

Rest in Jesus

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- [0 : 00] We're going to have our Bible reading now, and we're going to be reading from Matthew chapter 12, starting from verse 1 and going to verse 14.
- He said to them, And he went on from there and entered their synagogue.
- And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him? He said to them, If you want to open your Bibles or keep your Bibles open to Matthew chapter 12, how about I pray before we listen to God's word?
- Amen. Yeah, Father, as Simon introduced this morning, we really need your rest.
- We always do. But we're probably feeling it, especially at the moment, given our circumstances. I just pray that you would take your powerful word and breathe it into each of our souls, that we might hear you speaking and experience that rest that is ours in Christ, if we have come to know him.
- [2 : 39] So please go before us now. Fill us all with your spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen. Oh, yeah. Man, here we go again, hey?
- That five-letter C word that we're all sick of hearing, so I won't say it. But it's just threatening our loved ones again. And it's wreaking havoc on our Christmas plans.
- Our expectations are up this year, weren't they? We just want to sit around the table and have too much food. And like I said in another sermon, loosen our belt and recline together and just be with each other and enjoy each other's company at peace.
- I think we might be tempted to think that that C word is to blame for our plans maybe not happening this year.
- But do you remember previous years before that C word? Do you remember that we often talk as if as long as we can get our family in the same room together, then we'll have that peace, that joy together.
- [3 : 45] Did that work? Is that all you need to get people in the same room at the same time? I think we need more than that.
- We need more than being in the same room, having lots of food, having the Christmas tree up, having lots of alcohol for some. Does that give us peace and joy?
- We need a lot more, don't we? We need each individual who's there to want to be there. We need that attitude of wanting to be present with the family, not distracted by something else.
- We need the conversation to not bring up controversial topics that divide people. We need the conversation to avoid those relational hurts that bring up tension.
- Whatever relational tension existed in the year, we can't totally leave it at the door at Christmas, can we? At least people were walking on eggshells with each other if there's not peace before that day.
- [4 : 48] I'm saying all this because I think it's just another example of how we often look to the external trappings of things to then work their way inside to give us what we crave.

So we try and set up the outside to then get on the inside and give us the peace and joy, as if the external can do that. We do it all the time and it's not just Christmas.

We try and make ourselves beautiful on the outside to convince ourselves that we're lovely and desirable. We need others' respect so that we validate our sense of importance.

We pursue titles and awards and achievements to convince ourselves on the inside that we're important. We keep striving for that perfect house and car and lifestyle, thinking that's going to give us the perfect family.

All the while relationships can crumble. We try and muster arguments and get rally support to convince ourselves that we're guiltless.

[6 : 00] If you're like me, we keep putting our trust in the external things to give us the internal and it doesn't work.

Again and again it doesn't work and yet we keep going back to it. I think that kind of thinking will help us unlock what's going on in this passage. The Pharisees are confident in themselves that if they keep the external trappings of God's law, that will get them on the inside to be righteous, to be at peace with God, to have joy.

The problem is focusing on the external, they miss the substance. I think we're craving rest at the moment and God's chosen this word for today.

I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I think there's some tricky things to understand in this passage. So put your thinking caps on. Let's go 25 minutes of concentration here.

But let's trust that God's given us this word to give us rest. I don't think it's a coincidence that this passage about the Sabbath rest comes immediately after Jesus' warm invitation, come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest for your souls.

[7 : 20] So let's get into it. Let's think about that section just before chapter 12 so that we understand chapter 12 properly, what we've heard last week.

So if you've got your Bibles, keep them open. Chapter 11, verses 25 to 30. What is the rest that Jesus offers and who can have it?

It can't be talking about just rest from everyday work and effort. It's not about that. That's the kind of promise of rest that the lottery promises.

If you win the lottery, just retire early. Go caravanning. I listened to this TED talk that this social researcher did a long-term study.

I don't know what the technical term for that is. They actually tracked people who won the lottery and they tracked people who had something, a misfortune happened to them. Maybe they were in a car accident and they got injured.

[8 : 27] So they tracked these sets of people and asked them about their perception of their happiness. And as you'd expect, those who won the lottery felt really happy at first.

Those who had misfortune, really sad. But after two years, they were both at the same level of perceived happiness. I don't know what you want to do with that. I think it just tells you that it doesn't work.

