

The Lord of the Sabbath

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Date: 08 March 2015

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[0 : 00] Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have said that your word is living and active, sharper than any sword, penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

You have made it able to judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. So please enable me to speak faithfully from your word today and please cause it to do what you have promised it will.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ and for his glory. Amen. Please sit down. Well, friends, I love words and I love playing with words and I love learning new words.

I love words. Many years ago, I discovered a new word that filled me with particular delight. It was a new word for new words. The word was neologisms.

Actually, I should say it wasn't actually a new word. It was just new to me. It was used as far back as 1820 by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to John Adams.

[1 : 06] However, it was, as I said, a new word for me. Neologisms. New words. Great word, isn't it? Here's a few neologisms for 2014. You can engage at the moment in digital detox, which is where you seek to decrease stress by ceasing to use electronic devices.

Now, I could do with a bit of digital detox. In fact, I am doing with a bit today because it's been probably two or three years since I've preached using paper. Normally, it's my tablet.

But what I could do with even more is email digital detox. Email is overwhelming. And you probably all know that as well. Here's another neologism for 2014.

Digital afterlife. Do you know what digital afterlife is? It's what remains of you online after you've died. Another neologism, cultured leather.

Cultured leather is leather grown from human skin cells. What about cronut? Cronut is a piece of pastry which is a cross between a donut and a croissant.

[2 : 27] Or there is, and most of you will know this one, the selfie. The selfie is a picture you take of yourself often with an extended stick in front of some nice scenery or whatever and post on your social media website.

Anyway, this week I came across another neologism that I really loved. It is the word scoff law. Now, scoff law is actually a word that was created in a competition in 1924.

So it's hardly a neologism actually. It's a relatively old word. 1924, as a result of a national campaign sponsored by the Boston Herald.

It is a term scoff law that refers to anyone who displays a disdain for laws that are difficult to enforce. Okay? So a word for a disdain for laws that are difficult to enforce.

And you can hear it, can't you? It uses two words, scoff and law. You are scoffing at law. Now, I discovered that word this week while I worked on this Bible talk.

[3 : 38] And as a result, I've been trying to use it all week. I've tried it out on Heather. I've tried it out on various other people. I really...

It's a great word, isn't it? Scoff law. Now, I think it's a word that the Jews of Jesus' day might have used of Jesus. They might have called him a scoff law.

That is a... And do you think they are right? Do you think it would be right to call Jesus a scoff law? Is he someone who displays a disdain for the law?

Particularly, does he display a disdain for Old Testament law? That's what I want you to think about as we work through our passage today. Is Jesus a scoff law?

Did he have a disdain for Old Testament law? Let's check it out in our passage for today. You might like to have your Bibles open. But I do need to give you just a little bit more background before we do that.

[4 : 38] Do you remember what we've been doing the last few weeks? A couple of weeks ago, we saw Jesus go on a mission to Israel or send his disciples on a mission to Israel. In chapter 10, he begins that.

He sends out the 12 apostles. To the 12 tribes of Israel. Actually, I think it's chapter 11. He tells them, you go to the Jews. Here is your mission to them. You are to gather the lost sheep of Israel together.

You are to be... And then Jesus in chapter 11 is an example to the 12. He goes to Galilee.

He preaches there. And the reception he gets, I wonder is, that we saw last week, is perhaps symptomatic of the response his disciples might expect to get when they go to Israel as well.

There are lots of questions. Remember from last week, there are cautions. Even the greatest, John the Baptist, has got a few questions for Jesus. He has questions. He has queries.

[5 : 40] But Jesus indicates that the great ones in the kingdom are those who humbly, like children, accept Jesus and his kingdom. You remember that from the end of chapter 11 last week.

He says, it's children who are the inheritors of the kingdom. They are the ones to whom the Son reveals the Father. And they enter into God's rest. That's where we've been the last couple of weeks.

Now in chapter 12, Jesus is on the topic of the Sabbath. The topic is raised there. And because of that, it's very helpful for us to get some sort of understanding of Jews and Sabbath in the time of Jesus.

