

## Section 26

JESUS ANSWERS CHARGES OF  
SABBATH BREAKING

(Parallels: Mark 2:23—3:6; Luke 6:1-11)

## TEXT: 12:1-14

## I. SUSPICION

1. At that season Jesus went on the sabbath day through the grain-fields; and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears and to eat.
2. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do upon the sabbath.
3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him;
4. how he entered into the house of God, and ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?
5. Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath day the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless?
6. But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.
7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.
8. For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath.

## II. INVESTIGATION

9. And he departed thence, and went into their synagogue:
10. and behold, a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day, that they might accuse him.
11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this 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 of more value than a sheep! Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.
13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, as the other.

## III. DETERMINATION

14. But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did their conduct sanction His healing of the man?
- b. How does Jesus change, in verse 12, their question of verse 10, in order to bring out the underlying principle on which He justified His conduct?
- c. In what ways have some individuals indicated that they regard animals more than they do man?
- d. Could it be that MAN, for whom the sabbath under the law was made and not vice versa, is also the lord of the Sabbath in the sense that he is to use it for his own rest and for God's glory? Certainly, Jesus was the unique "Lord of the Sabbath" in a particular sense. But is not man also the "lord of the sabbath" in his freedom to decide what good deeds of mercy or necessity he shall perform?
- e. Why do you think Jesus brought "saving lives or killing" into His argument with the Pharisees? (Mk. 3:4) What is the connection?
- f. Why was Jesus so angry with those Pharisees? (Mk. 3:5)
- g. Why did these respected religious leaders wish to destroy this young Rabbi from Nazareth?
- h. Why did they call the Herodians into their discussions about how they might do away with Jesus? How could the Herodians help? (Mk. 3:6)
- i. What was the advantage to be gained for Jesus by calling the man with the shrivelled hand forward before healing him? (Lk. 6:8)
- j. What difference do you see in the way Jesus went about His work and the way the Pharisees operated?
- k. Why do you think Jesus kept going into the synagogues, even though He could probably foresee the difficulties and opposition He would meet there?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

One sabbath while Jesus and His disciples were walking through grainfields, His disciples, feeling hungry, began to pluck some of the heads of grain, rub off the husks in their hands and eat. But when some of the Pharisees noticed it, they remarked to Jesus, "Look! why are you and your disciples doing what is forbidden on the sabbath?"

Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David and his men did when they were in need and hungry—how he entered into the house of God (when Abiathar was high priest), took and ate the consecrated bread of the presence, though they did not have the right to eat? Only the priests can eat it. And he even gave it to those who were with him.

"Or have you not read in the law how the priests working in the temple on the sabbath profane the sabbath without guilt? I tell you, something more important than the temple is here.

"And if you had grasped the meaning of this scripture (Hosea 6:6)—'I desire mercy and not merely sacrifices'—you would not have condemned the innocent. The sabbath was made for man's benefit, not man for the sabbath. This is why the Son of man is even lord of the sabbath."

He went on from that place and on another sabbath He entered their synagogue and taught. Now there was a man present whose right hand was shrivelled or wasted away. The legal experts and Pharisees watched Him closely to see whether He would heal him on the sabbath.

Then they quizzed Him, "Is it right to heal anyone on the sabbath?" so that they might find an accusation to use against Him.

But He, knowing their motives, spoke to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here and stand in the midst of the group." The man rose and stood there. Then Jesus addressed the others, "Now, I put the question to you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or harm, to have life or destroy it?"

But they were silent.

Then He posed another question, "Suppose that you had one sheep which fell into a pit on the sabbath, would you not get hold of it and lift it out? How much more precious is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath!" He looked around on them all with anger, deeply hurt at their inhumanity and hardness of heart. Turning to the man, He spoke, "Stretch out your hand." When he did so it was restored as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees, filled with insane fury, went out and held counsel against Jesus, discussing with one another and with the Herodians what they might do to Jesus to destroy Him.

## NOTES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
- A. FOR PERMITTING GRAIN THRESHING ON THE SABBATH (12:1-8)

## 1. THE SITUATION (12:1)

12:1 **At that time** can be rather easily identified due to the maturity of the standing grain which the disciples are eating: the time is sometime in the Spring of 27 A.D., shortly after the second Passover of Jesus' ministry. (Cf. Jn. 5) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) note that "in the warmer parts of Palestine the barley ripens about the middle of April and is reaped in April or the beginning of May, whereas the wheat ripens two or three weeks later."

**His disciples were hungry.** Herein lies the rightness of what they did: God had not only instituted the Sabbath for man's blessing, but He had also made men to be hungry. The desire for food is not somehow secular, as opposed to sacred, merely because it has to do with this body and this life. Otherwise, would not God have dispensed with human hunger on the Sabbath, so they would have been able to serve Him without distraction? No, human hunger is no more sinful or secular than a thousand other human activities which divine revelation clearly limits to this age, this life. (Cf. Mt. 22:30, marriage; eating and drinking, I Tim. 4:3-5; 1 Co. 6:13) So, all other things being equal, even the human hunger of Jesus' disciples was part of God's plan for man, just as much as it was His intention that they rest sufficiently in body and soul by proper Sabbath observance. Even the simple confession "I am hungry", means "God has made me this way and I am just feeling experientially and personally this part of His good government of my human existence." But, of course, what is involved here is essential human need, not the responding to a mere desire unprompted by essential necessity.

**They began to pluck ears of grain and to eat,** "rubbing them in their hands" (Luke). Apparently, Jesus used none of His miraculous power to provide necessary daily food either for Himself or His men. (Cf. Mt. 21:18, 19=Mk. 11:12, 13) The arrogance of the Pharisees to make such a charge (12:2) becomes the more painfully apparent when it is remembered that the Sabbath was not observed by the Hebrews, even the Pharisees, with rigorous austerity. They even turned the day into one of feasting and entertainment of guests. (Cf. Lk. 14:1-6 and Plutarch, *Symp.* iv. 6, cited by Trench, *Miracles*, 207: "The Hebrews honor the Sabbath chiefly by inviting each other to drinking and intoxication.") By contrast, Jesus' men had to settle for what they could find to fill their empty stomachs.

Moses' Law expressly permits this action on any day of the week. (Dt. 23:24, 25) And all the Gospel writers make it precisely clear that what the disciples did was done while they were on the move,

going through the fields of standing grain. So the issue here is not theft, but merely what the objectors regard to be work done on the Sabbath. (Cf. the attitude of the synagogue's ruler, Lk. 13:14. Note *ergázesthai*.) Presumably, the disciples offended the rabbinic interpretation of "work" on several counts, since not only did they pluck the heads of grain (which legalistically could be called "harvesting"), but they also rubbed them in their hands (*psōchontes tās chersin* could be described by the nitpickers as "threshing"), and if they blew the husks out of their hands before eating, they could be accused of "winnowing"! (Cf. Lk. 6:1) Worse still, by this whole series of acts they could also be accused of preparing a meal on the Sabbath, whereas Sabbath food should have been readied the day before!

Morgan (*Matthew*, 125) points up the stark contrast between all this Jewish legalism and the personal mentality of the Apostles:

It was a perfectly simple and natural action of the disciples, and reveals very clearly their estimate of their Lord's heart. They did not for a moment imagine that He would rebuke them. They knew, as members of the Hebrew nation, that they were doing things that the Pharisees would object to, but they were with Him, and familiarity with Him, and a consciousness of His attitude towards the Sabbath, set them free to pluck the ears. . . . It is a revelation of the relationship existing between the Christ and His disciples. There was no hesitation, no appeal, no fear.

Or, if there had been any of this timidness, especially with Pharisees prowling in the vicinity, Jesus had allayed their fears, even if He Himself did not choose to satisfy His own hunger in the same way. (The Pharisees do not attack His own eating, but that of His disciples.)

## 2. THE PHARISEES' REACTION (12:2)

12:2 **But when the Pharisees saw it.** Though these may not be identical with those earlier critics (Mt. 9:2-8; Lk. 5:17), nevertheless their attitude is precisely the same and so illustrative of the zeal of the heresy-hunters. (Cf. Ac. 14:19; 17:13; Gal. 2:12) It is a revealing trait of these (and perhaps all) hypocrites that they lay great stress on the external forms and ceremonies of religion while standing quite mute before the pleas of the deeper, more real demands of justice, mercy and faith. Is it possible, then, to judge the shallowness and irrelevance of a man's religion by the amount of undue stress he lays upon such externals?

**They said to him, Look.** These hard-nosed legalists seem to have regularly sought opportunities to jump on anyone who did not respect their traditional view of Sabbath observance. (Cf. Jn. 5:10) **Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath,** or, as Mark and Luke put it, "Why do your disciples do (it)?" This question provided what seemed to these inquisitors to be the perfect trap:

1. Either the Nazarene must accept the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions truly violated the Sabbath and, therefore, He must condemn His own followers, thereby alienating them. This, because, for better or worse, He had taught them. Thus He would be shown up as knowing little better Himself! The disciples' actions clearly reflected His tacit approval of this freedom from the traditional, but obligatory requirements of the rabbis.
2. Or He must publicly repudiate the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions violated the Sabbath, in which case He would expose both Himself and His followers as transgressors of the Law. By defending their transgression, He becomes in spirit Himself a transgressor. In that event, though He would have defended His followers, they would still have defected, since, insofar as they shared the basic viewpoint of the Pharisees, He would have damned Himself in their eyes.