The outside doesn't ultimately change our perception of rest and happiness. So what is the rest that Jesus offers here if it's not outside stuff?

I think verse 25 helps us. Jesus, thanks the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. So we can't have this rest by our own wisdom and understanding. It has to be revealed to us.

[9 : 29] It has to be given to us. So if you think you've got your life together, if you think you're pretty good, you understand the world, you've got things fairly sorted, Jesus is not offering you rest.

The paragraph before applies to you mainly. Woe to you. Judgment is coming. So what is this rest?

I think it's in verse 27. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

To know the Father, to know the Son of God, to be loved by God, that is rest. That is at the heart of rest. So who can have it?

Not people who think they've got their life in order, but people who feel the weight of their sin and failure. I think that's, come to me all who labour and are heavy laden.

[10 : 41] I think that's describing people who know the Word of God and say, you should be like God in His character. The Bible says this, we should be like God in His character and in our obedience.

And yet you know that so often my love for God and my choices are over here. That is a heavy burden if you're in that place, if you know the gap.

That's a heavy burden. To you, Jesus says, come. I'll lift that burden. You think you've got your life in order?

No rest. If you are weighed down by your sin, come. And I'll give you the Father. So having that refresher in mind, let's get into chapter 12.

If we stay zoomed out in the story, so what happens here? It's fairly, I don't know, trivial things that happen in a sense.

[11 : 46] So it's on the Sabbath day when God said not to do any work and Jesus and His companions are walking through a field and they're plucking heads of grain and they're eating it because they're hungry.

And then Jesus goes into a synagogue and a man with a withered hand, he heals him. And verse 14, because of that, the Pharisees want to kill him.

Does that add up to you? That doesn't add up to me. If this passage was about some argument about a technicality of God's law, there should be a heated debate, not a plot to murder.

Something deeper is going on here. I think what's going on is two worlds are clashing, are clashing, clashing, colliding.

The Pharisees' outside-in world of trying to have peace and the good life is clashing with Jesus' inside-out rest that he's offering.

[12 : 54] He is confronting it head-on and they hate it. And to keep their outside-in, they want to kill what they see. I don't think we should easily dismiss the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy.

After all, this is God's command. The weekly rhythm of stopping work to spend one day differently in community worshipping God was a reminder of profound truth for Jewish people.

Let me just list off four things. The Sabbath was super, super important. It reminded of Genesis 1 and 2. This is God's world that you're living in, that he rested from work.

He is the creator. He is the sustainer of your life. It's a wonderful reminder of that. It's a reminder of the fourth in the Ten Commandments. You are one of God's holy people.

It's a reminder that you belong to a holy God. You are in relationship with God. It's a reminder of the promised land of rest, of milk and honey, the Messianic age where sin and everything is dealt with.

[14 : 15] It was the promise of a future rest for Jews when the Messiah would come. And it was a reminder of how we were to live ethically, that this Sabbath rest didn't just apply to Jews, but any foreigners who were in the land, any slaves, any animals were to have rest as well.

So it was actually a reminder to treat people with the dignity that God calls us to. There is a lot bound up in the Sabbath. So I think some Christians can quickly dismiss Sabbath.

Let's not do that. Jesus is not abolishing the law. He's not abolishing the law, we heard in the Sermon on the Mount. But he is coming to fulfill it.

Okay, so the rabbis at the time, reaping grain, they all agreed that's harvesting, that's work, that's breaking the Sabbath. Some think the justification it was that the disciples were hungry.

That's not fully satisfying for me. Excuse the pun there. But me saying I'm hungry at five o'clock after, I don't know, four hours from having lunch is very different from someone on the street who can barely maintain consciousness because they haven't eaten in days.

[15 : 39] There is a profound difference there. These guys could have waited. If anyone's ever done the 40-hour famine, they could have waited to the next morning. I don't think them being hungry is the justification here.

It's not what Jesus argues anyway. The Pharisees accuse, you are breaking the law of God, or your disciples are, and Jesus doesn't debate them.

He doesn't answer at that level. I think there's a reason why we find this, if you're like me anyway, why when we first read this paragraph, it's a bit confusing. It's like, what's going on here?

Something about David, something about the temple, something about the priest profaning the temple, his law to the Sabbath, mercy sacrament. What's he saying? He's not engaging on a technicality of law.

