

UNEXPECTED REST

Lesson 4

Matthew 12:1–14

RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week's "Spiritual Practice" and "On Mission" sections.

BIG IDEA

What do we do when we realize that our traditions have become as important to us as our faith? Rituals that lose meaning are empty and dangerous, causing us to forget the reason and purpose behind them. We risk becoming legalistic and performative. Jesus doesn't want our legalistic obedience, especially at other people's expense; rather He showed us how to obey by loving others well. While on earth, Jesus did not allow ritual or tradition to prevent His mission.

CONTEXT

Jesus' teaching in this passage is a criticism of the mass regulations imposed by the Pharisees and an invitation to ultimate rest. This teaching contributed greatly to the rise in hostility from the Pharisees. It is significant that this passage follows the offer of "rest" in **Matthew 11:28–30** since "rest" was the declared aim of the sabbath¹ law (**Exodus 23:12**; **Deuteronomy 5:14**). In His arguments, Jesus attempted to protect the practice of rest from becoming a burden instead of a blessing.²

¹ "Sabbath observance, which extended from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday, was the single most socially defining element in Jewish religious life. The chief distinction of Sabbath observance is cessation from work. Jews were forbidden from doing any work on Sabbath that was not necessary to preserve life, nor should any work be started that could not be completed at the onset of Sabbath. Not only Jews but also slaves, animals, and even vegetation (which could not be cut, plucked, or uprooted), were to be spared from Sabbath labors. Sabbath observance was instituted by God at creation (**Genesis 2:3**), and thus it was the only one of the Ten Commandments delivered to Jews prior to Moses. The observance of Sabbath, according to the Talmud, makes one a partner with God in both creation and salvation of the world." Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020. 868-869

² **Mark 2:27**

READ MATTHEW 12:1–14

¹ *At about that time, Jesus was walking through some grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they began breaking off some heads of grain and eating them.*

² *But some Pharisees saw them do it and protested, “Look, your disciples are breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath.”*

³ *Jesus said to them, “Haven’t you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry?*

⁴ *He went into the house of God, and he and his companions broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. ⁵ And haven’t you read in the law of Moses that the priests on duty in the Temple may work on the Sabbath? ⁶ I tell you, there is one here who is even greater than the Temple! ⁷ But you would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!”*

⁹ *Then Jesus went over to their synagogue, ¹⁰ where he noticed a man with a deformed hand. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Does the law permit a person to work by healing on the Sabbath?” (They were hoping he would say yes, so they could bring charges against him.)*

¹¹ *And he answered, “If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you work to pull it out? Of course, you would. ¹² And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Yes, the law permits a person to do good on the Sabbath.”*

¹³ *Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So, the man held out his hand, and it was restored, just like the other one!*

¹⁴ *Then the Pharisees called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus.”*

QUESTIONS

1. What connections do you notice between this passage (**Matthew 12:1–14**) and **Matthew 11:28–30**, which immediately precedes it?³
 - a. How does the theme of rest get developed in **Matthew 12:1–14**?
 - b. How do you define rest? How does our culture define rest?
 - c. What does rest look like in your life? What would you like rest to look like in your life?

³ “**Matthew 12:1–14** is linked to **11:25–30** by the contrast between the yoke of discipleship and the yoke of the law and by the theme of rest (**11:28**). In first-century Judaism rest meant, above all, observing the Sabbath—ceasing from all work on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Sabbath observance was in fact one of the three most important and distinctive badges of Jewish life, along with circumcision and the dietary laws. If coming to Jesus provided rest for the whole of life, then it is not surprising that he should come into conflict with regulations that prevented various kinds of work on one specific day out of seven.” Blomberg, Craig. *The New American Commentary: Matthew*. vol. 22. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. 195

2. Describe the two controversies in this passage (**Matthew 12:1–8 & 9–14**). In what ways are they similar and different?

3. Why was it unlawful for the disciples to pick grain⁴ and for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath?⁵

⁴ “The law permitted the poor to glean from the corners of the fields (**Leviticus 19:9; Deuteronomy 23:24**). **Exodus 34:21**, however, commands, ‘*Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest*’. The action of Jesus’ disciples was, in accordance with the strictness of the times, interpreted by the Pharisees as a violation of this statute.” Davies, W. D. and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2. T&T Clark International, 2004. 307

⁵ “According to the Mishnah [a collection of Jewish writings that interpret and expand the meaning of the Law, written by men rather than divinely inspired], thirty-nine classes of work are forbidden on Sabbath, including agricultural (e.g., plowing, hunting, butchering) and domestic labor (e.g., tying or loosening knots, sewing more than one stitch, writing more than one letter).” Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020. 868-869

a. How does Jesus' analogy of David eating "the sacred loaves of bread"⁶ defend the disciples' actions?⁷
(**1 Samuel 21:1–9**)

b. How does Jesus' mention of the priest working on the Sabbath support the disciples' actions (**Numbers 28:9–10**)?

4. In **Matthew 12:6**, Jesus says, "There is one here who is even greater than the Temple!" What do you think this means?

