

“THE LORD OF *THE SABBATH*”

unit 23 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's mercy allowed His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for humanity's sin. We have always missed the mark of God's holy standards of the law. But through Christ, we are rescued from the penalty of death because of His love and goodness.

COMPASSIONATE AUTHORITY

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Matthew 12

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:1-8

1 At that time Jesus passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry: 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the bread of the Presence—which is not lawful for him or for those with him to eat, but only for the priests? 5 Or haven't you read in the law that on Sabbath days the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

9 Moving on from there, he entered their synagogue. 10 There he saw a man who had a shriveled hand, and in order to accuse him they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" 11 He replied to them, "Who among you, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, wouldn't take hold of it and lift it out? 12 A person is worth far more than a sheep; so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath." 13 Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out, and it was restored, as good as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might kill him.

MAIN POINT.

God desires mercy and goodness over rituals and laws.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS MERCIFUL

Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God's withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

DISCUSSION

MERCY IS GREATER THAN SACRIFICE

MATTHEW 12:1-8

- How do you rest? What mattered most about Sabbath to Pharisees?
- ✝ • Read Hosea 6:6. What do you think it means that God desires "faithful love" (or mercy), not sacrifice?
- 📖 • What does Jesus mean by claiming He is "Lord of the Sabbath"? Should Christians take part in the Sabbath today?

LOVING OTHERS FULFILLS GOD'S LAW

MATTHEW 12:9-14

- 🧠 • Why did Jesus share the example about a sheep falling into a pit?
- Why did the Pharisees plot Jesus's death?
- ♥ • Why do we struggle to love others the way Jesus did? How are we sometimes more like Pharisees?



HOW CAN YOU SHOW MERCY TO SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE WHO DOESN'T DESERVE IT?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Does our culture celebrate getting revenge or showing mercy? The world is slow to praise mercy and quick to reward harsh online comments, stories of revenge, and people getting what they deserve. This way of thinking creeps into how we respond to people who offend us, but this is not the way of the gospel. We've all made mistakes; we've all sinned and fallen short of God's standard (Rom. 3:23). But in the face of all our failures, God shows us mercy—forgiveness instead of the punishment we deserve. The core of the gospel message is that sinners are not given what they deserve (death) but are given what they could never earn (salvation; Eph. 2:4-5). When you believe in this gospel, you're no longer conformed to culture but transformed in your mind (Rom. 12:2). The more we dwell on the mercy that has been given to us through Jesus Christ, the more we grow in our ability to show mercy to others. Mercy transforms our minds and hearts so that we carry mercy to others in an effort to reveal Jesus to the world.



DAY ONE

MATTHEW 12:1-14



Have you ever had to follow a rule that you just didn't understand or agree with? Immediately obeying rules is often the right response and shows a humble heart. But sometimes, not understanding the reason for a rule can eventually lead to confusion; because we don't understand the point of the rule, we become bitter about following it.

The Pharisees, or religious leaders, became confused about the Sabbath and began to add their own restrictions to God's command; even more, they didn't understand God's heart behind the command for the Sabbath. God gave the Sabbath command to Moses and the Israelites as a good gift. They were to set aside a day to rest in God and worship Him, instead of going about their normal work. The Pharisees warped the Sabbath day into a burden by adding extra restrictions to it. They focused so much on what they were doing and whether or not they were breaking a command that they lost focus on God. Jesus explained that the Sabbath was never meant to be a burden but a day of worshipful rest. The Sabbath is still God's good gift for us! In taking a day from our busy schedules to focus on God, we imitate God's rest from creation. We are recharged and refocused—more equipped to live out the Christian life. Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, reminds us that the Sabbath was for us, not to focus only on ourselves, but on Christ and what He has done to accomplish our eternal rest. It is a day of physical rest that points to our spiritual rest. Regardless of what cultures says, Sabbath is still a holy day.

- **DO YOU HAVE A SET DAY OR TIME DURING THE WEEK TO REST AND FOCUS ON THE LORD? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FREE UP MORE TIME FOR HOLY, INTENTIONAL REST?**
- **WHY IS THE SABBATH A GOOD GIFT FOR US? HOW DOES IT REFLECT GOD'S WORK AND REST?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR REST. WE WERE MADE TO FIND OUR GREATEST JOY AND PEACE IN YOU AND NOT IN OURSELVES OR IN OUR WORK. HELP US TO REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY AND TO RESIST THE LIE THAT WE'RE TOO BUSY TO SPEND TIME WITH YOU.



