

The Servant Under Attack

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 June 2008

Preacher: Wayne Schuller

- [0 : 0 0] Lord Jesus, as we come to your word and examine your character and your teaching and mission, I pray that we won't have closed minds, but we'll have open minds to see who you are and what you stand for, that we might do the same.
- Amen. Please have a seat. Well, friends, in my mind, there are only two types of people in the world. There are the rule keepers and the rule breakers.
- Which are you? Are you a rule keeper? Are you a diligent type of person? Do you like to follow correct protocol and order? Or are you a rule breaker?
- Do you like to buck the system? Do things your own way? You're a DIY kind of person. Theologically speaking, I know it's true to say we are all law breakers of God's law, but that's not quite what I'm talking about.
- I'm talking about as a personality type. People tend to either are drawn to obeying following rules or repelled by following rules.
- [1 : 0 6] Which are you? Do you like to do things by the book? Or do you like to wing it and do it yourself? Are you the kind of person who reads the manual to your appliances that you buy?
- Or are you the kind of person who just throws that straight in the bin? Because if anything's worth learning, you'll figure it out yourself. And I think in terms of the Christian life, these two personalities have Christian equivalents.
- So the rule keepers of the Christian life tend to be the more diligent or possibly more legalistic types. They have a quiet time at a set time every day.
- And it goes for exactly 15 minutes. And it's planned eight minutes of reading three chapters of the Bible. Then seven minutes of prayer through a very structured prayer list. On the other hand, the rule breaker is the more undisciplined Christian life.
- They couldn't tell you the last time they prayed alone. And when they did, it was completely spontaneous and probably quite forgettable. Now, who am I?
- [2 : 1 2] I'm personally, personality-wise, I am more of the rule breaker. I'm more of the kind of easygoing, laissez-faire, do-it-my-own-way kind of person. If somebody tells me how to do something, I will just find another way to do it to prove them wrong.
- I'm married to our rule keeper. God is very wise. And my wife's often telling me, Wayne, this is how it should be done. And I will say, says who?
- And try and find another way to do it. Now, I have a special delight today in this chapter of Matthew, chapter 12, because we see Jesus today the rule breaker.
- In fact, he is the rule smasher. It's excellent. It warms my heart. Jesus did not once. I've got to just get the distinction right, because he never broke God's law, never disobeyed God, God's word at all, ever.
- Kept it perfectly. But when it comes to the regulations of religious people and of Pharisees and legalists, he'd love to smash through them and show where they actually contradicted God's word and where they were unhelpful and where they actually drew people away from God, which is why I get angry at legalistic kind of people.

[3 : 28] Today we're going to see Jesus effectively be a bull in a china shop of regulations. And I think it's very hard for us to imagine what life would have been like under the kind of traditions of the first century Israelite, of where Pharisees had influence and power.

They didn't actually have much official power. They weren't in the positions of authority. They didn't hold the levers, but they just had a kind of indirect influence on the culture of God's people, that everywhere you went, you had in your mind all these rules of the Pharisees, and they were watching.

And so people tried to stay in line, especially to do with the Sabbath. They had so many regulations to guard people from breaking the Sabbath. That's not our world.

Our world is casual, relaxed, Aussie culture. I'm very much in that world. We are relaxed and free, and Australia has produced a very relaxed kind of Christianity.

Australian Christians are very, very easygoing, lax, laissez-faire. And so the question I want to ask, and you need to ask, is, which culture is more like what Jesus had in mind, the first century culture or our culture today?

[4 : 49] And what things in our Christianity or our spirituality of following Christ would Jesus affirm? And what would he smash?

We begin with looking at Jesus taking a walk in the park. In our chapter 12, verse 1, he's with his disciples walking through farms, paddocks on farms.

And his disciples are hungry, and they begin just to grab. They're walking through those really long, tall stalks of wheat. And his disciples just grab the head off the wheat. It's ripe.

And just chew it. I'm not even sure it would fill you up very much if you're hungry, but it just is something to nibble on. Now, if you're a rule keeper, and I'm not, but if you're a rule keeper, you're probably already thinking, they're trespassing, they're damaging property, they're stealing.

That's not how I think. But actually, we know from the Old Testament that there's a law. So if you're a rule keeper, there's a law that says, in Deuteronomy 23, you're allowed to by hand pick people's crops to eat.

[5 : 58] It's an explicitly allowed thing to do in God's law. As long as you don't pull out any farm tools and start kind of harvesting, you're fine. It's funny, because this has parallels in today's culture.

We used to live in a house that had a massive lemon tree out the front, and we'd often come home at night, and at least three or four times, there was somebody in our poorly lit front yard kind of harvesting off our lemon tree when we drove in.