He's going, your framing of the question is totally wrong. Totally wrong. So we've got to get into the detail to see how it's wrong.

[16 : 45] I don't know if this illustration is going to work or not, but here goes. That's always a good preamble. It should be good. If you're invited to Buckingham Palace, we got this wedding invitation last year, and looking at the calligraphy, and it had this stamp on the back, like maybe we were being invited to Buckingham Palace, but we weren't.

Anyway, imagine you were invited to Buckingham Palace, and you come in, you know you're in a special place. You're going to have a special meal with a special person, and the servants of the Queen tell you the protocol like you needed it.

You knew you'd be on your best behaviour, but they tell you the protocol before you go in. Now imagine you just sit down and start stuffing your face. And people just turn to you in anger and go, that is not right, what you are doing.

And you just respond, well haven't you read in the papers that Prince Charles eats whenever he feels like it? That would not solve the problem.

That would escalate the situation. I see Carol nodding. I'm not sure if the Buckingham Palace lands with everyone.

[18 : 06] Do you see what Jesus is saying? Do you remember the story of David eating the priest's bread? He says that to the Pharisee? How does that answer the question?

Or do you remember the story? I've got the passage there if you want to look it up later, but let me just retell the story, hopefully briefly. This is the first account of David being on the run from King Saul.

He's convinced now that King Saul wants him dead. And so he's on the run. This is the first story that happens. And he comes to a place called Nob, and he's hungry.

He's on the run. He's fleeing for his life. And at Nob, it's described as the city of priests. So this is probably where the tabernacle, before the temple is, this is where the tabernacle, the house of God was.

And so he comes to the priest there, probably the high priest, Ahimelech. And he says, have you got any bread? Now, the only bread he had was in the tabernacle.

[19 : 16] Now, Ahimelech knew his Bible that only the priests may eat that bread. Only the priests. Only if they're clean.

And he asked David, are you and your men ritually clean? So he's not being careless with God's law. He's not dismissing God's law. He's going, are you clean?

I'm not giving you this bread unless you're clean. And David goes, yes, I'm clean. He also lies, by the way, about, like, oh, no, I'm not on the run from Saul. I don't know what to do with the lie.

I'll let you think about that one. But, okay, you're clean. I know the law. It's only for priests. But he gives him the bread. Now, it's not compassion.

If the priests were compassionate for someone who was, anyone who was hungry, they would bake their own bread. They wouldn't give, they would never give the tabernacle bread to someone who was hungry.

[20 : 13] Why did he give the bread to David? The Pharisees cannot answer that question. Their view of outside-in religion, they've got no answer.

Have you got an answer? Why did the priests give David the bread? I wasn't planning this, but anyway, I want to call out an answer.

Why? Sorry, Zoom people, I'm not going to hear you, but feel free to yell at the screen if you want. Ian, yeah.

He'd been anointed? Yep. Yeah. I'm with you on that one. He would know that Samuel has already, the prophet Samuel has already anointed David.

That David is God's chosen king. Yes, Saul is king at the moment, but he knew he was anointed. There's only, I think, I think that's the answer. There's only one reason the priest gave David the bread.

[21 : 18] And even then, the fact that he was anointed still doesn't fully answer the question, but there's one reason, because it's David. And here's Jesus saying, it's okay what they're doing.

Don't you know what David did? He's not making an argument of precedence. David did it, so anyone can do it.

He's not saying that. He's making an argument of preeminence. I am at least as great as David, is the implication.

They're not doing anything wrong because they're with me. Two worlds are colliding here. Pharisees thinking they have peace with God because they are careful to keep God's laws.

Jesus saying that you have peace of God if you're with me. How do you and I have peace with God? Be a companion of Jesus. Have him say of you before the Father, before anyone who accuses you, it's okay.

[22 : 35] She's with me. It's a big claim.

It's a warm claim, I find. So as you look at verses 5 and 6, which, yeah, they're a bit difficult. I'm not sure.

I'll have a crack at it. I think what Jesus is doing is similar to the David story. He's at the same time confronting the Pharisees outside in religion and at the same time making a big claim about himself.

He points out that even the priests, in a sense, break the Sabbath. On the Sabbath day, the priests had to go into the temple to offer the sacrifices and to change that bread we've been talking about, the consecrated bread.

