

## Matthew 12: 1-21 Sermon Tregear 4.7.2021 – The Servant and Lord of the Sabbath

Did you enjoy the video? That was from last week's episode, they just happened to be doing the exact passage that we read about in Matthew 12. But you might have noticed they changed the two Sabbath incidents around – not sure why.

How have you gone with the lockdown? How have the kids gone, for those of you who've had kids at home? Well, if you're looking for things to do, you could watch *The Chosen* – it's a great insight into Jesus and the disciples.

As you saw the video and heard the Bible reading do you sense how the tensions are rising? Jesus is making waves – Everyone's asking, "Who is this man?"

As we read this passage, remember it's like Matthew is writing his memoirs. He's looking back at Jesus' life; how can he capture 3 years of amazing experiences in a few pages of his book? What will he include... and leave out?

If you've been watching *The Chosen* then you would have seen that the Sabbath or Shabat as the Jews call it was a very significant day each week. It reminded them that they were God's people and how he had rescued them over the years; that he was their God. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest – a day to remind ourselves amidst the busyness of life who we are and what we are doing on this earth.

Our passage opens with 2 stories of Jesus being challenged about what he and his disciples were doing on the Sabbath. The first story begins with the disciples very hungry and picking some heads of grain, rubbing it in the hands to remove the outer husk and then eating the grains. There was nothing wrong with that but there was a Pharisee law which forbade doing this on the Sabbath. The law was there to stop Jewish people from work, work, working – they needed to rest, to be refreshed. So Jesus doesn't dispute that this isn't a law. But what he does is retell a story from Jewish history and also gives a modern day example. Firstly, the

story involving David almost 1,000 years before. David was not king yet, although he had been anointed by Samuel. David was on the run from the king at that time, Saul, who wanted to kill David. When David and his followers arrived at the house of God at Shiloh (remember, there was no Temple in Jerusalem at this time) they were given the special, holy bread to eat that normally only the priests would be able to touch.

The second example is about the priests who right there and then did the sacrifices at the Temple on the Sabbath, working on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, in fact, there were twice as many sacrifices made so that was more work.

Jesus could have just said, “Look we were hungry and we just needed a little bit of food.” But he wants to help them to understand who he is – in doing this he’s raising the stakes a lot higher. The example of David is of the greatest King of Israel, remember the Messiah would be the Son of David, a descendent of David. Here is David going to God’s holy house to ease his hunger and then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> example here are the priests not keeping the Sabbath doing their work in God’s holy house, the Temple.

Ok, then Jesus says three things which will really upset the Pharisees: 1. Something greater than the Temple is here – he’s saying I matter more than the Temple; I am greater than the temple 2. He quotes the Old Testament prophet Hosea who says God desires mercy, not sacrifice – and Jesus adds, if you really knew these words then you wouldn’t be condemning the innocent, that is, the disciples. Mercy is more important than just meeting legal requirements 3. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. David, whom you all admire could eat the bread only meant for the priests. Well, there is someone greater than David here, the Son of Man. Like his earlier statements in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is claiming authority as “the Son of Man” a phrase which again picked up some prophetic words in Daniel. Jesus is saying “I am Lord of the Sabbath.” I matter more than the temple and I, like my Father, require mercy.

No wonder there is conflict with the Pharisees. They saw themselves as the guardians of the laws, making sure that people kept the law. And they also saw themselves as the guardians of

the Temple worship. And Jesus is saying that he is more important than the Temple and he has authority over the Sabbath.

Who does he think he is? The Messiah or something.

The second Sabbath story is of a healing. This time Jesus is doing the “work” of healing on the Sabbath. Can you see the ridiculousness of their question? Is it wrong to do a good thing like healing on the Sabbath? What? What are the two great commandments – Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself. If you could bring healing on the Sabbath wouldn't that please God. And if its God doing the healing anyway and it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath God wouldn't heal. But Jesus reveals the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. When Jesus healed the man, he didn't break the Sabbath law but he did break the Pharisaic code. The Mishnah, which was the collection of all the Pharisaic laws, taught that you could only give medical help on the Sabbath if a person's life was in danger. This man's was clearly not. So Jesus takes on the Pharisees who allow the rescue of a sheep that has fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day but not the rescue of a human being. The Pharisees are determined to do nothing in order to honour the Sabbath: but Jesus is determined to do good. It is clear that a major clash is brewing. In fact the Pharisees go away and determine that they are going to kill Jesus.

What is the message for us? Are we lovers of customs, things must be done this way, in our church, rather than lovers of Jesus and people? What's more important, that we do church the right way or that we love others? Do we desire mercy rather than things must be done in a certain way?

But also let's remember, Jesus IS the Lord of the Sabbath, in fact, the Lord of everything. He's even the lord of the lockdown. Can I survive the lockdown? Can I even find life and fulfilment in the lockdown? If I am IN Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, yes I can, no matter where I am.

As Jesus now withdraws from the big centres Matthew tells us how Jesus tried to keep the excitement about himself on a low level. He's telling people not to tell others about him. It's a

reminder to us that Jesus knew why he had come to earth – it was to die. It wasn't to use his powers to be a great healer or, in the world's eyes, a powerful leader. No, it was to die. So Matthew reminds us of the prophecy from Isaiah, 600 years before – the prophecies of the servant. Matthew is a Jew and the accounts of “the servant” in Isaiah were incredibly significant for the Jews. Here he is quoting from Isaiah 42:1-4. He is reminding us that Jesus is the Servant that was described by Isaiah and applying it to how Jesus is revealing himself.

As we look at Jesus here, we see him surrounded by pressures. We've just seen the Pharisees were wanting to kill him; people are badgering him to heal them, cast out spirits; to be with them in their every need; the disciples and his followers don't really understand what he's doing; and Jesus knows where it's all leading. But still he goes on.

The Servant of YHWH, the servant of God, is a strange figure in Isaiah: one who will bring God's blessing and justice to the world – the task which, earlier in Isaiah, was assigned to the Messiah, the coming King. But how is the Servant going to accomplish this task. Not by bullying and scolding Israel and the nations, or by threatening and fighting. No, he's going to do it with a quiet and gentle word of healing, bearing the love and grace of God to the dark parts of Israel and the world.

Matthew is writing some years after Jesus lived on earth and as he reflects back over Jesus' life he knows where it will lead – it will lead to the cross. He recognises that Jesus is the Servant prophesied, not only when he dies a cruel death, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, but also in the way in which he was doing things already in Galilee. He was going about bringing God's restoration wherever it was needed, not by making a fuss, but by gently leading people into God's healing love. I love the picture of the Servant in v.18 – God, the Trinity God, says *Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight.*” Does that ring a bell? Matthew chapter 3:16 – *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* God the Father is using the same words of Isaiah 42

as he speaks to Jesus. We have a little glimpse into the heart of the Father as he gazes down at his Son, the Servant, his heart bursting with love. We will never really know the depths of his love for the Son, but it is the same love that he has for me and for you. What an amazing God we serve and worship together!!

And the Servant is so different from other leaders. He *“will proclaim justice to the nations”* but there is no violence or arrogance in his actions – *“he will not quarrel or cry out”*. In fact, Isaiah says, *“No one will hear his voice in the streets”*. Note what Jesus does in v.16 – Hey you guys who I have just healed, *“Don’t tell others about me.”* There are people out to kill me; there are people who want to snuff me out. But the people who Jesus heals say, *“Jesus I haven’t walked for 30 years, this is amazing. I want to tell everyone.”*

How does he treat people – with gentleness. There are those who want to get ahead in the world, who would push others out of the way. They see a *“bruised reed”* and they will squash it, break it. They see a smouldering candle, it’s almost gone out – they will trample it without a thought. But that’s not the Servant’s way. The Servant is the very opposite of the powerful and the arrogant. He won’t break the weak; he won’t snuff out the smouldering wick. Yet, in his gentleness, in his mercy, in his love, in fact *“in his name the nations will put their hope”*.

Where is our hope? If you’ve started this morning with a heavy heart; if you’re hurting because of a strained relationship; if you’re in physical pain; if you’re worried about your family members; if you’re not sure what this pandemic means for our future and how long it will last, will it ever end, the Servant is the one in whom you can put your hope. *All the nations put their hope in him.*

We are part of the story of the Servant; the Servant has come as the suffering servant but also, the victorious servant – the one who has conquered death, sin and Satan. As Janet reminded us last week: in Romans 8:35: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Or lockdown or pandemic...<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[k]</sup> neither the*

*present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Servant comes to you this morning and reminds you that he is with us and he will bring his gentle healing touch wherever it is needed. The Servant reminds us that he is Lord of the Sabbath and we as his people are to act kindly and gently with others, we are to love others; we are not to put our rules and regulations or customs above doing good and showing mercy.