

Come Follow Me  
Elo Viz production  
Week 12  
Matthew 11-12, Luke 11

In Matthew 12 we have an interesting confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. It says:

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

2 But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.” (Matthew 12:1-2)

This was an interesting time in Jewish history. We might ask: What is the big deal then or now that the disciples ate corn on the sabbath?

There is a lot to understand about all that is going on here. Back in that day they had a practice known as “Gleaning”. What this meant is that when a farmer were to harvest a field there were certain areas that were not economically profitable to harvest so they would leave it for the poor to come in and harvest. We learn about this in the story of Ruth the Moabite who met her husband as she was gleaning in his field. It was also a common practice that if strangers were walking by that they would be permitted to eat or harvest some of your crop if they were hungry. Now we are not talking about grabbing a basket and a sickle, but just a handful of corn or grapes or wheat, whatever you were growing. So when we read about Jesus and the disciples walking through a field and eating some corn, this is not an uncommon practice. What is strange though is: Why were the Pharisees there? Were they following Jesus? Looking for any reason they could to destroy Him? We know that this is the case because at the end of this account, in verse fourteen it says:

“Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.” (Matt 1:14)

This was all part of their plan. And the reason they were saying that the disciples were breaking the sabbath is because in their mind they broke three commandments. Jewish law at the time said that: on the sabbath you were not allowed to harvest food, clean it, or prepare it. So, the disciples did all three. When they plucked it, they were harvesting, when they shucked it they were cleaning and preparing their meal to eat. It almost sounds ridiculous to us, but here is the point that Jesus is about to make:

All the Jewish laws at the time were aimed at forcing people to follow the letter of the law. And they would take a simple law of keeping the sabbath day holy and create all these sub laws or what they called “Oral” laws that would outline what that meant. So we would say “keep the sabbath day holy”, they would say. “You can only walk so far, or you must pray this many times a day.” Every action was outlined in their laws what they could or couldn't do.

So Jesus says to them:

“Have ye not **read** what **David** did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

**4** How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the **shewbread**, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

**5** Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the **sabbath** days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

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

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

What a response! Jesus gives two examples here that illustrate the point perfectly. First is about David, a man that they revered as the highest example of power and prestige. When David was ordained by the hands of the prophet Samuel, the current king Saul was unaware of this and at the time was hunting, and trying to kill David. So he and his men were on the run and weary from their battles. So they go into the temple and he lies to the Priest and tells him that King Saul had sent him. He asked for bread and the only bread left was that used for the ceremony rituals. It was law in that day that only the priests were allowed to eat that particular bread. But David takes it for his men.

His second example is of the priests that work in the Temple. All jews sabbath activities were strictly monitored and counted, however in that day the priests had to work harder on the sabbath than they did during the week because of the activities of the patrons that needed to sacrifice in the temple. Similar to Bishoprics or Stake presidencies today, the Sabbath is not a day of rest for them. But Jesus is referring to the other profane things that the priests were doing in the temple.

But His main jab at them is how he begins each phrase: “Have ye not read?”. This was common for Jesus to ask of those around Him. He is asking: You have all these laws and traditions but, have you not read what the scriptures actually say? You say you are governors of the law but do you know what the law actually is, according to God?

This is the same trap that we fall into today. Think about our laws as traditions, not just around the sabbath but around our whole culture. I'll give you a few examples to consider that we see every week:

When the deacons pass the sacrament, after the prayer, they all stand there and wait while one of them goes on to the stand and offers that sacrament to the Bishop or the presiding authority in that meeting. Once he has taken the sacrament then all the rest of the congregation receives it.

-Why? When Jesus instituted the sacrament in Luke 22 He didn't take it first and then give it to the disciples. The closest we can find is in the Book of Mormon when He institutes that sacrament in the new world. In 3rd Nephi He gives it to his disciples first then to the multitude. And somehow we take that and change it to conform to how we imagine it to be. Sure, it says it in the handbook. But my question is still, why? Are we elevating the Bishop to be greater than the flock he is watching over? Very soon we will get to Matthew 20 where Jesus teaches:

“But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be **great** among you, let him be your **minister**; And whosoever **will be** chief among you, let him be your **servant**”  
(Matt 20:26-27)

I'm not saying this is a bad thing, I'm simply pointing out that we have traditions and laws like their “oral” laws that might be distracting us from Him. We hold on to these and we may not even see the purpose in them.

White shirts are another one. I know of Bishops that would not allow a deacon to pass the sacrament because he wasn't wearing a white shirt. It is a very common tradition in the church that if you are to participate in any priesthood ordinance that we must wear a white shirt and tie. This is not doctrinal nor in the hand book. All the hand book says is: “Those who administer the sacrament should be well groomed and clean. They should not wear clothing or jewelry that might detract from the worship and covenant making that are the purpose of the sacrament.”

[https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/18-priesthood-ordinances-and-blessings?lang=eng#title\\_number27](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/18-priesthood-ordinances-and-blessings?lang=eng#title_number27)

I understand completely the purpose behind it, the sacredness of the priesthood and all its saving ordinances. That we are to be and look clean during the administration of them. But do we take it too far; to shun anyone who is not able to buy a clean white shirt, or a new member that may not own a white shirt; do we discourage them from using their newly ordained priesthood because of their worldly conditions? A good friend of mine refuses to come to church because he says he doesn't own a white shirt. And your mind probably goes to the same place mine does and say: well, then go buy one, or even; I will go buy your one. Which is great but it misses the principle; Why does it matter what color his shirt is when he comes to church? Why would he even consider or use that as an excuse to not better himself and draw closer to God?

Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that either of these things are bad. What I am trying to illustrate is that sometimes we do the same thing as the Pharisees, we add rules or regulations to the actual law of God. We do this in order to make it clearer to us and others how we view God's law. And yes, something may be true for you but that doesn't make it true for others. I know wonderfully faithful members that believe that for them they need to stay in their Sunday best all Sunday in order for them to keep the Sabbath day holy. Which is a great practice.

But this practice does not mean that that is true for all members of the church. These wonderful folks don't force it on anyone but rather share their deep conviction and testimony of their love for the Savior with their example.

Some may believe that certain foods or drinks are against the word of wisdom, and this may be true for them as the spirit has directed them. But this doesn't make that prompting applicable to their friends and family. Do you see my point? Each of us are given to feel the promptings of the spirit based on where we are at in our lives, and with our relationship with God. And I feel to say that; we need to reserve our judgment of others based on where they are on that path ahead of us or behind us. What I mean by that is; judging others who are striving to be righteous and whose who we assume are not as righteous as ourselves.

Jesus said to the pharisees then and to us now:

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

Meaning that He is the law. He is the one that dictates what the sabbath should or shouldn't be, and what His laws should and shouldn't mean. And in the next few verses He shows us what His law is:

“behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they [the Pharisees] asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

**11** And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out?

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

**13** Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. (Matt 12:10-13)

In other words Jesus is saying: Don't worship your worship. Don't let how we worship get in the way of who we worship. It would be well for us to strip down our traditions and rituals so we can clearly see the reason for those outward convictions of our faith. To worship the Creator only and not his creations.

He is asking us to turn outward in our conviction and conversion. That our outward actions are proof of our inward conversion. If our life is consumed with judging and controlling others, what does that say about our inward testimony? However, if our life is full of love like the Saviors, filled with service and sacrifice like His was. Then what does that prove about our inward relationship with God and His Son?

May our worship of Him be pure and singular is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.