

Matthew 12:1-21

“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.’ But he said unto them, ‘Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him: how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, but only for the priests? 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? But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple. But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.’ And when he departed thence, he went into their synagogue: and, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And when they asked him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?’ that they might accuse him. 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 more then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.’ Then saith he to the man, ‘Stretch forth thine hand.’ And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like the other. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and charged them that they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [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. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. And a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.’”

Introduction: There Are People Who Do Not Understand The God That They Serve

As we study what we're going to in Matthew 12 this morning, we'll see that there are people in our text, which has been true today throughout history, that do not understand the God that they serve. And because they don't understand him, and they've lost perspective of who he is, Jesus is there seeking to teach them and instruct them about his heart, and about what God is really like. We'll see in our passage, and it's true today, some people don't want to accept God for the way he is, because that's just not what they want God to be like. And so they want to rationalize a little differently. And that's what these people do, they don't want God to be that way. They want God to be another way [i.e. they want a harsh, judgmental God, because that's the way they are, in reality, that's the bottom line]. But that doesn't change who he is. But yet they have their opinion, just the same. [But their opinion doesn't live up with the Word of God.]

God Desires That We Be Merciful, And That We Would Truly Know Him---So What Is God Really Like?

You know, as we see in the Scripture, it is absolutely vitally important that we do know God and we know him accurately. It effects the way that you live. The view that you have of God, the way that you understand he thinks and reasons and what he desires, it tremendously impacts the way that you live. In Hosea chapter 6 God's speaking to the prophet Hosea. You know, as you go down to verse 6, Jesus is going to quote this verse in our text, in response to some people that really are clueless about what God thinks and what he's like. If you remember in our study in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus was hanging out with some sinners and some publicans, tax collectors, and as he was hanging out with them, there were those that were around him, the religious group there that thought that he was way out of line to be doing that. And at that time he quoted from here, **Hosea chapter 6, verse 6**, he's really trying to make a point, **'You just don't get it, this is the way God is, and you're just missing the point,'** as he says to these particular people. He'll say **"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,"** referring to the heart of God, and what God wants to see in us too. But then, what Jesus doesn't quote, and I like to begin with it, the second part of **verse 6**, **"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than**

burnt offerings.” God says through his prophet, what he wants to see is not so much a religious trip, a religious deal that you are righteously pious or whatever, that you attend Sunday [or Sabbath] school and church and have all these things down, you have the religious dress and the religious speech, that’s not what he desires. He says **“I desire mercy,”** and it’s a heart, it’s his heart. That you have his heart, because you know him and you’ve been hanging out with him, and then you share his heart. **“For I desire mercy,”** and also, he says **“I desire that you have the knowledge of God.”** That knowledge, the word “knowledge” that means in an experiential way, a practical way, it’s not theologically. He’s not saying “that I desire that you have your good theology,” which is good to have, an accurate theology. But what he desires is that you know your God, that you know him passionately, that you walk with him personally. It isn’t what you’ve been told, it isn’t just now and then, it is that you absolutely know him because you walk with him and you hang out with him, just as you would if you hang out with some public figure for thirty days on his ranch, and then you come back and say *‘Let me tell you something about this guy.’* But that you are with God intimately, growing in your relationship with him. It’s all about God, and it’s all about a relationship with him. Maybe you grew up with a certain understanding, because of what you were taught, because of maybe even the school you attended, and professors you had in college, or things you’ve been reading in books and media, and you’ve just been turned off to God, you think he’s whatever he is, which he is not. But here you are today, for whatever reason, God says through the prophet Hosea in **Hosea chapter 6, verse 1, “Come and let us return to the LORD.”** and then he goes down to **verse 3, “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.”** Let us know him, let us get to know him, and let’s pursue greater knowledge and understanding of who he is, and that we truly know our God.

The Lord Of The Sabbath Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice

Matthew chapter 12:1-8, “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, ‘Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’ But he said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how

