

Matthew 12:1-8

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[0:00] I want us to turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12, and this morning, and hopefully also in this evening, we'll look at verses 1 to 8. Now, I'm going to expound this in a general way, and there's no one verse that I want to look at, but if you do like a text, and some people do, I would direct your attention to verse 6. But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

Those of us who were brought up on the Shorter Catechism probably connect this passage with words from the Shorter Catechism describing the way that the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, is meant to be kept according to the Catechism. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly enjoyments and recreations as are lawful in other days, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy. And I suspect that those of us who come from that background, knowing this concept of works of necessity and mercy, immediately read this passage and say, ah, that is what Jesus is speaking about. Here is a proof text, if you like, for works of necessity and mercy. And I used to think that myself. But then I realized, you know, if that's all that we're taking out of this, we really have missed the whole point of the passage. We've missed the whole point of what Jesus is saying about the Sabbath, which goes much more, much beyond that. And we're missing out the other things about which Jesus is speaking clearly in this passage. And so, I want to open up this passage to see what it says besides speaking about works of necessity and necessity and mercy. And I think, in this respect, the context is worth looking at.

The passage that we read that goes just before this is worth looking at. Because there, for example, it says, come to me, I'll give you rest. It says, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And I think that is connected with this passage that we're looking at. Here is Jesus talking about what real rest means as in contrast with the Sabbath that the Pharisees had. Here is Jesus proving that his burden is easy, that his yoke is easy, that his burden is light, in comparison with the heavy burdens that the Pharisees laid upon people. So, that's one theme that we've got here, the yoke of Christ that is easy.

That's one theme that is developed in this passage. But if you think of that passage at the end of chapter 11, you can see that it's not just saying, I'll give you rest. It's not just talking about an easy yoke and a light burden. It's very much a matter of self-revelation. What sort of person says, I am gentle and humble in heart? As soon as a person says, I'm humble, you think they're proud.

[3:37] No humble person says that. So, what sort of person is speaking here that can afford to say, I'm humble in heart? And then again, look at what lies behind this great claim. Come to me, I'll give you rest. That's a pretty far-reaching claim and a pretty exclusive claim. You won't find rest in anyone but in me. It's pretty far-reaching, the sort of things that Jesus is speaking about, and the way that he's speaking implies something about himself. And you can't separate what he does from who he is. And I think that is carried on into this section that we're looking at.

So, it's not just something that teaches us about a rest, a yoke that is easy, a burden that is light. But it's still a matter also of self-revelation. The way Jesus puts the thing across, the things that he says, he's speaking about himself. And he's giving us a picture of who he is, so that it's not just a case of what's he teaching here, but who is it that's teaching this? And therefore, I don't like to divide the sermon into do, but effectively, that's what I've done.

And this morning, I want to look at this idea of the Jesus that is revealed here in this passage, because I think that's important. And then, this evening, all been well, we'll look at the particular issue that he's dealing with and see how it goes far beyond the idea of simply works of necessity and mercy. So, this morning, we're saying, how does Jesus come over in this passage? The way that he teaches, what is he saying about himself? What claims is he making in teaching in this way? And although what we're saying boils down to nothing that isn't familiar to most of us, I suspect, I do

hope it will still come to us with fresh light, and it will reinforce truths that are quite familiar to us, so that we've a deeper appreciation of who our Lord is, and what he's come to do, and that we'll be able to hear him speaking to us, so that we respond to this picture of Jesus in a fitting way. So, this morning, we're talking about Jesus.

And we're going to talk about him under three headings. Jesus here supplements the Scriptures, He is superior to the sanctuary, and He is sovereign over the Sabbath. And obviously, we're strongly alliteration here, and I hope you remember these things, even if you don't remember much else. You remember these as pegs to hang thoughts on. Firstly, Jesus supplements the Scriptures. Now, notice how He does this here. Here, He's got this problem about the disciples not keeping the Sabbath the way the Pharisees wanted them to keep it. And how does He deal with the matter? In verse 3, He answered, haven't you read? In verse 5, haven't you read? And in both cases, you see, He's looking at what the Scriptures say. He's taking incidents from the Old Testament, and He's appealing to their authority, and He's using that as a basis of arguments to support His views. And there's nothing really very surprising in this, because Jesus constantly referred to the Old Testament Scriptures. He seemed to accept their authority and appeal to them when He was teaching. Indeed, on at least four other occasions in Matthew's Gospel alone, there is this response of Jesus when He's asked usually a hostile question, and He responds by saying, haven't you read? Haven't you read? Four other occasions, He does the same thing. Jesus appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures. But He doesn't just appeal to the Scriptures,