Either way, it represented a triumph for the enemy. Either way, they have Him trapped. In either case, He stands to lose disciples and His popularity will be broken, for He would have committed Himself to the wrong side of a vital issue on which no self-respecting Hebrew could afford to be wrong, namely about the Sabbath.

This appears to be a beautiful dilemma on which to crucify Jesus, but the trouble with it, as well as with any other false choice, is that the fundamental proposition upon which the dilemma is constructed is false. The Pharisees could not dream that their own interpretations of the Sabbath law were of no where near the same validity as the Sabbath law itself. They had no conception of the possibility that they themselves, in their very attempt to interpret carefully the Sabbath law, had in fact become violators of its spirit and intent. The simplest method of eliminating the dilemma facing Jesus was to show that, while He took the Sabbath law seriously and taught His disciples likewise, what the disciples were actually doing was no profanation of God's original intent. Thus He destroyed the false proposition

upon which the Pharisees' dilemma is constructed, i.e. "Our understanding of the proper observance of the Sabbath is the only view possible." But before showing the proper, original intent of the Sabbath, He needed to draw their attention to the exceptions to strict interpretation of law which even the Pharisees themselves both admitted and justified.

But the Pharisees were so sure that they had found Jesus in flagrant violation of fundamental Mosaic Law because of their exaggerated stress on the Sabbath. The surprisingly high number of clashes between Jesus and His opponents that turned upon this one point is explicable in view of the superstitiously high regard with which the Jews held the Sabbath. Farrar (*Life*, 329) summarizes their feelings:

The Sabbath was a Mosaic, nay, even a primeval institution, and it had become the most distinctive and the most passionately revered of all the ordinances which separated Jew from Gentile as a peculiar people. It was at once the sign of their exclusive privileges, and the center of their barren formalism. Their traditions, their patriotism, even their obstinacy, were all enlisted in its scrupulous maintenance. Not only had it been observed in heaven before man was, but they declared that the people of Israel had been chosen for the sole purpose of keeping it. . . . Their devotion to it was only deepened by the universal ridicule, inconvenience, and loss which it entailed upon them in the heathen world. They were even proud that, from having observed it with a stolid literalism, they had suffered themselves on that day to lose battles, to be cut to pieces by their enemies, to see Jerusalem itself imperilled and captured. Its observance had been fenced round by the minutest, the most painfully precise, the most ludicrously insignificant restrictions . . .

Other religions had their sacred temples, holy cities, priests, sacrifices and festal assemblies, but to the Jews alone was the Sabbath given as the peculiar sign of their exclusive belonging to God. The sanctity with which Jews regarded the Sabbath may the more easily be gauged by the intensity and deadly seriousness with which they objected to Jesus' claims, teaching and practice regarding it. The importance of the issue may also be weighed by the unrelenting determination of Jesus to make His point, even though, for Him, death rode with the outcome. And the almost delighted conclusion of these heresy-hunters that what His disciples were doing with His obvious sanction was

"not lawful on the sabbath," was prompted by, and explicable on the basis of the fact that this act rendered them strictly liable to death by stoning according to the ancient mosaic precedent. (Cf. Nu. 15:32, 33)

**Not lawful on the sabbath.** What the disciples were doing was clearly a breach of rabbinic traditions, but not of the Biblical law, so the charge of the Pharisees is false. The original commandment given by God forbade work. (Study Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2, 3; Lev. 23:3; Nu. 15:32-36; Dt. 5:12-17)

### THE SABBATH LAW

- I. Who must observe it? (Ex. 20:9)
  - A. The Hebrew and his family
  - B. The Hebrew's servants
  - C. The Hebrew's animals
  - D. Any sojourners in Hebrew cities
  
- II. Why must they observe it? (Ex. 20:11; 31:15)
  - A. Because God rested on the seventh day
  - B. Because God blessed the seventh day
  - C. Because God hallowed the seventh day as "a sabbath unto Jehovah," making it thus "holy unto Jehovah."
  - D. The Sabbath is a special "sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:13)
  - E. The Sabbath is a perpetual agreement between God and Israel (Ex. 31:16)
  - F. Penalty for profanation by working was to be death (Ex. 31:14, 15; 35:2)
  - G. In order that servants may rest as well as the Hebrews themselves (Dt. 5:14)
  
- III. How must they observe it?
  - A. Negatively: what must not be done on the Sabbath?
    1. The Hebrew must do no work; work must be done on the other six days (Ex. 20:9, 10)
    2. No plowing or harvesting (Ex. 34:21)
    3. No kindling of a fire in the homes (Ex. 35:3; Num. 15:32-36?)
    4. No baking or boiling food (Ex. 16:23)
    5. No treading the winepress (Neh. 13:15)
    6. No hauling of goods or food to markets (Neh. 13:15)
    7. No carrying on of trade (Neh. 13:16; Amos 8:5)
  - B. Positively: what could be done on the Sabbath?



1. The Hebrew must rest (Ex. 34:21) a "solemn rest" (Ex. 35:2)
2. Holy convocations (Lev. 23:3) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) comment:

Moreover Knobel is wrong in identifying the 'holy convocation' with a journey to the sanctuary, whereas appearance at the tabernacle to hold the holy convocations (for worship) was not regarded as necessary either in the law itself or according to the latter orthodox custom, but, on the contrary, holy meetings for edification were held on the Sabbath in every place in the land, and it was out of this that the synagogues arose. (Cf. 2 Kg. 4:22, 23)

On this latter verse, they comment (*Kings*, 311):

From these words . . . others have drawn the correct conclusion that the pious in Israel were accustomed to meet together at the prophets' houses for worship and edification, on those which were appointed in the law (Lev. 23:3; Num. 18:11sq.) for the worship of God . . .

Cf. also Ezek. 46:3

3. Sabbath offerings in the Temple:
  - a. The regular, continual burnt-offering with its relative drink-offering (Nu. 28:1-8)
  - b. Additional, special Sabbath offerings of two male lambs with the relative libation (Nu. 28:9)

This hasty sketch of the Sabbath law mirrors a true impression of the absolute simplicity of the Sabbath ordinance. After all, God did not wish to burden His people with a multitude of regulations and so defeat the very purpose of the Sabbath by making it a burden. But, ironically, the interpreters of the Law were not satisfied with so simple a prohibition. "Work" must be defined so carefully as to eliminate any equivocation. With these definitions came a multiplicity of other rules, all intended to clarify God's will. What a travesty on piety to presume to be able to state God's will more clearly than He was able to do it Himself! But the orthodox took all these minute regulations with intense seriousness. For them, to keep these traditional definitions was to keep God's Law. To neglect or disregard them was to defy God! But when will the Church of Jesus Christ learn the lesson

that such a slavish adherence to the letter of Scripture, the more precise it is, usually produces only a wider departure from its spirit?

### 3. JESUS ANSWERS:

#### a. *Human need rises above strict, legal procedure* (12:3, 4)

There are times when it is proper to ignore the opposition, to let it die frustrated by its own weakness, fall of its own weight. But the Lord sees that this is not the time. This is the moment when He must do battle or surrender His cause. In the skirmishes that ensue He feels absolutely impelled to return the fire of the Pharisees, but He does so much more than this. He teaches us how to understand and apply the specific terminology of God's law as it applies to us. He reveals Himself as lord even of the Sabbath. He places the proper emphasis on real human need, as opposed to inhumane application of God's will which had originally been intended for man's good.

Whereas the critics' original objection had been levelled at the disciples' actions, everyone knew that Jesus, not the disciples, was really on trial. This explains why Jesus leaped to meet the attack. There is no apology here; rather He accepts full responsibility for what His men had done and justified them completely (See on 12:5).

12:3 **Have you not read?** Mark's rendering (2:25) is more brusque: "Have you never read. . . ?" (*oudépote anégnote*) However, Jesus expected a positive answer, as demonstrated by the form in which He framed the question (negative *ou*). Of course, they had read the cited Scripture many times, but had been blinded to its significance. This is a stinging rebuke for ignorance of Scripture when asked of those who pretended to be its official interpreters. The Lord used this approach effectively several times. (Cf. Mt. 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31) Even on this occasion He hammers on the inexcusable ignorance of the Scriptures, driving home their inability to grasp the real meaning of their own sacred texts. His argument rises with smashing force by means of two questions: "Have you not read? . . . Have you not read in the law?" (12:3, 5) until He clenches His conclusion with "If you had known what this means (Hos. 6:6), you would not have condemned the innocent." (12:7)

**What David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him.** The incident cited (1 Sam. 21:1-6) becomes also Jesus' vindication of the historicity of the facts narrated there, since it is inconceivable that Jesus should deceive men by making use of facts merely supposed to be true, but which He Himself knew to belong rather to the unfounded or otherwise unprovable traditions

of His people. Mark (2:26) reports David's act as taking place "in the days of Abiathar the high priest," whereas his father Ahimelech held that office until his murder by Saul. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1—22:21; 23:6) Thus, David asked bread, not of Abiathar but of Ahimelek. The solutions that have been offered to these apparently contradictory facts are:

1. There was a slip of the memory either on the part of Jesus or Mark, i.e. Mark forgot what Jesus actually said when He mentioned the right name, or worse still, Jesus momentarily misremembered the proper name and confounded father and son. But either of the suggestions is inadequate in light not only of the inspiration of Mark and the undoubted authority and infallibility of Jesus, but also in light of better arguments that harmonize the same facts more suitably, without requiring the disqualifying of either Jesus or Mark.
2. Jesus was speaking by prolepsis. Whereas Abiathar's high priesthood did not begin until later, yet, because he, through his association with David, became so much more famous than his father, is described by this later title by prolepsis. Note that Mark says no more than *epi Abiathar archierēōs*, which may mean no more than "in the time of Abiathar the high priest", and so not exclusively specifically, "when Abiathar was high priest", as the RSV renders the phrase. (For uses of *epi* with genitive to denote time, see Arndt and Gingrich, 286, I, 2)
3. Abiathar may have already been priest during the high priesthood of his father, carrying out some priestly functions. But even if he had nothing to do with the high priesthood *per se*, he actually became high priest only a few days after David's visit to his father Ahimelek, whose help to David cost him his life and whose death automatically made his only surviving son the next high priest. So the high priesthood of Abiathar was only a matter of hours after his father fed David and his men, and so may loosely be described centuries after the event as high priest, as he was thereafter known.

