

## Opposition to the Kingdom

BIG IDEA– The Pharisees opposition to Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath shows they fail to understand who he is and the kingdom he has come to usher in. He is the divine creator and Son of Man who has all authority and the author of true rest whose kingdom is founded on relationship not religiosity

### 1. Intro

- This week we started the Life of Jesus course in a few of our growth groups
  - One of the great things about the course is it shows quite emphatically that Jesus is a real man of history ... and that even secular scholars acknowledge this
  - The two key question that we, who are doing the course, need to wrestle with is ...
    - “Is Jesus who he says he is?”; and
    - “What does he have to say about the Kingdom of Heaven?”
- A lot of people today aren’t even willing to engage with that first question ... as to whether Jesus is a historical figure
- But for those who do acknowledge the historicity of Jesus ... without being willing to looking to into what Jesus actually said ... most end up coming to the wrong conclusion about Jesus and Christianity
- More often than not ... many people today
  - Misunderstand Jesus ... and therefore fail to take him seriously
  - Misunderstand Christianity ... and therefore exclude themselves from the rest their souls so desperately need
- In Matthew 12:1-14, we get a clear picture of who Jesus is and what is the nature of the kingdom came to usher in
- This morning we’re looking at three things
  - Understanding Jesus
  - Understanding his kingdom
  - Understanding ourselves

### 2. Understanding Jesus (v1-8)

- Matthew 11-12 is about different responses to Jesus and his kingdom
- 12:1-14 see the Pharisees opposing and rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and the Kingdom he has come to usher in
- The opposition to Jesus and his Kingdom comes to a head over this issue of what is lawful or not to do on the Sabbath
  - Sabbath the Jewish day of rest

- It was one of the 10 Commandment where God says
  - Exodus 20:9-10 *Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work*
- The Pharisees (religious elite) had devised 39 specific rules as to what you could / couldn't do on the Sabbath
  - No carrying
  - No lifting
  - No reaping
  - No walking long distances etc
- So many rules and traditions ... the Sabbath had become a burden, instead of a blessing
- So when Jesus and the disciples are walking along and they grab a few heads of grain on the way and have a little road trip snack ... the Pharisees confront Jesus and accuse his disciples of breaking, not the commandment, but their rules and traditions
- In v3-5 Jesus gives them two examples that show in making this accusation to Jesus they have totally underestimated and misunderstood who he is
- Basic point is this
  - If King David's hunger and the priests work in the temple means they are not condemned by the Sabbath command ...
  - Then when I come along
    - One who is greater than King David and greater than the temple
    - Then I'm not bound to your man made rules and traditions
- And Jesus concludes in v8 by saying
  - *For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*
- This is where it explodes
  - If the Pharisees were annoyed with Jesus beforehand ... now they are ropable
  - So much so by the end of the next encounter in the synagogue, they want to kill him
- Why?
  - As you might have guessed, it's not the breaking of the Sabbath that is the issue here ... it's much bigger than that

- Their issue is what Jesus is claiming about himself and his authority when he refers to himself as the Son of Man and the Lord of the Sabbath
- Now to understand the significance of this, we're going to have to do some heavy lifting in the Old Testament
- **Son of Man**
- Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man
- It's a reference to the Old Testament book of Daniel, where Daniel had a vision
  - *Daniel 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one **like a son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*
- Jesus is claiming to be this Son of Man
  - One who is led into the presence of God and
    - is given all authority, glory and power
    - all people and nations will worship him
    - his kingdom will be eternal
  - And Jesus is saying ... I'm that guy!
- In addition to that, he says I am Lord of the Sabbath
- Now in one sense ... as the Son of Man with all power and authority over all things ... it means when it comes to the Sabbath ... he can say
  - I'm Lord over that too
  - It's my interpretation of the Sabbath that matters ... not your man made rules and regulations
- However, as you might expect, for Jesus to say he is Lord of the Sabbath, he's saying much more than "I have the authority to set the rules around here"
- To understand the significance of Jesus being Lord of the Sabbath, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible and Genesis 2
- Genesis 2:2-3
  - *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the*

*seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

- Here God has done his work of creation and on the seventh day he rested
  - Notice the seventh day is different to all the other days in Genesis 1
  - The seventh day does not end
- Days 1-6 all have this refrain
  - 'there was morning , there was evening, the first day'
  - 'there was morning , there was evening, the second day'
  - 'there was morning , there was evening, the third day'
- But when we get to the seventh day its not there
  - And the implication is that the seventh day doesn't end
  
- And the rest of Genesis 2:4-25 goes on to describe what that seventh day looks like
  - If you read through Gen 2 you would see
    - God and man living in his perfect creation, in perfect harmony with each other and with God himself
  - This is the picture of God's rest
    - Mankind in good and perfect relationship with God, their creator
  
- Which means, true rest therefore, is found not in
  - early retirement
  - 3 month uni break
  - 5 star resort in Fiji
- Real rest is found in being in right relationship with our creator God
- Sadly that rest was fractured due to the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3
  
- However, the Sabbath that God instituted in the 10 Commandments was meant to help God's people remember the rest that God created them for
- So Exodus 20:8-11
  - <sup>8</sup> *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. <sup>11</sup> **For** in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

- The resting from work on the Sabbath is to
  - reflect on, and remember the relationship God's people are to have with their creator ...
  - **and** look forward to the day when that rest would one day be restored
- And so built into the diary of every Israelite, was a weekly reminder that they were created by God to be in perfect relationship with him
  - The purpose of the Sabbath is not to settle into the lounge, kick off your shoes, have an afternoon nanna-nap while pretending to watch the afternoon footy or re-runs of the Voice
- No the purpose of the Sabbath was to recall God's Sabbath rest and our relationship with him
  
- So now we are beginning to see what Jesus words 12:8 are so explosive
- When Jesus says ...
  - "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" ... he's not just saying
  - "Hey, I'm the one who sets the rules around here ... and there's going to be a few changes to the constitution"
- No, it's something much more profound than that
- He is saying two things ...
  - I'm the one God has given all authority and power over all people and all kingdoms; and
  - The Sabbath ... and resting from your work to remember the relationship you have with your creator ... points to me!
  - I am the one who is Lord of the Sabbath
  - I am the one you're made to be in relationship with
  - I am the one in whom you find your rest
- And therefore in both those things ... Jesus is claiming to be God
  - And that's why the Pharisees want to kill him
- The real issue is not that Jesus interprets the Sabbath differently
  - It's that he claims to be the divine Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath
  
- **Illustration – Royals**
- Will Taylor > St Helen's> tells great story of the cracking one-liners the Royal Family are known for
  - Queen Mother
    - Queen Mother speaking to her daughter Queen Elizabeth when her daughter asked for a second glass of wine at lunch – "Are you sure that's wise, you know you have to reign all afternoon"

- Queen
  - During the trooping of the colour, Ronald Ferguson, father of Sarah Ferguson got a bit ahead on his horse and the Queen "Back a bit [said the Queen] they've come to see me not you"
- Member of Public
  - Member of the public in a shop in Sandringham (town near one of the royal palaces where the royals often go for holidays), and the tourist remarks to this lady in a scarf "Excuse me, but you look remarkably like the Queen"
  - To which the Queen replied "How very reassuring"
- Here is a member of the public busy collecting memorabilia, souvenirs, bits and pieces, that when the Queen stood in front of them, they failed to recognise her
- So caught up with their life and what they were focused on ... they were blind to the royalty standing right there before them
- Seems to be that exactly where the Pharisees had got to
- The religious leaders of Jesus time were so focused on themselves, and their religion and rules ... that when royalty stood before them they failed to recognise it
- They were so caught up with their life and what they were focused on ... they were blind to the fact that they had the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath standing right there before them
- **Application**
- This passage makes it clear that Jesus is no long haired, hippie, peace out, love everybody guy who happened to sprout a few words of wisdom
- If you acknowledge Jesus was a real man of history, then this passage shows us he's the all-powerful Son of Man who has power and authority over all people and nations, including you and me
- Therefore, we cannot underestimate Jesus and think he's someone to be trifled with or ignored
- We cannot afford to dismiss Jesus as a footnote in history
- Likewise, if you're a Christian, there's no scope for sidelining Jesus and his call on your life

