Evidently it was only the disciples and that's who gets the accusation. And Jesus does know under any definition, can this be called work on the Sabbath? Healing on the Sabbath.

And if he hasn't touched the man to what do they attribute this healing? Jesus. So they know he's the source of this healing. They know he's the one that's got the power and they hate him.

And some of your English translations, when you come to this last verse 14 of this section translated assassinate, this is destroy meaning we want him gone. We want him dead. We want him off the scene.

We'll do whatever it takes. We can't have this kind of mayhem taking place. What's the nature of the threat? Well, now what is the pertinence of this to our current situation? What is the constant theme through this? Is it lawful? Your disciples are doing what is not lawful.

Jesus says, David did what was not lawful. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath over and over again. What is lawful? Well, what law are we talking about here? Why does do the Pharisees and these onlookers say that this is unlawful? What law is it? Well, if you go back to the old Testament, what is the law about work on the Sabbath? It's in the 10 commandments, right? It's in the old Testament scriptures.

You go to Leviticus chapter 23, verse three. For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is to be a Sabbath of complete rest, a day of sacred assembly. That often gets overlooked.

It's a day of rest and a day of the King James says, convocation, a holy convocation. What does it mean to convoke? Con means with. If you have a convocation, you have an assembly.

This is a sanctified holy assembly. So what is the objective of the Sabbath? Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the habit of some is, come together and worship. Jesus and the disciples are doing what they need to do to honor that holy convocation on the Sabbath.

And it is not wrong to do what you need to do to get there. They're not committing a crime. They're not knocking anybody in the head that nobody is suffering a detriment.

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. But here's what the Jews have done with this.

There are 39 Melakot.

This word comes from the word translated work. In six days, God created the heavens and the earth. And then he rested on the seventh day from his Malak or Malakot, his work or works.

You notice it's plural Malakot. That's the feminine plural. But this Malak, it looks a lot like the word Malak in terms of my messenger or my Malachi means my messenger.

Well, this is very similar. It's Malak, Malakot. And so they say, well, what did God rest from? And then they go to the equivalent instruction under the law.

What is it that God rested from? Well, they go to the reminder of this in Exodus chapter 31 and parallel it to Genesis chapter 2. In Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 through 3, turn there, please. Genesis chapter 2. God is the model. This is repeated in the Ten Commandments.

It's repeated in Exodus. It is repeated throughout the law. Genesis chapter 2, the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished.

And on the seventh day, God ended his Malak, his work, which he had done. And he rested on the seventh day from all his Malak, which he had done. God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it, he rested from all his Malak, which God had created and made.

Now, this is actually a pretty good example or a pretty good observation on the part of the rabbis and the early ancient Jewish interpreters of the law. What does it mean to work and to cease from work on the Sabbath? Well, what did God cease from? He ceased from creating and making. Creating and making, right? Isn't that what it says? Sanctify the seventh day because he rested from creating and making.

So this is actually a pretty good definition. What does it mean to work? Well, if you turn to say Exodus chapter 31, you know, just from the book and the general area here that this is going to be Israel in the wilderness and they are recipients of the law and they're getting ready to start construction. But the Lord spoke to Moses.

Now, he's up on the mountain there down in the valley with the golden calf right now. They're sitting down to eat and rise up to play and all of that. That's going down below.

God is still talking to Moses in the mountain. And he says in chapter 31 of Exodus, I've called by name, Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I filled him with the spirit of God and wisdom and understanding and knowledge and in all manner of work, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, cutting jewels for setting, carving wood, all manner of workmanship.

I've appointed with him Aholiab, the son of Ahasemak, of the tribe of Dan. I put wisdom in the hearts of all gifted artisans that they may make all that I have commanded you." They're going to manufacture the tabernacle, its materials, its accouterments, all of its associated things. So the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat that is on it, all the furniture of the tabernacle, verse seven, verse eight, the table, its utensils, lampstand, the altar, altar burn offering, its utensils, labor.

Verse 10, the garments of ministry, holy garments for Aaron. These guys are going to make and head up the team of artisans that are going to manufacture all of this stuff. The anointing oil, sweet incense for the holy place.

According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do. Now look right after that. And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak also to the children of Israel saying, surely my Sabbaths you shall keep.

For it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath. Therefore it is holy to you.

Everyone who profanes it so surely be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord.

Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever.

For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth. And on the seventh day, he rested and was refreshed. And when he made an end to speaking, he gave him the two tablets.

So what is the context for observing the Sabbath here? First half of the chapter is all of the work that Bezalel and Aholiab and the other artisans are going to do. The second half of the chapter is you're going to do all this work in six days and you're going to rest on the seventh. And you're going to continue that pattern of what you make, what you manufacture, the work that you do in service to the Lord or in service to your family or your perpetuation of your life and so on.

You do that in six days and you cease that kind of work on the Sabbath. Well, that context got lost. And when we come back from the break, I'm going to give you the 39 halakhat in a very brief few minutes to tell you and explain what this turned into in Israel and why they're trying to get the Lord in trouble and his disciples in trouble over pulling grain on the Sabbath.

And it has to do with losing the context. Jesus says, have you not read about David? Have you not read about the priests and what they do and don't do? He could have said, have you not read about Bezalel and Aholiab? Did you not read the context for the Sabbath law commandment? But when he starts saying, have you not read? This is an indictment of their lack of understanding of the scripture. Now, point of application as we go to the break, we need to be looking to the scriptures for our guidance.

How do we act? How do we behave in these times needs to be based on scripture, not based on feeling, not based on emotion, not as a reaction, not as a sop to people who are trying to make an accusation. Jesus didn't tell his disciples to stop. Jesus didn't refrain from healing the man with the wither hand because he was cowed or intimidated by people calling him out based on the existing law.

When we come back from the break, what we're going to talk about is what is the equivalent of the law for us today? Who, what, what code is being invoked and where are we said to be transgressors? There are people calling us out and saying, you're transgressing the prevailing law. You're not doing what you ought to do. You should be matching our understanding of what is and isn't done in a given situation or toward a given group or whatever it may be.

It's a direct equivalent. We're going to see what that law entails. After we look at the expansion of the Jewish law, we're going to see what has happened to the expansion of the law in this country, the moral law, the ethical law, and how people are doing the very same kind of brow beating.

And when you don't conform, they want to do the very same kind of destruction that they to do to the Lord Jesus. We'll see that when we come back from the break.