13:4 **how he entered the house of God**, not the Temple but the tabernacle pitched at Nob, apparently not at Shiloh. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1; 22:9, 10, 11, 19) **And ate the bread of the Presence.** (Cf. Ex. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9) **Which it was not lawful for him to eat . . . but only for the priests.** On this point the law is

clear: "It shall be for Aaron and his sons; and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy unto him of the offerings . . ." (Lev. 24:9) But what is the precise thrust of Jesus' argument? Does He justify David's course, or does He merely argue as He does because He knows the Pharisees justify David?

1. If this is a mere *argumentum ad hominem* based upon the fact that the Pharisees excused David for eating the holy bread, then His argument goes no further, since it would be valid only against those who mistakenly justified such a violation of the law of which David thus becomes guilty. But that Jesus Himself also justified David is evident from the fact that God also, in a sense, justified David and Ahimelek by not immediately smiting them for this "violation of strict Levitical practice". (Did God always punish violations of ceremonial or moral law immediately upon commission of the sin as He sometimes did?) Further, were there any hint that Jesus really condemned David's action, His opponents could have pounced upon it as a weapon against Him, since He had placed the actions of His disciples in the same position with David's, and if they had sensed that He held David to be culpable, they could have accused His disciples of the same.
2. Or, on the other hand, does Jesus justify David's actions, thus share the same fundamental proposition with the Pharisees while using it to show their inconsistency? If so, one must interpret Jesus' statement: **the bread . . . which it was not lawful for him to eat.** How can some action be justifiable and still be **not lawful**?
  - a. According to a strictly literal interpretation of the particular code in question, that bread was for none but priests only. There was a general prohibition specifically stated in the Levitical text that forbade the sharing of the bread of the Presence with laymen like David. (Lev. 22:10-16; cf. also Ex. 29:33; Lev. 10:12-15) The presentation bread was not merely the priests' food, because it was a consecrated sacrifice. (Lev. 24:9)
  - b. However, David's actions were in perfect harmony with good Scripture interpretation. Were Ahimelek and David wrong to interpret the Levitical law so liberally? God did not strike either man dead for any supposed transgression of this law. Nor had there been any Scriptural exception

which would permit the high priest to depart from this legislation in order to show love to a fellow man in need. And yet when he did so, this high priest and David were not punished by God for so doing, as was Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6, 7), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2) who also departed from strict legal procedure. The obvious difference between the apostasy of these latter and the actions of David and Ahimelek lies in their recognition that even the letter of God's holy law may be superceded and set aside by other, higher considerations. In this case, human need takes precedence over any ritual, custom or practice. Keil and Delitzsch (*Samuel*, 218) comment:

If they were clean at any rate in this respect, he (the high priest) would in such a case of necessity depart from the Levitical law concerning the eating of the shew-bread, for the sake of observing the higher commandment of love to a neighbour (Lev. 19:18) . . .

- c. David's actions were consistent with good legal administration. If **what David did . . . was not lawful** (as Jesus says), then how is it that the Lord of the law can let what must be seen as a strictly illegal action pass without censure? Do we not see here the principle that law, all law, or any given law, is enacted for the orderly exercise of social relations? Any mature leaders know that exceptions to the law may be made when society is running smoothly and that the only danger in exceptions is when they become the rule and chaos results. At such a time, the return to strict law enforcement is needed in order to reestablish the order. Exceptions may also be made when it is evident that the purpose or spirit behind the law is not being ignored or violated by the exception. Now while this argument does not PROVE the rightness of Ahimelek and David's act in giving and receiving the presence-bread, yet it illustrates the fact that Jesus' concept of law admits the type of exception Ahimelek's offer proposes.
- d. David's actions were vindicated also by Jewish interpretation, as Edersheim (*Life*, II, 57) remarks: "Jewish tradition vindicated his conduct on the plea that 'danger to life

superseded the Sabbath-law, and hence, all laws connected with it . . ."

Mark's rendering of Jesus' words (2:25) puts more emphasis on this human need, proving thus that Jesus' attention is directed toward the claims of stark necessity in preference to hard-nosed legal procedure that would have deprived David of this essential food. The resultant thrust of Jesus' argument is: if David's hunger could set aside a divine regulation, could not the hunger of my men waive your interpretation of the sabbath no-work law? And if Farrar (*Life*, 333) is right in suggesting that David ate the bread of the Presence on the Sabbath, since the bread was only changed on that day (cf. 1 Sam. 21:6 with Lev. 24:8, 9), the Lord's argumentation takes on more force, as these Pharisees, to be consistent with their own principles would have had to condemn the high priest for attending to a sojourner on the Sabbath!

NOTE: The sectarian "law of prohibitive silence" is proven false by Jesus' declarations here! The so-called "law of silence" states that God has clearly commanded everything He wants men to have or do or be. So, if God has not spoken regarding any issue, according to this theory, He must be against it. But this theory of the tacit prohibition or "law of prohibitive silence" contradicts Jesus here, since God had not expressly stated anywhere that any others than priests could eat that bread and live, much less live and be justified by Jesus. This is a case where not the letter but the real spirit behind the letter was observed in careful conformity to God's intention and will.

b. *Work in God's Service is permitted on the Sabbath* (12:5, 6)

12:5 **Or have ye not read in the law?** Feel the climactic construction and striking contrasts that Jesus combines in this sentence!

1. **In the Law!**
2. **On the Sabbath Day!**
3. **The Priests!**
4. **In the Temple!**
5. **PROFANE THE SABBATH!**
6. **Yet, are guiltless.**

The service of God was the object in view behind the Sabbath-law, not merely rest. Naturally, the priests worked on the Sabbath in order to carry out the service of God. In fact, there was extra work for them

to do on that day! (Nu. 28:1-10; Lev. 24:8) Offerings for the redemption of the firstborn had to be made after the thirty-third day whether it fell on Saturday or not. (Ex. 22:29, 30; Cf. Lev. 12:1-8 and Lk. 2:21, 22, 27, 39) Ex. 22:30 suggests that firstborn animals had to be sacrificed on the eighth day even if it were Sabbath. (But was this the work of the priests at the tabernacle or temple or were these animals slain by their owner at home?)

But the main point Jesus makes is that, if the priests did NOT carry out their obviously laborious tasks on the sabbath, they would certainly be profaners of the seventh day. Yet who would dare seriously argue that they were, in any sense, violating the sabbath? And yet, by the Pharisees' own definitions of work, the law contradicts itself by making those governed by it to violate its precepts by keeping other of its requirements! **The priests . . . profane the sabbath** must not be taken literally here, for Jesus intends the word **profane** ironically, since the priests' work only appeared to be profanation due to its nature as real work. The Lord's statement ("priests profane the sabbath") is only a concession to His opponents' mistaken interpretations which dared force the Law to contradict itself.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 463) suggests that Jesus' preceding arguments were but the induction of a general principle from a particular case admitted by all, whereas here He proceeds to the specific case actually stated in the Law which verified the principle inferred earlier: "All ceremonial laws, including the sabbath-law, are limited in their application." He rightly teaches that even the Law itself presents its ceremonial applications as not absolute in character and those who would so understand them must contradict the intent of the Law itself. The ceremonies are subservient to the real motivation which caused God to give the ordinances in the first place: i.e. the motivation behind all ordinances is found in their service to the well-being of man. (Cf. Deut. 30) The only reason the Law required the hard labor of *the priests on the Sabbath in the Temple* was the spiritual need of the people, for it was this, and not with a mere outward regulation or form, that God was concerned.

But from Jesus' argument at this point may we infer that He somehow elevates His disciples to the level of priests serving in the service of God in a Temple greater than that at Jerusalem? Though this conclusion is not absolutely compelling, yet the reaction that this statement must elicit from His objectors would be: "Whom do you make your disciples to be? Of course, the priests work in the Temple, because they are required by Law to do so. But your disciples are

common laymen whom we have caught reaping grain on the Sabbath!" From this viewpoint we see that the Master may be hinting at a priesthood superior to that of Aaron, which would be described more fully in the literature of the New Covenant (i.e. the epistle to the Hebrews). On the other hand, if Jesus means to suggest no more than the principle, illustrated by this case in point, that "All ceremonial laws are limited, not absolute, in their application", then it is truer to say that He is merely attacking the Pharisees' own misinterpretation of the Sabbath regulations. However, see on 12:6.

12:6 **But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.** What could the Lord gain by antagonizing the Pharisees with claims such as this? What is the relation of this sentence to His preceding argument? Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that this assertion is rationally explained as the response made by the Lord to a contemplated rebuttal by the Pharisees: "Then, lest the Pharisees should retort, or in their hearts make exception, that the work referred to was wrought in the service of the temple, and was therefore permitted, while there was no such serving of higher interests here, He adds, **"But I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the temple."**

What is the **one greater than the temple?** (*toú hieroú meízón estin hóde*)

### 1. Can Jesus be the one greater than the temple?

- a. Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that "He contemplates his disciples as already the priests of the New Covenant, of which He is Himself the living Temple." In favor of this view it should be noticed that **temple** (*hierón*) is neuter and might seem also to have the weight of Jn. 2:18-21. Accordingly, Jesus' declaration would be: "I, God's living Temple and the immediate expression of the presence of God, am greater than the Jerusalem sanctuary." However, the fact that He is more often pictured as High Priest of the heavenly Sanctuary would caution us against viewing Him as the Temple itself, although it is true that, while He is the High Priest, He is also the sacrificial Lamb. (cf. Heb. 8:1-3; 9:11, 12, 24; Jn. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6, 9) Perhaps it would be truer to say that, as High Priest of the spiritual order soon to appear, He employed His disciples in a service far higher than that of the Levitical. But against this alternative is the technicality of Jesus' actual accession to the high priesthood. (Cf. Heb.



2:17; 5:7-10; 6:20) Would He be considered priest prior to His own consecration as such, i.e. before He offered Himself in His death?

2. *Meizon* is neuter gender and so requires that Jesus' allusion to be something other than masculine, as to an idea, a principle or the like: "There is something involved here that is greater than all that the Jerusalem Temple stands for."

a. Taken in connection with the following verse (12:7), Jesus may mean that there is a principle of religion entirely overlooked by these narrow-souled objectors. There ARE matters of the Law weightier than all the purely ceremonial aspects, which include everything from the smallest tithes clear up to include the Temple itself. (Cf. Mt. 23:23; Micah 6:6-8; 1 Sam. 15:22) These are justice, mercy, faith, loving kindness, humility and real obedience! Taken in this connection, Jesus intends to specify precisely what is greater than temple service, by insisting that God wanted men to learn mercy, not merely how better to offer sacrifices. But, while this idea is certainly true in itself and much contextually in its favor, it may not exhaust Jesus' meaning.

b. Lenski (*Matthew*, 464) calls attention to three parallel situations in this section which in some way refer to the Temple:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) David entered <i>the house of God</i>     | David ate the holy bread                         |
| (2) Priests serve <i>in the Temple</i>        | Priests butcher sacrifices (their own food also) |
| (3) Something here <i>greater than Temple</i> | Disciples pluck and eat grain                    |

He notes also that in all three cases something occurs contrary to the Pharisean notion, but what is perfectly in harmony with the mind of God Who gave to Israel her Tabernacle, the Temple, and, lastly, the presence of the God-man Himself. Lenski concludes that the neuter adjective *meizon* ("greater") is more natural when seen as referring to something parallel in thought with "house of God" and "Temple", which are also non-personal references. However, he concludes that the former two symbolize the

divine presence, whereas Jesus' personal and immediate expression of the divine presence is far superior either to tabernacle or temple.

3. Despite the fact that the neuter *meizon* ("something greater") is the best reading of the Greek text, it can still be construed to refer to Jesus.
  - a. That *something*, in the final analysis, whatever it is, Jesus says, is superior to the Temple service. If so, it is superior to the entire ceremonial law which regulated the Temple. Later (12:8) Jesus places Himself above all the ceremonial law, even above the Sabbath itself, whence the implication that, even here, Jesus' presence and service is superior to the Temple.
  - b. Or, all that the Hebrews had in Jesus as the Christ was far superior to everything they enjoyed in the Jewish religion which their Temple was their most glorious symbol.
  - c. All that Jesus taught about true religion revealed a view of God and man far superior to all that the Jews had in their Temple service. But even this revolves around who Jesus is, i.e. He is no mere teacher, but the revealer of the mind of God.
  - d. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 58) emphasizes the Service to Christ in the following logical form:

The Service of God and the Service of the Temple, by universal consent superseded the Sabbath-law. But Christ was greater than the Temple, and His Service more truly that of God, and higher than that of the outward Temple—and the Sabbath was intended for men, to serve God: therefore Christ and His Service were superior to the Sabbath-Law.

But while we are searching for Jesus' specific meaning, let us not miss the thunderous impact that this shocking claim must have made upon His hearers, for, to those pious (and some not-so-pious) Hebrews, what could be higher, holier or more glorious than the earthly dwelling place of the glory of Jehovah? The truly devout could answer, with the understanding of Solomon: "Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee! How much less this house that I have built!" Even so, who does this young rabbi from Nazareth think He is, going around

to insist that what His disciples are doing is somehow part of a service to God *greater than our temple?*

c. *God's Interpretation of His Law is more lenient than yours* (12:7)

**If you had known what this meaneth . . . you would not have condemned,** means "You did not understand Hosea 6:6 and so you transgressed the spirit of real religion because of your ignorance." (See comments on 9:13; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8, 29; Jer. 7:22, 23; Am. 5:21-24; Psa. 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-19; 69:30, 31) The seriousness of this charge ("You . . . have condemned the guiltless!") must be apparent, because it classed these Pharisees, "the righteous" with the most abominable sinners they could imagine, such was the heinousness of this their religious conclusion. (Cf. Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:18-23)

**"I desire mercy and not sacrifice,** the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) **Mercy** (*chesed*: "love, favor, grace, mercy, kindness," according to Scerbo, *Dizionario Ebraico*, 92; "Mercy, pity, piety of men towards God," so Gesenius, 294; *éleos*, according to Arndt and Gingrich, 249, refers to "mercy, compassion, pity." Usage pictures this compassion, called for by Hosea, as both that which God has for man and that which man must show his fellows. But which meaning best suits Hosea's intent and, consequently, Jesus' use here?

1. God's mercy: "I desire that you learn what my mercy really means, not merely how better to sacrifice; I intend that you learn to know ME, not solely the liturgies and sacrifices I taught you." Israel in Hosea's day was being destroyed spiritually from lack of knowledge, having rejected and thus forgotten the law of God. (Hosea 4:6) They had raised impassible barriers between themselves and God because of their sins and it could truly be said that Israel did not know the Lord. (Hos. 5:4) Their crying need was to sense once again the real mercy of the Lord. (Hos. 6:3) Though Hosea vividly portrays Israel's sins, and consequent judgments that must come because of them, (Hos. 6:7—10:15) he pleads with Israel to remember God's longsuffering love and constant tender mercies. (Hos. 11:1-11; 14:1-7) According to this view, then, Hosea was pleading that Israel comprehend the fact that God was not a mere great man in the sky to be placated by so many sacrifices and ceremonies. Rather He is a God who punishes the iniquity of any person or nation, and a God who delights

in being gracious and merciful even in the hardest cases, especially that in which Israel then found herself. In this case, Jesus' use of this text means: "The essence of real religion is not the perfect, punctilious and perpetual performance of the proper practices, but in knowing and responding to a real, living God who cares about man."

2. Human mercy. This view sees God as pleading, "When I taught you to offer sacrifices in the first place, what I was trying to teach you was not that religious rituals and ceremonies are important. What I wanted you to sense was that I desire that you show mercy. When you offer any sacrifices, what are the sins you confess for which you make those offerings? Sins against the people with whom you live. Now, if you admit that you need my mercy and forgiveness in relation to those sins, how much does your neighbor require the forgiveness and mercy that only you can give? And if, in harmony with your obedience shown through your sacrifices, I showed mercy to you, should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Cf. Jesus' concept in Mt. 18:23-35) This view also has the advantage of harmonizing well with the original context of Hosea due to the heartlessness and unmercifulness of Israel. (cf. Hosea 4:1, 2; contrast Hos. 10:12)

Probably the latter explanation is the better, since it may also include the former. This is so, because those who really understand the mercy of God, have also grasped their own responsibility to show mercy to their fellows, even as God has shown them loving kindness. And, conversely, those who perfectly demonstrate human compassion and forgiveness have learned it from God. Another evidence that human mercy is intended is the prophet's antithesis: "*mercy and not sacrifice.*" Evidently, as sacrificing is a requirement of men, so mercy is something God expected of them.

Obviously, then, mercy to fellow human beings is far more important to God than the punctiliously correct but mechanical observance of the letter of the Law. Even so sacred an institution as the sabbath must take second place to deeds of mercy, because of the greater importance of people as human beings made in the image of God. The real purpose behind God's commandments and rituals was His desire to teach men the real value of human life and a merciful spirit that needs no law other than the cry of human need. All legalists generally tend to be tender and careful toward the rituals but harsh to

fellow humans for whose sake the laws were really intended. But by Jesus' constant insistence upon this principle (Hos. 6:6), we are led to see that that text lays down a principle which must touch and influence our understanding of the whole gamut of external ceremonies commanded by God: i.e. the external ordinances were not instituted for the sole purpose that man might observe them. Rather, they were designed to bless man by disciplining him for service to God out of the spontaneous expression of his own free choices. However, this observation of Jesus does not countermand either the Sabbath commandment, any more than that any of these Scriptures (Hos. 6:6 *et al.*) describe the end of material sacrificing. Far from it, many times in the same context, they pass rapidly from those spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing to God, to discuss the material sacrifices that must be offered in the right frame of mind. (Cf. Malachi 3:10 in its full context; note Jesus' way of exhorting to mercifulness, Mt. 5:23, 24) Even mercifulness of God shown a healed leper did not excuse him from ceremonial obedience to a Levitical ordinance that God had given for cases such as his! (Cf. Mt. 8:2-4)

**I desire mercy and not sacrifice.** By this citation Jesus proves that there were thousands of positive acts of goodness and mercy that the Jews should have been doing on any and every Sabbath. **I desire mercy** leaves them entirely free how to express the genuine concern for their fellows, but Jesus' scorching rebuttal unmasks their obvious indifference to the positive requirement that they actually do something useful whether it be Sabbath or not. Lenski (*Matthew*, 466) thinks that

Jesus is not speaking of mere humanitarian pity, nor of merciful actions inspired by the law. The mercy that Hosea refers to comes from the gospel, which fills also the Old Testament.