So in a technical sense, even God's law says the priests break the Sabbath because servicing God's house, I suppose, trumps it, is a weightier matter of law.

[23 : 43] Does that make sense? So even a weightier matter of God's law trumps a lesser matter of God's law. But what does that got to do with disciples walking through a grain field?

Like they're not serving in the temple. They're not worshipping God in the temple. I think it only makes sense if what Jesus says in verse 6 is true.

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. So what is that something greater than the temple? Some think because the disciples were serving on Jesus' mission, that that was kind of like parallel to the priests serving in the temple.

Don Carson points out that, well, one, that's a bit of a stretch because how are they really serving Jesus' mission while they're walking through a grain field?

We're not told what they're doing that day. But it's also not what Jesus compares. He says something greater than the temple itself is here. Not temple service, but something greater than the temple.

[24 : 58] Well, this is one of the reasons why the Jews wanted to kill him, a claim like this. Others think what's greater is the command of love that's greater than the other religious rules.

So I desire mercy, not sacrifice. And the fact that the next story is about healing a man with a withered hand. Again, Carson points out that that doesn't quite satisfy that last little phrase in verse 6.

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here, implying it wasn't here before. It is here now. The command of God to love has been the greatest of commands.

God's always said that. That's not new. So what is here? What's greater than the visible representation of God living with his people?

Just think about the temple. It represents God being with his people. The priests mediating between people and God so that they could relate together. The place where God tied his name to.

[26 : 13] So if you thought of the character of God, you think of the temple. You think of the temple, you think of the character of God. This is the place where sin is atoned for. People can live at peace and receive blessing from God.

What is greater than that? What's greater than the house of God? It's got to be God, doesn't it?

Only God is greater. Only his promise of eternal rest. The king's arrival. The messianic age. Only that is greater than the picture.

The reality is greater than the picture. And Jesus is saying, it's here. He is here. Standing right in front of you.

Talking to you. Face to face. And they're missing it. Why are they missing it? Jesus says, because they don't understand Hosea 6.6.

[27 : 15] I desire mercy, not sacrifice. That same word, mercy. I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice. So in Hosea's day, there was plenty of religion going on, but they were worshipping other gods.

Their heart for God wasn't there. Religion was there. Goodness was there. External was there. Internal love for God wasn't there. And Jesus is saying, that's the same for you, you Pharisees.

The one man who had complete, steadfast love for the Father was right in front of them.

And they missed it. Because they couldn't see it. They kept focusing on the external. They hated it, even.

I think they hated it because, or hated him, because it threatened their sense of peace. If the external gave them peace, he's popping their bubble.

[28 : 20] He's threatening what they think gives them peace, their goodness. It exposed their hypocrisy, claiming to love God but not really, rejecting his son.

It exposed that they claimed to be wise. They were not wise. They had no love for God in their hearts. And I think all that is captured in the next story of him entering their synagogue with a man with a withered hand.

What do they care about? They just care about those external regulations. They have no love for God, which overflowed into love for this man. They had no mercy for him. So Leviticus 21 says that any priest with a deformed limb was not allowed into the temple.

You can't be not whole and be in God's presence. Now that may sound harsh, but it was a picture of what God was going to do.

He was going to make everything whole one day. So this man was excluded from God's house. He would feel the burden of being cut off from God because of his sin, under God's curse.

[29 : 39] No peace. Cut off from community. And Jesus calls out their hypocrisy. They would have had more compassion on an animal than for this man.

Their outside-in religion just turned things upside down. They were blind to what God wanted them to do. And then he tells the man to stretch out his hand and it's fully made whole.

Which just confirms that all that Jesus has been saying is God's will. I like how DC put it. I'll let you decide whether DC is Don Carson or David Corderwood.

I like how he put it. This man couldn't go to the temple, so the temple came to him. The curse of sin that caused this defect, that prevented him from peace and joy and worship, by the grace of God in Jesus, he receives wholeness.

The curse is gone. He is declared guiltless before him. At peace with God, free to be thankful. Inside-out rest. And the Pharisees, still loving their outside peace, decide Jesus must go.

[31 : 05] He must be gotten rid of. So I think this leaves us with a question. Which peace do we want? The outside-in or the inside-out that Jesus offers?