- If he is THE Son of Man of Daniel 7, then everything you do, everything you have ... must be for him
- But Jesus is not just the Son of Man who has all power and authority ... he is also the Lord of the Sabbath
- Which means he created you to be in relationship with him ... so you can share in the eternal rest that he offers
- God is a relational God ... Jesus Christ deeply desires to be in relationship with each and everyone one of us ...
  - And he showed how deeply he desired to be in that relationship with you by dying on a cross for you
- So friends, don't be so distracted by the things around you that you fail to see and understand who is standing before you
  - Assessments > job > house > super > footy > gym ... they're all important and good
  - But don't be so caught up in all those things that you are blind to one
    - who came into this world, stepped in the pages of history
    - who truly is the all-powerful Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath

### 3. Understanding Jesus' Kingdom

- So the Pharisees have failed to understand Jesus
- They've also failed to understand Jesus' kingdom
- What this confrontation highlights is the kingdom of heaven that Christ has come to usher is not that type of kingdom where the religious are in and the irreligious are out
- This episode with the Pharisees shows it's impossible to be **religious** to be part of Jesus' kingdom
- Because the kingdom that Jesus has come to usher in is
  - Not based on rules and traditions and moralism,
  - But rather is a kingdom based on relationships
- The Sabbath was meant to remind Israel of the intimate and perfect relationship they had with God
- But they'd turned into a checklist of rule keeping that meant the real purpose of the Sabbath was lost on them
  - And so the nature of Jesus' kingdom was lost on them

- They were so concerned with their legalism ... that they couldn't see past their rule of 'not healing' on the Sabbath in order to do good to the man with the withered hand
  - So blinded had they become by their rules and traditions, that Jesus had to point out their hypocrisy that
    - they'd be happy to pull one of their sheep from a pit,
    - but they were unwilling to see a man healed
  - Jesus exposes their religiosity and moralism and that these things are not what the Kingdom is about
    - It's about relationship
    - That's why Jesus says in v7 - *I desire mercy not sacrifice*
  - The Israelites had become so focused and reliant on their religious rule keeping that relationally, they'd drifted far from God
  - As you read through the Bible ...
    - even though there is lots of wisdom for living a good and godly life ...
    - being part of God's kingdom, God's people, God's family ... is based on our relationship with him
    - Even when God gave Israel the 10 Commandments and the Sabbath command ... it was in the context of God saying
      - *Exodus 20:2 - "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*
    - God was in relationship with them BEFORE he gave them the commandments
  - And it's that relationship with God that the Jews had lost
    - They had developed hearts of stone that needed to be circumcised and replaced with hearts of flesh ...
      - hearts that were engaged with, and responding to, the God who called them and saved them
    - Not living a life of religion that was driven by rules, tradition and moralism ...
      - and yet devoid of a real relationship with the one who made them to be in relationship with him
  - **Application**
  - Christianity and being part of Jesus Kingdom, is not about whether one is religious or not
  - Lots of people have this misunderstanding about Christianity
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- They think in binary categories ...
- You're either irreligious or you're religious
- That being a Christian is about being religious
  - Keeping the rule
  - Do this, do that
  - Don't do this, don't do that
  - Obey this, obey that
- But what Jesus makes clear in these verses is that the KOH that he's come to bring about is all about a relationship with the one who is Lord of the Sabbath
- Christianity is about a personal relationship with Jesus
  - You cannot enter into Jesus kingdom by your religiosity
  - In fact if that's what you think is how it works ... it will have the opposite affect and push you further away from the Kingdom
- How?
- As Tim Keller says
  - "The irreligious person knows they are is far from God, but the religious person often does not"
- The religious person thinks they are right with God because of their obedience and morality and rule-keeping
- What this does is it leads to a person to
  - Pride > when they're being good;and
  - Despair > when they're failing
- Either way both keep you out of the Kingdom because
  - God opposes the proud
  - And when you despair in your moral failure you'll give up and say this is too hard
- Both pride and despair push you away from the one we need to be in relationship with ... the Lord of the Sabbath
  - Pride says ... I don't need Jesus
  - Despair says ... I'm too bad for Jesus
- There are lots of churches and denominations where this is a problem
  - They are so steeped in tradition and rituals
  - Or they are so focused on obedience to rules and laws
    - that a real and personal relationship with Jesus is forgotten
- Many people who go to these types of churches will
  - religiously follow the rituals and traditions

