

# Lord of the sabbath

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[ 0 : 00 ] I don't think I've got an introduction actually, but what I've got is a theme sentence and a name sentence. So my theme sentence, preachers are supposed to have a theme sentence.

My aim sentence is to bring us into engagement with the person of Jesus and to challenge us as to the true nature of our personal religion. We need that challenge. We had that challenge this morning, didn't we? Are we people who just go through the motions or do we really long for God? And this passage also has a similar challenge in it.

Let's give you a bit of context. So you've got your Bible there in front of you. We just flip through. We went through the instructions to the apostles, ended with chapter 10.

So there's a big section on the teaching on the mission of his apostles, the ones sent on by him. And later there's going to be a big section on parables, chapter 13.

And we're in the middle of between those. And there's a string of controversial claims and debates and confrontations about Jesus. So there was John the Baptist who had this conflict. Are you the one that we're expecting or is there someone else? Have we got that right or wrong?

[ 1 : 37 ] And he had a wobble on that, didn't he? And in 11 verse 20, Jesus denounces the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed. And he's denouncing that the people who were contemporary with him, this generation, and how hard they were, and how amazingly the people who actually saw him and talked to him didn't believe in him.

And there's resistance from the traditional Jewish townsfolk. So woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida. If the miracles performed in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. But you don't repent. It's an amazing hardness of heart.

And then in the middle of this section, we have the wonderful bit that Aaron was dealing with last week, where Jesus, on the one hand, praises God for this hardness.

You've hidden things from some people, but you've revealed it to others. And you've turned things upside down. The wise and learned, you've hidden it from them, but the little children, you reveal to them.

And this invitation which rings out, come to me, says Jesus. In the midst of all this, he puts himself right at the centre and says, I'm the solution to all this.

[ 2 : 57 ] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. This huge claim and this wonderful invitation. And as we go on, we go back to the opposition. So here's opposition from the Pharisees to do with the law.

We're going to have opposition in the face of opposition of the demonic, or accusation of the demonic, which Steve's going to take next week. And there's going to be a complaint in chapter 12 that Jesus didn't do enough signs.

Seems a very bizarre complaint. And it's going to end up with a redefinition of the family of God. Who are the family of God? Who are my brothers and brother and mother and sisters?

Well, Jesus says, end of chapter 12, is the people. The people who sit listening to me and do the will of God. That's the family of God. So that's the context of it.

And for chapter 12, verses 1 to 14, which we're going to look at the plan, is I'll try and retell the stories, just to make sure we've got all the details of them. And I think there are five pieces of reasoning that Jesus brings to the criticism that he is unfaithful to the God-given law of the Sabbath.

[ 4 : 16 ] And the reasons are to do with David. He's like David, but greater. To do with the temple. He's like the temple, but greater. This whole matter of, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Deep inner steadfastness, not low-cost externals. The claim that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. I presume he's the Lord of all the other days as well. And then at the end, there's something about the value of doing good.

Now, all of these will, those five things, just five, isn't it? One, two, three, four, five. We'll go through. So let's first of all retell the story. You with me? Okay. Right.

Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. At that time, Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. So we're told it's at that time.

It's linked with the other things that are going on, which Aaron acutely picked up last time. But this is another at that time.

[ 5 : 12 ] Jesus went through the cornfields. He goes with his companions. Presumably, he might be leading the way. But he's certainly in charge of the group. So they go through the cornfields.

I thought of drawing a cornfield, but I thought you can imagine a cornfield. And we're told significantly it's on the Sabbath. There's Jewish legislation about the distance you could go on the Sabbath.

So that doesn't seem to have been a problem. Well, there was a sort of a tradition about how far you could go. So it doesn't seem they've gone too far. But the problem comes up in another reason. The word Sabbath, Shabbat, means to rest. And they're going to be accused of breaking that. The law of Moses says six days work and the seventh day is a rest day.

And just to fill you in, in that time, that whole legislation about what is work, what is rest, was navigated by a vast array of legalities.

[ 6 : 11 ] Huge, complicated structure. This is work, that isn't. If you do it this way, it is work. And so on and so on and so on. So it's a huge minefield in the time of Jesus.

And I think it probably still is. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. So they were presumably just picking something as they walked past and rubbing it and eating it in their hands.

I don't think we're to understand that they were about to die of hunger. But they were just, I think, they were just peckish. And the Pharisees are there. The Pharisees see this.

So presumably they're following along behind Jesus or happen to be taking a walk the same way that he is. And their criticism is, look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

So just to clear up this word unlawful, in English it makes us think law. We've just been thinking about law. In the original, the word law is not contained in it. It means something more like out of place, unfitting, unacceptable, we might say in modern parlance.