DAY TWO

MARK 3:1-6

The odds are high that someone has sinned against you. This may have made you upset or angry. When this happens, we often feel justified in our anger. Surely God feels anger over sin and injustice. Christians should feel anger over sin as well because it causes harm (Ps. 5:5-6). However, sin should also make us sorrowful because Jesus gave His life for it. God's wrath and anger toward sin is righteous and holy, but it mingles with His own grief toward sin as well (Gen. 6:6; Matt. 23:37-39). In today's passage, Christ grieved because the religious leaders' hearts were so hardened that they couldn't see someone in need of mercy and healing. The Lord desires the salvation of all people, and though He is rightly angry with sin, He is also sorrowful over how sin has infected His good creation, especially human beings who bear His image (2 Pet. 3:9). God's response to sin, therefore, should form our response to sin. God feels anger and sorrow over sin, but ultimately, He shows us mercy when we call on Him for salvation. Though sin can make us angry at times, our frustration must point toward the real enemy—Satan. We should feel sorrow for the sinner, which leads to mercy and the desire for all sinners to repent. We must boldly approach the lost with the truth of the gospel. We must call sin exactly what it is! When we skip this step, we cheapen the gospel. We cheapen Jesus's sacrifice. But we must also share the love of Christ from a heart that desires for others to be saved. When we see sin in the world, may we remember who we were before Christ found us. May we compassionately approach the lost world with the transforming truth of the gospel. Our love for lost people and our desire for them to share in our hope should triumph over our anger at their sin. God's love for us triumphed over sin when He sent Christ to take our punishment. May we follow His example as we help others know the way to freedom and forgiveness.

- **WHY DO WE OFTEN ACT MORE LIKE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THIS PASSAGE THAN LIKE JESUS?**
- **HOW CAN WE BE MORE LIKE JESUS IN OUR FEELINGS AND ACTIONS TOWARD THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW HIM?**

PRAY

FATHER, EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE RIGHTLY ANGRY
WITH OUR SIN, YOU SHOW US MERCY AND LOVE.
HELP US TO LOVE LOST PEOPLE AND TO SPEAK THE
GOSPEL WITH BOLDNESS.



DAY THREE

HOSEA 6:6

A lot of life seems to depend on how well we can perform. If you play sports, you are judged on how well you can play, how fast you can run, or how accurately you can throw. In school, you earn grades based on your skill in certain subjects. This performance-driven mindset can easily creep into how we view our relationship with God. Our relationship with God and the efforts we make to grow can unintentionally become just another thing we do in our busy lives. Prayer, Bible reading, and going to church become boxes that we check off to make us feel like we are being “good Christians.” But is this how God wants us to live our lives? Thankfully, no.

God wants our love and devotion before He wants our good works. In fact, our good works are like filthy rags when they don’t flow from a heart redeemed by Christ (Isa. 64:6). We do good works, not to make God love us more, but in response to the fact that He has already loved us. How often are we like the Israelites, who thought their burnt offerings and sacrifices would satisfy God, even though their hearts did not love Him? Or the religious leaders, who put their own rules above God’s intention for the law and accused Jesus’s disciples of sinning when they picked grain on the Sabbath? If we’re honest, we are often tempted to see our works or “goodness” as a way of earning God’s love—as a way of showing others how “good” we are. The truth is that no one is good or righteous (Rom. 3:10-12), and our good works don’t make us deserving of God’s love or make Him love us more. He already loved us before we could choose to love Him in return. God first desires our love, not our works. Only when we love Him deeply can we then serve Him rightly.

- **HAVE YOU EVER DONE GOOD WORKS TO EARN PRAISE OR TO IMPRESS PEOPLE? WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?**
- **HOW CAN THE GOSPEL FREE US TO DO GOOD WORKS WITHOUT FEELING LIKE WE MUST WORK TO EARN GOD’S LOVE?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR GRACE. WE COULD NEVER EARN OR DESERVE YOUR LOVE. HELP US TO REMEMBER THE GOSPEL AND TO LOVE YOU IN RETURN—WITH OUR WHOLE HEARTS, HOPING ONLY IN CHRIST AND NOT OUR WORKS.