And you'd be unloading in the car, it takes a few trips, you leave a few kids in the car, and it was a bit unnerving to have somebody in your yard. You'd say, what are you doing in my front yard? So I'm just picking lemons.

And I'd be like, I'm a rule breaker. I'd be like, oh, that's fine. Only Helen might be more worried. And that's exactly what happens here with Jesus, his disciples picking grain. The Pharisees, these rule keepers, it's almost Monty Python-esque.

They jump out of bushes somewhere and go, aha, you're doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. And now this accusation, this dynamic of people attacking Jesus' followers is a very common dynamic.

[7 : 09] We've looked at it before in Matthew, where people who hate Jesus, too kind of gutless to attack him, attack his followers. Same thing happens today, that people who don't like Jesus will say that they're into Jesus, or they respect Jesus, but they'll attack the Christian and they'll attack the church to sort of express their hatred of Jesus.

So I think it just shows that if you want to be a Christian, it's more than just a personal trust and repentance. It's actually a public stand for Christ.

Christ, and to stand up for your master and to cop flack for him. Now, so what about these Pharisees? Do they have a point? Is Jesus doing something wrong on the Sabbath?

Well, he answers a very clear no in verse 3. He said to them, in response to their accusation, Have you not read in the Bible what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests.

[8 : 21] Many times in this chapter, and I hope you notice that we're going to see Jesus correct legalism from the Bible, because the Bible's not legalistic. Pharisees are.

You know, there are legalistic Christians, but the Bible itself is not legalistic. And so Jesus says to them, Have you not read your Bible? And that's a massive insult to somebody who's religious, because they claim to be experts in the Bible, and yet here comes Jesus with a counterexample from the Bible.

The Pharisees don't understand the weightier and the lighter matters of the law. The Pharisees don't really understand the Bible that they claim to know.

If they read the Bible more, they would not be as legalistic as they are. Now, what is Jesus referring to? Well, there is an incident in 1 Samuel chapter 21, where David has just found out from Jonathan that King Saul is going to kill him, or is really, really trying to out to get him.

So David hits the road with his soldiers, hasn't done any preparation, doesn't have any food for his soldiers. And on his way out of Jerusalem, he goes to the temple that was then the tabernacle, the tent where God's presence dwelt.

[9 : 37] And he says to the priest and begs him and possibly even deceives him. It's not quite clear. It's a bit ambiguous and says, Have you got some bread? I'm on a mission.

Have you got some bread? And Elimelech the priest says, No, we don't. Well, all we've got is the bread of the presence that stands before the Holy of Holies, that every Sabbath the priest would put out these 12 loaves before the Lord, and the priest would eat it week by week.

David says, That will do. We will take that bread. So why does Jesus quote this example? Well, for two reasons. Firstly, he's saying to the Pharisees that, Pharisees, you have a regulation that King David himself has broken.

Therefore, by implication, I think your regulations are broken, not King David. Secondly, Jesus is saying, What King David did for his soldiers, I can do for my disciples.

Jesus can do for his disciples. His mission trumps any mission David was on. Jesus is claiming an authority on a par with King David, or even at least equal to King David.

[10 : 53] The Pharisees' accusation does not stand. Jesus continues, And the tables start to turn against the Pharisees.

Or have you not read in the law, verse 5, It's quite commonly known that Pharisees would have to admit that the priests, you know, God's set-apart workers in the temple, broke the Sabbath every Sabbath because they had to do their job.

There were offerings to be made on the Sabbath. And the principle behind this was, The temple of God's presence was more important than the Sabbath.

That within the Bible, there's a hierarchy of priority of doctrine. And temple trumps Sabbath. And Jesus says, Something greater than the temple is here.

If God's presence in the temple can trump the Sabbath law, how much more could God's presence in Jesus, who is God incarnate, God walking the earth, how much more can that trump the Sabbath law?

[12 : 11] Both the Bible and a proper understanding of Jesus Christ contradict the Pharisees, contradict their legalistic regulations.

Jesus is saying to them, Your way of following God is way out of tune. It's way out of balance. If you had known, verse 7, what this means, and again, quotes the Bible to correct legalism, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

You would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus quotes Hosea to show that their whole way of approaching God is completely out of tune.

The Bible teaches, if they'd read the Bible, they would have a greater sense of what matters and what doesn't matter. What matters, Jesus says, is God's honour, matters of mercy, matters of the kingdom, matters of the covenant of grace.

Those things trump sacrifice. They trump traditions. And so Jesus says, the Pharisees are condemning the guiltless.