So let me give you some background. I think for us, the whole idea of keeping the Sabbath seems a little burdensome. I remember when I first took my first parish appointment, people were a little surreptitious about reading the Sunday newspaper.

It was back in the 80s. And when I investigated, they had had a rector, because I was in Sydney, so it was rectors rather than bickers. They had had a rector who apparently had told them that it was incredibly ungodly to read a newspaper on a Sunday.

[6 : 48] So they thought that all other rectors that followed might have the same attitude. And so they kept their newspapers secret on Sundays. And so, you know, most of us, I think, have the idea that a Sabbath is a rather burdensome thing.

But let me tell you that for Jews, that wasn't the case. Now, you see, Jews welcomed the Sabbath. They thought the Sabbath was a good thing. They saw it as being a way of engaging with God and commemorating the way that he made the world.

You know, he had made the world on six days and rested. And as you rested on the Sabbath day, you engaged with God. It was a fantastic thing. On the Sabbath, all fasting was banned.

You could eat what you liked. You could drink what you liked. Most of the Ten Commandments told Jews what they could not do, but not the Sabbath. By the way, there are two commandments that say what you can do of the Ten Commandments.

Can you think what the other one might be? One is keep the Sabbath day and the other one is honour your father and mother. Quite right. Those two are positive. Anyway, they were told, on this day, this was a great thing to do.

[8 : 01] Keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a very positive thing for Jews. Jews embraced it. They loved it. It symbolised their exclusive and special relationship with God.

Only Jews out of all the nations of the world celebrated this day. In fact, the Romans were not terribly happy with Jews because when they were conscripted for military service, they'd stop on the Sabbath day.

Not very good if you're in the middle of a battle, is it? So, they loved it. They loved the Sabbath. It marked them out as being different. In the end, the Romans gave up having Jews as soldiers because they weren't very good in this way.

They would stop on a certain day. But what would you do with the Sabbath? Well, you'd remember how God had created the world and then rested and you'd also remember how God had brought you up out of Egypt and how he'd brought you into a place, a land that was full of milk and honey and a place where you could rest and just watch the grapes fall into your mouth and so on.

It marked them out as God's true people. It was not a burden for them. It was a celebration of them and their God and all that he'd done for them. It was a remembrance of his ownership and rescue of them.

[9 : 19] So that's the big picture behind this passage. Jesus the Jew is talking about that great day, special to Jews, one day that no other nation celebrated like them.

He's talking to his fellow Jews about how this day should be kept. Okay, now you can open your Bibles at chapter 12. There are two incidents in it.

The first occurs in verses 1 to 8 and let's see what happens. Have a look at it. Jesus is travelling along with his disciples and verse 1 tells us that they go through some grain fields on the Sabbath day and the disciples are hungry.

They begin to pick some of the heads of grain and eat them and we're not told why they're travelling on the Sabbath nor are we told why they're exceeding whether they might be exceeding the limits of travel on a Sabbath day but we're just told what they do on that.

They take some grains, they take the shell off it, they begin to eat and we're told that the Pharisees observe them and they come to Jesus and they pose the question to the master of the disciples.

[10 : 28] We're not told whether Jesus is doing it, I presume he's not because they don't accuse him of doing it, they accuse his disciples and look at what they say. They say, look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

Now Deuteronomy 23 verse 25 indicates it was okay to go into a neighbour's field to pluck grain to satisfy your hunger as long as you didn't use a sickle to do it because then you'd be reaping and that'd be work.

A sickle would amount to stealing and work. The rabbis were a little divided as to whether this was permissible on the Sabbath or not.

However, some classified the picking of grain as a form of reaping. Reaping was prohibited on the Sabbath. So therefore, what the disciples were doing, picking the grain, taking it out, they were working.

So that was probably the basis of the question by the Pharisees. Anyway, let's turn to the response by Jesus. Verse 3. Jesus goes to the book of Samuel and the book of Samuel was considered by the Jews to be part of the prophetic works.