DAY FOUR

MATTHEW 5:17

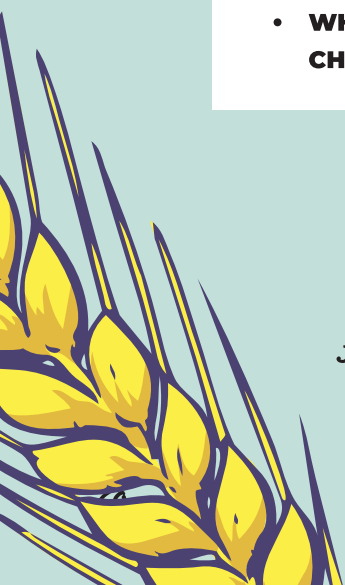
When Jesus healed a person on the Sabbath, many religious leaders accused Him of breaking the command not to work on the Sabbath. By the time Jesus came to earth, the religious leaders had added extra rules to God's law. Perhaps they thought they were being obedient, ensuring that the law would not be broken by giving very specific rules to follow. However, they ended up missing God's point entirely. The religious leaders had forgotten that God gave them the law, not only as a guide for right living, but also as a means for revealing His character to all people. We can't do away with the law, but we shouldn't add to it or see it simply as a list of rules to follow. And if we're honest, many of us have viewed God's commands this way and failed to see that His commands are like a gift, guiding us to know Him and to live for Him.

When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, He didn't violate the command to rest on the Sabbath. Instead, He fulfilled the command for the Sabbath to be a holy day, set apart to worship God and rest. His healing on the Sabbath reflected the purpose of the law itself—to allow us to see who God is and to help us be more like Him. Jesus is the only One who followed the law perfectly. He didn't bend the rules; He showed us God's heart for His commands. He fulfilled the law. Jesus showed us what following and living out God's commands looks like. The religious leaders didn't understand the law because they missed God's heart revealed in the law. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, lovingly showed us the intention of the law. He showed us both the heart of God in the law and the way to apply it in real life.

- **WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD'S COMMANDS, SPECIFICALLY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, DO YOU SEE THEM AS SIMPLY A LIST OF RULES OR AS SOMETHING ELSE?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN SEE MORE OF GOD'S CHARACTER IN HIS COMMANDS TO US?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR SHOWING US WHO YOU ARE IN YOUR COMMANDS TO US. THANK YOU THAT JESUS FULFILLED THE LAW FOR US SO THAT WE CAN SEE YOUR HEART AND FOLLOW YOUR COMMANDS BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.





DAY FIVE

MATTHEW 11:28-30

Rules, rules, and more rules. Our days can feel weighted down with rules at school, rules at home, rules in our groups and activities. If we're honest, we can feel like following Jesus is a list of rules too. Want to hear some good news? The Bible never supports this mentality. Following the Lord is so much more than following rules.

Jesus never taught that His disciples should be burdened by His commands. Just before the passage in this week's lesson, Jesus taught that anyone with a heavy burden should come to Him and receive rest. Jesus offers us rest because He fulfilled the law for us and is able to forgive our sins. The heavy burden of the law was placed on His shoulders, the only One sinless and worthy enough to carry it. Because Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly, He then could offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all who could not keep the law perfectly—for all of us. Therefore, if we place our faith in Jesus, then we receive rest from the unbearable weight of having to follow the law to be in right standing with God. Instead, because we are in Christ, we receive His righteousness and are saved and accepted by God, only by grace through faith. We are freed from the burden of the law, and instead, we are able to rest in the fact that Christ's sacrifice is enough to save us when we call on Him in faith. This doesn't mean we do away with the law and not seek to obey it. Actually, we are gifted with the Holy Spirit, who frees us and empowers us to obey! We seek to imitate Jesus in all that we do, while also realizing that if and when we fail to do it perfectly, we can repent and find forgiveness in Him who alone is perfect.

- **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT FOLLOWING JESUS FEELS LIKE A BURDEN OR A LIST OF RULES TO YOU?**
- **HOW DOES THE TRUTH THAT JESUS KEPT THE LAW PERFECTLY STRENGTHEN YOU TO FOLLOW HIM JOYFULLY AND WITHOUT FEELING WEIGHED DOWN?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU THAT CHRIST HAS FULFILLED THE LAW. HELP ME TO COME TO JESUS FOR ALL OF MY NEEDS AND TO FOLLOW HIM WITH MY WHOLE HEART, NOT WITH ANXIETY BUT BECAUSE OF THE FREEDOM I HAVE IN HIM.