[ 7 : 23 ] So he's saying it's unacceptable for your disciples to be eating like this. It's work on the day of rest.

So that's what happens in the cornfield. And then Jesus answers that. So let's go to the next bit of narrative, which is in verse 10.

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue. So we're in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Going on from that place, it's linked, isn't it?

And he goes into the synagogue. And a second ingredient in this, a man with a shriveled hand was there.

Does it say their synagogue? Did I miss that bit? Yes, their synagogue. It's noticed that it's their synagogue and they. So there's a bit of a distance between Jesus and the they.

[ 8 : 19 ] And there's a man with a dried up hand. Now, whether it's just the hand or whether it's the arm, not quite sure, but it's just, it's withered, contorted, something like that.

And the Pharisees are here too. Because in verse 14, we find that it is the Pharisees that go out and plot how they might kill Jesus.

And again, they ask this question about lawfulness. Verse 10, looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they ask him, is it acceptable?

Is it fitting? Does it fit to heal on the Sabbath? I wonder whether they're actually sort of setting him up here. It says they're looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.

So is this all like a challenge? Because you, as if to say, well, you can heal. And now if you don't, you've agreed with us. And if you do, now you're in deep trouble. I don't know. But it's set up there as looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.

[ 9 : 27 ] They ask him about the lawfulness of healing. And then we get another dialogue following on from that. But the outcome of which, so when Jesus has said this, knowing that it's a confrontation situation, he says to the man, stretch out your hand.

Now, if the whole of it was withered up, that in itself is an impossible thing to ask. Because you might say, I can't move my hand. If it was just the end of it, then perhaps he could do that.

But as he does so, the hand is completely healed, just as sound as the other. And you think, great round of applause. This is a brilliant thing.

What did we just see? Jesus just said to that man, stretch out your hand. And his hand was cured. And we notice that the response of the Pharisees is completely different to that.

Isn't it? Completely different. The hand is restored, but you see the response, which we'll come to in a moment. So what I'd like to do, those are the two bits of action, which I just want to make sure we've got the hang of those.

[10:40] Jesus actually produces these five pieces of reasoning. And I'd like us to take some time to go through that. I'm going to try and go fairly quickly.

We've got communion afterwards. And I don't want to get in the way of that. So what does Jesus say to answer this accusation that what he's doing is unfitting, out of place, unacceptable on the Sabbath?

So, verse 3. He answered, Haven't you read? So his appeal is to Scripture.

He doesn't say it doesn't make sense, or he doesn't say, isn't it fairly obvious? He says, no. What does it say in the Bible, that we're both agreeing the Bible rules on this?

Haven't you read? Verse 3. And in verse 5, he's going to say something else. Haven't you read? In the law. And...

[11:46] In verse 7, he doesn't say, haven't you read? But he does say, if you had known what these words mean.

And it's a quotation. It's a quotation from Hosea, Prophet Hosea. So, his strategy is to say, let's look at what the Bible is already saying.

At least that's the first part of his strategy. So, we need to think, what does he quote, and how does he use it? So, what does he quote first of all? He says, Haven't you read what David did?

This is King David. When he and his companions were hungry, he entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

So, he says, David? Now, just think on this. It's in your Bible. Well, David, when he was on the run from Saul, and his companions, we're told here, went.

[12:54] They needed provisions. They went to the tabernacle, the house of God, and they took the holy bread, the show bread, the bread that was in the tabernacle, and they took that and ate it.

And Jesus says, and that was okay. Normally, that would not be okay. If you and I did that, that would not be okay. But if David and his companions did it, it was okay.

He says, Normally, that's not lawful. But David and his companions did it. Now, and he goes on to talk about not condemning the guiltless.

If I can just find the place. He says it at the end of verse 7. He would not have condemned the innocent. So I think we take it that Jesus is saying that David and his companions were innocent, guiltless, as are me and my disciples.

Now, just notice what Jesus is doing here. It really is quite a compressed argument, but he says, if that was okay for David and his companions, then that means what we've just been doing is all right for me and my disciples.

[14:20] So we ask, what was it that made David and his companions, what was it that made it okay for them to do that, which they shouldn't normally do? And the answer is, I think the answer has to be because it was David.

Because he was the king. And the king and his companions have a status which means something special for them and that they were right to go to the tabernacle and eat that bread because it was David.

How does that fit with Jesus and his disciples? Do you see what Jesus is implying? He's saying, well, you see, I am going, I'm leading my disciples through the cornfields and I'm not telling them off for eating this, the corn here.