[11 : 36] We regard it as history works but actually the Jews regard it as prophetic work. And Jesus goes to the book of Samuel and he turns to it and he, or he quotes from it and he talks about one particular incident that's outlined in our Bible, our Old Testament Bible reading for today, 1 Samuel 21, 1 to 6.

Apparently David and his men are like the disciples are hungry. David asks Ahimelech, the priest, for bread. You know, he turns up to the temple or there wasn't a temple there at the time but he turns up to the priest who probably is overseeing a form of where the Ark of the Covenant was and David asks the priest for bread.

And the only bread available is the consecrated bread of the presence. That is the bread that resided in the temple precincts and that was only used to demonstrate the presence of God as it were.

And normally only priests could eat that bread. You can see that in Leviticus 24 and Numbers 28. However, what Ahimelech does is he gives some of that bread to David to distribute to his men.

Here we have David, the Messiah, as it were, that's what he's called. So David the Messiah is able to distribute bread to his men.

[12 : 58] And what we have here in this passage we're looking at today is great David's greater son. That is, David was a forerunner, a type of Messiah. Well, here we have the actual Messiah, as it were.

And he is the dominant priest of his day in one sense. He is God's appointed great priest. And the priest of, every other major priest of the day, sorry, let me take it back a bit.

This is, the priest of David's day recognised that this situation that David was in was a very urgent one.

It was therefore okay to give bread to David and his men. He was not condemned in scripture for his act. Ahimelech was not condemned.

And what I think Jesus is doing is drawing on that and saying, so if I am God's coming Messiah and God's priest, as it were, I, I can distribute bread to my disciples as well.

[14 : 10] Or I can distribute, distribute, distribute grain, as it were. And he makes this point. Have a look. He said, David entered the house of God. He and his companions ate the consecrated bread which was lawful for them to do, which was not lawful for them to do but only for priests.

There is Jesus' first defence. It comes from the prophets. It says, look, David, in his day, had authority to do what no other might do. I, and Jesus is saying, I, like my ancestor, have authority to do this for my followers as well.

The argument appears to be, David, God's Messiah, had such authority. I am God's Messiah. I have such authority. I, God's King, have such authority.

I am the fulfilment of what David was. I am greater than David. Therefore, I have an authority much greater than David and if David can do it, how much more can I do it?

Can you see the logic of what's going on? Now look at verse 5. Jesus has quoted from the prophets. Now he quotes from the law and he appears to refer to Numbers 28 verses 9 to 10 and what he does is he observes that on the Sabbath priests still do temple work.

[15 : 30] Let me explain what I mean. What priests are told to do in Numbers 28 is they are to take lambs and slaughter them and offer them as burnt offerings.

Now, when you think about that, the implication is clear. Temple duties in the Old Testament in Old Testament law are permitted and in fact priests are instructed to violate the Sabbath in order to kill lambs and slaughter them.

Priests are not seen to be lawbreakers when they do that. Well, here we have God's Messiah, God's true priest, God's replacement for all the temple sacrifices itself and he is the fulfillment of the temple and as he says in verse 6, he is someone greater than the temple and therefore he's allowed to do these things.

Surely, surely he should be able to break the Sabbath as priests were able to do in the law. Let's move on, look at verse 7. First, he insinuates that the Pharisees don't know or understand scripture and so he says to them these things.

If you had known what these words mean, and then he quotes scripture again. He's already quoted Old Testament prophetic scripture in support. He's already quoted Old Testament law in support.

[16:56] Now he's quoting the prophets yet again. This time he's quoting the book of Hosea and in Hosea 6 verse 6, Hosea says, I desire, in God's name he says, I desire mercy not sacrifice.

Can you see the point that Jesus is making? He's saying, you Pharisees, you are guilty of pedantry and punctiliousness in relation to Old Testament law. However, what you've done is neglected the heart of Old Testament law.