⁶ "The sacred bread refers to the 'bread of presentation,' 'showbread,' or 'bread of the Presence,' twelve loaves prepared weekly for the tabernacle and later, the temple. See **Exodus 25:30; 35:13; 39:36; Leviticus 24:5–9**. Each loaf was made from 3 quarts (3.5 liters; Heb 'two tenths of an ephah') of fine flour. The loaves were placed on a table in the holy place of the tabernacle, on the north side opposite the lampstand (**Exodus 26:35**). It was the duty of the priest each Sabbath to place fresh bread on the table; the loaves from the previous week were then given to Aaron and his descendants, who ate them in the holy place, because they were considered sacred (**Leviticus 24:9**). See also **Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5**." Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, Second Edition. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

⁷ "The story comes from **1 Samuel 21:1–9**, when David talked the priest into giving him and his men bread dedicated to God in his temple, bread that only priests were supposed to eat (**Leviticus 24:5–9**). By referring to this story Jesus may have been comparing himself and his disciples to David and the ruffians who accompanied 'the anointed one' while he was on the run from Saul (**1 Samuel 22:2**)." Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020. 821

How does the following quote add to your understanding?
“We are not told precisely what the ‘something greater’ might be, but the inference lies readily at hand that it must be Jesus himself. What could be greater than the temple other than the one to whom it is dedicated, the one who is worshiped in it? Matthew’s argument is in effect this: if Jesus is ‘God with us,’ then his presence sanctifies the labors of those who work to serve him, even on the sabbath.”⁸

5. Why do you think Jesus appealed to **Hosea 6:6**⁹ to support His argument against the Pharisees?¹⁰ (**Matthew 12:7**)

6. What was Jesus implying when He said, “*the Son of Man*”¹¹ *is Lord, even over the Sabbath!*”? (**Matthew 12:8**)

⁸ Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Baylor University Press, 2018. 168

⁹ “[**Hosea 6:6**]6a thus repeats the theme of **1 Samuel 15:22**, that obedience, in this case by means of mercy, is better than sacrifice. ‘Mercy,’ which allows Jesus’ followers to reap a small crop to feed themselves, takes precedence over an interpretation of Sabbath work that would have stopped them (mercy resides at the center of God’s will ...).” Beale, Gregory K., and Donald A. Carson. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of The Old Testament*. Baker Academic, 2009. 34, 41

¹⁰ It is important to note that Jesus references this concept more than once in His teachings (see **Matthew 9:13**). You can reference your answers in lesson one to further supplement this question.

¹¹ This is one of Jesus’ most commonly used names for Himself. “**Daniel 7:13–14**, from which the title almost certainly derives, is a vision of universal authority over all peoples exercised by the ‘one like a son of man’ from his heavenly throne.” France, R. T. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*. William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007.

a. In what ways was Jesus reframing the practice of Sabbath for the Pharisees? (see also **Mark 2:27–28**)

b. What is your perspective on the Sabbath?

i. How do you practice it?

ii. Has it ever turned ritualistic and empty? If so, how did or how can Jesus reframe it for you?

7. There is great irony in the fact that Jesus healed a man's hand, which he would need in order to work, on the Sabbath—a day on which work was forbidden.¹² Ultimately, God created the Sabbath for our benefit, so that we are able to work from a place of rest, rather than require rest because of our work.

a. Do you tend to rest from your work or work from your rest?

b. How is this concept challenging and inviting to you?

8. Why do you believe Jesus healing stirred such a hostile reaction from the Pharisees?¹³

¹² "The passive verb 'was restored' points to healing by God. Now the question becomes: Would God exercise his power through Jesus, if what Jesus was doing were wrong?" Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, Second Edition. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

¹³ "Connections between the Sabbath and the World to Come coincide perfectly with Jesus' frequent claims that the Kingdom of God has broken into this world. For the Gospel writers, the holy one of God has invaded the world and is bringing the life, wholeness, purity, and holiness that constitute the Kingdom of God. If Mark, Matthew, and Luke are correct and the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus, then what better time for Jesus to heal than the present, especially on the Sabbath, since it serves as a foretaste of all the Kingdom will bring." Thiessen, Matthew. *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism*. Baker Book House, 2021. 141

How have you put rituals and/or rules over the well-being of yourself or other people?

9. As you think about your life, where do you long for rest?

Spend some time talking with Jesus about what He desires for you when it comes to regulations and rest.

10. Each of these stories tells us more about Jesus, the unexpected King. What is one thing you have learned about Jesus from this lesson, and how will it impact how you live?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Both Jesus and the Gospel writers wanted their audiences to understand the Sabbath as rest and delight versus rules and regulations. Jesus summarizes His teaching in one famous line “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”¹⁴

John Mark Comer elaborates further, “First-century Jews needed to hear the second half of that command ‘Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath.’ They had it backward, cart before the horse, all that. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century: we aren’t legalistic about the Sabbath—most of us don’t even practice Sabbath at all.”¹⁵

Sabbath is more than going to church. This week consider practicing Sabbath within the framework of Stop–Rest–Delight–Worship. As you commit to a Sabbath sometime this week (it doesn’t have to be on Sunday), consider this practice: Make a list of activities that cause you delight and joy, and plan to do one to three of them during your Sabbath, while you worship and enjoy being with your Savior.

Here are a few ideas:¹⁶

- Make pancakes.
- Play music.
- Get coffee with a friend.
- Take a walk.
- Nap.
- Eat delicious food.
- Go fishing or surfing or swimming.
- Be in nature.
- Make a fire.
- Read fiction or poetry.
- Sing.
- Play a game.
- Call a friend or family member who lives far away.

¹⁴ **Mark 2:27** (NIV)

¹⁵ Comer, John Mark. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. WaterBrook, 2020. 151

¹⁶ The spiritual practice comes from curriculum material presented by Practicing the Way, <https://www.practicingtheway.org/>.

ON MISSION

Invite someone in your spheres of influence, who doesn't know Jesus, to experience the practice of Sabbath.¹⁷ We are not only inviting individuals to rest but also to find healing from the hustle and hurried life.

If you are able to do this, consider debriefing the experience with that individual, possibly allowing an opportunity to talk about Jesus and His teachings about the Sabbath.

¹⁷ One idea could be inviting someone to join you as you do an activity from the list in the "Spiritual Practice" section.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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SERMON NOTES

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