

5/31/26

Sermon Title: Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.

² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

³ He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?”

⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

⁵ Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?

⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

⁷ If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’^[a] you would not have condemned the innocent.

⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Jesus and His disciples were passing through grainfields on the Sabbath.

As they became hungry, the disciples began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.

When the Pharisees saw this, they accused Jesus, claiming that His disciples were violating the Sabbath regulations.

The Sabbath was the day on which God rested after creating the heavens and the earth.

The Law commanded the people both to remember this day and to rest on it, and violations were punished severely—even by death in certain cases.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” is the Fourth Commandment of the Ten Commandments.

In their effort to keep this commandment, the Jews developed thirty-nine categories of prohibited work for the Sabbath.

These regulations were not part of the Mosaic Law itself but were based on the traditions of the elders.

According to these traditions, all forms of labor were forbidden from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday.

Activities such as using electricity or kindling a fire, cooking and food preparation, production and construction work, carrying objects, and traveling were either prohibited or heavily restricted.

Turning lights on or off, operating switches, using smartphones, and driving automobiles were considered violations because they involved creating a spark or opening and closing electrical circuits.

Cooking over a fire was forbidden, and even reheating food or squeezing fruit to make juice was restricted.

Agricultural activities such as sowing, harvesting, and threshing were prohibited, as were making objects, sewing, tying or untying knots, and writing or erasing letters.

Carrying items outside designated areas and traveling beyond a certain distance were also forbidden.

It was under these circumstances that Jesus’ disciples, while traveling with Him through the grainfields on the Sabbath, became hungry and picked some heads of grain to eat.

Considering that the disciples certainly knew the Sabbath regulations, it is likely that they had been so busy traveling and engaging in ministry with Jesus that they had not had an opportunity to eat properly.

But the Pharisees were not about to let this pass unnoticed.

They already disapproved of Jesus and had been looking for opportunities to find fault with Him.

Now, they believed they had found the perfect opportunity.

¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.

² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees took issue with what they considered the disciples’ violation of the Law.

According to their interpretation of the Sabbath regulations, the disciples’ actions were equivalent to harvesting grain.

If they rubbed the heads of grain in their hands to remove the husks, that would be considered threshing.

If they then blew away the chaff with their mouths, that would be regarded as winnowing.

Jesus responded by referring to the incident in which David entered the house of God and, together with his men, ate the consecrated bread that was lawful only for the priests to eat.

By citing this example, Jesus demonstrated that His disciples’ actions were not truly a violation of God’s intent for the Law.

³ He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?”

⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

David once fled from Saul, who was seeking to kill him. While on the run with a few of his men, he became hungry and entered the house of God at Nob, where the priest Ahimelek gave him the consecrated bread to satisfy their hunger.

(1 Samuel 21:1-6)

1 David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

2 David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.

3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

4 But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

5 David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!”

6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced

David’s action technically violated the Mosaic Law, which stated that the twelve loaves of the Bread of the Presence set before the Lord were to be eaten only by the priests.

(Leviticus 24:5–9)

5 “Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf.

6 Arrange them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the Lord.

7 By each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be a food offering presented to the Lord.

8 This bread is to be set out before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant.

9 It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is a most holy part of their perpetual share of the food offerings presented to the Lord.”

Yet Scripture nowhere condemns David for this action.

By citing this example, Jesus was teaching the Pharisees that an excessively rigid and legalistic interpretation of the Law can violate the very spirit and purpose of Scripture.

God did not establish the Sabbath in order to restrict people’s freedom through endless regulations.

Rather, He gave the Sabbath to provide rest from six days of hard labor and to direct people’s hearts toward remembering and worshiping God.

The Pharisees, however, failed to understand God’s purpose in establishing the Sabbath.

By creating numerous human traditions and regulations, they ended up burdening people and even condemning actions that were entirely legitimate before God.

Jesus then provides another example of something that could be done on the Sabbath without incurring guilt.

⁵ Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?

The priests, despite the Sabbath regulations, worked in the temple on the Sabbath.

They replaced the Bread of the Presence and offered rams and other sacrifices in worship to God.

This demonstrates that the laws concerning the temple took precedence over the laws concerning the Sabbath.

In other words, it was recognized that a lesser regulation could be set aside in order to fulfill a greater one.

Indeed, Jesus was teaching that the Sabbath was not primarily about external and customary regulations, but about understanding and embracing its God-centered, inward, and essential purpose.

Jesus then makes a remarkable and profound statement.

Referring to Himself, He declares that One greater than the temple is here.

⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

Just as the laws concerning the temple take precedence over the laws concerning the Sabbath, Jesus was teaching that His own work and ministry—as the Son of God and Lord of the temple—take precedence even over the temple laws themselves.

The Law not only points to Jesus, but also finds its fulfillment in Him.

The absolute and eternal authority of Jesus, who is the true reality to which the temple points, far surpasses the limited and temporary authority of human priests.

For the Jewish people, the temple symbolized the presence of the one true God and was regarded as the most sacred institution second only to God Himself.

Yet the physical temple was merely a temporary shadow and symbol pointing forward to Jesus.

Once the reality appeared, the shadow no longer held the same significance.

God no longer needed to reveal His presence through a building made by human hands.

He now dwells and reveals Himself in Jesus, the true Temple.

For this reason, it is only natural that Jesus is greater than Moses, greater than Abraham, and greater than the temple itself.

Jesus then goes on to explain His true purpose in establishing the Sabbath.

⁷ If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,'^[a] you would not have condemned the innocent.

Here, the term “sacrifice” carries the sense of formalistic and habitual religious observances.

Therefore, Jesus was not saying that people should neglect the religious duty of offering sacrifices as prescribed in the Law.

Rather, He was teaching that acts of mercy, which reflect God's purpose in establishing the Sabbath, should take precedence over ritual obligations and legal requirements.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for failing to understand the Scriptures correctly.

He pointed out that their attitude toward the Law was no different from that of the people in Hosea's day, who were concerned only with superficial and hypocritical religious rituals.

They were interested in religious ceremonies, but they failed to understand the true intention of the One who gave the Law—namely, love for God and love for one's neighbor.

God established the Sabbath so that the people of Israel would remember their past as slaves in Egypt, where they had labored for more than four hundred years without experiencing true rest.

The Sabbath was intended to provide rest and relief not only for themselves, but also for servants, livestock, foreigners, and society's most vulnerable people—those who otherwise would have been forced to work without respite.

(Deuteronomy 5:14)

14 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.

Therefore, the Pharisees' practice of creating thirty-nine additional Sabbath prohibitions that were not found in Scripture and using them to burden people was a serious distortion of God's original purpose for the Sabbath.

Jesus then makes a profound declaration: He is Lord of the Sabbath.

⁸ *For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*"

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus possesses authority over the Sabbath, governs it, and has the right to interpret its regulations.

With that authority, Jesus reveals the true freedom and peace that the Sabbath was always meant to provide—blessings that had long been obscured and hidden. He makes them available for all people to enjoy.

He calls people to lay aside the unbearable burden of complicated and restrictive legal regulations and to come to Him to find rest.

Indeed, Jesus, the Messiah who came into the world for the salvation of humanity, opens the Sabbath to all people and invites them to experience the true rest that God intended from the beginning.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

Today's message showed us how different the Pharisees' understanding of the Sabbath was from that of Jesus.

The Pharisees viewed the Sabbath as a set of rules and prohibitions.

They turned what God intended as a day of freedom into a day of restriction and condemnation.

But Jesus restored the true meaning and purpose of the Sabbath.

God established the Sabbath not to burden people, but to give them rest—to help them remember Him, to restore weary souls, and to give relief to those carrying heavy burdens.

The Sabbath was never meant to add weight to the law, but to be a day of experiencing God's grace.

Jesus declared, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath."

This means far more than having authority to interpret the Sabbath; it reveals that Jesus Himself is the very source of true rest.

He is greater than the temple, the One who fulfills the Law, and the One who breaks the power of sin and death.

We live carrying many burdens in life—the burden of guilt, anxiety, failure, competition, and the pressure of other people's expectations and judgments.

At times, even our Christian life can feel more like an obligation and a burden than a source of joy.

To people like us, the Lord says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

True rest is not found in perfectly keeping rules.

True rest is found in coming to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.

When we remain in His grace, abide in His love, and obey His word, our souls find true rest.

May we live not under legalism, but in the freedom of God's grace.

Let us not carry our burdens alone, but bring them to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.

May we all enjoy true freedom, true peace, and true rest in Him. In Jesus' name,