The prophets make clear that God's demand is for mercy and that demand for mercy overrides pedantry and punctiliousness. Mercy, you see, is at the very heart of God's law and God's command and you Pharisees are neglecting the heart.

All for the sake of the detail. But have another look at verse 7. Jesus quoted from the prophets the law, then the prophets again and now he alludes to the law again.

You see, in the Ten Commandments, the Old Testament law made clear that God is Lord of the Sabbath. Exodus chapter 20 verse 11 says that God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

[18:08] Well, look at what Jesus says in verse 8. He says, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. He's the true Messiah. He's the true temple. He keeps the heart of the prophets and he, as Lord of the Sabbath, determines what does and does not conform to God's will for the Sabbath.

I wonder if you can hear what Jesus is saying. It's very profound and bold and strong. What Jesus is doing is he's placing himself in the position of ultimate authority and what he's saying is implicitly a claim to be God.

Jesus is, I think, saying, I am in the place of God here. As God in the flesh, I have authority to interpret the law and the prophets which I am doing now.

And my interpretation of the law and the prophets is that the Sabbath was not made for legalists to be pedants with. No, it was made for humans and for their good.

It was made for the well-being of humans and true interpretation will interpret the law in line with that. So friends, there's incident number one. Let's move to the second incident.

[19:17] Look at verses 9 to 14. Look at verse 9. We're told Jesus moves from the grain fields into the territory of his enemies, the Pharisees.

look carefully at verse 9. There's one telltale word there. Can you see it? It talks about the territory of the Pharisees and what does he call it? What does he call it?

Their synagogues. Not God's synagogue, their synagogue. There, in their synagogue, is a man with a shriveled hand.

Now the Pharisees, they're not going to wait and see what happens. They take a preemptive strike by way of a question. They say, looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they ask him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

Now look at the response of Jesus. He uses what's called, what is a common form of argument in the New Testament and amongst Jews. He argues from the lesser to the greater.

[20 : 17] The lesser is the sheep. Okay? So have a look at the argument. He talks about sheep and he says, if any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?

Okay? There's a lesser. If you were to have this action with a lesser, then surely it's appropriate for a greater. What would the greater be? A person.

So that's the point of verse 12, you see. How much more valuable than a person is a sheep? So if you go around lifting sheep out, surely you should care for people as well. And the conclusion therefore is verse 12, Jesus says, therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

You see how he's gone? Sheep, people, principle. Then Jesus adds, look at verse 13, then he said, stretch out your hand. And so the man with the shriveled hand stretches it out and it's completely restored, just as sound as the other.

Now friends, I wonder if you've thought about this incident in any depth here. I mean, just think about it for a moment. Sabbath day, man with a withered hand, probably been withered from birth.

[21 : 30] See, in my mind, I wonder, why is Jesus doing this here? I mean, after all, this man clearly has had his malady for some time now, hasn't he? He had it yesterday and he's going to have it tomorrow as well unless something happens.

And so why couldn't he come back tomorrow? That would save Jesus a lot of angst, wouldn't it? And why couldn't Jesus tell him, come back tomorrow and I'll do it? Jesus could save himself a lot of trouble and ask the man to come back tomorrow and he'll sort it out then.

Not a hard thing to do. You could say to him, look, look mate, could you come back tomorrow? We can sort this out and it won't upset the Pharisees and we'll all be in a good place.

Come back tomorrow, could you? But he doesn't. see, instead, he sees his enemies in their synagogue and he acts in defiance of them.

It's as though he shakes his fist at them. you see, his examination of the law and the prophets has made it clear that the demands of love and mercy are top demands and you ought not to put them on hold for anything.

[22 : 50] They override quibbles, they override pedantry, they override punctiliousness. God is not restricted to doing his work for six days, nor is the Lord of the Sabbath.

And it's Lord of the Sabbath, he does the work of his father and he does what his father does in mercy and love. You see, he is going to fulfill the heart of God which is reflected in scriptures and restore the hand of this man in this synagogue of theirs.