But this is not faithful to Hosea's context, since it would have made no sense to Hosea's original audience, if Lenski is right, nor could Jesus reproach the Pharisees for not grasping this concept. So He is discussing that real, humanitarian pity that causes a man to interpret and apply the Law in such a way as to do kindness to his fellow creatures. **Not sacrifice, sacrifice** here is taken typically for the entire ceremonial law, the Sabbath-law included, because the ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath was not the end-all of God's intention for giving the Sabbath. Thus, the Hebrews, should have been able to see that Saturday could have been spent in positive deeds of mercy that expressed the active love and compassion of God in them. Mercy is

something that is always lawful! (Cf. Gal. 5:22f "against such there is no law." I Tim. 1:8, 9)

Trench (*Miracles*, 197) poses the trenchant problem regarding the application of the principle Jesus stated: just to whom does the Lord intend to apply it, to His own disciples or to the Pharisees? He makes a good case for both:

1. To the disciples: "If you had at all known what God desires of men, you would then have understood that my disciples, who in love and pity for perishing souls have so laboured and toiled as to go without their necessary food, were offering that very thing; you would have seen that their loving violation was better than other men's cold and heartless fulfilment of the letter of the commandment." (I presume here that Trench means a "violation" of rabbinic definitions rather than of the Sabbath-law itself. HEF)
2. To the Pharisees: "If you had understood the service wherein God delights, you would have sought to please Him by mercy,—by a charitable judgment of your brethren,—by that love out of a pure heart, which to Him is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices (Mark xii. 33), rather than in the way of harsh and unrighteous censure of your brethren."

Should any suppose this standard to be the easier, because God requires **mercy** above rituals, let him be merciful and act fully consistent with this standard whereby he gives the other fellow the benefit of the doubt for but one single day, and he will see that God raised the requirement to a far more rigorous demand than ever before imagined! **Sacrifice** is by far the easier part of religion. Many can make great, expensive sacrifices (and they are necessary!), but how many submit to the daily discipline of being consistently merciful to their fellows?

**Guiltless.** This is the Lord's verdict. It must have brought raised eyebrows among those scribes who were even then straining eagerly to wring out of Jesus the very opposite admission. But even this scandalous remark will be rapidly forgotten after Jesus lays before them the authority upon which He arrives at this pronouncement of their innocence: "As Lord of the Sabbath myself, I find them not guilty of any wrongdoing on this day!" (cf. 12:8)

d. *I am Lord of the Sabbath* (12:8)

**For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath** (*kúrios gár estin*, Mt.; *hōste kúrios estin*, Mk.) Why does Matthew and Mark use

these special connectives (*gār* and *bōste*), when Luke proves that one can do without them and still have a grammatically good sentence? *Gār* ("for") is intended to introduce the reason why Jesus reaches the verdict announced in the previous verse, concerning the disciples' innocence, while Mark's *bōste* ("so") introduces what Jesus sees as the logical result that derives from admitting that "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." (Mark 2:27, 28) Since this latter declaration is Mark's record of the context in which Jesus made this great claim, we are obligated to ask whether Jesus was saying something about Himself, about any man, or both. Since "son of man" as well as "Son of man" have quite different meanings, even though both expressions refer to man in an ideal or abstract way, we must understand whether Jesus intended the one or the other meaning, when He surprised His listeners with this pithy remark. (Since in the original manuscripts of the Gospel writers all words were written in capital letters, capitalization in English translations are the result of translators' decisions about the meaning.)

1. "son of man" meaning "any man" taken as a Hebraism.

- a. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 29) argues that "on this occasion Jesus is not defending *Himself* for anything that He did on the Sabbath; He is defending His *disciples*; . . . the authority which He is stressing here is not so much His own authority as the authority of human need." While Barclay is right to sense this thrust in Jesus' argument, nevertheless Jesus' authority is very definitely under discussion. Even if the Pharisees attacked the disciples' practice, their intention was to undercut their confidence in Jesus by whose tacit permission (if not His direct approval) the disciples violated the Sabbath by their eating grain reaped on that day.
- b. "son of man" is a Hebraism referring to mankind in general (cf. Ps. 8:4; Mt. 12:31 with Mk. 3:28). Regarded in this fashion, the phrase is rendered by Barclay's (*ibid.*, 23) suggestive translation thus: "For man is master of the Sabbath."
- c. Mark's context (2:27, 28) seems to promote this conclusion by revealing that God planned the sabbath to be a benefit to man, not a burden. It also makes man, any man, lord of the sabbath in the sense that any man must decide what he should do with the sabbath so as to achieve

his own welfare and please God. The Sabbath-law was not the lord of man and might temporarily be set aside when its strict observance conflicted with his welfare or hindered his expression of the impulses of God's Spirit within him. But such exceptions only proved the rule and never replaced the rule. Man was not free to dispense with the Sabbath as his caprice led. Only in really pleasing God by obeying Him does one find the satisfaction of his own best interests anyway.

2. "Son of man" meaning that unique title Jesus took to identify Himself with humanity. (See on 8:20; 9:6)
  - a. Those who see this interpretation of the phrase in question argue that such a marvelous claim is perfectly harmonious with, and even part of the explanation of, the foregoing, less lucid claim that the Jews had in Him something greater than the Temple (12:6).
  - b. While sheer frequency of use is not determinative in discovering meaning, it should be noted that Jesus uses the phrase "Son of man" elsewhere as His own unique title. However, even though He used the words almost exclusively as a title scores of times, mere frequency of use cannot be the final, deciding factor, since, if Jesus meant "man-kind" here in this one text, then that is His meaning. The true meaning of an author is determined by discovering what the author really intended to say, not by what we may determine from word counts, even though this method may help us approach the author's true meaning with more probability.
  - c. Matthew's introductory "For" (*gar*) argues that this claim explains Jesus' acquittal of His disciples, a verdict that calls for authority beyond which there could be no further appeal. So Jesus really is defending His right to say what He does.

If this latter view be the proper one, His vindication lies in what He Himself is. As rightful **Lord of the sabbath**, as His miracles and signs amply demonstrated, then He may declare what is allowable on that day. And from the uniquely Jewish standpoint that regarded the Sabbath above every other day, this makes Jesus Lord of all life, since, if He is Lord of the day of all days, He is then Lord of all



lesser days too. This self-revelation as the ideal Man who is superior to the Sabbath-law itself qualifies Him to know what was really involved in the original ordinance. It also qualifies Him to expose any tampering with its real purpose. This is why He defended His followers from the accusation of profaning the Sabbath merely on the basis of mistaken rabbinical notions which entirely missed the point of the real intent behind the Sabbath. Jesus is no longer arguing with the Pharisees, He is TELLING them, on the basis of His rightful authority, what the real meaning of this sacred day must be.

The great issue to be resolved here is whether God intended man to understand this concept of the original Sabbath ordinance now expressed by Jesus, i.e. that the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa. Could the ancients have known and understood this and, hence, practiced its meaning in proper activity on that day?

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 277) argues that "When the welfare of man conflicts with the observance of the Sabbath, the latter must give way. But of this man himself is not the judge, because he can not judge with impartiality his own interests. . . . No one is competent to judge in the case who does not know all that pertains to the welfare of man, and this is known only by the Lord." But this comment ignores the fact that the very lack of precision surrounding the Sabbath ordinance itself makes man the sole judge of what must be done. By deliberately being not casuistic, God literally left men really free to use the Sabbath in ways that their conscience, enlightened by His other precepts, might devise. And the quibble about the human intelligence being incompetent to know all that pertains to human welfare misses the great point that God left men unfettered in order that they might be free on the Sabbath especially to deal with those practical problems of mercy or necessity which men actually faced. This freedom left men even more responsible before God for what they did with the Sabbath! That freedom did not enslave the Hebrews with a host of tyrannical regulations but should have been the first lessons in that great principle of what we have learned to appreciate as Christian freedom revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. McGarvey's assertion (*ibid.*) that "the passage teaches, then, not that men might violate the law of the Sabbath when their welfare seemed to them to demand it, but that Jesus could set it aside, as he afterward did, when his own judgment of

men's welfare required him to do so," puts unnecessary emphasis on the word "violate". A man does not "violate" the Sabbath by exerting himself in his own best interests or in that of his neighbor, even though some stickler for the traditional interpretation of "work" might call his exertion "work, therefore, violation." The Sabbath-law was notably unhedged about with minute details about how it was to be observed. This left man largely master of his own decisions regarding what activities he could pursue on that day, activities, that is, which did not transgress what was actually written in the Law regarding that day.

3. The Pharisees' great mistake was that they had raised to the level of divine revelation those private judgments about what could (or could not) be done on the Sabbath. From the view of God's original intent, it would have been fairly difficult to violate the Sabbath, else it would have become what Jesus expressly affirms that it was not, i.e. the tyrannical lord of man.

But let it be noted, contrary to many older commentaries, that it is no argument for His requiring Christians to observe weekly sabbaths to say that He is yet **Lord of the sabbath**. For His fundamental argument here is that He is Lord of the whole Law that instituted the Sabbath for man's benefit. But this beneficial quality of the Sabbath is no argument for observing it further today. The Sabbath, as any other part of the Mosaic economy, was instituted for the blessing of the people under that particular system. The real stumblingblock for Sabbatarians of every age is their inability to conceive of the possibility that God could institute an entirely new and different kind of system or arrangement **SO FAR SUPERIOR TO THE SABBATH** or any other phase of Mosaic Law, that the temporary benefits of the Mosaic system seem detrimental by comparison! The Sabbath was a temporary means to achieve a particular end for a certain people. The Son of Man proved His full, rightful lordship over that day by disposing of the Sabbath in favor of a system far superior to it.

#### B. FOR HEALING A MAN'S WITHERED HAND ON THE SABBATH (12:9-15a)

##### 1. SITUATION: A TRAP LAID FOR JESUS (12:9, 10)

12:9 **And he departed thence**, i.e. from where the former controversy occurred, but that He did not immediately **enter their synagogue**, we are informed by Luke (6:6) who notes that it was

"on another sabbath". But He DID enter the synagogue, and by so doing, stepped again into the arena with the beasts. Why, when His appearance was sure to rekindle the fires of controversy and invite attack upon Him? Because in the synagogue God's Word was going to be read and men would worship there. No fear of possible trouble was permitted to interfere with Jesus' felt need to be there. **Their synagogue:** these are the same Pharisees from last week's encounter. Luke (6:6) reports Jesus' usual activity in the synagogue as teaching. The wily scribes and Pharisees were maliciously watching (*paretēroun, paretērounto*) to see whether he would heal the cripple. **12:10 And behold, a man having a withered** (Luke: "right") **hand.** It is not clear whether he was "planted" in the audience by the Pharisees in order to make this use of his weakness, or whether his presence in the synagogue merely furnished the occasion they sought. Since Mark (3:2) notes that they were waiting to "see whether He would heal him on the sabbath," the man is very much in their mind as part of their scheme, whether he himself is aware of it or not. It might be that Jesus let them watch for quite a while (note the imperfect tense in Mark 3:2; Lk. 6:7), so long in fact that they felt compelled to make the first move. So they toss Him a seemingly innocent, almost academic question, but which, if answered either positively or negatively, would embroil Jesus in the very trap they had laid for Him. On other occasions they "watched Him" with similarly malicious intent, (cf. Lk. 14:1; 20:20) that they might accuse Him of Sabbath profanation which, if proved, bore the death penalty. (Ex. 31:14) Perhaps their testimony would go to the Sanhedrin.

**Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?** By asking this loaded question, they seem to call direct attention to the man's twisted arm. Could it be that they had judged Jesus rightly, i.e. they knew that He could not encounter the diseased arm without doing something about it? If so, how right they were, but how wrong they were to use this partial knowledge to combat Him on His own ground! Perhaps they thought they had found the perfect dilemma with which to finish Him:

1. "If He answers that healing may not be done on the Sabbath, we will unmask His inhumanity to man." (Or, granted the live possibility that these Pharisees were not all this sensitive to human problems, they would more likely have thought, "If He condemns healing on the Sabbath, He will prove us right.")

2. Or if He answers that healing may be done, we will expose His flagrant rejection of the ancient and revered opinions of the fathers."

**Is it lawful?** is itself a legitimate question, depending upon what one intends to do with it, for even the Lord Himself used it to open debate on the legitimacy of healing. (Lk. 14:3) But the Pharisees' motivation poisoned it. Lenski (*Matthew*, 468) sighs: "We see how little impression Christ's word regarding mercy has made on them, v. 7. They still ask only . . . 'is it lawful,' and not, 'is it merciful?'" But, because the case was not one of life and death, since the withered hand could wait until the next day to be healed, this was an excellent test case for deciding between the two conflicting views or approaches to Sabbath interpretation.

**Is it lawful?** What hypocrisy! The hierarchy consider it a matter of small importance that they desecrate the Sabbath in order to challenge, criticize, plot against and crucify this One who alone proved His right to govern it. They had no interest in proper legal interpretation, their hypocrisy being betrayed by their own censoriousness. Worse still, since genuine concern for man and a deep un-hypocritical love prove to be the best rules of thumb for interpreting God's laws, where these are absent, a close, slavish adherence to the letter of the law, which generally produces a heartless, inhumane application of that law to others, can only lead to a wider departure from its spirit.

## 2. JESUS' ANSWERS AND CONCLUSION (12:11-13)

### a. *A Deliberate Intensification of the Tension* (Mk. 3:3; Lk. 6:8)

Jesus is not at all unaware of their secret motives. (cf. Mt. 9:4; 12:25; 22:18; Jn. 2:24, 25) He called the crippled sufferer to come forward to stand before the whole synagogue as the test case. Jesus' subsequent remarks are made so much more impressive by the sight of this man standing in a conspicuous position among the accusers. With Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 21) we can applaud, as he notes:

He met opposition with courageous *defiance* . . . We see Him openly and deliberately defying the Scribes and Pharisees. This thing was not done in a corner; it was done in a crowded synagogue. It was not done in their absence; it was done when they were there with deliberate intent to formulate a charge against Jesus.

b. *Jesus raises the moral issue* (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)

Though they had flung this question at Him, as one would hurl a challenge, He bounced it right back at them to make them answer it: "I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" But by so doing, He exposed the Pharisees as mute, moral cowards in the presence of a real issue. And they cannot object to His question either, as if He had failed to answer theirs by asking His. Two reasons:

1. He who asks a question, asks the favor of an answer, and as suppliant, he has no right to dictate what sort of answer he shall receive. Therefore he cannot object if the answer he seeks is a question that exposes his own weakness and failure, if that question gets at the truth he seeks.
2. Some questions must be reframed before they can receive a proper answer, since, in their present construction, they do not lead to the truth ultimately sought, as the question flung at Him by the Pharisees here.

So, the real question is not "to heal or not to heal," as stated by the dilemma posed Him by the Pharisees, but rather "to do good or harm, to save life or to kill". Now, while "to heal or not to heal" is a legitimate question (see on 12:10; Cf. Lk. 14:3), to clarify the real character of the act of healing a man, Jesus sounds out the Pharisees' moral acumen by simply asking to what moral class of deeds does healing belong? Is healing helpful or harmful? Does it save or destroy life? When the question is put in these terms, it becomes instantly clear whether healing is justified or not. The real alternative then becomes not "to do it or not", answered "one must do nothing at all", but "to do good or fail and do harm", for, to Jesus, to fail to do good is to sin. (Cf. Jas. 4:17) To leave the man's hand shrivelled even one more day is to "do wrong", whereas to restore it immediately is an act of obvious moral excellence, worthy of a Sabbath intended to bless man.

But why should Jesus add "to save life or to destroy it"?

1. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. By carrying this question to its necessary extreme, which extreme has the moral approbation of His audience, He covers all the territory in between. That is, if the ultimate extreme be admitted, all lesser acts included in the principle are justified also. There seems to have been no life-and-death urgency about

healing the man's hand, so Jesus could not justify His act as "saving a man's life or letting him die". But if they admit the necessity to save a man's life, a much greater act often accompanied by a far greater exertion of energy or "work" then could they reasonably object to His doing the lesser, easier task of merely healing him?

2. Knowing that they were out to kill Him if they could but do it legally, perhaps His contrast is between their desire to destroy Him and His desire to restore a man to full life.

**But they were silent** (cf. also Lk. 14:4) Their silence on this moral issue must have provoked Jesus to real anger. (Mark 3:5) As He surveyed the entire group, He could find no man who would commit himself on this question. And the deep anger He felt was occasioned by their unwillingness to understand, despite the clear-cut morality of the issue. The mental block hindering their comprehension was, of course, their unwillingness to surrender their pride and reject their own conclusions, hoary with centuries of thought, that the Sabbath no-work law covered certain categories and not others, despite the fact that God had made no such distinctions or qualifications. *Hardness of heart* was that unwillingness to accept truth when confronted with it. (Cf. Mk. 6:52; 8:17; Jn. 12:40; Ro. 11:25; 2 Co. 3:14; Eph. 4:18)

But why were these theological experts silent when faced with this dilemma? Why did they not merely raise the objection that Jesus' question raised a false dilemma, presenting a false dichotomy and that there existed a third alternative not respected by His statement of the choices? Why could they not merely have objected in this manner? "But to obey the law of God as we are able to understand it is good, whereas healing is work that can be postponed until the end of the Sabbath. Hence, healing on the Sabbath is really to do harm, and we sincerely wish the man no harm. Further, the real choice is not between saving a life or destroying it, since only the man's withered hand, not his life, is involved. Consequently, not to heal his hand, Jesus, would NOT be to destroy his life, as you insinuate."

1. Perhaps the best answer to this quandary is the fact that in the case of the Pharisees, the problem lay not with logic but in their morality. There may have been something in the tone or manner of Jesus that indicated to them that He was not discussing solely the particular merits of the case of the man's withered hand. The unflinching gaze of the Son of man may have convinced them that He was bringing them to a

moral show-down. So the contrasts He sets before them describe the two distinct courses of action followed either by Jesus or the scribes themselves. Consequently, the meaning is: "Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good (as I am now planning to do for this cripple) or to do harm (as you meditate it against me), to save life (by bringing it to full, normal usefulness) or to destroy it (as you plan in my case)?"

2. Morgan (*Luke*, 85) suggests another alternative:

In the presence of a man like that, you do one thing or another: you either do him good, or harm. . . . You are either acting for his recovery; or you are acting for the perpetuation of his misery. . . . In the presence of human misery and dereliction, we cannot be neutral."

Whoever perpetuates pain or disability, when he possesses the power to help, becomes guilty of inhumanity, the most iniquitous of social sin. (cf. Mt. 22:39; 1 Jn. 3:15)

**They were silent!** They WOULD not say that doing good is lawful on the Sabbath, for this opened up too many exceptions to their carefully prepared but partisan rules. But, on the other hand, they did not DARE affirm that doing evil or destroying life was legitimate Sabbath activity. **They were silent!** This was their damnation, for it was their moral obligation, as authoritative exponents of Judaism and the guardians of orthodoxy, to take a positive stand for righteousness and truth right then and there before the waiting synagogue. Without any hidden motives or falsifications, they had to permit Jesus to bring perfect soundness to that withered hand. But their moral cowardice, grown strong from their constant leaning upon the authority and opinions of other men, kept them from braving the consequences of having to think for themselves or publicly change ground on this live issue. They were silent

1. Because they feared instant exposure as frauds before the people;
2. Because the Christ was powerfully and swiftly maneuvering them into an inescapable trap and they felt and feared His terrible ascendancy over them;
3. Because of their determinedly wicked hearts, since they had no intention of playing nice games of logic or morality with Him nor did they care about truth, for their avowed purpose was "to find an accusation against Him."

4. Or did some of them, deep in their conscience, really admit that healing WAS lawful and morally obligatory?

As learned men of the cloth, it was their duty clearly to pronounce judgment, but they said not a mumbling word. But by their silence they automatically surrendered their credentials, for who can trust the authority of a leader who in the face of a real problem must confess his ignorance and failure, especially in his own field where he had pretended earlier to be the expert? By their humiliated silence, they left Jesus entirely free to act without any possible fear of criticism.

- c. *Argumentum ad hominem*: "You work by helping a dumb beast"  
(12:11, 12a)

Jesus says, "Even if you refuse to answer your own question thrown back at you, I will abide by the answer to it that you show by your own actions."

12:11 **What man shall there be of you?** Indeed, what **man?** (*Tís anthropos*; *tís* alone is sufficient to ask the question "who? or what man?" so *anthropos* becomes emphatic here.) Inhumanity was the Pharisee's fundamental failure, so the Lord asks, "Who does not have a man's heart to feel this?" The ordinary man, what would he do in such a case? But would the Pharisees' rules permit them to do what common sense dictated, if the sheep in question were their own? **That shall have one sheep:** this is the owner, not simply a passerby who happens to see the helpless animal, consequently, someone who feels personally the value of the distressed beast.

But is it legitimate to make out of this part of the illustration a claim to be the "Owner of man", as does Morgan (*Matthew*, 127)? The emphasis of the argument here is rather upon the relative value of men contrasted to that of animals and the response we make to each.

**One sheep**, i.e., this is not a question of the loss of the whole valuable flock, but of one lone stray. And yet, despite the toil and exertion involved in saving the animal (see the Lord's picturesque words describe the shepherd's straining!), hardly any owner would even dream that he was technically profaning the Sabbath. He would probably never admit to having profaned it at all. And yet, despite the clearly justifiable nature of this humanitarian gentleness to dumb beasts, it does represent a technical violation of the Sabbath law, unconscionably justified by the average legalist, though not, by any means, the most rigid rabbis. Here is the irony: the Pharisees, like anyone



else, have to live in God's real world, despite his own unrealistic home-made rules. Because of the very character and necessities of his own earthly condition, regardless of what the Pharisee taught about the strictness of Sabbath-keeping, he himself was forced to do things on that day that could easily be adjudged to be a very laborious process! These scribes must be made to feel the keen contradiction between their principles, by which they had attempted to blame Christ, and their own practice by the logic of which they themselves justified what He did. Their grudging, narrow-heartedness was brutally exposed by their own inhumanity to man in the face of their solicitous attention to their own worldly interests (by saving one of their own possessions on the Sabbath). But once they admitted the REALITY of their practice, this argument becomes irresistible.

**12:12a How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!** The effectiveness of this argument is proven by Jesus' constant use of it. (Lk. 13:15-17; 14:5, 6; Jn. 7:21-24) Study other uses of this standard of value: Mt. 6:26; 10:29-31; 1 Co. 9:9, 10. What kind of blindness is required to render men incapable of grasping the chasm of difference that yawns between all lesser creatures and Man, who God destined to be lord of creation! (Ps. 8:5, 6; Gen. 1:26, 28; 9:2) One of the sure products of a false or hypocritical religion is inhumanity to man. What incensed Jesus was the fact that these nit-pickers would not have hesitated to help a brute beast in danger on the Sabbath, but denied Him (and others) the right to minister to distressed human beings on that day! According to Jesus, any religion that makes its adherents inhumane is a FALSE religion, regardless of all its other pretenses to orthodoxy. Who would dare affirm that a human being is somehow of less value to God than a dumb beast? And yet Jesus' question remains one that has not even yet been adequately understood and applied by Christians.

This rhetorical question is really an exclamation of human value that damns all human rules and schemes that reduce a man to the brute level. Why is it true?

1. Because of man's inherent sense of worth; he, above all animals, is conscious of himself.
2. Because man is moral, even though this means he can sin where a sheep cannot. Man should be saved, because he is so valuable because of what he is.
3. Because of the infinity of the human spirit, not totally limited to the bounds of the flesh in which man lives.

4. Because God chose to communicate with and redeem MAN, not sheep.

d. *Jesus' Own Conclusion* (12:12b)

12:12b **Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.** This surprisingly elementary declaration rushes from the fulness of Jesus' consciousness and concept of God and goes straight to the root of the problem, shatters all the legalistic objections and immediately resolves the question. **Doing good** knows no seasonal limitations: this is what the Kingdom of God is all about. This is why positive helpfulness is not only permissible, but obligatory any day of the week. (Jas. 4:17) Here Jesus repudiates the standard ecclesiastical rule that healing might be done on the Sabbath only where there was danger to life. But more than this, He rejects the assumption that the Sabbath was instituted to make man somehow less humane, less willing to meet the needs of his fellows. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 34) says it well:

It was Jesus' basic principle that there is no time so sacred that it cannot be used for helping a fellow-man who is in need. We will not be judged by the number of church services which we attended, or by the number of chapters of the Bible we have read, or even by the number of hours we have spent in prayer, but by the number of people we have helped when their need came crying to us.

Jesus proved the validity of this proposition in his own ministry by healing not merely this once, but at least seven times on the Sabbath!

1. The demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue exorcized (Mk. 1:21-28 = Lk. 4:31-37)
2. Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14, 15 = Mk. 1:29-31 = Lk. 4:38, 39)
3. The sick man at Jerusalem's Bethzatha pool (Jn. 5:1-9)
4. This man with the helpless hand (Mt. 12:9-13 = Mk. 3:1-6 = Lk. 6:6-11)
5. The man congenitally blind at Jerusalem (Jn. 9:1-14)
6. The deformed woman (Lk. 13:10-17)
7. The dropsical man in the Pharisee's house (Lk. 14:1-4)

The conclusiveness of this answer of Jesus to their insidious question is shown by the fact that, whereas they had challenged the rightness of healing on the Sabbath, He proved that it is legitimate **to do good on the Sabbath**, and therefore, **to heal**. The greater includes

the lesser. (See above on 12:11) From this and the preceding illustration, it becomes clear that the Old Testament worthies, who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that deeds of necessity and mercy were certainly allowable on the Sabbath even though this seems to contravene the intent of the law, showed greater understanding of the Sabbath institution, yes, even of the Law itself, than did these Pharisees who sought to protect its application by special casuistic interpretation. There should be no doubt that activities of any other kind than those of mercy or necessity were really forbidden by God, despite this more liberal view of the Sabbath ordinance. Nevertheless, Jesus demonstrated here once and for all that man, any man, was lord of the Sabbath in the sense that every individual person had to decide how best, within the few limits God actually placed on these activities, to worship God and to serve the needs of his fellows on that day.

However, the older commentators are greatly errant in supposing that Christ merely changed the proper holy day of the week to Sunday, making "the Lord's Day" a Christian Sabbath of which the modern disciple is obligated to make proper use through work and worship as if it were somehow more holy than the other six days. Even those usually doctrinally sound Bible students who seek to restore NT faith and practice in the life of the Church greatly err in limiting their concept of worship to what is done by the assembly of saints on Sunday in the local meeting place. The net result of this logic is the reestablishment of the "Christian Sabbath=Sunday" concept. Both errors arise from the mistaken conviction that Jesus actually regards one day higher than another, so that what is done on that day is somehow "holier" or more important or more critical than the activities in which one is engaged on any other day of the week. But God is no longer interested in making special holy days, places or special holy men in contradistinction to the rest of God's people, days or places. This is the prime reason why there are no peculiarly Christian feast-days or high holy days that are somehow more precious to God than any other. The stewardship of every day, the special sanctification of every hour by every person is that holiness which Jesus seeks.

Here again (see on 12:3, 4) the so-called "Law of Prohibitive Silence" must be found on the side of those Jews who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that no deeds of mercy, or acts to alleviate human suffering, were permitted. The Law forbade the normal, week-day occupations. But it did not specify what activities might be legal when done on a Sabbath. The "Law of Prohibitive Silence", if applied here, must render quite illegal all of our Lord's Sabbath activities, for

in this He went clearly beyond what was strictly written. Further, He taught that man is superior to the Sabbath law and should be using it positively for his good and the good of others. Finally, the Lord argues as if He expected these legal experts to have grasped this truth and He holds them as inexcusable for their ignorance of it.

e. *The Miracle Proves Jesus Right* (12:13)

12:13 **Then saith he to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand."** The hand was the man's right hand (Luke) and, unless he were left-handed, the uselessness of his right arm only plagued him as he tried to work with his less dextrous left hand. Jesus had already recognized the high utility and splendid service rendered by one's right hand (cf. note on Mt. 5:29, 30). Notice Jesus' procedure: without so much as a command that the shrivelled limb be healed, without even touching it, Jesus simply asked the man to stretch it out. No Pharisean definition yet elaborated could possibly define what Jesus had just done as "practicing the profession of medicine and healing". Nevertheless, just as surely they knew that He had healed the hand. And worse yet, had they but the conscience to see it, they were going to have to WORK OVERTIME that Sabbath in order to prove that He had worked! For who could ever demonstrate that to speak a single word of such marvellous power to heal was an *infraction of the Sabbath?*

These Jews had in their own history the marvellous cure of the withered hand of Jeroboam by the man of God from Judah. (1 Kg. 13:1-10) This was done in connection with the terrifying sign that God had indeed spoken by the prophet. The chief difference between the two accounts (that of the man of God and this of the Son of God) is that the Judean prophet besought the Lord for Jeroboam, whereas here Jesus heals the hand Himself directly without public appeal to God.

**And he stretched it forth.** By this act the man shows his good sense, expressed his open contempt for the inhuman traditions and interpretations that would leave him a cripple another day, and confessed his faith in Jesus. Without great eloquence and profusive confessions, the man's simple act evinced his acknowledgement of Jesus' authority. He did what he had been told, even though he knew it impossible.

**And it was restored whole, as the other,** with the same shade of tan, matching callouses and identical degree of aging. Should we expect God to botch the job by mismatching the poor man's hands by providing him a child's fist or the delicate fingers of a lady?

The Lord had beaten the Pharisees fairly, without unnecessary roughness and with unanswerable argument and undeniable evidence. Instead of repenting or humbly seeking His indulgence for more time to reconsider His position, they are driven by their instinct to self-preservation and resort to "violence, the last resort of vanquished opponents." (Lenski, *Matthew*, 471)

### 3. THE NEGATIVE REACTION OF THE LEADERS (12:14)

12:14 **But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.** Their counsel was not merely about Him, but decidedly prejudiced **against him**. Justice and evidence, fair play and commonsense have nothing to do with this discussion among these ecclesiastics, for no gentle graciousness nor logical argument on His part could sway them from this verdict of guilty. Their reaction, according to Mark 3:6 and Luke 6:11 is immediate and pointed:

1. They became furious (*eplēsthēsan anōtas*), true enough, but their motivation may well have been mixed with envy of His sway over the people. Even a relative outsider like Pilate could sense this. (Mt. 27:18) Why should they not be furious? He had ignored their traditions, reduced them to silence and publicly shamed them on vital moral issues! Their list of complaints against Him is growing:
  - a. He had attacked their illicit economic gains produced by the market which He claimed desecrated the Temple (Jn. 2:13-16)
  - b. He applied Messianic Scripture to Himself (Lk. 4:18-21)
  - c. He claimed to forgive sins, risking the charge of blasphemy (Mt. 9:3)
  - d. He mingled freely with the scum of Jewish society (Mt. 9:9-13)
  - e. He did not observe their stated fastdays (Mt. 9:14)
  - f. He ignored their rules for Sabbath observances and justified His disciples in the same (Jn. 5:16; Mt. 12:1-14)
  - g. He claimed to be equal with God (Jn. 5:17, 18)

Lange (*Matthew*, 218) summarizes the fundamental basis: Objections of less weight, and an interminable catalogue of calumnies, were connected with these charges. But the real stumbling block of the Pharisees, was

that conflict between the spirit and the dead letter, between the gospels and traditionalism, between salvation and unbelief, righteousness and hypocrisy, and holiness and proud self-seeking, which Christ represented and embodied.

2. They immediately counseled among themselves what to do with Jesus. They had already proposed to kill Him in Jerusalem (Jn. 5:16, 18), but their intention had been thwarted then. Although John does not record any specific attempts made on His life, apparently His strategic return to Galilee blocked any immediate efforts in that direction. By maintaining a moving ministry (see on 12:15), He kept any concentration of hostile efforts from forming, thus keeping the attackers off balance. He had already faced their critical judgment at close range and ably defended Himself. (See on 9:2ff.; cf. Lk. 5:17ff.)
3. They formed an unholy alliance with the Herodians. (cf. Mk. 8:15; 12:13; Mt. 22:15, 16) The Herodians were apostate Jews who not only accepted Roman rule in Palestine and supported the wicked Herodian house, but also affected pagan practices in the name of "culture". It must indeed have been a fierce hate for Jesus that could drive these usually fastidious Pharisees to make common cause with those Hellenizing Herodians! Mutual jealousies and long-standing enmity were forgotten in this conspiracy against Jesus, since He was a menace to both parties equally. But what could motivate the Herodians to join the Pharisees? Maybe it was simply calculating political expediency to unite against this "upstart rabbi whose religious following could take on political overtones that menaced the status quo". Perhaps they too hated the high religion He preached that exposed their shameful lives.

**How they might destroy him:** this is their determination, not whether to do so but how. To the mind of those who accept the significance of Jesus' miracles, this reaction is completely irrational. How could people who had just seen God heal through Jesus turn right around and plot His murder?

1. Because they could not even guess the fearful power at His disposal, should He choose to use it in self-defence. (Cf. Mt. 26:53) Could He not use His powerful word to destroy them? Nevertheless, they do not hesitate shamelessly to plot.

2. They certainly did not accept the proposition that God was actually working through Jesus. Once granted the thesis that no Messiah could ever be like Jesus of Nazareth, it became a simple matter to fault Him with collusion with Satan. (See on 12:22-37)
3. And if this latter conclusion be true, they were obligated by their perverted conscience to proceed with His elimination, the sooner the better.

With fitting irony Lenski (*Matthew*, 471) unmasks the perverted Pharisaic conscience: "To heal on the Sabbath—a mortal crime; but to plot murder—a perfectly legal act!" Violence is the only hope of those who are frustrated in their attempts to silence truth. For those who have eyes to see it, here are the first indications of the inevitability of the cross.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the occasions on which Jesus was accused of breaking the Law.
2. State and explain briefly all His answers to charges of Sabbath breaking.
3. Discuss the Sabbath: the law as God gave it; the law as the Pharisees had interpreted it and tried to enforce it; the teaching and practice of Jesus on it; and our relation to the Sabbath.
4. Were the disciples accused of stealing the grain?
5. What was wrong with their conduct, according to the Pharisees?
6. Did God make the law to which the Pharisees appealed in their criticism of Jesus' followers?
7. Did Jesus justify David's conduct? How did He use the allusion to the incident in David's life to justify the action of His disciples?
8. Was Abiathar the High Priest at the time of David's visit to the tabernacle? How may the discrepancy be explained?
9. Where in the Law does God permit the priests to work in the temple on the Sabbath without fear of breaking the Sabbath commandment?
10. What bearing does this mention of the priests' work on the Sabbath have upon Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath?
11. What does Jesus mean by saying, "One greater than the temple is here," as some translators put it, or, "Something greater than the

- temple is here," as the Greek has it? What is greater than the temple?
12. How does Jesus' allusion to Hosea 6:6 advance His argument? How would their comprehension of this passage have kept them from condemning the innocent?
  13. Who is (or are) "the guiltless"? (v. 7)
  14. In what connection does Mark (2:28) cite Jesus' word "So the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath"? How does this help the interpretation of this declaration of Jesus?
  15. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' challenge: "Is it right to heal on the sabbath day?"
  16. What is the point of the sheep story?
  17. How did the Pharisees react to Jesus' healing the man's hand? What did they do?
  18. If the Sabbath was God's Law for His people, why is it that the Church does not recognize the Sabbath any more?
  19. From the fact that the disciples were gathering their own food in this simple way, what may be deduced about Jesus' use of His miraculous power to feed them?
  20. What proof did Jesus offer the Pharisees that demonstrated His teaching correct and approved by God?

## Section 27

JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT  
OF JEHOVAH

(Parallel: Mark 3:7-12)

TEXT: 12:15-21

15. And Jesus perceiving *it* withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all,
16. and charged them that they should not make him known:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah 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 declare judgment to the Gentiles.
19. He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; Neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets.