

Intro

Last week we saw that following Jesus results in rest. For example, rest from the impossible task of striving to earn God's acceptance through our performance. Or rest from the burden of having to live up to a seemingly impossible to follow set of rules. Kind of like the school bus driver who has to perform all of their normal duties, as if there were no COVID rules, while ensuring every last COVID requirement is maintained. Sometimes an overly restrictive set of rules makes living impossible. Something's gotta give. The Pharisees, with their excessive rules, made living appear impossible.

Have you ever been mistreated by someone in the church? I'm thinking about a situation where someone scolded you for doing something, and you had no idea that it was wrong. You couldn't think of any biblical reason why they would be so upset. You either concluded they're a mean and nasty person. Or you were weighed down with guilt.

Let's look at an instance where Jesus' disciples were declared guilty when they were perfectly innocent. And let's see what Jesus had to say about it.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

First we'll interpret the passage and sort out what's going on...then we'll make some applications.

What's going on here?

Around the time Jesus called out to the crowds, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*" he was going "*through the grainfields on the Sabbath.*" The Pharisees detected a problem with the behavior of Jesus' disciples:

"His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat." (12:1)

According to the Pharisees, Jesus' disciples were "*doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.*"

In the OT, work was forbidden on the Sabbath:

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Sabbath was a day for rest, as God rested on the seventh day. So work was forbidden. The issue is, what's the definition of work? Here's how the Pharisees understood it:

This fundamental mishna enumerates those who perform the **primary categories of labor** prohibited on Shabbat, which number **forty-less-one**. They are grouped in accordance with their function: **One who sows, and one who plows, and one who reaps, and one who gathers** sheaves into a pile, **and one who threshes**, removing the kernel from the husk, **and one who winnows** threshed grain in the wind, and **one who selects** the inedible waste from the edible, and **one**

who grinds, and one who sifts the flour in a sieve, **and one who kneads** dough, **and one who bakes.** ([Mishnah Shabbat 7 \(sefaria.org\)](http://sefaria.org))

This is from a 2nd century Jewish document called the Mishnah, which reflects the Pharisees' practice. In order to ensure that work wasn't done on the Sabbath, the Pharisees devised an extra-biblical code. The Mishnah listed 39 forbidden activities on the Sabbath, including "removing the kernel from the husk." According to the Pharisees, Jesus' disciples violated the 4th commandment. They worked on the Sabbath. So the Pharisees questioned Jesus: "Why aren't you correcting your disciples? They're breaking God's law."

First Jesus defends their practice by appealing to David's actions. When David and his men were hungry they did what was unlawful by eating the bread of the Presence, which was reserved for priests.

- 1) Human need (hunger) took priority over the law's demand
- 2) David had authority as king
- 3) David was not punished for his actions

Jesus gives a second defense:

Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? (12:5)

- 1) Not all work is forbidden on the Sabbath
- 2) Temple service takes priority over Sabbath restriction of labor

Jesus continues:

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. (12:6)

If temple service took priority over the command not to work, the surely something greater than the temple (= Jesus and his mission) takes priority over the Sabbath law.

Jesus corrects the Pharisees and declares his disciples guiltless:

And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (12:7)

The Pharisees misunderstood what God actually desires, so they condemned the guiltless.

- 1) Nothing was wrong with plucking grain on the Sabbath
- 2) The purpose of the Sabbath was rest for our good...in the same episode Mark adds this:

Mark 2:27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

- 3) The law wasn't intended for man to serve the Sabbath...the Sabbath serves us
- 4) The purpose of the Sabbath wasn't to forbid every last possible activity (this doesn't serve us)
- 5) Better than rigid conformity to a set of rules is a merciful heart...a quote from Hosea 6:6:

Hosea 6:6-7 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
⁷ But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

God desired more than just external conformity to sacrifice laws...God wanted people who loved him...people who knew him...people who trusted him and acted faithfully in response to his love

- 6) The Pharisees misunderstood the intent of the law...the spirit of the law...external conformity doesn't cut it...God is after our hearts

Jesus concludes:

For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. (12:8)

As God the Son, Jesus has authority over the Sabbath. As God the Son, Jesus is the authoritative interpreter of Sabbath law. Without saying it, Jesus is declaring his deity. The disciples don't need to repent. A divine pronouncement has been made. The Sabbath's intent wasn't a complex set of burdens. Plucking a head of grain doesn't bring God's condemnation.

Application

FCF: we follow the Pharisees when we falsely accuse, when we exact extra-biblical restrictions, when we resist Jesus' lordship, when we lack mercy

Grace given: Jesus gives divine vindication, freedom from exacting standards, restful instruction, mercy for the guilty

Gospel connection: God wants a people who extend mercy because they've received mercy, not a people who impose merciless rules

Point 1: Rest from false accusations

Explanation

The disciples were accused of breaking the 4th commandment. Part of Jesus' defense was an appeal to Scripture. David wasn't condemned for his actions. So the disciples shouldn't be condemned.

Application

There's two pitfalls we need to avoid when accused. First, excusing our sin and rejecting helpful correction. Second, feeling condemned when there's nothing wrong with our conduct.

Listen to the charge. Understand the why. Don't automatically rule it out. We all have blind spots.

Evaluate the person's argument. Is the charge a reasonable application of Scripture? If not, reject false guilt.

Illustration

I was once accused and called to meet for something I'm still puzzled to explain. Someone who I assumed had strong character confided to me extremely bizarre sin happening in their marriage. I was shocked and lost respect for his wife who was portrayed as an exemplary Christian woman. The man "discerned" something wrong in my heart. So he forced a meeting with me and his wife. The meeting felt like I was on trial for the thoughts I had. Thoughts any person would have had if they were privy to the information. I was dating Kaitlin at the time and she rebuked me for putting up with it. Why was I on trial when they were the ones engaging in horrific sin?

That was 2006. I was ill-prepared to deal with the issues at the time. I had an overly simplistic view of the Christian life. A person born of the Spirit couldn't live like this. I don't share this to discourage you from coming to me for help. Nothing you share with me will probably shock me today. I share this to model how to deal with accusations.

How should I have dealt with these accusations? I should have examined my own heart. Looking back I know there was nothing wrong with thinking there are serious character issues here. Nothing wrong with being shocked and disturbed. What was wrong was my lack of pastoral concern. I should have attempted to help them to overcome their sin through counsel and making myself available. Unfortunately, at that time I was unequipped to deal with such shocking and complex sin issues. I would have been over my head.

Looking back I would have challenged them for putting me on trial. I would have been bolder to stress their need to deal with their sin rather than focusing on my sin. There was a pattern of pointing out sin in others while neglecting their own sin (Matt 7:1-5). There was a pattern of failure to listen to correction. They were the ones in desperate need of repentance.

When accused acknowledge failure if appropriate. When accused unjustly don't feel condemned if Scripture is on your side. It might be proper to defend ourselves. Jesus defended his disciples. But your defense may fall on deaf ears. So entrust yourself to God's judgment.

Jesus' yoke brings rest because we're free from false accusations.

Point 2: Rest from legalism

Explanation

The 4th commandment said no work on the Sabbath without spelling out the nature of work in exacting detail. So the Pharisees took it upon themselves to clarify what no work meant. In doing so they went beyond the law's intent. They created burdens God never intended.

Application

Direct obedience vs wisdom vs legalism

Some commands are clear. Like "You shall not commit adultery." A direction prohibition. Avoid adultery. Plain and simple.

Other commands require wisdom. Like the implied command "*making the best use of the time*" (Eph 5:16 also translated "redeeming the time"). Like the Sabbath, the exact nature of obedience isn't clearly spelled out. So obedience requires wisdom.

Wisdom is the skill of applying truth well to a given situation. Wisdom discerns the context of commands. Time may indicate a particular point in time, a season, or an opportunity. Not necessarily every minute we're alive. More likely a season since "*making the best use of the time, because the days are evil*" = make the best use of your time during this season, because evil abounds and we might disregard wisdom. Different types of seasons require different application of wisdom. There's no one size fits all way to redeem the time. You can't make a rule that fits every season.

Legalism creates manmade standards as a means of becoming acceptable to God. Ignoring the context of the phrase, they'd come up with rules like employed people must spend one hour in Bible reading, one hour in prayer, and one hour in evangelism on their work days. Days off require two hours in Bible reading, prayer, and evangelism. On days off no more than one hour of leisure activity is allowed. Legalism seeks to impose a one size fits all criteria to insure the command is kept. Legalism adds to the law creating rules that harm rather than help.

Jesus' yoke brings rest because we're free from manmade bondage.

Point 3: Rest in Jesus' authority

Explanation

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He's the authoritative interpreter of the OT. He declared his authority over the Pharisees' extra-biblical commands. The Pharisees usurped God's authority by creating their own burdensome rules.

Application

In rejecting God's authority, by adding to his Word, the Pharisees brought bondage. But submitting to Jesus' authority brings blessing. While the Pharisees turned the Sabbath into a rigid rulebook that made life on the Sabbath an ordeal (I'm hungry and there's food right in front of me but it would be sin to eat it), Jesus declared that the Sabbath is for our good. God's instructions aren't intended to restrict function or withhold good. No, they're intended to help and protect from harm. The blessing of the Sabbath was rest from our labors. The human body can wear out from over activity. In his mercy, God gave the Sabbath to preserve life.

The Sabbath as law went away when the Old Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant. The Sabbath was a shadow that pointed to eternal rest in Christ (Col 2:16-17). We maintain the Sabbath principle when we enjoy days of rest from occupational labor.

Joyfully embrace Jesus' authority. Positively, we embrace Jesus' authority when we follow his instructions. Negatively, we embrace Jesus' authority when we don't add to his instruction.

We celebrate Jesus' lordship in our doctrinal statement:

The Bible, as originally written, is God's Word, that it was written by men divinely inspired, and that it is the supreme, infallible authority in all matters of faith and conduct. – PCC Constitution

- It's a misconception to think that true freedom is the ability to do whatever I want without restraint
- True freedom is freedom from the power of sin...freedom from destructive patterns and unrestrained foolishness
- Jesus' teaching brings rest because his instruction is liberating...his instruction frees us from a life worn out by our sin

Jesus' yoke brings rest because we're free from destructive authorities that harm rather than help.

Point 4: Rest results in mercy

Explanation

God's desire isn't a people that obey external rules dutifully. God's desire is a people who receive his mercy and live in response to mercy they've experienced. If we've experienced God's mercy, we'll extend mercy to others. Have I said this before?

Application

The Pharisees imposed merciless rules. No empathy. No compassion. They turned rest from labor into you can't eat. Rest = you need to starve. The issue here is merciless guilt on the guiltless. How might we be guilty of this?

Illustration

Rule we think is valid but isn't. Like no hats in the sanctuary. What happens when we hold this sort of extra-biblical conviction? Maybe we treat a visitor with hostility. What does that do for our reputation? What does that contribute to our mission? Like making new disciples.

What Scripture supports this conviction about hats? The only possible appeal is found in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In that passage, a man who prays with a head covering dishonors his head while every woman who prays without a head covering dishonors her head.

- 1) To be consistent, if we require men to remove hats we need to require women to wear head coverings.
- 2) This is a challenging passage, but the majority interpretation is that the head covering was a symbol of authority in that culture (1 Cor 11:10) = the woman's head covering was a sign of respect to her husband
- 3) Principle = wives should conduct themselves in a manner that respects their husbands, not hats in the sanctuary is sinful
- 4) Not saying we shouldn't be culturally respectful (like taking our hat off for the national anthem)...saying we shouldn't create unnecessary stumbling blocks (like communicating to a younger visitor you're not welcome to worship with us because you have a hat on)...they'll just go to a different church where they're made to feel welcome, or they'll be turned off by Christians...how would you feel if you finally got your grandson into the church and they were accosted for wearing a hat?

Problem: going beyond the biblical requirements.

Make sure you get Scripture right before pronouncing someone guilty! Be merciful. Don't hold people to standards God doesn't hold them to.

Jesus' yoke brings rest because he gives mercy.

Conclusion

What rest does Jesus provide?

Rest from false accusations. Reject false guilt.

Rest from legalism. Reject manmade bondage.

Rest in Jesus' authority. Embrace Jesus' instruction.

Rest results in mercy. Extend mercy.