

## Mercy Please 10-24-04

Matthew 12:1-14 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."<sup>3</sup> He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?<sup>6</sup> I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>9</sup> Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, <sup>10</sup> 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?"<sup>11</sup> 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?"<sup>12</sup> How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Jesus' disciples were a rough lot. Traveling on foot from town to town, they sometimes had money to buy food and at other times accepted generosity. (Mark 15:41) The Mosaic Law specifically gave permission for the hungry to eat what they could collect with their bare hands from anyone's grain field. (Deuteronomy 23:25) This grain field must have been right on the edge of Capernaum, for the Law only allowed one to travel ¾ mile on the Sabbath. I do not know if you have ever munched on raw grain. It is tasty, especially when you are hungry. Wheat becomes chewy like bubblegum. It will take the edge off your hunger if you eat a few mouthfuls.

<sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

The Law forbids harvesting on the Sabbath. The Pharisees thought they had caught this rabbi allowing His disciples to do something contrary to the Law. "Look, Jesus! You are letting them get away with a sinful act. What kind of a rabbi are you? They harvested by picking the grain, threshed the grain by rubbing it in their hands, winnowed it by separating the chaff, and ultimately prepared a meal on the Sabbath! Sinners!" It is easy to join the ritual police force. There are no tests or requirements. You just need to prefer ritual and routine, temporary things, over eternal souls. We have all been on the force at some time or other.

The issue was not a moral action, but simply their interpretation of ritual law. Today, the ritual police complain about the order of service, or what someone wears, or any kind of physical matter that is not a moral or truly substantive issue. They do not look at the heart or need of the people involved; they look at the outward appearance to see if it conforms to their idea of proper church etiquette. (1 Samuel 16:7)

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>41</sup> In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.  
Mark 15:41 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>25</sup> If you enter your neighbor's grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.  
Deuteronomy 23:25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.  
1 Samuel 16:7 (KJV)

<sup>3</sup> He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?<sup>4</sup> 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 reminded them of exceptions to the rule in the story of their great King David. Before he became king, he was fleeing from the jealous wrath of King Saul. David went to a priest named Abimelech. You can find the story in 1 Samuel 21. He was hungry from his quick flight to safety and needed food and the sword of Goliath. Abimelech only had the bread of the Presence. The Law warned that only the priests were to eat the bread and that, in a holy place. (Leviticus 24:8-9) Abimelech bent the rules because of David and his men's need. Even though David's story to Abimelech about being on a secret mission was a lie, we never see God dealing with David about the lie or the sacred bread. In fact, some believe that when David ate the bread, he entered into a salt covenant with God. (2 Chronicles 13:5) That is another story for another time.

One thing is sure, God blessed David. Disobedience does not bring on the blessing of God. Jesus reminded them that when this man, called of God on a mission, was in need of food, the strict ritual law was relaxed because of human need. In our passage for today, the Son of David, on a mission for the Father, had men who had a need for sustenance, and they did what the Law allowed but not according to the strict interpretation of the Pharisees. This was not as radical an act as that of David, though one greater than David was in their midst. These learned men of the Law now had reason to reconsider. However, Jesus did not stop there. He had another example from their Scriptures of the ritual law being set aside.

<sup>5</sup> Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? Every Sabbath the priests "work". In fact, they have double duty, twice the sacrifices. (Numbers 28:9-10) They have their regular temple duties to perform. Then Jesus added the zinger,

<sup>6</sup> I tell you that one (something) greater than the temple is here.

If the shadow of the heavenly temple, that is this temple on the earth, is allowed an exception because of the importance of its activities, what about the reality that walked among them? (Hebrews 8:5) Isn't the One for Whom the temple exists allowed to have His disciples work in His assistance on the Sabbath? I think this one went right over their heads. Usually, when they understood one of Jesus' expressions like this; they would pick up rocks to stone Him. (John 8:58-59; John 10:31-32)

I hope you know that One greater than this temple is here right now. We are doing some remodeling so that this building to be good stewards and honor God, but that is nothing if this building (motioning to the people) is in disrepair. (1 Corinthians 3:9) If we do not honor God by serving those in need, it does not matter how perfect the building is! One greater than the temple is here, and He cares a lot more about our hearts than He does the building. I am thankful that God has provided so that we can fix the many needed repairs and update the building, but the greatest repair needed is that of our hearts. (Psalms 51:16-17) I pray it is not going over our heads today as it did to the listeners 2000 years ago. He is in the house! Do you know it? Do you recognize Him? He is in your brothers and sisters who are His temple.

