

Matthew continues proving that Jesus is indeed the Christ-king by describing incidents where Jesus asserted His authority as Lord over the Sabbath by allowing His disciples to pick grain to satisfy their hunger and performing a miraculous healing, both on the Sabbath. Matthew again points out that these things fulfill Messianic prophecies written by Isaiah.

¹ At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. ² 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.

“Corn” here refers to grain, such as wheat or barley. It was a Sabbath day and apparently Jesus and His disciples were going to the synagogue (v. 9) but because they were hungry they took a detour through someone’s grain fields in order to get something to eat. The Mosaic law allowed for individuals to feed themselves in a neighbor’s grain field as long as they didn’t attempt to harvest it (**Deut. 23:25** “*When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.*”). The complaint of the Pharisees was that the disciples were doing this on the Sabbath. According to Luke 6:1 they were rubbing the plucked ears with their hands, which in the mind of the Pharisees was threshing. They also considered the plucking as harvesting and so they believed that the disciples were guilty of doing the work of harvesting and threshing on the Sabbath.

³ But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; ⁴ How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the incident recorded in 1 Sam. 21:1-6 when David and his men were running from Saul and they stop by the house of Ahimelech the priest for provisions. When he asked the priest for food, Ahimelech had nothing but the shewbread which had been removed from the tabernacle after it had been replaced with fresh loaves. These loaves of bread were given to the priests and their families to eat once they had served their purpose in the tabernacle but no one else was allowed to eat them. Because of the need, however, the priest gave David and his men some of the shewbread. The point that Jesus is making is that the Sabbath laws can be bent in cases of necessity.

⁵ 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? ⁶ But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

Jesus continues by pointing out that the Mosaic law requires that the priests work on the Sabbath while they are performing their duties in the temple. The priests are considered blameless when serving God on the Sabbath despite performing the labor intensive duties of offering the burnt sacrifices (killing and preparing the sacrifice, cutting and preparing the wood, building the fire, etc.) and any other temple duties. Jesus then adds that One greater than the temple served by these priests was there (Himself). If the priests serving in the earthly temple are blameless when working on the Sabbath, how much more are the disciples blameless if they “work” on the Sabbath as they serve Christ. Notice that Jesus is also claiming to be deity by saying that He was greater than the temple which was built for the worship of God.

⁷ But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

Jesus had already criticized the Pharisees in vs. 3 and 5 by saying “Have you not read?” Now He criticizes them again by stating that they did not understand the verse that He now quotes from **Hos. 6:6**: “*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*” The fact that they had condemned the guiltless disciples proved that they did not understand the verse Jesus quotes. The context of the verse in Hosea is that Israel was performing religious duties such as offering sacrifices but they were living wicked lives. The LORD states through Hosea that the sacrifices and burnt offerings were pointless without mercy and the knowledge of God. Going to church on Sunday is hypocritical if we live like the devil the rest of the week.

⁸ For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

In another claim of deity, Jesus declares His superiority and Lordship over the Sabbath, which had been instituted by God. He was not subject to the Sabbath and neither were His disciples when they were serving Him. Mark’s account adds an additional statement that Jesus made about the Sabbath: “*And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was made to be a benefit to man, not to be a burden or a means of enslavement.

⁹ And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: ¹⁰ And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

“And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue” – The synagogue was apparently where Jesus and the disciples were heading when they were stopped by the Pharisees. Matthew seems to describe this as if is the same day but Luke 6:6 says that it was on another Sabbath when this incident at the synagogue occurs.

“And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered [dry]” – The man’s hand was dry and shriveled.

“And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him” – According to Luke’s account in Luke 6:6-11, they watched Jesus to see what He would do but Jesus knew what they were thinking. Here, they confront Jesus and ask whether healing on the Sabbath was permissible under the law. The purpose of the question was to lure Jesus into a situation where they could accuse Him. It’s interesting to note that this question reveals that they believed two things about Jesus: (1) that He was able to heal whenever He chose; (2) that He was willing to heal on the Sabbath.

¹¹ 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? ¹² How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Jesus reveals their hypocrisy by pointing out that each one of them would be willing to rescue one of their sheep if it fell into a pit on the Sabbath, rather than lose it. He then asks a rhetorical question comparing the worth of a man to a sheep: If they were willing to rescue a sheep on the Sabbath then shouldn't they be even more willing to rescue a man on the Sabbath? Jesus then gives the conclusion that naturally follows: Doing good on the Sabbath does not violate the Sabbath. If helping a sheep on the Sabbath did not violate the law then helping a man on the Sabbath would not either.

¹³ Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Jesus has the man to stretch forth his hand so that all in the synagogue could see. In Luke 6:8-10 Jesus has the man stand in front of everyone. Obviously Jesus wasn't trying to be sneaky and heal the man when the Pharisees wouldn't notice. He boldly heals the man's hand in plain sight of everyone in the synagogue despite knowing that the Pharisees would not approve. Luke 6:11 says the Pharisees were "filled with madness" (they were filled with rage), so saying that the Pharisees did not approve would be an extreme understatement.

Verses 14-16: When the Pharisees saw that Jesus would not comply with their Sabbath rules they leave and call a meeting to determine how they could destroy Him. Once Jesus becomes aware of this, He leaves the area but is followed by great multitudes and He ministers to all who need to be healed. He tells the multitudes to not publicize that He is there.

¹⁷ That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, ¹⁸ 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.

In vs. 18-21 Matthew quotes from Isaiah 42:1-4 to show that Jesus was fulfilling yet another Messianic prophesy:

Isaiah 42:1-4 ¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. ² He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. ⁴ He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law."

Matthew's reason for quoting this passage here is to show that, while Jesus was not the Messiah that the Pharisees and other religious leaders were expecting (or wanting), He was exactly the Messiah that the LORD promised through the prophets. Jesus was the Chosen of God and His Father was well pleased with Him. The Father placed His Spirit on Jesus and He will bring judgment (justice) even to the Gentiles. The prophetic quotation continues in vs. 20-21, describing the Messiah as being meek and humble and that the Gentiles will trust in Him.

Verses 22-50: Jesus heals a demon possessed man but the Pharisees attempt to discount it, saying that He could only have power over demons because He was possessed by Satan Himself. Jesus exposes the folly of that idea, pointing out that that would mean that Satan was at cross-purposes with himself and if that were true then Satan's kingdom would certainly crumble. Jesus then rebukes the Pharisees for attributing the works of the Holy Ghost to the devil, equating it with blaspheming the Holy Ghost. He issues the warning that we must be careful with what we say because we will be held accountable for every idle word spoken.

Later, certain scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus asking for a sign to prove that He is the Messiah. Jesus refuses on the grounds that such a request comes not from faith but from a wicked heart. Their hearts were saying "Prove it and we'll believe" but faith says "I believe even though I do not yet understand." **Heb. 11:3** "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Notice that this verse does not say "Through understanding we have faith..."

Jesus' mother and family came to speak with Him while He was teaching the people. When someone advised Jesus that His family was there wanting to speak with Him He used the occasion to teach a principle. He declared that He considered anyone who obeys the will of the Father to be His mother, sister and brother.