[13 : 25] They are condemning people God doesn't condemn. So Jesus condemns them. Jesus condemns them for condemning the guiltless. He is Lord of the Sabbath.

He has kingly rights that King David had. He has a priority over the Sabbath that the temple had. He is Lord of the Sabbath. It's a stunning claim that the Pharisees either have to, if they're going to admit it, they're going to have to change a lot of what they do in their service of God.

And I think the stunning and very sad and tragic thing, and we see this today, is that if in your Christian faith you are obsessed by a secondary matter, not only, like you are not only at risk of losing Christ, you're going to lose the thing that you're treasuring anyway.

The Sabbath junkies, the Pharisees don't have good Sabbaths. They have terrible Sabbaths. And they also lose Christ. If your priorities are out of order, not only do you lose what you neglect, you lose what you elevate.

Last week we saw Jesus promise a very Sabbath-like thing. He said, Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

[14 : 53] He says, You will find rest for your souls in me, in Jesus. The promise of peace and relationship with God through Jesus, that is the truest Sabbath experience this side of heaven, which is the kind of eternal Sabbath.

But the Sabbath regulators, the Pharisees, they will miss it. They will miss the true Sabbath because of their legalism about the Sabbath. Do you see the tragedy of that?

It's so sad. What a terrible thing it is to overvalue a Christian practice or a Christian principle that you actually miss out on Christ.

They actually don't realise that Christ is the true fulfilment of what you value, and you lose both. You can only have secondary things by putting first things first, and Jesus Christ must come first.

An example of this are people, I mean, I wasn't around, but years ago, who say stop coming to a church because they changed from the King James Version, that kind of venerable translation that served the church well for a couple of hundred years, and they started using more modern, and I think more accurate translations, and they stopped coming to church because of that, because that's not good enough.

[16 : 18] And in doing so, some of those people lost their faith. They shipwrecked their faith. So they not only lost the Bible, they lost Christ, because they were putting a secondary thing first.

So friends, what's a test you could do on yourself to test whether you might be becoming a Pharisee? Because the issues could be many. I couldn't begin to name them all.

So what's a test you could apply? How do you know if you're becoming a Pharisee? Well, here's a test. Are you, or do you find yourself, tempted to become a gossip, or a complainer in a church?

If you find yourself enjoying complaining about the latest thing wrong at Holy Trinity, or spreading gossip about a third party, or if you just find yourself enjoying listening to that kind of talk, then you are in great danger of becoming a Pharisee.

You are in great danger of placing people or issues or agendas above the Lord Jesus himself. That's because if you actually loved the person you were gossiping about, and if you loved the Lord Jesus, you would go and tell that person what's on your heart.

[17 : 36] Or if you loved the Lord Jesus most of all, you'd be thankful that a church is proclaiming him, even if they're not doing it the way you would have them do it.

Even if they're not doing your pet preference or project, you'd be thankful that Christ is being proclaimed out of a church. So friends, the test is, one of the tests is, watch out if you're a grumbler.

Now Jesus goes on to keep smashing regulations, and he goes straight to the lion's den now. They're out in some field somewhere, I don't know where they are. Now Jesus decides to go straight to the Pharisee synagogue, to their home base, to where they're hanging out.

So he leaves that place to go and fight more with Pharisees. And it's very likely Jesus would have known that at any synagogue, on any Sabbath, you'll find people who need healing.

You'll find people who are hanging around cripples or people who are looking for some mercy or generosity around the synagogue. And so he goes in verse 10 and finds in their Sabbath a man was there with a withered hand.

[18 : 46] And they asked him, that is the Pharisees asked him, is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him? See in those days there were, there would have been local Jewish prophets, local Jewish healers who kind of had a kind of mixed kind of healing ministry that people would go to and pay money and they'd pray.

And it wasn't a reward, it was sort of a genuine ministry that happened. And it would be expected those kind of Jewish healers would not work on the Sabbath and not do that kind of healing work.

But of course Jesus is not just another gung-ho kind of cowboy healer. He's bringing the kingdom of God when in his healings, he's bringing something that trumps the Sabbath. And yet the Pharisees say to him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

They're trying to trap him. But we know Jesus has actually gone into their synagogue to trap them. So it's the old kind of reverse trap in a trap move, which I like.

And he says to them, verse 11, to get them. So suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath. Will you not lay hold of it and lift it out?

[20 : 01] Will you not work on the Sabbath to save your only sheep? If you're that poor and this sheep is your livelihood or it's your food or something, you would rescue it rather than wait a day and come back and it's probably going to be dead.

Of course you would. How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep? Analogy is a very powerful tool for truth, isn't it?

See, Jesus says, so it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he says to the man and he gets the man who needs the healing, the cripple, with the withered hand.

And here is going to be the real confrontation because if God is with the Pharisees, Jesus won't be able to heal him. But if God is against the Pharisees and with Jesus, then the man will be healed, right?

So it's going to be crystal clear in their home base. And so Jesus says to the man, stretch out your hand.

[21 : 05] He stretched it out and it was restored as sound as the other. There are no more arguments. The Pharisees and their regulations have been smashed.

God is not with them. God is with Jesus. There's no more arguments to be had. The Pharisees storm out and begin conspiring against him how to destroy him.

They start planning the cross at that point to get him killed. The ironies here, I think, are shocking that the religious leaders, the Pharisees, can create regulations to stop Jesus doing good and yet they spend their Sabbath doing evil.

They spend their Sabbath accusing and spying and plotting murder. Jesus leaves the synagogue to make a profound statement about who he is.

He also walks out and many crowds followed him and he cured all of them and he ordered them not to make him known. This is very unusual in the Gospels.

[22 : 11] I don't think there's anywhere else where we have Jesus healing everyone. Normally he cures a few people to make a point about the kingdom and leaves a queue of sick people that he doesn't do everyone.

He's not a miracle man. It's not why he came. But here, and the rule breaker in me loves this. It's as if to smash the Pharisees' silly regulation about what not to do on the Sabbath.

He heals everyone and every healing is a way of saying he is Lord of the Sabbath. He brings the kingdom of God. He has the authority equal to King David.

Every healing is a contradiction of the Pharisees. Every one of them is healed. But then Jesus himself gives a very unusual rule which we've heard him give before in Matthew.

He says to the people, He orders them, don't make me known. Don't tell people what I've done even though it's sort of been so awesome and you've seen me kind of turn the Pharisees on their head.

[23 : 11] Don't tell anyone what I've been doing. Why would he do that? Well, I think Jesus could have and maybe should have spent much more time confronting Pharisees.

He could have spent more time going around turning Pharisees on their head and challenging legalists. They deserve it. They deserve that humiliation.

He could have done that. But that's actually not why he came. He didn't come to play petty games with Pharisees. Why did he come? He came to be the servant of the Lord.

The promised servant of the Lord. promised in the book of Isaiah, chapter 42, which Jesus quotes. So this must be important. Verse 17.

This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah. Actually, this is Matthew's comment. Here is my servant whom I have chosen, says God, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.

[24 : 17] I will put my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope.

Jesus' mission is to be the servant of the Lord, the Messiah, the one who in humility and service will die for the sins of many. Although Jesus has short incidents of confrontation and smashing of legalists, that's not his main job.

His main job is not to break rules or quarrel or wrangle with people. His main job is not to fight for his vindication when he's accused falsely. His main job is to humbly by the power of the Spirit go all the way to the cross to bring where God's mercy and God's justice meet together to bring the salvation not just of Israel but all the nations, all the Gentiles of the world.

I think he's making this a similar point to last week that Jesus is holding back the kind of things he will do in his second coming, judgment and crushing of those who work against God.

[25 : 42] He's saying he hasn't come to do that in the first coming. He's come to save. He's come to save sinners. I think if Jesus had come in the first coming to judge, there'd be no one left to save.

If anything, I think the reason that Jesus has today confronted Pharisees is to get the process in motion that will lead to the cross. That's actually why he was a bull in a china shop.

That's why he was confronting the legalists so that he could get to the cross and they're scheming for it right now. Matthew gives us a very strong contrast between the glory of Jesus and the ugliness of legalism.

You see, the Pharisees, they're obsessed by their regulations but Jesus, what is he obsessed by? He's concerned with people, with individuals. The Pharisees focus on outward minutia.

Jesus focuses on the heart, on matters of mercy. The Pharisees are full of hate and scheming. Jesus is tranquil, he's gentle.

[26 : 50] Pharisees clamor for attention and they try and control people, put them under the thumb. Jesus is the opposite. He humbly suppresses hype about himself and he just goes on about preaching the kingdom of God.

The Pharisees deny the Bible, they deny the scriptures by their legalism but Jesus fulfills the scriptures and he truly knows the scriptures and the weight and balance of the scriptures.

Only the gospel that Jesus gives is one for all nations, Jew and Gentile. Any legalistic religion, even legalistic Christianity, it has no hope.

If you're a legalist, there's no hope in legalism and legalism doesn't honour God. It only honours those who are making the rules. So in any legalistic group, it only honours the rule makers at the top of that tree.