he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place is *One* greater than the temple. But if you had known what *this* means, *'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,'* you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath." [Comment: for an interesting article showing all the places where Jesus kept the Sabbath, which demonstrates his feelings toward how it should be observed, not in any sense legalistically, see: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/wwcofg/Has%20the%20Sabbath%20Been%20Abrogated.htm>.] Jesus now is heading through a field, walking, journeying with his disciples. And you see there in verse 1, as he does, going through the grainfields, it's the Sabbath-day. We learn from the other Gospels it's the springtime. And he, as he's walking, his disciples go along with him, they are hungry it says. And because they are hungry they want to eat. So they began to pluck the grain that is there in the field, and they began to partake in that. It says in Luke, that not only do they pluck it, they began to take it in their hands and rub it, which was a way of threshing the wheat in the sense of separating the chaff from the wheat, and then you would blow on it, and have what's left that edible part. So they began to do that. Now according to the Scriptures, you can even turn with me if you wouldn't mind, turn to **Deuteronomy chapter 23, verse 25**. According to what God had given the people of Israel, God has a certain heart towards the needy and towards the widows and orphans, he even said, ***'When you reap the fields, leave some behind, don't reap the corners, but leave it there for those in need.'*** And he also said this in **verse 25 of chapter 23**, ***"When you come into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbour's standing grain."*** The point being, God even said in the Law that when you travel the roads, they didn't have cars and drive-thru's like we do now, you know, you couldn't just pull up to a McDonalds. If you're traveling on a journey, a path through a field, and as you're traveling, if you haven't eaten a lot and you're famished, you could according to the Law of God in the nation of Israel, you could right there in that field, you could pluck some of the grain and thresh it and have a meal right there. But what you couldn't do, is you couldn't take your tools in there and take a harvest, and load up the wheelbarrows and go off. But you could take enough, right

there, to eat. So it's legal to do that. It was according to the Law that you could do that. But notice back in Matthew 12, when the Pharisees saw it, they see them doing that, and they are just bent out of shape. They are totally bugged by it. **'Lord, your disciples, what in the world are they doing? Look what they're doing, what they are doing is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. It's not lawful for them to do that. That's against the Sabbath.'** Now, they understood, and they taught, the religious leaders, that you could actually, six days a week, do what God said in Deuteronomy. Although I don't know if you noticed, he [God] didn't give any, like, exceptions to it. He just said you could do it. But the religious leaders taught, you could do it Monday, well I guess Sunday through Friday on their calendar. But come the Sabbath-day, Saturday, you couldn't do it then. They taught that it was illegal, it was against the Law. God said to them, **'Here's the Sabbath.'** Now the Sabbath, as you study the Old Testament, in especially the New Testament we learn this, you know, the New Testament is the best commentary on the Old Testament. We look at the Old Testament today through the New. The Sabbath was intended to be a blessing to the people of Israel. It was truly a gift to them. As you read there in Exodus, God had given the Sabbath especially as a sign between them, the nation of Israel [all 12 tribes, at that time] and him, that they were to be set apart as a nation, they were to be holy, set apart. But as he said too to them, you know, **'I worked six days [in creation, Genesis 1-2] and rested the seventh, just as I did that, I want you to rest on the seventh.'** And there was this statement too in that, that there was as time to physically stop, life has been busy, to stop and just get focused on God, to consider him, during a day of worship, and just hang out with him in your heart, and get to know him. [And it is truly a blessing to do that on God's Sabbath, if your focus is to spend a day with God and not *'I shouldn't be working today,'* in the legalistic sense. I don't think you can detect that Jesus is putting a legalistic bias on Sabbath observance here in Matthew 12, not at all.] Just knowing the way we can be as people, we can get so busy with the physical, and all that we see in front of our noses, then we don't take the time and take the vertical and look to God and get to know him. So he had them take the seventh day, a day too of physical refreshment and replenishment, but especially spiritual. Now Jesus said, as Yahweh, as the pre-Incarnate Christ (cf. Exodus 3:13-15; John 8:58-59) that they were not to do any work on that day. And it was part of the Law (God's Torah Law). So that's the Sabbath. So now I come to Christ, and I rest from my works. [Comment: that is how we spiritually keep the Sabbath.]

The day for believers has not been done away with, but transformed to a spiritual rest we have in Christ. But we find that a huge dichotomy in belief about Sabbath verses Sunday observance exists within the greater Body of Christ. This dichotomy is explored in these two links: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/wwcofg/Has%20the%20Sabbath%20Been%20Abrogated.htm> and <http://www.unityinchrist.com/hebrews/Hebrews4-1-16.htm>. My very weird spiritual journey has exposed me to both sides of that dichotomy, as explained in the “About the Author” section of this site, at: <http://www.unityinchrist.com/author.htm> So the Sabbath was given with a certain heart and attitude.