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>8</sup> This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. <sup>9</sup> It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."  
Leviticus 24:8-9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>5</sup> Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?  
2 Chronicles 13:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>9</sup> 'On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. <sup>10</sup> This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.  
Numbers 28:9-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>5</sup> They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."  
Hebrews 8:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>58</sup> "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" <sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.  
John 8:58-59 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>31</sup> Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup> but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"  
John 10:31-32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.  
1 Corinthians 3:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.  
<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.  
Psalms 51:16-17 (NIV)

(1 Corinthians 3:17) Another acceptable translation is "something greater than the temple is here." In that sense, the apostles were the foundation of the new temple of living stones. (1 Peter 2:5) People are more important than the building! That is why God prefers mercy to sacrifice.

God did not give us ritual and liturgy to use as weapon against one another, but to help us stay on track. His heart is a heart of love for man. In our flesh, we take the ritual and liturgy and use it to beat up on our fellow man instead of helping them in their need. If we put the need of man above ritual and physical things, If we seek to please God who loves the world, we will be more pleasing to God than if we performed a mountain of religious ritual.

*<sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.*

In case those two scriptural examples were not enough, Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 from the prophets. Jesus must have felt this verse was a real need in that day. He quoted it earlier in Matthew 9:13. He made the application for them. Their judgment condemned the innocent disciples. If they had mercy on their hunger instead of the sacrifice of total obedience to ritual law, they would not have condemned them.

This eternal truth cries out for application in our own lives. How often we have the opportunity of either judging or showing mercy! It seems everyday we are offended by someone about something. (Luke 17:1) When you face the next offense, will you remember that God desires mercy, not sacrifice? He does not want some great service or offering from you as much as He wants you to have mercy on your fellow man. If you will have mercy, you will not condemn the innocent. Jesus personally experienced the ultimate expression of condemning the innocent, yet He is always seeking to forgive, to set man free from the condemnation they are under.

How often we misread other's motives or intentions. (John 7:24) I have had people tell me I did things for reasons that never crossed my mind. I have been accused of things that I detest, deplore, and would not think of doing. I have also been on the dishing out end and found that I completely misread the situation. Brothers and sisters, it is so easy to misread one another. Let us express mercy! God desires mercy. Let us seek to forgive and set people free from condemnation, not put them under condemnation. Then we will not condemn the innocent. Amen?

If you are having troubling extending mercy and patience, just remind yourself how patient and merciful God is with you. Then remember, Jesus says He will deal with you as you deal with others. (Matthew 7:2) Have Mercy!

*<sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*

One greater than the temple is here. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, the day of rest. He just said in the preceding passage where we can find rest. (Matthew 11:28) It is yoked to Him. That is easy and light. It is not a burden or wearisome. The Sabbath today is resting in Jesus. He is our Sabbath rest! (Hebrews 4:9-11) We need a day off. It does wonderful things for your body. It creates a huge reduction in stress. However, what we really need is to find the Lord of the Sabbath as the One to Whom we yoke

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.  
1 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.  
1 Peter 2:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."  
Matthew 9:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>1</sup> Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!  
Luke 17:1 (KJV)

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>24</sup> Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.  
John 7:24 (KJV)

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.  
Matthew 7:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  
Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;  
<sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.  
<sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.  
Hebrews 4:9-11 (NIV)

ourselves in faithful service. He is our continual rest. He does the work. We just cooperate.

Jesus' yoke fits great! It is light when we let Him lead the way. Lord of the Sabbath has a special meaning to me. In it, I hear Lord of godly communion and rest. He is the Master who knows my needs and does not make demands without enabling me with His own power to do them. The author of Hebrews tells us,

<sup>3</sup> *Now we who have believed enter that rest...* Hebrews 4:3a (NIV)

...speaking of the Sabbath rest. What the Sabbath was a shadow of, is the reality we find when we come to Christ and take His yoke upon us. He did the work for us and does the work within us when we are submitted to Him. Lord of the Sabbath, what a wonderful name! Do you see what it really means? Is He the Lord of the Sabbath to you?

Our story breaks there and we pick up with part two on the same subject.

<sup>9</sup> *Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue,<sup>10</sup> 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?"*

Trying to trap Jesus with the Law is not a winnable game. Remember, He authored it. In their thinking, healing was a form of work. Some of their great rabbi had said so. However, that was not in the Law itself. The Spirit of the Law was that man needed a day to rest and be refreshed, (Exodus 23:12) not further burdened with rules that kept him from that rest. Jesus had already put them in their place with the Scriptures. Now they are trying to corner Him with their rules.