I'm saying that's okay. So it's okay. And you see the comparison that he's making. David and his followers, me and my followers, we're in the same league.

And what he's really saying is, he was the king, King David. And do you know, I'm the king too. I, in my kingly authority, with my kingly plans and purposes, I say this is okay, so it's okay.

[16:00] And that's quite a thing for them to say, isn't it? He's sort of quietly likening himself to David. David, the king figure and Jesus saying, David can do that, I can do that because I'm the son

of David.

It's a powerful claim. Jesus has the same effect on his disciples as David on his companions, being the king figure.

So I put this as the first argument that Jesus is using, which clarifies who he is. Who is he? He's the king figure. He is David's son.

He is David's David's greater son. He is all that David was meant to be, all that David failed to be. All the fulfilment of all the Davidic promises are in this Jesus of Nazareth walking through the cornfields, the very person that they're addressing at that moment.

[17:06] And if I put an application, if Jesus is the king, the application is we should do what he says. If he's our king, that means we unreservedly do what he says.

That's correct, isn't it? We are his subjects. It is a way of expressing his authority over our lives. What he says we will do, where he sends we will go.

So, next thing. The priests in the temple. So, Jesus has another line from the from the scriptures. Verse 5, or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent. So, now he's got a connected but a slightly different line of argument here and he says, well, in your Bible on the Sabbath the priests are doing all sorts of things aren't they? They're offering sacrifices and it's a working day for them and that's okay. They are not guilty by doing that are they? They shouldn't go home and say, oh, I've done a terrible thing.

[18:25] I've been at work in the temple on the Lord's day or whatever it is. That's what they're supposed to do. They are guiltless. And Jesus says, well, that's relevant, you know.

That's relevant to this case. They do that on the Sabbath. They desecrate the day yet they are innocent and his punchline is verse 6.

I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. Just however many words that is.

One, two, three, four, five, six, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven words. Seven words and then the next sentence but let's just not whoosh over that. Hear what he said.

One greater than the temple is here. Referring to himself. He says, I'm here and I'm greater than the temple. Do you remember the woman at the well who said in her wonderfully sort of feisty way, are you greater than our father Jacob who dug this well?

[19:35] Do you remember her saying that? And here is Jesus saying, I'm greater than the temple. I'm like the temple but greater than the temple. My friend who came to the men's breakfast yesterday was telling me that I think someday coming up soon is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar because it is the feast in which Jewish people all over the world bemoan the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians and then the destruction of the temple by the Romans and many other sad things that have befallen them.

and it's a day of immense mourning and I don't know whether we can quite get the hang of that but all that's hung on the temple in terms of the promises of God the worship of God the access to God the glory of God in the temple there and to have that smashed and lost and closed down is if you think of it a matter of extreme sorrow and sadness because the temple is that important but here's Jesus walking along saying you know guys I'm greater than the temple don't worry about that it's just bricks I'm here and all the things that the temple stands for is me do you remember beginning of John's gospel where he says destroy this temple and I will build it again in three days I didn't understand but the temple he had spoken of was his body one greater than the temple is here Jesus has the same effect as the temple he fulfills the theology of the temple see what I mean about this clarifying the claims of Jesus we've moved from discussing what you can do on what day the identity of Jesus and he is greater than the temple he has the same effect as the temple he is the place to meet God if we want to meet God we don't like the psalmist this morning have to get ourselves to Jerusalem we have to get ourselves to Jesus and here's my application point if he is greater than the temple we should go to him to meet God we should how can I meet God answer go to Jesus of Nazareth go to Jesus Christ and in him we meet God in his fullness in his greatness in his graciousness in his glory we meet God that was

B so third thing verse seven if you had known what these words mean I desire mercy not sacrifice you would not have condemned the innocent so it's a quote from Hosea six and there it is I read it out at the beginning uses this word hesed which you will have noticed perhaps is one of my favourite!

words it's the Hebrew word meaning steadfast love covenant love relating to God steadfastly God shows hesed to us and we are to show hesed in response to God and in Hosea six it says of his people your hesed your love is like the early dew that disappears therefore I killed you with the words of my mouth for this is the quote!