Unbridled Legalism Over Sabbath Observance

Now the Pharisees got this word “work,” and these guys, as time went on, they just lost vision of who God was. The Sabbath was to be a blessing, but they made it a big works trip. They had their writings, the Talmud, interpretations of the Law. In fact, when they came to the Sabbath, in trying to discern what the Sabbath meant, and what “work” meant, they went on for 24 chapters. This Talmud was divided into two sections, one being the Mishna. In the Mishna the word “work” described 39 different areas of “work,” where if you did one of these on the Sabbath, you would violate the Sabbath. And I’m sure a lot of you who have been in church awhile, you’ve heard stories [like this one, sounds like some of the controversy I encountered within a Sabbath-keeping Church of God over the use of crockpots during the Sabbath, because it was kindling electric fire. Oh my. For one, the Sabbath is the first Holy Day, a Festival day, Feast day, mentioned in the 23rd chapter of Leviticus (verses 1-3). A feast day is when you would worship God on that day, and feast, which implies sumptuous meals and spiritual fellowship. Come on guys, stop being Pharisaic. And you see this same out-of-control in Orthodox Judaism today]. You know, they said ‘*This is work, if you carried more than the weight of something that weighed more than a fig, if you carried that on the Sabbath, that would be work.*’ So if you had two figs in your pocket, and you’re walking along on the Sabbath, you were guilty, violating the Sabbath. And that’s pretty significant, based on who had the authority to kill you over the slightest infraction (the religious authorities in Jerusalem). [That’s scary. Religious government, a theocracy, out of control and in the hands of man, no longer in the hands

of God, that was the situation there. You see a lot of this in the religious world today. The Puritans in Boston during the 1600s were like this, making the Massachusetts Bay Colony into a theocracy (not the Separatists in Plymouth). And Jesus, God in the flesh, was running headlong into that out-of-control authority. And it was not the heart of God, as the pastor is bringing out. These guys were beyond legalism, in that sense. The Sabbath was meant to be a time of joy and rest, like what was portrayed in the musical *"Fiddler on the Roof"*.] And so if your false teeth weighed more than a fig, too bad, too bad. They also said you couldn't look in the mirror, because if you looked in a mirror, you may get tempted to pluck one of your grey hairs. I get tempted to do that. [laughter] And if you looked in the mirror, and you plucked a grey hair, that was constituted as work. So you just violated the Sabbath. They said on the Sabbath you couldn't take a bath. [Funny, one of Boston's old 'blue laws' forbid taking a bath on Sunday.] Because if you took a bath, and the water, as you're moving around, enjoying, and it goes over the top and it got on the floor, that the floor would be cleaned by the water, and you're cleaning the floor then, so that's work, and you just violated the Sabbath. So they went on and on and on about what was work, and what you couldn't do. And what happened is, God came and said ***'I've got the Sabbath for you, rest, hang out with me, a blessing's been set apart for you, I just want you to just focus on me, you're to be holy.'*** God gave it to them for that, and the religious leaders, who do not know the heart of God [I might add, then and now] who do not know the heart of God, made it [and make it] into a huge works trip, huge big-time works-trip. The Sabbath became an excessive burden to the people of Jesus' day, as did the whole Law of God, because of these religious leaders. These religious leaders see the disciples doing something that is in *their eyes* a violation of the Sabbath, when it wasn't at all.

Jesus Tries To Show The Heart Of God

Jesus doesn't respond and try to defend and say *'Hey, these guys haven't done any work,'* he doesn't say that. Rather, he meets these guys where they're at, and tries to show them the heart of God, that they're missing the God that they serve. **"Have you not read about David,"** of course these guys have read about David, these guys are the religious elite, man, David, man, they spoke the word *'David'* in a certain way. You know, this David, ***'Haven't you read about David in the Old***

Testament, remember when David was hungry, he and his buddies there, they were fleeing from Saul? (cf. 1st Samuel 21) and they had gone on a journey, Saul wanted to kill David. And you remember, because they are famished, David came to the Tabernacle there, and to the high priest, and he said to him, Ahimelech, 'Hey listen, do you have anything to eat? Don't you remember that? Ahimelech the priest says, 'All I got is the bread, man, the bread for the priests.' Now according to the Law, that bread was holy, the showbread, and there would be 12 loaves that were replaced once a week before the LORD in the Tabernacle. But they were put out on display, the 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel, and they would keep them there for the week, and then on the Sabbath day they would take them out and replace them with fresh loaves. And the bread that was taken out, the priest could go and eat it in a particular place, along with the portions of meat that were given to them from the sacrifices, and it was considered holy, but they could eat it and their families could eat it, but nobody else could eat it. That's explicitly what the Law stated. But on this occasion David comes, and the priest says, **'All I got is the showbread,'** and David says, **'Well,'** and it probably was the Sabbath day, and a lot of the rabbis believe it was, although it doesn't tell us. David says, **'Well it's the showbread, it's been set aside, it's not holy in that sense anymore that it's there and set aside before the LORD, it's just there and not set before the LORD, it's been taken out.'** And so the priest says, **'So listen, have you guys been with any women?'** and David says, **'No we haven't,'** and the priest says, **'OK, you can take it.'** and that's basically the story, **'You can have the bread.'** Now there's no reference to any case, anywhere in the Old Testament that what David did was wrong. And so here's Jesus' disciples doing some eating, eating some food in a way that is considered to the religious elite unlawful, and he says **'Hold on, look at David, remember what David did? Now that doesn't look like it's lawful either, but no mention of it being unlawful, no mention of it being wrong.'** Jesus is using that to bring to light the heart of the LORD. God isn't some God whose legalistic, he's not a God that comes at you with the Law to beat you up, all formal, *'and this is the way it's done, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and even though you might have good intentions, you got out of bounds a little bit, he's gonna whack you,'* he's not like that. God's not legalistic. Jesus is God the Son, and he's showing what God is really like in these verses we're looking at today. But they, these religious leaders, completely misrepresented the LORD, and so Jesus is saying,

‘God is not that way. You know, the letter of the Law kills, and that’s what you guys are about, the letter, but it’s the spirit of the Law that gives life.’ Jesus gives them another example, **verse 5**, **“Or have you not read in the law how that on the Sabbath the priests in the Temple profane the Sabbath, and they’re blameless.”** And he goes a little further, talking about work on the Sabbath, ***‘You guys are on a works trip, but you know in the Law God says you shall not work, and you shall not profane the Sabbath, but then in the same Law God said to the priests, ‘Listen, on the Sabbath, here’s what you do on the rest of the week days, here’s your work-load, but on the Sabbath, I gotta pick it up a little bit, you’ve got twice as many sacrifices to do, you’ve got a ton of work to do on the Sabbath.’*** So Jesus is saying, ***‘Now hold on, you’re so pulled into this works thing, the letter. What about the priests? The priests work like crazy on the Sabbath, it’s their hardest day of the week, it’s their hardest day of the week, and clearly that is what God asked of them...maybe you’re missing the point about God, and about his heart, and about the way he works, and about even his intention with the Sabbath.’***

*‘You’re Hung Up On The Law, You’ve Forgotten God,
The One Who Created The Law’*

And he says, **verse 6**, **“Yet I say to you that in this place there’s one greater than the Temple.”** You’ll notice that a number of times he gives the comparison, that he is, he is King, he is The Priest, he is The Prophet. So here he’s saying, greater than the Temple, greater than the priesthood, by default, greater than all of that, he’s the High Priest, Jesus is our High Priest (cf. Hebrews 7) He is greater, he’s King of kings. He is greater because he’s the Creator of the heavens and the earth, he’s made it all anyway. And so these guys that are all bent out of shape because of the way he’s approaching the Sabbath, and allowing his disciples to have a meal, he’s saying to them, ***‘Dude, I’m greater, I came up with the idea. I’m the one who ordained this whole Sabbath thing. I’m the one who set the boundaries, and you’re telling me that I’m not doing it right? I set the rules here, guys. It’s my concept, my design. I’m greater,’*** he’s the Designer. [Jesus, Yeshua was the pre-Incarnate Yahweh, cf. Exodus 3:13-14; John 8:58-59]

What God Desires---Mercy, That We Be Merciful

Then he says in **verse 7**, **“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”** ***‘I desire mercy, I desire love, man. I desire the work of the Spirit. I desire mercy, mercy, the heart of mercy.’*** And he desires it because that is his heart. The heart of God is a merciful heart. In the Psalms you notice that sometimes, some Psalmists, worshipping God, some of the chapters, many of them, every other verse in the psalm they come back to **‘God, you’re merciful, your mercy endures forever, your mercy, your mercy.’** ***‘Your mercies are new every morning.’*** God is a merciful God. Jesus is saying to them, **‘If you had known that, then you’d know it too, you’d be that way too.’** That’s what God wants is mercy, merciful people. That’s the way he is. And then Jesus says, **“For the Son of man is LORD even of the Sabbath.”** He’s LORD even of the Sabbath, again he’s the guy who designed it. He’s the guy that came up with the whole idea. He is Lord even of the Sabbath. So, for that reason, he can do as he feels led to do, he can do all these things, he certainly knows what’s best, and is not in violation to what is intended through the Sabbath commands.