The Lord of rest promises you and me to make us whole, starting on the inside, his character and out. He promises to give us peace with God, the hope of everlasting rest, to declare us guiltless before God, simply by belonging to him.

Now if you think about that, why could Jesus declare them guiltless at this point? Because he was looking forward to what he would do for his disciples. He knew the cost he was going to pay for them.

And he can declare us guiltless before God. Because he died for us. If you come to him for rest, he will declare you guiltless.

But here's the catch, if I can put it like this. He's not going to put up with our outside-in way of doing life.

[32 : 14] Like in this passage, he'll keep confronting our trust in outside, external things. So that he can give us the true rest that comes on the inside.

Knowing him. Knowing the Father. Knowing the Son. So what about for us? What are we going to trust? The outside-in or the inside-out? The Lord of rest calls you to come to me.

I'll give you rest for your souls. And in the book of Hebrews, we're told that day of rest, that promise of rest, still is open for you today. Tomorrow may not be guaranteed. Today it is.

Come. Come and get that rest. Just ask him for it.

That's what faith is. You promised it. Please give it to me. Let me just finish with just a few comments about what this inside-out rest can look like as a Christian.

[33 : 17] First, in our approach to the Bible. When you hear God's word, whether that's a sermon you're listening to, or whether you open, as much as the sermon is saying the truth, of course, whether it's reading the Bible, listening to a devotional, like, how do you approach the Bible?

Do you approach it as this category of topics? It's like, where does it talk about parenting? And you turn to Ephesians 5 or somewhere else.

Where does it talk about marriage? Where does it talk about, I don't know, how I should conduct myself in work and making peace in relationships?

If we treat it like this encyclopedia of topics of how to live, I think we've got a danger there of using it to create our outside trappings of that good life.

The Bible doesn't, that's not what the Bible's about. There's another danger, that when we read it like that, all we hear is God telling us, you must do this.

[34 : 30] If you do it, it'll go well with you. That'll just put a, that's just going to put a burden on you. I don't think that'll give you rest if you treat the Bible like that. But, like we've heard in this story, something greater than David is here.

Something greater than the temple is here. Something greater than the law is here. Sinclair Ferguson talks about the Old Testament as a pop-up children's book.

It's like a, we see something concrete, the temple, so that we understand the reality once Jesus comes. I like that description. If we come to the Bible knowing it's all about Jesus, then everything we read will give us rest, because it expands our understanding of Jesus and his grace towards us.

It could be confronting, but if we come to it as about Jesus, then it gives us rest every single time. Come to it for the external, it'll be a burden.

Come to it internal, it'll refresh your soul every time. And the last thing I want to say is that whatever's going on in our circumstances, if Jesus, knowing him, gives us rest, then if you've already come to him, then we have rest now.

[35 : 51] It is here. We have it. We have it. We are guiltless before God. God couldn't love us any more than he already does.

We've got to remember who is now here. And he promises that full rest in his presence is coming. We don't have to have it right now in full.

We do have it internally, but the external is coming. We can wait for that. We don't have to have it now. It's coming. We don't have it.

We don't have it. We don't have it. Which I think sets us free to serve others and show them the rest that we have in Jesus. I really encourage you to read what Dave Cordard wrote about Rita on the bulletin.

Rita's enjoying that rest now. We'll join her in full in the resurrection, of course.

[37 : 01] She understood this inside out really well and demonstrated it well. So I think our desire this Christmas for this, to be at peace around the table with our family, I'm not sure if I'm right or not, but I wonder if that desire is actually a longing for this.

Heavenly rest as God's family around his table. I just wonder if we see it that way, then that just might help us at this point in time.

So let me finish with a question. How will you spend, let's just concentrate on this Christmas. How will you spend this Christmas working on that inner rest for yourself and for others who don't know the Lord of rest yet?

How will you pursue that inner rest for you and others rather than putting your trust in the external trappings? Will you pray with me?

Let's pray. Father, again, I ask you to press into our hearts what your word says to us.

[38 : 19] Please help us to see Jesus as Lord, Lord over all things, the circumstances we are in, that he is Lord over the external and the internal.

But we thank you that you prioritise the substance before you give us the trappings. Lord, help us not kick against you as you do that.

Help us to rejoice as you take away the external so that you can give us more of a vision of your son and your grace to us in the Lord Jesus. So thank you for your word to us this morning.

Please press it into our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.