Do you know what really bothers me about this scenario? They do not care in the least about the man with the shriveled hand. He is just a prop. They did not care about the hunger of the disciples, or the handicap this man had to endure, or even the life and ministry of Jesus. They valued their positions and esteem of man more than human need. (Matthew 23:5-7) When rules are overemphasized, when power and position become the issue, people and relationships are cheapened. However, Jesus is always focused on blessing, liberating, and healing. His love for man is always evident. That is His wonderful nature. The very, very sad thing is that most of the Pharisees could not see His beautiful character because it was so foreign to them and their way of seeing the world. They were focused on fault finding instead of helping. (Matthew 15:9)

<sup>11</sup> *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?"<sup>12</sup> How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Jesus gave this illustration a number of times. The pit in this passage could be an irrigation ditch. One time He said "...fallen into a well." (Luke 14:5) That would be referring to a cistern. In either case, the animal could drown. No one sits there and says, "Well, lets see. I am not supposed to lift anything heavier than two dried figs. The sheep is much heavier. Oh well. Bye sheep." No! They would not have a second thought about rescuing the sheep, and they knew it. How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! God values human life much more than animal life. (Matthew 6:26) He values all His creation, but man is made in His image. (Genesis 1:26a) Jesus will give His own life for man to save him from the ditch of sin that threatens to drown us through all eternity. Good is godly, therefore, good is lawful. You cannot be doing good

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>12</sup> "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed. Exodus 23:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>5</sup> But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, <sup>6</sup> And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, <sup>7</sup> And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. Matthew 23:5-7 (KJV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>9</sup> They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Matthew 15:9 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** <sup>5</sup> Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" Luke 14:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** <sup>26</sup> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: Genesis 1:26 (KJV)

and breaking the spirit of God's law. "It was Jesus' basic principle that there was no time so sacred that it could not be used for helping a fellow-man in need." Barclay

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

My imagination is always captured by what these miracles must have looked like, and, just as much, by the awe that must have flowed through the crowd as they watched. As in many of Jesus' miracles, Jesus asked the man to do what he was not able to do. That gave the man a chance to express faith in Jesus' words. In that instant Jesus restored three things to the man's life: his physical hand, his ability to work, and his self-esteem. (from Barclay NT Commentary)

I think He does the same with each of us. A person does not think they can play a musical instrument, but Jesus' says, "Play!" and as they step out and make an effort, they are enabled. He says to some, "Give!" and they give more than they thought it was possible to give. He tells others, "Serve!" and they step into a ministry that they could not imagine doing. What is He saying to you? He will challenge you to do something you did not think you could so that you can express faith in His word. You will find it means much more to you than you first imagine. Do yourself a big favor and make the effort. That is when God meets you and enables you to do what you never believed possible. (Luke 17:6)

How do the Pharisees respond to the wonderful miracle that restored this poor man's hand and dignity?

*<sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.*

Here is Jesus, serving man, healing the sick, preaching this liberating truth that you can do good on the Sabbath. He backs up His teaching with irrefutable Scripture, and what do these religious leaders do? They plan an assassination. Well, I guess we can tell where they are at. (Matthew 7:20) However, it was not so easy for the crowds to see it. They looked to these leaders as the keepers of truth. The people thought, "If our leaders don't believe, even after these amazing signs, there must be a reason." So, not only do they refuse to enter the Kingdom, they hinder others from entering in by there deceptive examples. (Matthew 23:13) Look at the irony here. They want to kill because He heals. Of course, the bottom line is power. They felt their authority and positions threatened. Jesus was not stealing it. They never had it. Authority comes from God. (Romans 13:1) What they were actually losing is their respect in the eyes of men. Their esteem was slipping. But killing Jesus was only going to make it worse.

It is also ironic in that killing Him, they would enable Him to perform the greatest healing of all time, the healing of our sin condition for all who will receive it. (Colossians 1:19-20) One that is greater than the temple is here. He died to make you whole in spirit. Is He at home in your heart? Do you have His joy; know His peace; live in His love? (Romans 15:13) If not, you may have played religion, listened to Pharisees, or tried to be good, but never surrendered yourself to the Lord of Rest. Give yourself to Him today!

**Commented [notes26]:** <sup>6</sup> He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. Luke 17:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Matthew 7:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** <sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Matthew 23:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** <sup>1</sup> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Romans 13:1 (KJV)

**Commented [notes30]:** <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** <sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13 (NIV)