[7 : 55] He goes beyond the Scriptures. And He gives His own opinion, and He reinterprets the Scriptures, and brings out fresh meaning, and adds to what is already there. And you'll get that, you see, if we read verse 6 in a proper way. Because here in the NIV, which I presume most of us got before us, it says, I tell you. But actually, we should put a but in there, which most translations have, although some have yet. But there should certainly be a but put in there. And I think that that changes the emphasis of this passage quite considerably. He's saying, haven't you read the Scriptures? But I tell you. And there you see, he's contrasting his view with what the Scriptures say. He's saying, that's what the Bible says, but this is what I'm saying. He's not saying the Bible's wrong, he's appealing to that. This is authority, but he's going beyond the Scriptures. He's adding to the Scriptures. He's supplementing the Scriptures.

He's giving an authoritative interpretation that contains new ideas that are not there in the Scriptures, and that's the way we have to see things. There's the contrast between, have you read in the Scriptures, but I tell you. And that, you see, is something that is pretty staggering to the people at the time. But it doesn't affect us in the same way, because we're kind of used to it ourselves. After all, Jesus spoke in this sort of fashion on other occasions as well, and that's why we read the passage in Matthew chapter 5. We could have read much more, but we didn't have time.

Where Jesus says, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not murder, but I tell you. There's the same contrast. Where is the command, do not murder? It's there in the Ten Commandments, there in the Old Testament Scriptures. And Jesus is saying, you used to hear what it was said in the Scriptures, but I'm telling you this. So he's got authority to reinterpret the Scriptures, to add to the Scriptures, to bring out fresh meaning from it that was not genuine, not grasped before. And he's bringing the Scriptures to their fulfillment. That's what he's doing. And he doesn't just do that once in the Sermon on the Mount. He says later, you have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery, but I tell you. Now, it's pretty well the same thing that he's doing here. As he has interpreted in a fresh way, the sixth commandment and the seventh commandment, that's what he's doing here.

He's reinterpreting the fourth commandment because he's got this ability to bring fresh revelation and to bring the knowledge of God to a new level of understanding and meaning, because he's the great revealer who supplements, or we actually should say, who complements the Scriptures. Now, that's a picture of Jesus that we shouldn't be slow to accept. Jesus is the great revealer. He's the one that came into this world when the people understood certain things by God's revelation, and he brought that understanding to completion. He brought it to a new level, and he's the one who brings this revelation of God to its fullness and completeness. That's what Jesus does. There's nobody like him as a revealer of the things of God. There's nobody like him to have the authority to say, that's what the Old Testament says, but this is the way things are, adding to what they had understood from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Not that he's contradicting them. He's just bringing them to a fuller expression. And that's natural because of who he is. He's the Son of God. He's God himself in human form.

[11:54] And the writer of Hebrews is particularly strong on this point, and he speaks about Jesus as the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Now, can you think of anybody better equipped than that to bring revelation to its climax and fullness, to supplement the Scriptures or complement the Scriptures in this way? That's what Jesus is doing here. And, you know, sometimes there's a wee bit of misunderstanding about this, and folks say, well, isn't it really the Holy Spirit?

This is now the great revealer. And we must be careful about saying no to that, because he is, in some aspects, in some aspects. After all, he's written the Scriptures. So, in that sense, he is the great revealer. But the task of the Spirit is not to bring fresh revelation to bear, as if you could better the revelation that Christ gave. The task of the Holy Spirit is to take of the things that are Christ's and reveal them to us. And that's the picture that we've got of Jesus here, the one that supplements the Scriptures. Now, let's accept this and acknowledge this.

Let's say, well, I'm going to listen to the voice of Jesus. I'm going to accept him in this capacity as the great revealer. I'm not going to look to the Spirit as an independent witness. And I'm certainly not going to lean upon my own understanding, because he's the great revealer, the great prophet that brought the Scriptures to a new level of understanding. And that's the first claim that Jesus effectively makes here when he says, have you not read? But I tell you.

Not only that, Jesus is superior to the sanctuary. I tell you, but I tell you, that one greater than the temple is superior to the temple is superior to the temple. And the temple is here. Now, the problem, at first sight at least, about this statement is that it doesn't seem naturally to fit into what he's speaking about. Is he not speaking about the Sabbath? So, how come he makes a statement like this?

How does this fit into his line of thought? Well, I would just like to suggest this. Jesus seems to be arguing that there is a scale of priorities in regard to the things of God.

[14:35] You see this in the example that he's been using here about the priests in the temple who are going to be doing here about the Sabbath. So, here they are. They're working on the Sabbath.

They're going about their normal duties. They're killing animals, lighting lamps, all sort of things of that nature. And yet, they're not considered to be blameworthy, even although they are doing that on the Sabbath. How come they can desecrate the Sabbath, as Jesus calls it, and still be innocent? And the answer, I think, is that Jesus is saying, well, there's a scale of priorities here. The Sabbath is important, but of overriding importance is the ministry of the temple.

The temple ministry is there designed, essentially, to bring a person to God and to give them free access into the presence of God. There needs to be the slaying of animals day by day because we're sinful, and we need atonement to be made, and blood needs to be shed for that purpose. And that's a matter of overriding consideration, so that to provide a temple ministry of that nature on the Sabbath is more important than keeping the Sabbath. They can't say, we're going to keep the Sabbath, and we're not going to do these sacrifices. The sacrifices are too important, more important than the Sabbath is. Now, I think that's basically the way we've traditionally understood that, and it's in that context that Jesus says this here. He's been saying, look, the Sabbath is important, but more important is the temple, the temple ministry. And then he says this, but I tell you, one greater than the temple is here. So he says, there's something more important than that yet.

More important than the Sabbath, more important than the temple, there's someone more important than these things. And that's a fantastic claim that Jesus is making, because I don't think anybody doubts that he's making this claim about himself. Here he is, and he's effectively saying, the Sabbath, the temple, I'm greater than both. In this version, we've once again got something that needs comment.

[17:13] I tell you that one greater than the temple is here, and the footnote says something greater than the temple is here, and that's the better translation, the footnote in the NIV.

So it's not just that he's thinking about himself as greater, but he's thinking about his ministry as greater than the temple ministry. So then in practice, it doesn't make too much difference which translation you have. But technically, he's speaking not about himself, but about what he does about his ministry. So here is Jesus saying, you folks are used to this temple and its sacrifices and its ministry, but I'm telling you that now that I have come, something greater has come with me, a

ministry that surpasses that of the temple. Again, it's the writer to the Hebrews that develops this idea at some length, indeed, throughout his letter. And he draws attention to the imperfect nature of what was done in the tabernacle, or in the sanctuary, if you like, and he points out that Jesus' ministry was far superior.

And the writer to the Hebrews says, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. So that's what they were doing in the Old Testament temple ministry. The blood of bulls and goats constantly offered, even perhaps on the Sabbath, but it was impossible that that should take away sin.

And the proof that he does give of that is simply this. Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin.

And so what he's really saying is, if they need to do it again and again, they can't be doing it very well. A very simple illustration. If I've got a car and it breaks down, I take it to my mechanic and he mends it. And next week, the same thing goes wrong, and I take it to him and he mends it. And the next week, the same, and he mends it. I don't go around saying, what a wonderful mechanic I've got.

[19:30] Every week he mends my car. I say, I've got to get another one. This one's no good. When I want something mended, I want it mended properly. And that's what's happening in the Old Testament.

Do these sacrifices take away sin? Of course they don't, because if they didn't, you wouldn't have to keep repeating them. The fact that you keep repeating them shows that they're hopeless, they're useless. They may depict reality, but they don't achieve anything. And that's the argument of the writer to the Hebrews, and it fits in nicely here. This is how in Jesus something greater than the temple has come. Because in Jesus, a ministry is here that is an effective ministry.

And what the blood of bulls and goats couldn't do, Jesus did. What needed to be done day after day, year after year, century after century, has been done once in Jesus, because it's been done properly.

And so the writer to the Hebrews once again speaks of Jesus and says, when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sin, he sat down at the right hand of God. The priests in the Old Testament were always standing ministering. This man presents one sacrifice and sits down at the right hand of God, his work done, because it's an effective work. Now, if therefore you take this statement here and develop it, which Jesus actually doesn't do, he would leave people to think about it. But we, with a fuller revelation, know exactly what's going on here. You know, this is quite fantastic as well, and it's very good information for us. Jesus fulfills and completes the Scriptures, and he brings the temple ministry to its completion as well. He's the true temple. He's the great high priest. He's the greatest atoning sacrifice. He's the one and only, in these respects, just as he is the one and only final revealer. He provides a temple-style ministry, an atoning ministry far superior to that which was practiced at Jerusalem. Because he is the great revealer, we listen to him with submission, because he's the greater than the temple. We come to him in our guilt and in our sin and in our uncertainty, and we look to the blood that was shed at Calvary, and we say, that blood avails for me.

That's an effective sacrifice that was offered up on behalf of God's people, and it's a sacrifice that was really effective. That's my hope. I'm going to go to him. I'm going to rest upon him. I'm going to ask that blood of atonement that was shed at Calvary, cover me, and so find the forgiveness that he offers. And that's what this part of the message brings to our attention. The need that each one of us, when we're confronted with the reality of our sin and the weight of our guilt, and perhaps even for some people, the fear of death and the certainty of judgment, that we'll be able to say, the temple ministry wasn't effective. But thank God, something greater than the temple is here, and to the atoning ministry of Christ, I'm looking. That's my hope. I'm resting upon him. So Jesus doesn't only supplement the Scriptures. He's also superior to the sanctuary. He's also sovereign over the Sabbath, and that's the third and last thing that we're looking at here this morning. That's in verse 8. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Now, what does this phrase, Son of Man, mean? And some people urge that it's simply a way of saying man, and we have to acknowledge that the Greek, but especially the Hebrew way of speaking that lies behind us could lead us to that interpretation. And some people, therefore, have said that that's what Jesus meant. Man is Lord of the Sabbath, which is a wonderful thought if you don't want to keep the Sabbath at all. You're going

to throw it over it, and you do what you like in it.

[24 : 15] That's what they take this to mean. I must confess, I do feel that that is a deliberate distortion of an obvious truth, because this title, Son of Man, is obviously in the Gospels not used as a way of describing people in general. It's a specific title that is applied only to our Lord Himself, and to the Lord, not in His humanity, but in His glorious splendor. So, when Jesus says the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, He's not saying people are Lord over the Sabbath, men are Lord over the Sabbath. He's saying, I am Lord over the Sabbath. To say anything else is absurd, in my opinion, especially given the context. Here is this man, and he's been supplementing the Scriptures, and he's been saying that he's superior to the sanctuary. And then, do you think he's going to say, but people in general are Lord over the Sabbath? It makes no sense at all. This is another of these fantastic claims that Jesus is making here, supplementing the Scriptures, superior to the sanctuary, and also sovereign over the Sabbath. And it is an amazing claim that he's making here, because who laid down the Sabbath? And you might say Moses laid down the Sabbath, but I would suspect that even then they would look beyond Moses and say, God laid down the Sabbath. And if you go back to

Genesis, of course, there's no two ways about it. God is Lord over the Sabbath. He instituted the Sabbath. He rested on the seventh day. He blessed the seventh day. It stems from his original mandate, from his original example, from what he said away back in the beginning. It's something that God did.

And now here's this person, and he's saying, I'm Lord over the Sabbath. And what's he claiming here? He's claiming full authority to interpret the Sabbath in accordance with his understanding of things.

And how can he do that if God was the one that instituted the Sabbath? It's a remarkable claim of his sovereignty over the Sabbath. He's not saying that he's going to make it mean whatever he wants it to mean. He's saying that he's the one that is capable of giving an authority of statement about what the Sabbath is all about, as hopefully we'll see this evening. But what a fantastic claim he's making. He's Lord over the Sabbath. He's sovereign. He's sovereign. He's one who claims an authority that requires our obedience. He's one that says, when I say things, you can count on it being true, and it's your duty to submit. I'm Lord. Your place is to obey. And that's what this part of the message teaches us about, submission to the Lord. If he says, come to me, and I'll give you rest. Because it's a revelation, we take it to heart and say he's the greater revealer. It must be true. But because he's sovereign and urges this as a command, what are we to do but give our obedience to it? So if the world is speaking to you today and saying something like, come to me, and I'll give you rest, don't hesitate to submit to him, because he's sovereign and has a right to address us in this way and command our obedience. And that's the way the Christian life begins, by submitting to the gospel commands, the gracious commands of the gospel, and acknowledging his sovereignty over us in this respect as in all respects. And just as we begin the Christian life in that way, so we go on. What he says, we do. What he commands, we obey. What he says is right, we accept his right. We submit to him because he's sovereign, sovereign over the Sabbath, and therefore sovereign over the whole of life too.

