

Matthew Chapter 12

Verses 1-9: "The Sabbath day" is the seventh day of the week, corresponding to our Saturday (Mark 2:23 – 3:6; Luke 6:1-11). However, it begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until the following sunset. The Pharisees had burdened the Sabbath with a multitude of detailed observances that were not laid down in the Mosaic Law.

In responding to their legalistic traditions, Jesus always referred to Scripture. "Have ye not read?" The passage referred to is 1 Sam. 21:1-6. The Lord makes the point that in the case of necessity the ceremonial law might be overruled.

He uses the illustration of David eating the "showbread." These loaves were placed on the table in the holy place in the tabernacle each Sabbath. They were to be eaten only by the priest and his family (Lev. 24:5-9; Num. 28:9).

The priests prepared the sacrifices on the Sabbath despite the general prohibition of work. If the necessities of temple worship permitted the priests to "profane the Sabbath," there was more reason why the service of Christ would allow a similar liberty.

Matthew 12:1-2 "At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat." "But when the Pharisees saw [it], they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day."

"Not lawful to do upon the Sabbath": Actually, no law prohibited the plucking of grain in order to eat on the Sabbath. Gleaning handfuls of grain from a neighbor's field to satisfy one's immediate hunger was explicitly permitted (Deut. 23:25). What was prohibited was labor for the sake of profit. Thus, a farmer could not harvest for profit on the Sabbath, but an individual could glean enough grain to eat.

These Pharisees were caught up in the law. They did not realize that the Word of God had taken the form of flesh, and this was He that was walking through the corn field. These Pharisees were so caught up in the "thou shalt nots" in the Bible, they had no time to do anything for God.

Matthew 12:3 "But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him;"

"He said": Jesus' answer (in verses 3-8), points out that the Sabbath laws do not restrict deeds of necessity (verses 3-4); service to God (verses 5-6), or acts of mercy (verses 7-8). He reaffirmed that the Sabbath was made for man's benefit and God's glory. It was never intended to be a yoke of bondage to the people of God (Mark 2:27).

Matthew 12:4 "How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?"

“The showbread”: The consecrated bread of the Presence, 12 loaves baked fresh each Sabbath, which was usually eaten by the priests only (Lev. 24:5-9). God was not offended by David’s act, done to satisfy a legitimate need when his men were weak with hunger (1 Sam. 21:4-6).

Matthew 12:5 "Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?"

“Profane the Sabbath, and are blameless”: I.e., the priests have to do their work on the Sabbath, proving that some aspects of the Sabbath restrictions are not inviolable moral absolutes, but rather precepts pertaining to the ceremonial features of the law.

You see, what Jesus was trying to get them to do was to understand the "spirit" of the law, and not the "literal" law.

Matthew 12:6 "But I say unto you, That in this place is [one] greater than the temple."

“Greater than the temple”: This was a straightforward claim of deity. The Lord Jesus was God incarnate – God dwelling in human flesh – far superior to a building which God merely visited.

Jesus was trying to explain that the building is not what we should worship. We are to worship Him with our spirit.

Matthew 12:7 "But if ye had known what [this] meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

“Mercy, and not sacrifice”: This phrase was commonly used as a rebuke for those who did not know something they should have known. The verse Jesus cites is (Hos. 6:6; 1 Sam 15:22; Mic. 6:6-8), which emphasizes the absolute priority of the law’s moral standards over the ceremonial requirements.

Matthew 12:8 "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day."

“The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath”: Christ has the prerogative to rule over not only their man-made Sabbatarian rules, but also over the Sabbath itself, which was designed for worshiping God. Again, this was an inescapable claim of deity, and as such it prompted the Pharisees’ violent outrage (verse 14).

You see, if they truly understood God, they would have realized who Jesus was and would have not criticized Him for anything. He was not subject to their ordinances.

Verses 10-27: “Withered” (shriveled): Luke 6 shows that this incident occurred on a different Sabbath. However, the objection of the Pharisees on this occasion was ultimately the same. They were in opposition to Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath. The reference to “their synagogue” (verse 9), indicates that in this particular synagogue the Pharisees were predominant.

**Matthew 12:9-10 "And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:"
"And, behold, there was a man which had [his] hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him."**

These religious people were trying to find some reason to get rid of Him. They knew that Jesus would not let the Sabbath keep Him from helping someone in need.

Matthew 12:11-12 "And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift [it] out?" "How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days."

He was telling these people, in a way that they could understand, what He was doing. They had sheep, and He knew that if they had a sheep missing, they would go and find him, even on the Sabbath. Jesus is our Shepherd, and we are His sheep. He takes care of His sheep.

Matthew 12:13 "Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched [it] forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other."

Obedience to Jesus brings restoration. This was the case here, as well. As soon as this man did what Jesus said, His hand was restored.

Matthew 12:14 "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him."

The Pharisee's were jealous. They had no power like this in their lives.

Matthew 12:15 "But when Jesus knew [it], he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;"

"He healed them all": In all of Old Testament history there was never a time or a person who exhibited such extensive healing power. Physical healings were very rare in the Old Testament.

Christ chose to display His deity by healing, raising the dead, and liberating people from demons. That not only showed the Messiah's power over the physical and spiritual realms, but also demonstrated the compassion of God toward those affected by sin.

Matthew 12:16 "And charged them that they should not make him known:"

"Charged them that they should not make him known": Here Christ seems concerned about the potential zealotry of those who would try to press Him into the conquering-hero mold that the rabbinical experts had made out of messianic prophecy.

These people would not accept the Savior, so He just moved on to others who would. The reason He did not want it told, was so He could work freely.

Matthew 12:17-18 "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying," "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles."

“Verses 18-21 are (quoted from Isaiah 42:1-4), to demonstrate that (contrary to the typical first-century rabbinical expectations), the Messiah would not arrive with political agendas, military campaigns, and great fanfare, but with gentleness and meekness, declaring righteousness even “to the Gentiles.”

Matthew 12:19 "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets."

“Not strive, nor cry”: The Messiah would not try to stir up a revolution or force His way into power.

Matthew 12:20 "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

“Bruised reed ... smoking flax”: The reed was used by shepherds to fashion a small musical instrument. Once cracked or worn, it was useless.

A smoldering wick “flax” was also useless for giving light. These represent people who are deemed useless by the world. Christ’s work was to restore and rekindle such people, not to “break” them. This speaks of His tender compassion toward the lowliest of the lost. He came not to gather the strong for a revolution, but to show mercy to the weak. (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Matthew 12:21 "And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Jesus will not force Himself on anyone, but when the religious Jews turned Him down, He turned to the Gentiles.

Matthew 12:22-23 "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw." "And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?"

These people knew Jesus as one of them. They thought He was only flesh and blood. They knew for sure that they could not heal this man. They did not realize whose presence they were in.

Matthew 12:24 "But when the Pharisees heard [it], they said, This [fellow] doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."

“Beelzebub”: After all the displays of Jesus’ deity, the Pharisees declared that He was from Satan, exactly opposite the truth, and they knew it (9:34; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15).

This was really a ridiculous statement. The devil would not cast himself out. He does not want us to be free.

Matthew 12:25 "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:"

The reasoning of the Pharisees (in Matthew 12:24), was not expressed verbally, and Jesus, knowing their thoughts, gave them here ample proof of his omniscience. This, with our Lord's masterly confutation of their reasoning, by a conclusion drawn from their own premises, one would have supposed might have humbled and convinced these men.

Mark 3:23 "And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan drive out Satan?"

"And Jesus knew their thoughts": He not only heard their blasphemous words, but was privy to their secret thoughts. He knew their vile malicious intentions and designs, with what view they expressed themselves in this manner, on purpose to reproach him.

And set the people against him, contrary to the inward light of their minds, and dictates of their consciences; who must, and did know the contrary of what they said: and regarding the inward frame of their minds, as well as their words, and which is a proof of his omniscience, and so of his deity, and consequently of his Messiahship.

But the most conclusive reasoning, and the most astonishing miracles, was lost upon a people who were obstinately determined to disbelieve everything good, relative to Christ. How true the saying, He came unto his own, and his own received him not!

A soul under Satan's power, and led captive by him, is blind in the things of God, and dumb at the throne of grace; sees nothing, and says nothing to the purpose. Satan blinds the eyes by unbelief, and seals up the lips from prayer. The more people magnified Christ, the more desirous the Pharisees were to vilify him. It was evident that if Satan aided Jesus in casting out devils, the kingdom of hell was divided against itself; how then could it stand!

Matthew 12:26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?"

If Satan is divided against himself; he acts contrary to his own interest, which is to keep possession of the bodies and souls of men; and consequently, it must in course, be subversive of his power and dominion:

"How shall then his kingdom stand?": He will never be able to maintain his authority, and keep up the show of a government, as he does: Our Lord's argument, and which is his first, for others follow, is, that since Satan, who is so cunning and crafty, can never be thought to act such an opposite part to himself.

Subversive of his kingdom and government; and which would give so much credit to Christ, and serve so much to strengthen his interest, as to assist him in the casting out of devils; the weakness, and maliciousness of such a suggestion, must be clear and evident to all.

Matthew 12:27 "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast [them] out? Therefore they shall be your judges."

It was evident that if Satan aided Jesus in casting out devils, the kingdom of hell was divided against itself; how then could it stand! And if they said that Jesus cast out devils by the prince of the devils, they could not prove that their children cast them out by any other power.

“Therefore they shall be your judges”: - They condemn you and your argument. They are conclusive witnesses against the force of your reasoning.

Christ was not satisfied by showing them the intrinsic absurdity of their argument. He showed them that it might as well be applied to them as to him. Your disciples taught by you and encouraged by you, pretend to cast out devils.

If your argument be true that a man who casts out devils must be in league with the devil, then "your disciples", and you who taught them, have made a covenant with him also. You must therefore either give up this argument, or admit that the working of miracles is proof of the assistance of God.

Verses 28-30: “The kingdom of God:” Matthew’s usual expression is the “kingdom of heaven” (3:2). Some have attempted to distinguish between the meaning of the two, but they likely mean the same thing.

“Is come unto you” (literally “has come upon you”): The Lord’s power over demons was evidence enough that He was the Messiah. Hence, “spoil his goods ... house”, refers to Satan as being defeated or ruined by the capture of souls from him for Christ by the gospel.

Matthew 12:28 "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."

“The Kingdom of God is come”: That was precisely true. The King was in their midst, displaying His sovereign power. He showed it by demonstrating His ability to bind Satan and his demons (verse 29).

He was warning them here, that they were speaking out against God.

Matthew 12:29 "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house."

The "strong man", is meant the devil (see Isaiah 49:24), who is powerful and mighty, as appears from his nature, being an angel, though a fallen one, excelling in strength.

This is another argument of Christ's proving that his casting out of devils could not be by Satan, but by the Spirit of God. For if he did not act by any superior power to Satan's, and such by which he was able to master, overcome, and bind him, he could never spoil his goods, as he did.

Or dispossess devils out of the bodies or souls of men: just as if a man should enter into another man's house, who is strong and robust, with a design to spoil his goods. Who would never make use of the man himself to do it, and can never be thought to effect it, unless he has a power superior to his, and uses it;

Matthew 12:30 "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

You cannot straddle the fence. You are either the friend of Christ, helping win souls to Him, or you are His enemy, driving people away from God. There is no middle road. We cannot go uncommitted.

Matthew Chapter 12 Questions

1. What day was it when Jesus went through the corn field?
2. What did the disciples do? Why
3. What did the Pharisees say about it?
4. The Pharisees are caught up in what?
5. What did David do when he was hungry?
6. On the Sabbath, the priests do what?
7. What is Jesus trying to get them to do pertaining to the law?
8. In verse 6, Jesus is greater than what?
9. Finish this statement. For the son of man is Lord _____
_____.
10. When Jesus left these men, where did He go?
11. Why did they ask Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath?
12. What animal did Jesus use to give them an example of why He healed on the Sabbath?

13. Jesus is our _____.
14. What brings restoration?
15. The author's assumption of what was wrong with them was they were what?
16. After the incident, when Jesus healed them all, He said what?
17. Why?
18. When they would not accept Him, what did He do?
19. Who prophesied about this ahead of time?
20. Jesus was tired of the stiff-necked church and turned to whom?
21. The people were amazed when Jesus healed the dumb man, why?
22. What was the Pharisees' statement about healing the dumb?
23. What did Jesus say to them to make them realize how ridiculous their statement was?
24. If this was the Spirit of God, what had happened?
25. What we do first, before we cast out the demon?
26. If you are not for Jesus, you are _____,
27. You are either the friend of Jesus or you are His _____.