

Matthew 12.1-21

Clint Le Page

Main Point – Jesus brings us to the true Sabbath rest, so put your hope in him and do good

Maybe you're watching the online service this morning on your couch, and enjoying not having to get up n' ready and out the door to come to church.

Maybe it's nice being able to watch the service with your coffee or brekky, and not having to push yourself to talk to other people?-----

Or maybe you are watching alone, and you grieve not being with n' talking with others.

Maybe you're flat and discouraged, and another week of online church doesn't help.

Or maybe you miss the chance to meet with your church family, sing God's praises together, hear others sing; miss hearing God's word and encouraging one another in person.-----

God gives us rest so we can be refreshed but also so we can do good.

And lockdown makes that hard in many ways.-----

But today Jesus reminds us he is Lord, he wants us to seek others' good, and to put our hope in him.-----

Sometimes it's especially important to remember the original text of the Bible didn't come with chapter divisions, so there's no big division between ch11 and 12.

Jesus had just spoken about how we can come to him and find rest.

As we learn from him we find rest for our souls.-----

And that's the important background to ch12.

Because remember the Sabbath is the 7th Day (our Saturday), and comes from a Hebrew word meaning rest or ceasing from work.

That's because God made the world in 6 days then on the 7th day he ceased from creating(**SLIDE**) and 'rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.'

The Sabbath day of rest comes from creation.-----

And God's intention was that Adam and Eve could rest from their work in the Garden, in God's presence, on that Sabbath rest.-----

Then in the 4th Commandment, **Ex 20,(SLIDE)** God tells the people to 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: ⁹You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work...¹¹For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day.'

The 10 commandments in **Deut 5** also says the Sabbath is to be observed because God rescued them from slavery; God saved them to serve him.-----

So, the Sabbath was a life enhancing provision, that remembered the rest God had given Israel, in redeeming them from slavery.

The Sabbath was meant to be a taste of life in the garden.-----

The question was, if the day's about rest, what should you do or not do?-----

And in this dispute of what's acceptable to do on the Sabbath, **Jesus declares he is 'the Lord of the Sabbath',(SLIDE) our first point.**-----

12v1, on the Sabbath, Jesus' disciples are hungry and they pick and eat grain from the fields as they walk.-----

These men were plucking.

They weren't farmers doing illegal harvesting work on the Sabbath, or cooking food.

For Jews the Sabbath was a day for eating Friday's leftovers 😊

But the Pharisees see it n' have a go at Jesus... 'your disciples are doing what's not lawful on the Sabbath'.-----

Jesus' followers were not disobeying God's O.T. law.

But Jewish oral tradition added many other rules on top of God's word, and the disciples disobeyed these man-made **traditions**; which was still serious.-----

It was said about the Sabbath, the scripture is scanty, but the rules are many.-----

And as Jesus reveals, the Pharisees not only had too many rules, but had the wrong idea altogether.

So Jesus brings them back to the Scriptures with 2 examples.

First he says, remember David, when he n' his men ate the bread of the presence. **(SLIDE)** Those 12 loaves, a food offering to the Lord, which only the priests were meant to eat, according to Leviticus 24[v9].

Jesus is teaching from the lesser to the greater.

If David in **1 Sam 21** is not condemned for that, then know that one greater than David has come. The new David, a greater King, is bringing something new.-----

Jesus is greater than David, and his mission of saving people all over the world, bringing them into God's presence and rest is greater.-----

Jesus' second example is from **Num 28.9-10**, and the priests effectively working on the Sabbath.

For they'd offer lamb sacrifices, grain and drink offerings to God.

In a sense they broke the Sabbath by working, but God permitted it.

They were not guilty.

For the bigger purpose of the Sabbath law was about love for God and love for others, which continued on Sabbaths.----

But again, **v6** something or someone greater than the temple is here.

God is here. God's presence in Jesus is greater.

And Jesus brings his people into God's presence, and rest and blessing in ways far greater than the temple ever could.----

Jesus' divinity qualifies him to act differently from their traditions.-----

V8 Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.-----

As Daniel 7 promised, The Son of Man has all authority.

He has supreme authority over the Sabbath.

In fact he has dominion over creation, redemption, and the interpretation of the Scriptures.---

He can modify divine ordinances.

He can declare God's rules for observing the Sabbath.

He shows the true meaning of the Sabbath.

He will show shortly it is about a restored and full life.

More than that Jesus' death and resurrection brings us into that full life, and the presence of God forevermore.-----

The Sabbath was given to enrich life, not ruin it.

Not just for you but for others.-----

Jesus shows us here the real goal of the Sabbath law is love – for God and others.---

So it's a day for showing mercy; compassion; love.-----

Jesus says to the Pharisees, if you'd understood God's word in **Hos 6.6**, '**I desire mercy and not sacrifice**', you would not have condemned the innocent.-----

As we heard in the kids talk, 'mercy' is showing kindness to someone who needs help.

And we need God's kindness, we need Jesus to show us mercy, don't we?-----

And when we've understood the heart and character of the God, when we've accepted Jesus' mercy, we'll respond differently to the Pharisees.

Because sacrifices, ritual observances, religious rule keeping alone doesn't please God.

What matters most to God is love, us showing compassion, kindness.-----

When I think of kindness I think of the movie **UP(SLIDE)** and Russell's kindness to grumpy old Mr Fredricksen.-----

Or recently I watched a movie called, **Our friend(SLIDE)**.

Based on a true story, Nicole receives a terminal cancer diagnosis, and she, her husband Matt and their kids are overwhelmed and struggling just to live.

Her friend Dane sees their need and mess, and he comes to help out for a couple of weeks but ends up staying.

He gives up his life really, to move in and care for the family:

school runs, cleaning, cooking, washing; patience, listening, care.

It was a moving example of kindness.-----

And kindness to someone in need is what we see next in Matt 12.

**Point 2, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and he says, it's a day for doing good.---
Like him, Do good.-----**

The Sabbath wasn't a day to be focused on rule-keeping, but honouring God, which included doing good.

This day for physical and spiritual rest, for honouring God and assembling with his people [Lev 23.2], had been twisted by legalism.-----

Jews would attend the synagogue each Sabbath to hear God's word, sing and pray.

And Jesus has attended the service, but is being watched, and he knows it.----

The Pharisees try to entrap him, by asking if it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath, right while a disabled man stands nearby, **v10**.-----

Jesus highlights their hypocrisy and makes it personal by asking, who of you wouldn't get your sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath?-----

And a person is worth much more than a sheep.-----

So it is lawful **v12** to do good on the Sabbath.

It is right to show compassion in a crisis, and acts of mercy.

And Jesus does that, merely speaking to heal the man's shrivelled hand.-----

The Pharisees were determined to do nothing to help the disabled man.

Jesus was determined to do good, even at cost to himself.-----

For now they want to kill him.-----

Jesus showed mercy and kindness on the Sabbath.-----

Now what about us?-----

Since New Testament times the **Christian church started meeting on Sundays**, the Lord's Day, remembering Christ's resurrection from the dead.

And I know that for many Christians Sunday has been viewed as the 'Christian Sabbath'.

Sunday is a special day and good time to meet together.-----

And being part of a society with a Christian background, Sunday was a day when people could rest from their work, and gather with God's people.-----

It grieves me that as our society has turned away from the Lord, and his word, and that work has become a great idol for many.

And the lack of adequate rest time for workers is a great scourge.-----

So while Christians don't celebrate the Sabbath in the same way as Jews in the OT, taking time to rest, one day in seven, is a very good principle built into the fabric of creation by its Maker.

Christians ought to rest, because life is more than work, and it shows we trust our sovereign and good God's provision.-----

The day of rest is for our good, and a day for gathering with Christ's people, meeting with God in his word, and doing good.-----

I'm not going to give you a list of dos and don'ts for how to spend a Sunday or your day of rest.

As Paul says in **Romans 14.5-6**, whether you do some work, or visit a shop or restaurant on a Sunday, is a matter of conscience and personal conviction.

It ought not be something we divide over.-----

And let's remember that love and compassion was a priority for Jesus, and it should be for us.-----

What Jesus makes crystal clear in Matt 12 is **the day of rest is a time for doing good.**

What might that look like for you?-----

I suggest **in lockdown** it ought to include watching the livestream and engaging with what's said and taught, for your encouragement & growth in faith and Christ-likeness.

In lockdown doing good might also include:

Spending extra time in God's word, reflecting, praying.

If you live with others, consider what good you can do to them or for them.

Engaging with your family, doing something together.

Kids, doing good could mean you helping with cooking, cleaning; and pray God will help you love your family members, with your words and actions.-----

Even if you live alone you could make a meal or biscuits for a neighbour, or struggling friend.-----

Or you might have a desire to do good and be frustrated that lockdown is stopping that. Don't let that squash your desire to love and serve.

We could send a text message, give someone a call to ask how they're going. Go for a walk with someone.

When lockdown eases doing good will mean:

We make the effort to come back to church in person, because church and my life isn't just about me and my comfort, but a day for seeking the good of others.

We must not give up meeting together, and setting aside time to meet.-----

To rest from our work, worship, reflect, love and serve our families, church and others, is still so important.

So maybe you could pray about the anxiety you feel about returning to church in person, and pray you'll come when u can, and speak to maybe just one person and ask how they're going, for their good.

Pray you'll come with a willingness to serve in a ministry team or where's there's needs.-----

On Sunday it's a good time to rest and be refreshed, but it's not an excuse for just lazing on the couch all day, thinking it's all about me.-----

Having said that, if you're overwhelmed and stressed by just coping with what's on your plate, I'm not trying to lump more on your plate and give you a guilt trip.

Maybe for a season, caring for yourself or your family is the good God calls you to.---

But for most of us, when lock down ends, and by the grace of God, we'll even be able to visit others; or have visitors to our place and share a meal. ☺

I look fwd to that. Kids maybe you look fwd to a sleepover at your friend's place.

And the discouragement we endure now will make us all the more grateful I think.----

Other good things could include having some non-church friends or neighbours over for a meal, or even someone who could never repay the favour.-----

Jesus our Lord and Saviour wants us to be rich in doing good works.-----

What would it look like for you to show compassion to someone in need, mercy to a person who's struggling?-----

How do you want to respond?-----

But wherever we're at, **we need grace** and strength, and the motivation.

For if you're like me you might be feeling weary and flat.-----

When we remember what Jesus has done and will do, it enables us to love.

When we remind ourselves and one another of the eternal rest Jesus has and will bring us, it encourages our hearts so we can do good.-----

In **Hebrews 3 and 4**, the Promised Land is described as a place of rest.

And that the Israelites in the Exodus wilderness would miss out on that rest due to their unbelief and disobedience.----

But that promised land rest was only a shadow of the heavenly, eternal and perfect rest to come in the new creation.

Hebrews 4 says to new covenant believers, 'since the promise to enter his rest remains, let us beware that none of you be found to have fallen short.'

So there remains a rest for us to enter and experience, which we get by faith in Christ.

Hebrews 4 teaches us, that the 4th commandment 7th day rest and Israelites' promised land rest weren't the end goal, they only pointed to the real and ultimate rest.-----

So a Sabbath rest remains for God's people, **v9.(SLIDE)**

And we enter it resting from our own works, not trying to enter God's heavenly presence by our good works.-----

We enter our heavenly and eternal rest by trusting in Jesus, and living his way, following him. The Sabbath, more than being about rules to obey, is about remembering Jesus.

Remembering the rest and justification by grace through faith we have now, and the rest he will bring us to experience in heaven.-----

We want to remember that each Lords' Day, and when we're struggling in lockdown.---

Jesus brings us to a better rest than we get from a day off work, from a holiday, or than the Jews got living in the land flowing with milk and honey.

Jesus brings us to the eternal Sabbath rest. He will.

Hold fast to him.-----

Encourage your family and others to hold fast to him in faith.-----

And this is what we're encouraged to do in our **final point, Put your hope in him.**

Jesus withdraws from his enemies, **v15**, but the crowds follow.

He heals them all, and says not to make him known.

Not 'cos he fears opposition or death, but to avoid premature opposition.

More importantly Matthew says it's to fulfil Scripture.

From the lengthy quote from **Isa 42**, do you see in **v19**, Jesus the promised n' chosen Servant, has not come to argue or shout.

He's not here to make a loud show of power, or seek popularity.-----

But we're told even more about Jesus.-----

He's chosen by God, loved by God.

The Father delights in him, is pleased with him.-----

He brings justice, restores justice.

He treats people rightly.

He does what is right now, healing the sick and disabled.

But he will bring perfect justice when he comes again.

Not just for Israel but for the nations, **v18**, for us.-----

Justice for all his followers who've suffered oppression and injustice.

And for Christians living in Afghanistan, unable to flee, **(SLIDE)**

for Christian gatherings in Heilongjiang Province in China, being dobbed into the authorities for money,

for Nigerian Christian students being kidnapped by Jihadists,

for all who suffer injustice,

the justice and true rest Jesus will bring, is desperately longed for.-----

The servant Jesus is the one who will not '**break a bruised reed**', or 'put out a smoldering wick'.

Maybe you feel weak and bruised at the moment.-----

Know Jesus came not to break you, but you give you hope and life and rest.-----

Maybe you feel your weakness; like the flame of your energy, spiritual life or hope is going out. **(SLIDE)**

Know Jesus has not come to snuff out your life, but to give justice and hope and life.----

Jesus is concerned for the helpless and downtrodden.

What was true for the man with the shrivelled hand, is true for you.

If restoral, health, strength and hope, is something you need, believe it's something Jesus can and will give.

Resilience now and rest in heaven Will Come.-----

Notice the last phrase in **v21**, 'The nations will put their hope in his name'.-----

We're part of the nations of the world, who put our hope in Jesus' name.

And to put our hope in Jesus the servant, is to put our confidence in him.

God wants us all to put our hope and confidence in him.

We can have a sure and confident expectation of eternal salvation and of entering the promised rest, as we trust in Jesus.

So put your hope and trust in Jesus today.

Keep on putting your hope and confidence in Jesus, the servant who cares for you.

He died for you, rose for you, and will one day raise you to enjoy his rest in glory.-----

As I reflected on the challenges this lockdown has brought to many of us, I thought of a Christian friend from my last church, **Leanne**.

Shortly after the birth of one of her children Leanne contracted a very serious chemical sensitivity.

Anyone's perfume, deodorant, shampoo, washing detergents or cleaning products affected her badly with migraines, reactions and more.

I thought, we've been in lockdown for 2 weeks or 2 months, but Leanne was in a virtual lockdown in her home, for like 20 years.

I remember her coming to church in a gas mask.

Having visitors was hard, going to the shops or other's homes was impossible.----

But I know that her trust and hope and confidence in Christ sustained her and carried her.----

Leanne by the grace of God has been healed for many years now, and has done much good, to the glory of Christ.

But even in her sickness and lockdown, I remember her having a ministry of prayer, of sending cards, messages; calling people, making meals for others.

She was an inspiring example to me of someone who had real hope in Christ, and who's faith, hope and love, led her to many good works.-----

The Lord Jesus brings us to our true Sabbath rest, so put your hope in him, for your sake, and for the strength to do good.

Let's pray.