What Is God Really Like? God Is A God Of Mercy

Now **verses 9-14**, **“Now when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’---that they might accuse him.”** We learn in Luke that it’s his right hand that’s withered. Now when you compare it with the other Gospels, you find that there’s a little bit more to it, and you have to put it all together to get the whole story. But it appears, actually, that Jesus started this. He knew where they were coming from, he knew what they were trying to do. Maybe this guy was even planted in this synagogue, they’re trying to set him up. So he initially actually brings up the subject (in Luke), **“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?”** And then there’s a dialogue that goes back and forth, and then we have here in Matthew, they ask him the question. So you put it together, it’s a little bit of a dialogue going on. **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ They asked him that, that they might accuse him. Then he said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if he falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay**

hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against him how they might destroy him.” So he’s in this synagogue and there’s this guy with a withered hand. Now according to the religious elite, the Pharisees and Scribes of the time, they understanding the Sabbath and what constituted work and what didn’t, they believed that you could, if somebody was physically harmed, somebody had an injury, you could do just enough on the Sabbath to keep him alive, to get him over till the next day, the day after the Sabbath. But that’s all you could do. Now I don’t know about you, if I had a Pharisee for a neighbour and I got hurt, he’d be the last guy I’d call if it was the Sabbath day, because he’d come over, and if you were hurt badly, like bleeding profusely, he’d go *‘Well, here’s the towel, you know, hold it on there, apply pressure, I’ll be back tomorrow.’* That’s basically what he’d do. You could do that. But he couldn’t do anything to bring any sort of healing and make you better. That, according to the religious leadership, the Pharisees and Scribes, was a violation of the Sabbath law. And so Jesus goes right at it. Can you imagine a God like that? A God that would give you that type of law? That you’re here sitting in a car accident, bleeding profusely, and here comes the religious leaders, the guys that really know God well, and all they can do is, they leave you there on the side of the road, and give you maybe a band-aid, and say *‘I’ll be back tomorrow.’* I mean, can you imagine? [Jesus makes the same point in his story about the Good Samaritan.] Now, this man has a withered hand, so he technically, this is a set-up, he can wait till the next day. It’s not life-threatening. But you know, they set him up, because they know the heart of Christ. They totally despise it, they want nothing to do with it, but it’s the heart of God, it is the heart of God, and they’re actually turned off to it. They know, *‘If you put this guy there on the Sabbath, with his hand, this guy’s gonna be tempted to do something about it. So let’s see if we can set him up in a way that would break the Law [in their warped minds, that is].’* Well he says, **‘Listen,’** his response, **‘you guys, on the Sabbath day, if you had a sheep that fell into a hole, now come on, speaking of pity, you certainly would pull that sheep outa there. You know you would.’** Interestingly, in some of the rabbinical writings, they actually debated this very point, this point about *‘If my animal falls in the pit on the Sabbath, what should I do?’*

Initially, early on, it was, *'Well, we can feed it, throw some food down to the animal, you can do that. But you can't do any more.'* Then they continued to debate it and debate it, and for personal reasons I guess, probably, *'Ah, you can lift the bugger out of there, get the cat out, this is the cat, come on, you're not gonna leave him in the hole.'* Or whatever, the pet dog. So, Jesus says ***'You pity the animal for your own deal, but how much more valuable is a man than an animal? You don't pity this man. That's the point, you don't want to show love, compassion. You don't think God does either? Man, you're way off base on what you believe God is and God is not, that's for sure.'*** And so I would have loved to have been there, **verse 13**, he says to him, **"Stretch out your hand."** That would be cool, watching him do this kind of stuff. And the guy stretches out his hand, and vuala, there it is. And now these guys are ticked, they're totally ticked. They leave, the Pharisees, they go out, they plot against him, how they might destroy him. We learn in the other Gospels, they join up with the Herodians, the Herodians, these Jewish guys that kind of sided with the Roman government, who are like, just the enemies, really, rivals to the Pharisees. They go out, because they're so angry at Jesus, they team up with their political arch-enemies, and they conspire how to destroy him, how to kill him. Now there's a heart for you. He heals a guy, and in their eyes, he shows pity on the Sabbath, he violates the Sabbath [again, in their warped eyes], which is such an abomination to them that he would do it in this way, so they go out and plot how to kill him, which to me seems pretty evil too. So, blinded, these guys are so blinded, so hard-hearted. But you see, your God is good, God is good, he cares for the sheep in the hole, even on the Sabbath. Jesus cares for this man, he doesn't want him to suffer another day with it. Maybe it hurts. He just loves him, and yes, it's the Sabbath, yes, it's the rest, but we show good, we show pity, we show love, that's the heart of God, God is a good God. So these religious leaders misrepresented the Lord, they did not know the Lord. Maybe you're here today, and you've had the same experience [with religious leaders in some of the legalistic churches]. I mean, God has not been shown to you as someone who wants to do good. But we studied the Bible, and of course we've looked at the cross, and we see that God is a good God, and he loves to do good. Well these guys are ticked, man. They are just so blinded to God.