And that's what he's teaching about himself in this passage. He supplements the Scriptures, he is superior to the sanctuary, and he is sovereign over the Sabbath.

[28 : 41] Now, as I say, this evening, all been well, we'll go on and look at the rest of this passage to think particularly of what this teaching is about the Sabbath. But just try and sum up the impact of this for the people at that time. For us, it's not too surprising because we're familiar with these things.

I think to the people at that time, if they took anything of this aboard, they must have been absolutely staggered by what Jesus is saying here. I think I would be right to say that there were three pillars of Judaism, of the Jewish religion at that time. There was the Scriptures, there was the temple, and there was the Sabbath, three great bastions of their way of thinking. And here is Jesus, and he comes, as it were, and he modifies them all. And indeed, he would be seen to be attacking them all.

The things that were most important to them, the absolute pillars of everything that they believed, here is Jesus saying, I can add to the Scriptures, you know. I'm greater than your temple, and I'm Lord over the Sabbath. And that, to them, must have been absolutely staggering.

And I would think that they would have difficulty coming to terms with this, and that even the most sensitive of them would be saying to themselves, what on earth is he talking about, and how can we possibly square what he is claiming here to what we've always believed?

And it was a real shake-up in their experience and in their understanding of things to look at this. They had an awful job assessing who Jesus really was. Now, as I say to us, really, this is Jesus as prophet, priest, and king, a familiar concept to most of us, but that's something that we've known about most of us all our days, and that's what we've got here. But it shouldn't blind us to the fact that it is an amazing thing that Jesus is saying, and it makes us ask the question, well, who really is this person that's making these amazing claims? And I think, you know, one thing we can say is that this person wasn't just a good man. Now, that's what a lot of so-called Christian people say, and an awful lot of non-Christian people say, he was a man, but he was a good man.

[31 : 14] That's the last thing that we can say about Jesus, because the man that comes out here is certainly not a good man. He's saying, I'm humble in heart. Did you ever hear a good man saying, I'm humble in heart? Not if he really was humble in heart, you didn't hear him saying that. Jesus makes claims here that are not compatible with him being just a good man. He's making fantastic claims, and there's no way you can say, these are the claims of a good man. I'm superior to the temple. I'm Lord over the Sabbath.

I can supplement the scriptures if I want. There's no way that a mere good man can say that. You can't rest upon that. And there's a way of looking at things that I never used to think much of until I really came to grips with this passage. You must decide what Jesus is, and if he's not a good man, you've either got to say, he's mad, or he's bad, or he's God. And I think these claims that are made here must make people think in one of these ways. And we know that his family said he's beside himself, he's mad. We know that the Pharisees thought he was bad. But the Gospels have come down to us, because some people resolved this difficulty and said, he's not mad, and he's not bad. There's only one explanation. He must be God. And I think that that's what this drives us to. There's no other explanation that can be offered of the things that Jesus claims here, and that's the way I want to leave it. Let's make sure we understand what Jesus is saying here. He's the great revealer, the great prophet. He's the great sacrifice, the great high priest. He's the great king sovereign, able to interpret the Sabbath to us. He's God. And let that be our reaction. I'm going to bow, and I'm going to worship. I'm going to submit and yield myself to him. He deserves all the worship on the glory that is due to God himself. He's not mad. He's not bad. He's God. He's my God.

May God bless to us his word. Now, let's sing in conclusion Psalm 25. This again in the Sing Psalms version. Psalm 25 from on page 29. And we'll go to sing verses 4 to 11 to the tune Rockingham.

O Lord, reveal to me your ways, and all your paths help me to know. Direct and guide me in your truth. Instruct me in the way to go. Psalm 25, verses 4 to 11. We'll stand to sing and remain standing for the benediction.

O Lord, reveal to me your ways, and all your paths help me to know.

[34 : 29] I'll stand to sing and remain standing for the way to go. You are my Savior and my God.

All day I roam with you alone Remember, Lord, your darkness is Which from the stages you have shown Do not recall my sins of you On my rebellious evil ways Remember me in your way For you, O Lord, my brutal ways Because the Lord is just and good He shows His path to all who swear He guides the people in what is right And teaches them His holy way To those who keep His path and loss

He shows His path and sins and fear For you, O Lord, my God Forgive my grace In the name of Jesus Now may grace, mercy, and peace From God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Be with us all, now and forevermore Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Süanta Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen