

## Justified! The Series: Chapter 5 – Mercy, Not Sacrifice

### Description

1 AT THAT particular time Jesus went through the fields of standing grain on t  
2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, See there! Your disciples a  
3 He said to them, Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, a  
4 How he went into the house of God and ate the loaves of the showbread-which  
5 Or have you never read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the tem  
7 And if you had only known what this saying means, I desire mercy [readiness  
8 For the Son of Man is Lord [even] of the Sabbath.  
9 And going on from there, He went into their synagogue.

Matthew 12:1-5,7-9 AMPC

It's very interesting that the passage that is actually the foundation of this series, that sparked the song that placed this series in my spirit, took all the way until part 5 before we got here. It was the song "Justified" by Smokie Norful that led me to this verse and began my recent journey through scripture to identify areas where Jesus stepped in as mediator, redeemer, and advocate for us when others and Satan tries to condemn us. In the passage above we must have proper context of the entire picture to understand the significance of this scene. In Matthew 10 Jesus calls and commissions (sends) the 12 apostles/disciples to go and spread the word, heal the sick, deliver them from evil spirits, and prepare the way. He instructs them how to handle rejection by the people who they were sent to help. In Matthew 11 we saw Jesus "**Justify**" John the Baptist before the crowd of onlookers after John's disciples questions Jesus' authority and significance on behalf of John (see Justified: Chapter 4). Now we arrive at Matthew chapter 12, where the Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) are attacking Jesus' authority and credibility because of the actions of his apostles. Now lets 1st assess what the problem is; the Sabbath is a holy day of rest given by God in the 10 commandments that called for the Jews to refrain from work on the 7th day of the week. The apostles plucking grain from the field to eat as they walked through could be considered harvesting, which would be unlawful for them to do on the Sabbath. The pharisees seeing an opportunity to attack Jesus' character and credibility seized the moment to check him concerning his people. As I re-read this passage right now, I notice something that I didn't notice before; though the Pharisees are criticizing the actions of the apostles, they don't address them, they directly address Jesus. The Pharisees bring accusations/charges against the apostles directly to Jesus, not because they sought to condemn the apostles, but because they wanted to attack the authority of Jesus. How could Jesus be the Son of Man, and as he identified himself later as the "Lord of the Sabbath" if his own disciples were failing at keeping his commands? There are so many things I want to unpack with this passage, and the larger implications of the scene/exchange, but in this I'm going to try to focus on 3 quick ones.

1. Jesus is who he is regardless of what we choose to do. Let that digest for a moment. As I said above, Jesus had already identified himself as the Son of Man in Matthew chapter 9 when he healed a paralyzed man in the presence of other pharisees and persons in the audience in his hometown of Capernaum. Jesus revealed his authority 1st at home among his brethren, which is odd now when I consider that reality, because it was also here where Jesus declared that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. Jesus in the passage above identifies himself as

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the Lord of the Sabbath even as his apostles are being observed “breaking the sabbath” according to the Pharisees aka the religious interpreters of the law. What’s important to remember and understand about this is that Jesus is Lord, AND he’s faithful even when we aren’t faithful.

