

## Lesson 11 – Work on the Sabbath

Text: Matthew 12:1-21; Mark 2:23-3:12; Luke 6:1-11

Main Characters: God, Jesus, the Jews (scribes and Pharisees)

Key Passages:

- Matthew 12:7 – If the Jews had understood the basic commands, they would not have accused Jesus.
- Matthew 12:14 – The Pharisees began to plot to kill Jesus very early in his ministry.

Main Storyline:

One day in Galilee, Jesus and his disciples were going through grain fields on the Sabbath. As they were going through the fields, Jesus' disciples began to pluck some of the grain, rubbing the kernels between their hands so as to remove the husks first. When the Pharisees saw what the disciples were doing, they rebuked Jesus, "Look, your disciples are breaking the law of the Sabbath!"

Jesus answered the Pharisees, reminding them of when David had gone into the house of God to eat the showbread that the priest had given him (1 Samuel 21:1ff) which was only to be for the priests. David had also given it to those who were with him at the time. Jesus also pointed out that the priests "broke the Sabbath" (by "working," offering sacrifices), yet were considered blameless (Numbers 28.9-10). He told them that there was one there who was greater than the temple. Jesus said that if they had understood the meaning of the statement, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice," they would not have condemned the guiltless. He said, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." In all of this, Jesus was trying to help the Pharisees reevaluate their beliefs regarding the Sabbath while defending what the disciples had done.

On another Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue to teach. There was a man there whose right hand was withered (in other words, lame or atrophied). The scribes and Pharisees watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath. They hoped that, if he healed the man, they would be able to accuse him of breaking the law.

Jesus was not ignorant concerning their intentions; he knew exactly what the scribes and Pharisees were thinking and planning. Jesus called the man with the withered hand to stand up and come forward, and he obeyed. He asked the audience, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil? To save a life, or kill? Which of you, if you had one sheep and it fell into a pit, would not lift the sheep out it? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus looked around at the scribes and Pharisees, angry that they had such hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand," and the man's hand was restored like the other. The scribes and Pharisees were very angry because of what they had seen. They went out and immediately started trying to figure out a way to kill Jesus. They were so angry that they even included their enemies, the Herodians, in their plotting.

It is important to realize that Jesus and his disciples never broke the Sabbath law in any of these events. The Jewish rabbis of the day had taken the Law of Moses and elaborated on the rules in contained beyond what God had commanded. It was these traditions that Jesus was "guilty" of violating. However, the Jews failed to understand that God placed righteousness, goodness, and mercy over the performance of ritual for ritual's sake. If they had understood this, they would not have accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath.

Jesus, aware of the plot of the Pharisees, decided to leave the city and go to the Sea of Galilee with his disciples. There were so many people following Jesus that he told the disciples to have a small boat ready for him, in case he needed to escape from the crowds. He healed many people there, but told them not to tell others who he was. Matthew explains that this was done to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, that Jesus would care tenderly for the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:1).

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) God's laws are intended to promote righteousness, goodness, and mercy over ritualistic behaviors.
- 2.) We cannot let our desires or preconceptions prevent us from seeing the obvious truths of God.