The Religious Leaders Are Plotting To Kill Jesus, So He Takes His Ministry Out Of The Public Eye

And then let's look at the last few verses we'll look at. **Verses 15-21, "But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all. Yet he warned them not to make him known, 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 will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, till he sends forth justice to victory; and in his name Gentiles will trust.' [Isaiah 42:1-4]

This time Matthew quotes Isaiah 42 and he uses a passage more so, it's the longest passage he pulls out of the Old Testament. And he does this with a purpose, but you see that Jesus as he hears about these religious leaders being upset, he withdraws from there. And that's kind of a foretaste of where we're going, because there's a time-clock for when Jesus is going to go to the cross, there's an ordained hour. And so the religious leaders, they're going to start really planning on killing Jesus from here on out. So he kind of goes into, you could say, into a secret sort of ministry, he stays away from the direct public eye. He ministers to multitudes that follow him around, though. Here he has these guys all bent out of shape, and they want to kill him, and he knows that. Yet what does he do? He sees the hurting people and he keeps ministering to them. He heals a ton of them, heals them all. It just tells you, he wants to do good and bless everybody's life. But he warns, ***'Don't let it be known, because, here's the deal, these guys are out of control.'*** And so then, Matthew now as he's penning this, this former tax-collector whose only experienced the grace and goodness of God, kindness of the Lord, he now writes and includes, ***'Hey, he goes into secret, he doesn't get into a big boxing match with these guys, and this is according to the prophecy of the Servant, the Messiah, found in Isaiah 42, 'Behold my servant, I've chosen him, my beloved, I love him, in whom I am well pleased...'*** It says in **verse 19, "He will not quarrel nor cry out,"** meaning, he will not put up the

dukes, he's not going to get in this big defense and argument, trying, trying to prove himself in this verbal debate. I mean, he'll make a stand and move on, but he's not going to quarrel or cry out. That's what those words mean. **"nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets,"** so he's going to go on the back paths, hanging out with people that go with him there. That prophecy again, was fulfilled.

Jesus Came To Serve And Heal

And then notice, **verse 20, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench."** Commentators take that differently. I lean towards, which is probably the most prominent way to look at this, and I think the context bears that out, and that is, a bruised reed, you know, some of the reeds along the Jordan or even the Nile river, when they would bend over, certain types, they get a bruise, what seems to be a bruise. A bruised reed he will not break, meaning something that's already bent over and hurting, he's not going to come and go *'Whack! It's useless, break it.'* And a smoking flax, you know, the little flax there in a candle, it's just smoke. He's not going to come and quench it and snuff it out. And the point being, it's the way he is, as the servant, he comes to serve [not destroy]. Somebody's broken, somebody's hurt, somebody's bruised, somebody has just pain in their life, he doesn't come and stomp on them, just trample you, he doesn't come that way, he's a servant. And he comes with a kindness to him. A smoking flax, I mean, you're dying, the juice has gone out, spiritually you're just dried up and at a really difficult point, he doesn't go and put out the flame. Instead he kindles it and gets it going and gets you back in the deal again, and just passionate about him and walking with him. **"Till he sends forth justice to victory."** Well, given all that, the point is, victory is coming. he comes as a servant, **"and in his name Gentiles will trust."** (verse 21) You know, today, maybe God wants to remind you, maybe you've been out of church, you're sitting there for awhile, maybe you've been here awhile. And you know, it's about knowing God for who he truly is. And as we are reminded in our verses today, God is an understanding God. And if you don't think he's understanding, then draw near to him, and he'll draw near to you, and you'll learn indeed that God is an understanding God. [Condensed down from a connective expository sermon on Matthew 12:1-21, given somewhere in New England.]

Related links:

To see everywhere Jesus kept the Sabbath, and how he observed it, see

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<http://www.unityinchrist.com/hebrews/Hebrews4-1-16.htm> and

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