

Questions for Matthew 12:1-21

For Bill Smith

1. Were Jesus and his disciples actually breaking the law or were they within their rights to pluck and eat corn on the Sabbath? (Verse 1)

Bill Smith: "They were not breaking any of God's laws. In fact Jesus in vs5 pointed out how the priest profane the temple and are blameless. Yes, these disciples were within their rights to prepare food for themselves. Duet. 23:24-25 actually allowed for a traveler, on any day, to eat their fill of grapes or grain from their neighbor's field. As our brother Austin pointed out last Sunday, it seems amazing the spies and effort the Pharisees put out trying to catch or trap Jesus in sin. This "corn" is actually thought to be barley or wheat, and as our brother Mike Criswell wrote, there were no fences in these days.

Boundaries were marked with stones and there were foot paths through these fields. It therefore would be quite easy for these disciples to reach out, strip a handful of wheat or barley seeds, roll the grain heads, winnow the chaff from the seed by blowing on it and eat the seeds that are left."

Levi Shaw: "The Pharisees often force very strict ruling upon the people, even rules and traditions that they made up. Jesus and his disciples were not in the wrong, rather it was the Pharisees just trying to trip up Jesus."

Loren Gorrell: "The disciples were not breaking the Sabbath law, verse 7 references them as guiltless.

Deut. 23:24-25 – Old testament Law allowed a person to eat grapes and grain from anyone's vineyard or field while passing through it. Picking and eating was not theft. Gathering for storage or sale was theft. By the same token it is reasonable to assume picking and eating to satisfy immediate hunger was not work that violated the Sabbath. Some commentators suggest that removing the wheat from the heads was considered threshing by the Pharisees equivalent to harvesting grain in a farming operation. In an effort to draw a hard definable line Jewish tradition had gone beyond the original intent of the Law."

Logan Shaw: "1. Of course, we believe Jesus is within his rights to do whatever he wishes, but to the Pharisees, this violates the law of labor on the Sabbath as plucking and cleaning the corn before eating it was considered "work". With this logic one might also consider getting out of bed or taking a walk as work, but it was considered work nonetheless. Jesus did not have a problem with it, as we will see in later verses.

For Hunter Smith

2. Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath law? Which law did they break? (Verse 2)

Hunter Smith: “The Pharisees were essentially grasping at straws with this accusation

against Jesus and His disciples. In trying to find some (or truthfully any at all) degree of fault with Jesus, the Pharisees made the accusation that they had violated the command to abstain from all servile work on the Sabbath. This was essentially the “why” as to their actions and the answer to the first part of this question. The “why” was to be able to have something to accuse Jesus and His disciples of- some degree of wrongdoing. Not being able to find any other wrongdoing or anything accusatory, the Pharisees leveraged this petty charge instead.

They “broke” the command to abstain from any servile work/manual labor as mentioned in Exodus 20:10; 35:2-3. As a reference, we may remember the account in Numbers 15:32-36 of the man gathering wood on the Sabbath who was ultimately stoned to death. This was their accusation and the context behind which the pharisees leveraged their claim, i.e. that any work was punishable, even something as simple as gathering wood for a fire or in their supposed case, plucking heads of grain and eating them. Interestingly, this exact situation is mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:25, where it says, “When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.” Any other day, this would have been entirely permissible but on a Sabbath day, there were those who had an issue with it. I think Coffman’s comments on this verse are an excellent answer to this question:

“This charge (against Jesus) was false. God's law did not prohibit the preparation and eating of food on the sabbath day. At the conclusion of the interview, Jesus referred to his disciples as "guiltless" (Matthew 12:5). It is true, however, that the disciples had violated a Pharisaical "interpretation" of the law; and such interpretations were held even more sacred by the Pharisees than the law itself. In the Pharisees' view, the disciples were guilty of threshing wheat! The Pharisees were out to "get" Jesus; and any charge was better than none.”

Bart Shaw: “Over the years, Rabbinic tradition had evolved a host of infractions that, allegedly, violated the law’s prohibition of work on the sabbath. The

Pharisees were obviously hoping to discredit Jesus by holding Him accountable for the conduct of his students.

The Torah legislated against 'work' on the Sabbath:

Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said to them, "These are the words which the Lord has commanded you to do: ²Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. (Ex 35:1-2)

One of these prohibited acts was "grinding," which, by Pharisaical false decree, the disciples actions would be perceived to be doing. Simply plucking and eating corn, however, was hardly that of harvest time grinding, as was considered in the Torah."

Austin Maddox: "They didn't break any of the laws of Moses, they were breaking the traditions that had been established. The Pharisees had gone so far in their rules and regulations that they considered what Jesus was doing to be work and therefore breaking the Sabbath. They had, however, everyone else convinced that what they were enforcing was the right way to do things. When Jesus starts to buck the trends that they had set, they had a problem with that, and it messed with their egos."

For Dennis Nilson

3. Why does Jesus use these 2 examples? Were the priests or David sinning in these instances? Why or why not? (Verses 3-6)

Dennis Nilson: "As was brought out so well in last Lord's Day's sermon,..the 10 commandments prohibited work on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11). That was the "letter" of the law. But the PURPOSE of the Sabbath was to rest and worship God. The priests were allowed to do work by performing their duties of preparing and offering sacrifices and doing necessary tasks to facilitate worship. This "work" they were doing was service to God. Jesus here is emphasizing the INTENT of the law. The meaning behind the letter. The Pharisees has lost the spirit of the law and were rigidly demanding that the letter (their distorted interpretation of it) be obeyed. Jesus was also kind-of saying,.. 'if you condemn ME,..you need to also condemn David. No,..David was not sinning as was pointed out in the lesson. The priest 'inquired' of the Lord (1st Sam. 22:10),..God granted an exception in this case. God was demonstrating His mercy in this instance toward David and his men,..considering their well-being more important than rigid adherence to the law. He was emphasizing discernment and compassion in enforcing the laws."

Loren Gorrell: “It seems that really 3 examples are in play in this teaching: David, Priests, and man with withered hand. If considered in that manner it is a three pronged rejection of the Pharisees rigid Sabbath traditions.

1. David: Some argue that David did not sin either because the human need of his men superseded the lawful use of the showbread, or that Ahimelech secured a one time exemption for David by consulting God (1Sam. 22:10). However, the most straight forward conclusion is David did sin by eating showbread. Jesus is pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who lauded King David, who in this instance flagrantly violated Sabbath law and holy food ordinances, while condemning the disciples who did not violate the law. So 1st point is Hypocrisy in the accusation.

2. Priests: The priests were not sinning. The priests were required to work on the Sabbath making offerings (Numbers 28:9) and baking (Leviticus 24:5). 2nd point some work must be done on the Sabbath, it was not as blunt as Pharisaical tradition tried to define the Sabbath.

3. See question 5.”

Austin Maddox: “These 2 examples that Jesus uses focus on God given exceptions to Sabbath rules. The first is that of David and the eating of the showbread on the Sabbath. The law stated in Leviticus 24:9 that only the priests were to eat of that bread. Also, a point could be made about the absence of scripture being authoritative. All the scripture said was that the priests were supposed to eat this bread, but that excluded everyone else from eating this bread and the Lord expected His followers that this was the lesson. Jesus points this out as well in this example. It wasn’t lawful for David to eat this bread, yet he did. Was David in sin? The answer is no. The reason that David was not in sin is because Ahimilech the priest inquired of the Lord for David and then gave him the victuals (1 Sam 22:10). This was a God approved exception to the normal Sabbath rule.

The second example is that of the priests. This is much easier to look at and understand as opposed to David’s example for us today. The priests were obviously doing work on the Sabbath because they are in charge of all of the sacrifices and burdens of keeping up the tabernacle/temple. Jesus points to them as examples that by their own rules, the very priests performing their actions would be sinners. God approved exceptions to the Sabbath rule for the sake of the priests so they could fulfill their duties, but his original law still stood in place.”

Bill Smith: “#1) David and his men did what was unlawful vs4. Jesus reminds the Pharisees that their great king had done what was unlawful and yet they approved it and revered David. The priest that profane by working in the temple business are considered blameless. By using these 2 examples, Jesus is showing the hypocrisy demonstrated by the Pharisees. He's also creating the comparison of Jesus and the Temple, and Jesus's disciples and the priest. #2) No, the priest had jobs to do in service to the Temple and the Lord understood that. David did not simply go in and eat the shewbread. Instead he asked the priest, who asked God if this could be done.”

Bart Shaw: “The Lord did not allow these arrogant, insincere Pharisees to usurp God’s place. With brilliant logic Jesus demolishes their criticisms. The first argument He uses involves the event where David ate of the tabernacle showbread which was ‘not lawful’ for him or his men to eat under normal circumstances. (Mt. 12:4; cf. 1 Sam. 21:6).

But what is remarkable was that the Pharisees did not condemn David, who was their hero. In this manner they were illustrating their own hypocrisy. David had (on the surface) ‘violated’ God’s given law. But the disciples had breached no more than Pharisaic, man made traditions. The Pharisees were actually concerned with their own power structure, not God’s law. Their insincerity was exposed.

Secondly, Christ ably demonstrated that even the Levites worked on the Sabbath without any guilt whatever (Mt. 12:5; cf. Num. 28:10). Their work was authorized by God. So too David’s eating of the showbread was authorized by God as Ahimilech consulted God to seek God’s mandate for the exception.

Neither David nor the Levitical priests had sinned against God. However, the Pharisees, conversely, were guilty of sin against God for their presumption pursuit of their own merciless standards.”

For Austin Maddox

4. What is the meaning of mercy in this context? What was Jesus asking these Pharisees to change their thinking about? (Verses 7-8)

Austin Maddox: “Jesus was asking them to incorporate mercy in their lives! They were people without mercy, insomuch that they were trying to condemn guiltless people! The meaning of mercy here is opposed to that of condemnation. This is a response to a Pharisaic attitude that was devoid of faith, justice and mercy as Jesus would later point out in Matthew 23:10. Jesus is not asking them to ignore God’s law or tolerate unrighteous behavior but provide mercy to their fellow man inside of God’s laws. Realize also, that God

has the ability to provide mercy in the sense of suspending His own rules and laws as He sees fit. We as human beings do not have such authority, so the mercy that we extend has to fit within God's framework. Mercy doesn't supersede God's laws, it coincides within them."

Loren Gorrell: "This a plea to remember the nature of the Law by referencing Old Testament verses in which this term is used.

Hosea 6:6 - For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Jesus says if you had known what this means. He is encouraging the Pharisees to know the nature of God and the nature of the law. Not to focus on ritual alone.

Another like verse references the futility of undiscerning ritual and states the nature of God and what He seeks.

Micah 6:6-8

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"

Bill Smith: "#1) Mercy here means a readiness to help those in trouble. Same usage found in Matt.9:13, which is the second time Jesus has told the Pharisees this quote from Hosea6:6.

#2) Possibly about their use of their man made laws, traditions, and commandments of the Jewish leadership. But I think the better answer might be found in vs6, where Jesus is trying to help the Pharisees see that there was one among them right then that was greater than the Temple of Jerusalem."

Bart Shaw: "The Pharisees had lost sight of their mission as God's representatives on earth. They were making it difficult to enter heaven by binding extra laws and responsibilities on those who would enter God's presence. They had perverted and twisted the Sabbath laws so that they were the 'gatekeepers' and would sit in judgment of anyone they perceived as lesser and inferior. They would arrogantly thank God that they were not like the publican. They would refuse to call the sinners to repentance because they imagined that they were beyond help and beneath them. They were haters and murderers who were alien to mercy:

Jesus spoke of them in Matthew 23:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ⁴ For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay

them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. ³¹ "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. ³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (Mt 23:2-4, 31-33).

The Pharisees did not know of the meaning of mercy towards one fellow man, and Jesus asks them to go and in humility find love for their brother."

For Matt Kudrna

5. How does Jesus prove that healing was a lawful thing to do on the Sabbath? Why were the Pharisees so opposed to this action and the actions in the verses prior? (Verses 9-14)

Matt Kudrna: "First, we need to look at what the law of Moses commands regarding the sabbath. The command in focus here is to do no work on the sabbath. Examples are as follows:

- Ex 20:10 – "but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."
- Ex. 31:14 – "Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people."

The Hebrew word for "work" is /melakah/, and it alludes to labor in the sense of employment or business. It does not seem to imply all physical activity or work, rather work that produces financial gain.

The Pharisaical tradition of the time elevated the appearance of piety above the intent of the law. They perpetuated this to the point that they would not even do the work of God on the sabbath. In fact, they mockingly ask Christ if it is lawful to heal on the sabbath. Their binary way of thinking forced them into this dichotomy of choosing between keeping the sabbath and healing. Jesus would explain that the two are not in contradiction.

Using logic, the Lord asked the crowd if they would rescue injured or endangered livestock on the sabbath. Of course, this question was rhetorical and has an obvious answer. No one would allow that animal to suffer on account of the command to "do no work" because that is not at all what is implicated in the command in the first place! The sabbath was designed as a time to reflect on the goodness of God and to worship Him. Why would God reject an act of kindness or righteousness on the sabbath? The answer is He would not. Was Jesus working on the sabbath? Yes, but not in the sense that is condemned by the scriptures. Jesus was doing the work of God, which as a general rule, is always allowed."

Dennis Nilson: “He begins by exposing their hypocrisy through the rhetorical question,..what man among you will not save his own sheep by pulling it (work) out of a pit? So by this He is inferring that the Pharisees (who are very willing to deny this man a healing and let him continue to suffer because of their distorted interpretation of the law). When a situation directly benefits them,..they will not hesitate to 'break' their own rigid rules concerning what is and is not acceptable to do on the Sabbath. Also scripture state plainly states their intent was to 'accuse Him' even if falsely in their effort to silence Him and or get Him out of the picture.”

Logan Shaw: “Jesus uses the value an animals life has as an example here. Similar to how in Luke 12 Jesus uses an animal to illustrate a point about the value of human life. If you would save a sheep from falling into a pit on the sabbath, why wouldn't you do the same for a brother? They were angry as they're hypocrisy had been revealed. Jesus also compared their actions with the old law and found them to be not in line with each other.”

Loren Gorrell: “This is Jesus’s 3rd point of reasoning to the Pharisees who were putting extreme emphasis on the Sabbath to the detriment of other considerations.

Ex 23:4-5 & Deut. 22:4 These laws required a person to help a distressed beast owned by either a neighbor or even an enemy. One could not simply ignore the need of these animals or the potential loss to their owners. The tradition of the Pharisees based on this principle allowed a person to aid their own animal but only one.

Jesus reasoned with them a person is more valuable than an animal. Therefore it is certainly lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath. Consider the wording of this event in Mark 3:4 is it lawful to save a life or kill on the Sabbath. We see Jesus balance the requirement to do good, by aiding a person in immediate need, to the duty under the Old Law to keep the ordinance of the Sabbath.

3rd point the Sabbath requirement does not negate the requirement to do good.”

For Loren Gorrell

6. Explain how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy with his actions here. (Verses 15-21)

Loren Gorrell: “ It shows the Messiah was not a conquering warrior as many wanted, but a guiding, helping, loving leader. He will not cry out – not loud and

boisterous. Bruised reed He will not break – will not snuff out the weak and hurting but help them and seek justice for them. Not only Jews but also Gentiles will follow Him”

Levi Shaw: “I think this refers to the messianic secret, and how Jesus told everyone to keep quiet. Jesus isn't trying to put on a big show. He knew it wasn't God's will to yell on the streets of all his miracles in these circumstances.”

Logan Shaw: “Jesus was humble and plain. Seeking not the immediate attention and spotlight of the Jews and Pharisees. Instead he came to spread the word, save souls, and through that come to power and be recognized by his believers as the messiah. "He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.”

Bart Shaw: “There was no hint of insincerity in Jesus. He was no a brawling politician swaggering about with empty boasting and vain words. He was not a rabble rouser ringing the political cow bell to draw rowdy young men to His side to cause trouble and create factions.

He spoke the truth in love to all who would hear Him. He was gentle to those who were humble, kind to those who were small in their own eyes, and of sweet disposition to those truly seeking God. He did not bruise the broken reed, or quench the smoking flax. If a meek person sought Jesus, He would meet them in the way. In other words, as He says in the sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”

Austin Maddox: “Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by not staying and fighting these pharisees. He was removing himself from the equation. This shows a great amount of wisdom and strength. We would think that he would have every right to defend himself because he had done nothing wrong, you would think that these bullies needed to be shown a lesson that they wouldn't forget! Instead, Jesus fulfills Isaiah's prophecy by not striving or crying till he sent forth judgment in victory! He left it in the Lord's hands and at the same time was in complete control of the situation. This goes against many of the lessons that we learn as Americans. We are expected to have that pride within ourselves that will never back down from a fight or a challenge. Jesus shows that there is more than one

way to win. It's not through fighting and striving, it's through the judgment that is to come that will result in our victory!"