It doesn't honour God. But the kingdom of God that Jesus brings, that's not another religion. That's not another set of rules to try to get to God.

[27 : 58] The kingdom of God that Jesus brings is actually the true reign of God in the world through the gospel of Jesus, where people can be forgiven through the cross of Christ and by trusting in him, they can love God with all their heart and they can love their neighbour as themselves.

It's a very simple cross-centred two-rule religion. You trust in the cross of Christ and you love God, you love your neighbour.

Two rules. Not 999, just two. What version of Christianity have you got? Now friends, I think finally I'll conclude with this.

There is a warning to us today, not just about legalism, but about absolutising or magnifying some part of Christianity to the expense of other parts.

The Pharisees absolutise the Sabbath and make that the main thing at the expense of other important things, of other more important things, and in doing so they lose everything.

[29 : 07] So what are we guilty of absolutising at the expense of Christ and everything else? Well let me give you a few ideas. You might like to talk about them over lunch or after church.

I wonder if we're in danger of absolutising the love of God at the expense of the other awesome attributes of God.

Yes, God is a God of love, but do we emphasise that, absolutise that, at the expense of the justice of God, the holiness of God, the power of God, the goodness of God, the righteousness of God, the truthfulness of God.

Is our God too small if we just say he's just a God of love? Do we reduce God to something less than he is by making love, the love of God, too high category, when it's only one of many attributes of God?

Or another example, have we absolutised the Christian virtues of tolerance and respect at the expense of other Christian virtues, say, of rebuke or of speaking the truth in love or of giving Jesus honouring words?

[30 : 26] Do we actually say, I better not say that because I want to respect the person, when actually God is calling us to speak the truth? Another example, are we in danger of absolutising God's desire for our happiness and comfort at the expense of God's desire for our holiness?

In fact, I think true Christian happiness and joy are a fruit of Christian holiness and sacrificial living. I think Christians cling to tightly that God must want me to be comfortable and happy at the expense of our holiness and taking up our cross to follow Jesus.

And lastly, friends, and I think this is sort of ironic because it's the opposite of what the Pharisees did. I wonder if we are in danger, and I'm preaching to myself here because I'm a rule breaker, are we in danger of absolutising Christian freedom at the expense of a godly, disciplined Christian life?

There's a lot in the New Testament about Christian freedom. And very little about how to structure your week or your quiet time or whatever or the Sabbath. Very little in the New Testament about that.

But I worry that we have twisted our Christian freedom to basically become worldly in our use of time, to become exactly like the world in our use of time, especially at the expense of our regular weekly day of rest worship of God and of Christian community.

[32 : 06] Have we absolutised God's grace and mercy so much that we don't have any godly routines or godly structures or disciplines in our life?

I think the challenge is maybe the reverse of what Jesus faced today. People like me need to learn to build in godly commitments and routines and structures into our week of church or daily prayer or family prayer or being part of a small group.

I won't be a legalist and tell you what you must do but we must have some kind of godly structures of discipline in honour to glorify Jesus. Because otherwise we're just like everyone else.

We don't stand out anymore. At the centre of Matthew's teaching is Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord of the Sabbath, Teacher of the Bible, Breaker of Rules, Gentle Servant of the Lord, King of God's Kingdom, Saviour of the World.

How does the love and glory of Jesus drive everything you do as a Christian? I want us to affirm our Christian freedoms that bring honour to Jesus.

[33 : 20] At the same time, I want us to rediscover and celebrate disciplines in our lives that will honour and glorify Jesus. I want us to deny all the legalisms, the legalistic forms of Christianity that obscure Jesus.

But at the same time, I want us to deny all the kind of lazy forms of the Christian life that also just as much dishonour Jesus.

The Lord Jesus himself will return to judge. He is gentle and humble and patient with us now until the day he brings justice to victory on the day of judgment.

And anything in our lives and anything in our church that is not for his honour and glory will be smashed. And anything that is for his glory and for a genuine love of his people will stand.

So friends, what in your life will survive his challenge? Why don't we come to him and ask him to help us in this today? Our Lord Jesus, we tremble before your name and ask that our lives might be for your honour and glory.

[34 : 37] Lord Jesus, spare us from the traps of legalism, of becoming obsessed by rules and of letting rules take over a genuine worship and following of you.

And Lord Jesus, at the same time I pray that you would help us to, in the honour and glory of your name, seek structures of commitment to seek godly routines and disciplines that will help us serve you and honour you and love you more.

All this, Lord Jesus, we pray that by your spirit you would transform us and to make us faithful and to be seen faithful on the day you return to judge. Amen.