[ 23 : 31 ] I desire hesed now our translation says mercy and I guess that's because that's the way the writers of the New Testament found an equivalent word which is now translated into English as mercy but the underlying word is hesed I desire steadfast love not sacrifice!

so it goes back to the Lord's complaint in Hosea to people who were shall we say observant so they did the sacrifices they did the burnt offerings and God says okay you do the burnt offerings but I'm not that interested in the burnt offerings actually I'm looking for something deeper than that I'm looking for hesed in you I'm looking for a deep committedness in your heart to me and I'm looking for a deep faithfulness in your relationships to other people and that's what I'm not finding I desire hesed I don't desire burnt offerings I desire the knowledge of God that you know who God is and that knowledge transforms who you are because you know who I am the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings it's a very profound thing isn't it that's what his religion is it's not about the costless or relatively costless externals he says what I find lacking is steadfast covenant love for God and for each other and this is an accusation against the Pharisees you're fawning about wondering whether rubbing ears of corn that amount constitutes work why are you not bothered about knowing God the Pharisees deserve this criticism let's let us not deserve that criticism we should not be preoccupied as if the whole thing were outward low cost rituals and routines God preserve us from that what we should value is the deep inner steadfast love for God and reliable active love for one another that's the costly stuff and that's what I'm looking for I desire hesed not sacrifice I desire the knowledge of God rather than sacrifices and it's the same challenge really as this morning isn't it that

God says you're doing lots of stuff you're very busy but do you actually love me do you long for me is that what's at the heart of what motivates you and your religion because Jesus says that's what my religion is all about it is that deep inner hesed rather than cost relatively!

costless externals! next one costless come bang bang bang don't they like that they're quite concentrated so the next sentence is another thing he says for verse eight the son of man is lord of the sabbath we could just go on to the next sentence now but we shouldn't claim the son of man is lord of the sabbath now what sort of claim is that now we know that the sabbath legislation goes back to right back to genesis god's creation week the last day the seventh day this is an unfinished day the others it's all morning and evening finished this one it would appear to be as an unfinished day an eternal day if you like and that's the one that's blessed the seventh day the seventh is repeated several times and it's God rested that's where the sabbath bit comes from and

[ 28 : 09 ] God's old covenant people are specifically commanded to have that seventh day that's the saturday to imitate God's working week in their working week a reminder week by week that there is an eternal rest which is the goal of creation it's the goal of redemption too isn't it an eternal there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God now we're still aiming for that we haven't got there yet it's a weekly reminder to them that that's what it's all about there's a rest for the people of God make every effort to enter into that rest Joshua had achieved that rest then he wouldn't speak in another day of entering into that rest and so on and so on and what Jesus is saying is he's claiming to be in charge of this he's claiming to be in charge of how it's interpreted and how it is enforced that's a huge claim

I take the working week of Yahweh the Lord of hosts and I'm in charge of that says Jesus I'm in charge of how that spills out into your calendar I'm the Lord of Shabbat I'm the Lord of the Sabbath I tried to tell that to my Jewish friend he would choke on his soup wouldn't he that this so dearly held institution is actually in the hands of Jesus I am the Lord of the Sabbath it's a huge claim it is Jesus claim to administer the Lord's law as regards human time I suppose you could say things like there's a song it might be from a psalm my days are in your hands every one of them is planned how does anybody know how that was built by big road every day every day

Jesus specifically mentions the Sabbath but I'm sure he's the Lord of every day isn't he the Lord of time the Lord of our times the Lord of the rhythms of our life my application point is we should give every day to him should we not every day is his he is the Lord of all the seasons of our lives the times when we scatter and go to work and the times when we gather and encourage one another and that's how he's done it scattering and gathering scattering and gathering scattering and

gathering until the day when we reach that eternal rest and we haven't got there yet but that's where we're headed and Jesus says I'm the Lord of that which is such an enormous claim and we honour him and worship him in it next point next point so we go now into the synagogue and here again same sort of issues is it lawful to heal on the

Sabbath so that's 12 verse 10 and Jesus brings to mind or brings to their attention their current practice as regards animals falling into pits now according to the amount of reading that I did and I didn't read about everything but it would appear that in later centuries rabbinic law actually forbade rescuing animals from pits except under certain circumstances and I didn't get into the complication of it but clearly at this point rabbinic law doesn't say that it says we all know if Joseph's sheep falls into a pit and he'll say come on guys can you give me a hand to pull that sheep out we'll say yeah it's the Sabbath but it's a sheep come on so you take hold of it and you lift it I like that idea of lifting because that seems to be quite appropriate their current practice is okay to raise or lift a sheep from a pit on the

Sabbath and Jesus says now arguing from that to this here's a man the sheep in the pit that's quite a situation hardly dare say you've probably got money tied up in that sheep and you wouldn't like it to starve or you know but that's not mentioned but here's a person now the withered hand is not a terminal condition he's not going to die of it but it's not what he should be he is less than let me just try and phrase this sensitively the fully restored human being would have a fully restored and functioning hand and that is God's purpose for his people that we should be fully restored in the resurrection and so the issue is of healing

[ 33 : 34 ] I can't remember the word in the original but the question is now is that a lawful thing to do is that appropriate to take this man and restore him even now today on to what God's intention for the human body should be in the resurrection he'll have a whole fully functioning body is it at all appropriate to take any steps towards that now on Shabbat it's an interesting question isn't it and you think actually it's a stupid question in the sense that obviously if Shabbat is the day of fulfilling God's purposes this is God's purpose isn't it to heal isn't that what God is about healing making us whole advancing his purposes redeeming people making them the people they ought to be isn't that exactly what

God's purpose is and yet the Pharisees have got in the position of saying I don't think that's at all appropriate and Jesus is pointing out the ludicrous ridiculous nature of that God's will is for the good of human beings he says you see in verse 12 he makes the comparison how much more valuable is a man than a sheep and then he says therefore it is lawful to do good on Shabbat on the Sabbath it is fitting with the purposes of God he says I hope this doesn't come as a surprise to you it is fitting for the purposes of God to do good you see the underlying assumption that that is God's plan to do good to do people good that's what God is about doing people good and on the Sabbath when we particularly draw near to him is it not all the more his purpose to do people good God's will is for the good of human beings that's the logic of it isn't it it is lawful to do good every day and on the Sabbath and I think this is just wonderful good news for us as human beings isn't it that God's plan is to do good to people that's God's plan for each of us to do us good he's not against us he's for us and as we go out to tell people good news about Jesus Christ I know we frame it correctly but the bottom line is God wants to do you good he wants to rescue you from his wrath from sin from Satan he wants to do you good do you remember when Paul had that vision of the Macedonian man and the Macedonian man said come over and help us come and do us good that's what the gospel is about doing people good it's good news for us human beings that the God of creation the holy God in this day of grace intends us good and it's doubly astounding for his children it's doubly astounding for his children because there is in Jesus Christ when we belong to him there are no ifs and buts we don't have to frame it in a certain way it's just the plain fact he's redeemed us for our good he set his love on us for our good he doesn't intend anything for us at all! all that's brilliant isn't it all that I meet will work for my good the bitter is sweet the medicine is food though painful and pleasant will cease before long and how pleasant the conqueror song John Newton he intends us good Jesus says doing good that's definitely an awful bit of an understatement isn't it and here as an application point well an application point is to be grateful to grasp that and to live as if that was true but here's another application point we should be like him remember Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said the father does good he sends his rain on the just and the unjust he makes his sun to shine on the just and the unjust and we therefore should love our enemies we should do good to people who hate us that we may be perfect that we may be

the sons of our father in heaven and that inclination to do good should be deep in the heart of what we are as

[ 38 : 49 ] Christians it isn't always is it but it ought to be a deep inclination a deep orientation to do good to our fellow human beings and to do as much good as we can sometimes we can't do as much good as we'd like we'd love people to be saved sometimes it just we don't have the opportunity to do that well we'll help them cross the road safely or we'll go and visit them when they're poorly or whatever we will do good yes all sorts of things that come under this heading Jesus says it in these just few words but it's such an understatement it's lawful to do good that was the fifth piece of reasoning on this sabbath controversy and the summary of them is Jesus doesn't actually say a whole lot about the sabbath but it brings up these weighty issues the identity of Jesus he is king like David but greater he is like the temple but greater the Lord's desire is for the deep steadfastness of the heart not just low cost external things like sacrifices Jesus is the Lord of the sabbath brackets and all the other days as well and the value of doing good to people that's deeply at the heart of what Jesus is about and what we should be about too and having said all of those wonderful things because I think they are wonderful I'd just like to say there are two reactions and the first reaction which I referred to but didn't spell out is in verse 14 having heard all this it's really about doing good it's about the majesty and magnitude of Jesus the Pharisees Jesus has just said how important how precious it is to heal this man with the withered arm to restore him to give him more of what life is to heal him to do him good and the Pharisees say that is just you deserve to die if you say stuff like that it's appalling isn't it it is so ironic but the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus what a reaction what a reaction something deeply wrong there isn't there something deeply wrong reaction one to plot to get rid of him and by contrast I want to say our reaction ought to be completely the opposite our reaction ought to be completely the opposite to plot to have more of him I think that's what our reaction should be we should be getting our heads together and our plans together and our actions together I want more of this Jesus I don't want him to the periphery of my life I want him the centre of my life I want more of him every day I want him to be lord of my life I want to draw near to God through him I want his intuitions about how to live life to be my intuitions I want his motivations and insights to be my motivation and insights I want more of him I finished