But let's look at the result, look at verse 14 and look at what it says. It tells us that the Pharisees go out of their synagogue and they go out and they plot.

And they go out and plot how they might kill Jesus. Can you see the incredible irony in that verse? What is at the heart of the law? It is love and mercy.

And on this day in their synagogue, what are they doing? Well, actually, no, they at least have enough to go out of the synagogue. But when they do, on this day, on this Lord's day, they plot as to how they might kill his Messiah.

[24 : 06] There's an incredible irony in it. But what about Jesus? What does he do? Well, verse 13, 15 tells us he too withdraws from that place.

And a crowd who long for his goodness and his gifts follow him and he heals all who are ill. But he warns them not to tell others about him.

I think that's because he wants to interpret the scriptures for his hearers rather than have other people do it for him. He himself wants to be the interpreter of scripture as he's just done. He wants to tell others what God's perspective on all of this is.

And it's a marked contrast, isn't it? God's self-appointed interpreters of scripture withdrawing to a plot to kill God's Messiah and God's appointed interpreter of scripture.

And God's Messiah going out to act according to the heart of God's word and healing those who are ill and doing so in fulfilment of scripture.

[25 : 09] The irony is profound. So friends, what have we got here? What do you think this passage is about? What do we learn here? What's here for us? Well, friends, a number of things. First, let's return to the question that we started with.

Let me ask you, what do you think? Is Jesus a scoff law? Does he scoff at God's law? Does he treat it with disdain?

No, he doesn't, does he? This passage is very clear. He is no scoff law. He does not treat God's law with disdain. In fact, he sees the heart of God's law and fulfills it.

He does it. He obeys it. Friends, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of a righteousness that fulfills the law, didn't he?

Do you remember that? Do you remember he said, you ought to have a righteousness that is greater than that of the law and the prophets? Did you notice how in this passage, Jesus refers to both law and prophets twice?

[26 : 13] What is he saying by doing this? The story of David and the showbread comes from the prophets. The story of the priests on the Sabbath day comes from the law. The quotation from Hosea comes from the prophets.

The allusion to the Lord of the Sabbath comes from the law. Prophets law, prophets law. Jesus showing us what a righteousness from the law and the prophets looks like. What does it look like? It looks like this.

And then he demonstrates it to the man with the withered hand. It looks like that. It looks like love.

It looks like mercy. It looks like compassion. It looks like what God does. Friends, you see, Jesus himself is faithful to the law. He is faithful to God's covenant with his people.

He has a righteousness that fulfills the law and the prophets. And he demonstrates in word and action what we are to be like. Friends, this is what God demands of us.

[27 : 14] not punctiliousness, not pedantry, not splitting things up, but conformity to the heart of God as demonstrated in the law and the prophets.

A quiet giving to the needy with no trumpets is what he said in the Sermon on the Mount. Or a left hand that doesn't know what the right is doing.

A left that doesn't know what the right is doing. Quiet prayer out of the limelight for the poor and the needy rather than public babbling.

Forgiving others as God forgives you. That's the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. Eyes full of light. Focus on serving God, not money.

Not judging others, but rather having a self-critical self-judgment. generosity towards others as God is generous toward you. Love for others.

[28 : 19] Good fruit. Doing the will of God from the heart. Doing to others what you would have them do to you. can you hear the language of the Sermon on the Mount? Loving us we have been loved.

For this friend sums up the law and the prophets. And such an attitude will result in our doing the works of our master.

We will look like him. Let's pray. Father we pray that you would make us people who fulfill the heart of scripture.

Who have a righteousness that surpasses that of the law and the prophets because it goes to the heart of the law and the prophets. For it is full of mercy and kindness and love even as you are.

So Father we pray that you would make us like this. Help us to live in conformity to your heart as it is demonstrated in the law and the prophets.

[29 : 40] Help us to have good fruit of love and mercy and justice loving as we have been loved in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this will sum up the law and the prophets. Please make us such people. Please make us such people here at Holy Trinity. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.