- devoutly seek to obey the rules
- And yet ... have no relationship with Jesus Christ
  
- You need to understand ...
  - being irreligious will keep you out of the kingdom
  - being religious will also keep you out of the kingdom
- Only a personal trust in Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath will ensure you get to enjoy the rest of his eternal kingdom

#### 4. Understanding Ourselves

- Not only do these verses help us understand Jesus and his kingdom, they help us understand ourselves
- I don't know about you, but I found it shocking that the Pharisees would plot to murder Jesus over some petty legal dispute about what you can or can't do on the Sabbath
- The Pharisees were not normally like this
  - They were normally devout, conservative, moral and upright people
  - Not normally given to plotting to murder people
  
- What does this say then about their hearts and that leads them to sin like this?
- What it reveals is what happens to anyone who is challenged on the thing they're devoted to
- The Pharisees were **devoted** to their religious system of rules, tradition and religiosity
  - It's what defined them
  - They were the religious guys ... the rule makers
  - Everyone looked up to them as the standard bearers of religious devotion
- And so when Jesus comes along and completely undermines that by saying
  - It's not about religion ... it's about relationship with me
  - They're so outraged, they want to kill him
  
- Why?
- Any counselor will tell you that anger is secondary emotion that come to the fore when we're experiencing other primary emotions like
  - Fear
  - Disrespect
  - Pressure
  - Anxiety

- When the thing that the Pharisees were devoted was challenged
  - Their fear and anxiety of losing their status, control and security was too much
  - They couldn't handle losing all that
  - It freaked them out
  - And it led to them to great sin
- **Application**
- When you have something in your life that you are so **devoted** to
  - That if you were to lose it ...
  - Or if it was threatened
    - That it would cause you such fear and anxiety
    - That it would
      - it would destroy you
      - or cause you to react in outrage
  - Then you know you have an idol that you need to smash and get rid of
- Now what's an idol?
- An idol is ...
  - something you are more **devoted** to than God
  - something you love more than God
- And we will always choose to feed and satisfy the idols of our heart
  - And if that thing that we're devoted to is threatened or challenged ...
  - We will often react in sinful, harmful, hurtful ways to protect it and keep it ... just like the Pharisees
- Friends what do you fear in life?
- What's the thing that you're so devoted to, that if you lost it ... your life would not be worth living?
- What's the thing that causes you to fly into a rage?
  - Chances are, the answer to that question is ... that's probably your idol
- And if you're a Christian seeking to live to be and make disciples of Jesus ... then you cannot do that when you have an idol of the heart that you're more devoted to than Jesus
  - Because it'll be competing for your attention, will, money, and emotions
  - And what will happen is
    - Not only will it lead you behavior that is ungodly and ugly

- It will stop you growing in godliness and Christ-likeness, ... because you'll be constantly wanting to protect and feed your idol
- So metaphorically you need to smash your idol ... you need to get rid of it
  
- But even if you're not a Christian ... you will want to get rid of the idols of your heart ... because it will make you a better person
  - You won't be given to anger and rage when it's threatened
  - You won't be prone to despair if you lose it
  - You won't be led into ugly behaviour in order to keep it
  
- So how do you smash your idol and get rid of it?
  - You need to be devoted to something better
  - You need to replace your idol with something that your heart will be more devoted to
  
- The only thing ... the only thing that can be is Jesus Christ – the Lord of the Sabbath
  - The one who made you ... so you could be in relationship with him
  - The one who was so devoted to you ... he was willing to show you mercy ... and offer himself as a sacrifice ... for that to happen
  
- To the extent you understand how devoted Jesus was to you
- Then you will be willing to devote yourself to Jesus
- Because you will know the one who says
  - "I don't want your rituals or religiosity or sacrifices"
  - "You don't have to pay sacrifice to me ... because I came and paid the sacrifice for you"
  - "And I did it so you can
    - enter my kingdom
    - and experience eternal rest
    - by having a relationship with me – the Lord of the Sabbath."

## PRAY