2. The Pharisees take their accusations against the apostles directly to Jesus, never making the apostles aware of their “mistakes”, or extending grace based on the circumstances. The scene in the passage reminds me of Job chapter 1 & 2 where Satan appears before God to make accusations against Job in hopes that God will ALLOW remove his protection from Job and allow him to attack him. I’m not calling the Pharisees Satan, but I’m using the scene from this passage to highlight the spiritual battle that always taking place with us in the center, often to our ignorance. Like Job, the apostles were only a vehicle for Satan to attack God’s righteousness, the only difference here is that Satan used the Pharisees as a front, and attempted to condemn Jesus using the word like he had attempted to do in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4. For us, we should take note from this passage to not repeat the behavior of the Pharisees where they attempted to use God’s law or his word as a tool to condemn the shortcomings of his children. As Jesus said elsewhere (Matthew 23), the Pharisees were the interpreters of the law of God, so listen to them, but don’t follow them because their life and application of God’s word/law wasn’t reflected in their lives. Jesus unlike the Pharisees used his authority and his word to set people free, to heal, to restore, and establish relationship. Jesus could have condemned everyone, but he choose to save them by extending grace that would allow people to be saved by faith in him that would allow them to live a life that reflected Jesus. The Pharisees like many “christians” today place people in bondage with scripture, but understand that Jesus isn’t swayed by the accusations of others because he knows who he is, and who his children are in spite of their flaws.
3. Jesus expects us to show others what he continues to show us.....MERCY! In verse 7, Jesus informs the Pharisees of a concept that we would do well to remember and apply ourselves. Extend mercy to those who need it, which also includes ourselves sometimes. Oftentimes we’ll find ourselves in the position of the Pharisees where we observe behavior and situations that either clearly violate God’s words, or don’t align with our expectations, or interpretation of the word. It’s in these moments that we are faced with a decision; show mercy, or sacrifice. Showing mercy is a spectrum, I personally believe that how mercy looks depends on the person who is committing the error, and the person who is providing rebuke or extending mercy. What’s consistent when it comes to mercy is the posture of the heart, which is that only God can truly condemn, and that regardless of the offense or action, the law, and its consequences are ultimately in the hands of God. While we are to follow his commands, and hold others accountable, it is not our place to sacrifice others which in the context that Jesus used it in verse 7 means to slay or wound others in their sin or mistakes with no heart/desire to restore that brother or sister. The Pharisees watching Jesus and his apostles, and pouncing on their mistake violates Jesus instruction in Matthew 7 about judging and criticizing others, which I believe is less about the judgment and more about the heart. What would cause you to sacrifice someone else in relation to slaying them for their mistakes for the purpose of elevating yourself which is only done from an unclean hear. Like Jesus we must be 1st to forgive, extend grace and mercy, and slow to condemn because his will is that none be lost.

Now you may have read all of this and be scratching your head asking yourself, I thought this was about being **Justified** through Christ (insert perplexed emoji)? In the course of this entire scene, we

never hear the apostles speak, though this entire scene was a result of the actions...or though it would seem. Earlier I said that this scene is reminiscent of Satan making his appeal to God so that he could afflict Job, because it wasn't about Job, but rather how Satan could get back at God and shame him for his love and confidence in his children. We don't hear the apostles speak in this passage because their mediator, protector, savior, and Lord intercedes on their behalf to refute the accusations hurled at them. The apostles are GUILTY according to the **Pharisees interpretation** of God's law, yet Jesus aware of their scheme, steps in and condemns the Pharisees based on their contradiction and violation of the same command that they are using to condemn the apostles. Jesus highlights that they themselves and the Levitical priests of the old testament regularly break the Sabbath to fulfill their priestly duties, David who God called a man after his own heart violated God's commands for the temple showbread when he and his men ate it while hungry, yet God didn't charge these offenses to the Levitical priests, or David's account. Jesus **justifies** the apostles in the presence of accusations, condemnation, and actual wrongdoings, because he knows their heart, and we are saved through faith, NOT our perfect adherence to rules and regulations which are often wrongly interpreted and applied by man. When Jesus identifies himself as the Lord of the Sabbath he is announcing his authority to forgive those who transgress his word, but more importantly re-establishing how his word is to be interpreted and applied as opposed to how it had been previously applied.

## Overtime

I feel like this has been a long post, but this passage has hit me in another way as I've been reading and writing, and the holy spirit is revealing things in the word that I previously hadn't recognized.

And going on from there, He went into their synagogue.  
*Matthew 12:9 AMPC*

This verse took on a profound significance to me as I was studying this passage again because the spirit highlighted the significance of this word choice. The synagogue was supposed to be a place of worship, a place where God's spirit dwelled, where the people came to pray, worship, and bring their sacrifices. It makes this wording interesting given that it says Jesus went into THEIR synagogue. The church (both the body of believers and the buildings) belongs to God, we saw Jesus at the age of 12 remain in the temple after his parents left so that he could minister to the people, yet here Matthew says that Jesus went into THIER synagogue. I believe that his wording is intentional and reflects the reality that the religious leaders, and the people who regularly met and worshipped there did not reflect God, or his design for his people. What's interesting is that though Jesus had just had this tense exchange with them based on their misinterpretation of God's command regarding the sabbath, he still accompanies them to the synagogue, further displaying his own commitment to his directive to them of extending mercy not sacrifice.

## Reflection Time

Do you extend mercy to those who need it, or have you left a trail of sacrifices in your Christian walk? How do you respond to accusations from other “christians?” Do you find the need to address others who misunderstand you, or criticize your interpretation and application of God’s word, or do you allow your fruit to speak for you? Are you living a life that Jesus would defend? If not, study his word and pray for guidance on how to live a life that reflects Christ effectively.

**Category**

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