

## **Intro**

In recent messages we've considered the burden of legalism. The Pharisees added to God's law, creating standards that made life virtually impossible. If you happened to be hungry on the Sabbath and heads of grain were in front of your face, you couldn't pluck them because that would be work. Legalism = striving for God's acceptance based on my performance and it often comes in the form of bizarre extra-biblical rules.

And we've seen rest in Christ. Jesus says to learn from him and we'll find rest for our souls. Rest from striving to keep manmade rules. Rest from the guilt of our sins. In saying learn from me, Jesus is saying his commands bring rest to our souls.

Many would object to this claim thinking something like Christians are a bunch of prudes. Thinking God's rules hinder rather than help. Thinking God's rules get in the way of human freedom and flourishing. Restrictions impede while positive commands make life inconvenient. This morning we consider the nature of God's law, and the nature of Jesus' mission...

## **READ PASSAGE**

## **PRAY**

### **Body**

#### **Before we dig in...2 clarifications:**

##### 1) God uses legalistic churches

Don't want your response to be bashing other churches. See God's how God's hand was on you there. See the good. People who prayed for me, people who shared the gospel with me, people who cared for me. People who guided me to some helpful resources. People who encouraged a serious devotion to Jesus. Some good like evaluating my entertainment choices and encouraging evangelism. At the same time, see the weaknesses you experienced. Reject practices that don't agree with biblical spirituality. Overly restrictive. Forbid what was allowed creating lusts that didn't need to be and troubled my conscience. Misguided focus. Can I watch this Star Trek episode? Not am I faithfully loving my wife? Encouraged judging fellow believers who weren't as radical and as holy. Made me not want to fellowship with common Christians. Only wanted to be around the spiritually elite.

See God's good hand. Reject harmful spiritual practices.

##### 2) Extra-biblical rules aren't always bad

Don't want your take way to be "all extra-biblical rules are bad." This isn't the case because some extra-biblical rules devised by God's people are wise applications of biblical truth. For example, when a local church issues a dress code for its worship team. A dress code generally requires modest dress and forbids offensive material:

**1 Timothy 2:8-10** I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, <sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness- with good works.

The specific apparel forbidden may reflect the fact that, in that culture, prostitutes dressed in these ways. They didn't want Christian women dressing like prostitutes because that would send the wrong message. One way the church seeks to live out 1 Timothy 2:8-10 is by creating a dress code for its worship team. A dress code is well within God's intent when it isn't burdensome and overly restrictive. For example, it would be burdensome if worship team members were required to buy specific clothing that was really expensive. God's rules aren't intended to burden us. They're intended to help us live for God's glory, which is beneficial for us. The Pharisees' extra-biblical rules failed because they harmed rather than helped.

### **Passage Focus**

FCF: forgetting the law's purpose; ignorant of God's character

Grace given: divine intent revealed; Jesus' character revealed

Gospel connection: Jesus extends help to the hurting...spiritually = those worn out from their sins...Jesus' faithful completion of his mission secured our salvation...Jesus came to serve us and secure rest for our souls

### **Point 1: God's law is for our good (12:9-14)**

#### **Explanation**

Sometime after the Pharisees disputed plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath (12:1), Jesus had another encounter with them, this time in a synagogue. Luke 6:6 reveals this was a different Sabbath:

**Luke 6:6** On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

Luke also adds that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and the affected hand was the man's right hand. Withered = shriveled up hand that resulted in handicap...right hand = handicap in his dominant hand. The presence of a handicap, the Pharisees' likely knowledge of Jesus' healing power, and their knowledge that Jesus didn't hold to their stringent Sabbath restrictions, naturally led to a confrontation. The Pharisees asked Jesus a question: *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"* - 12:10

The Pharisees taught that help couldn't be administered on the Sabbath except in life-threatening cases. "Work" was okay when life was in danger:

**And furthermore, [Rabbi Matya ben Harash](#) said:** With regard to **one who suffers pain in his throat, one may place medicine inside his mouth on Shabbat**, although administering a remedy is prohibited on Shabbat. This is **because** there is **uncertainty** whether or not it is a **life-threatening** situation for him, as it is difficult to ascertain the severity of internal pain. **And** a case of **uncertainty** concerning a **life-threatening** situation **overrides Shabbat**. [[Mishnah Yoma 8 \(sefaria.org\)](#)]

But a handicap was not life-threatening, so healing this man violated the Sabbath in the Pharisees' mind.

Note Matthew's editorial comment: *"so that they might accuse him."* The Pharisees aren't impartial seekers with an honest question. They're opponents seeking to find fault. They've already rejected Jesus' authority and teachings.

Jesus' response is instructive. He responds to their question with a question of his own: *"Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out (12:11)?"* Jesus

doesn't appeal to their own teachings. He doesn't appeal to Scripture. He appeals to their actual practice. If they had a sheep who fell in pit they would rescue it. No one debates with Jesus. It's a given. So their own practice contradicts what they expect of him. They demand that he not heal a handicap while they feel free to rescue a sheep. He responds to their baited question with a question that reveals their inconsistency.

Jesus' logic continues:

*"Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

In other words, since humans are created in the image of God they're more valuable than animals. If you feel okay helping a sheep on the Sabbath you should be comfortable helping a handicapped man. Reason and then a direct answer. It is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Calling the man to exercise public faith, Jesus says stretch out your hand. The man extends his hand and he's healed immediately.

The debate wasn't just for the Pharisees. They were already hardened and had their minds made up. But what about the onlookers in the synagogue? Perhaps Jesus' logical response was intended for them? Jesus wisely interacted with the Pharisees knowing others were witnessing the confrontation. So he reasons to persuade.

Before giving a direct answer, Jesus wisely appeals to their own practice and understanding (man is more valuable than animals). When baited with questions where we have to give the "wrong" answer, we might be better off asking some questions and demonstrating the soundness of our answers before simply giving the obvious biblical answer. And use your response as an opportunity to commend the gospel to those witnessing the encounter.

Jesus again contradicts the Pharisees. In both cases, whether hunger or handicap, alleviating human suffering on the Sabbath doesn't constitute work. The Sabbath was for us. For physical refreshment. God's laws are restful. Jesus said learning from me will bring rest for your souls (11:29). God's laws help rather than harm. The Pharisees misapplied the Sabbath in such a way that it prevented ministry to those in need.

The Pharisees didn't like it one bit. He defied their practice. They were hardened in their rejection. So they plotted to kill him.

### **Application**

Problem: thinking God is more concerned about a rigid set of rules than loving our neighbor

Problem: thinking Christianity is more about maintaining a rigid set of rules than caring for people

The Pharisees made helping a handicap man at odds with obeying God.

A word of caution. I'm not saying God is against rules. He made a lot of them. Look at Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Look at the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus taught on anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and loving our enemies. God's word is full of commands. God isn't against rules.

Under the Old Covenant, Israel had dietary laws that served as boundary markers. They made a clear demarcation between Israel and the nations. Israel's conformity to the dietary laws marked them out as God's people. When the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, the dietary and sacrificial laws done away with. Under the New Covenant, the church is confronted with God's ethical commands. Like Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount. Under the New Covenant, God wants us in the world as salt and

light, not imitating the world's practices. Our ethical conduct is our boundary marker. So God is still concerned with rules.

But if we rightly understand God's commands, they will serve our good, and our neighbor's good. Jesus says learn from me and you will find rest for your souls. God's rules rightly understood bring rest, not harm. Rest not bondage.

### **Illustration**

How God's instruction helps rather than harms

- 1) God's commands liberate us (freedom to pluck grain)
- 2) God's commands serve our neighbor (freedom to help the handicapped)

**Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

- Uninhibited freedom says I can say whatever I want. Freedom to tell it how it is.
- Liberating freedom says a sanctified mouth protects us from the consequences of an unrestrained mouth.
- Corrupting talk in context = angry and bitter speech, unrestrained yelling, slanderous speech, and malicious speech (Eph 4:31).
- Uninhibited speech results in division.
- Liberating speech consists of edifying speech (builds up), occasion fitting speech, and gracious speech (= words that bless).
- This sort of speech serves our neighbor while liberating us from contentious division.
- Jesus doesn't just give commands. He imparts the Spirit to enable living out these commands.

We need to trust that God's commands help rather than harm.

We need to convey to non-Christians that God's commands help rather than harm.

### **To the unbeliever**

God's law helps rather than harms. Jesus says follow me. Learn from me. You will find rest for your souls. Are you weary from trying to do life without Jesus? Are you under burdens you can't escape? Do you recognize your need for God's help? Are you grieved over your sins? Jesus says repent and believe. Trust me. And turn to me rather than from me.

### **Point 2: Jesus came for our good (12:15-21)**

#### **Explanation**

Aware of the Pharisees' conspiracy against him, he withdrew from the area, continued healing, and ordered those healed not to make him known = to reveal that he was the Messiah. In doing so, Jesus directly fulfilled

what Isaiah has prophesied long ago. Jesus is doing what Isaiah said the Messiah would do = Jesus is the Messiah. Isaiah described the Messiah in these ways:

- 1) the Father's servant = Jesus came to do the Father's will
- 2) my beloved = the Father's Son in whom the Father delights
- 3) The Father places the Spirit on Jesus = Jesus, in his humanity, is empowered by the Holy Spirit
- 4) Will proclaim justice to the Gentiles = hints at his work through his church (Matt 16:18; 28:18-20)
- 5) Won't quarrel or cry aloud ... won't hear his voice in the streets ≠ will be totally silent... = won't publicly defend himself or try to vindicate himself (because his mission required rejection)... didn't come for publicity or to make a name for himself
- 6) The bruised reed and smoldering wick refer to the harassed and helpless (9:36), those who labor and are heavy laden (11:28)... Jesus didn't come to break them down... he came to give them rest... this he will do through the church until he returns (*"until he brings justice to victory"*)
- 7) In the future the Gentiles will hope in Jesus = foreshadows the successful mission to the Gentiles

Jesus is the fulfillment of OT prophecy. He's the promised Messiah. He came to serve, not to be served. He came to die, not to become a popular figure. He came to bring relief to those suffering under the weight of the Pharisees' traditions, not to crush people's spirits. He will be victorious through his church. And the Father is thoroughly pleased with him.

**Jesus came for our good.**

### **Mission that serves**

Jesus is described as "my servant." He serves the Father in that he accomplishes all the Father willed for him to do. Which includes serving us. By dying on the cross in our place to take the penalty of our sins (Matt 20:28). He serves by suffering in our place. Jesus came to give of himself for others. Enduring slander, threats, plots, and death on a cross for our good. Jesus is self-giving = he can be trusted. Since Jesus is God the Son in human flesh, God can be trusted. Jesus reveals the Father (John 1:18).

### **Mission that brings relief**

Jesus came to rescue bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. He came to help the harassed and helpless. He came to bring rest to the weary and heavy laden. He came to bring hope. Jesus brings relief through his finished work on the cross. We find rest for our souls. No more wearying ourselves to earn God's favor. No more burden of sin we can't bear. A cleansed conscience and our sins forgiven.

### **Mission that succeeds**

Jesus' mission will not fail. The Gentiles will hope in his name. If you're a believing non-Jew, you are fulfillment of Isaiah 42! Jesus promised that he would build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). We hope in a king and a kingdom that can't fail.

Maybe you're troubled over what's going on in our nation. It's right to care. We're called to seek the welfare of our land and its people (Jer 29:7). We're called to pray for our leaders and desire a land with peace and tranquility where there's freedom to proclaim the gospel (1 Tim 2:1-4). We desire a government that punishes evil and rewards good citizens (Rom 13:1-7). But earthly kingdoms don't offer a lasting hope. And they're marred by sin. Like Abraham we seek a heavenly country (Heb 11:13-16). Like Peter we long for a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). Jesus offers a sure and certain hope: a king and a kingdom that cannot fail.

### **Conclusion**

**God's law is for our good.** His teaching, his commands bring rest to our souls. Trust the goodness of God's commands. And declare that goodness to those who haven't embraced God's goodness.

**Jesus came for our good.** Jesus came to us meek and humble. As a servant. He says trust me. In your weariness over your health, your family, your nation, your sins, I'll serve you. I'll give you relief. I'll comfort. I'll strengthen. And I'll give you a sure hope that cannot fail. Set your hope on Jesus.