

When Religion Misses the Point

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from the book of Matthew chapter 11 and 12. Please follow along on the bulletin or your own Bible. Starting in verse 28 we read, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?

Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here, and if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless, for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

[1 : 3 0] This is the Word of God. Great. Thank you, Celeste. Let's see if I can sort this out.

Okay, good morning, everyone. Great. Good to see so many of you. And it's great to be back in Matthew's Gospel. I don't know if you realize this, but we started Matthew's Gospel three years ago, and then we took a long break, and we picked it up again earlier this year, and then we took some more breaks, and we're back in Matthew's Gospel, and we're going to just keep on working through it.

And it might take us five years, but it's so good to be back there. Let me pray for us, and then we're going to dive into this passage. So, Father God, once again, once again, God, we come and we quieten ourselves.

We still ourselves. We come to your Word. Your Word, God, which for 2,000 years and more has spoken life to so many people in every country, in every culture, in every corner of the globe, God, your Word has brought us face to face with King Jesus.

And Lord, we ask you to do that again this morning. We ask God that you give us clarity about who you are and who we are in you. We ask God that you come and speak to us.

[2 : 4 6] God, won't you both encourage us and challenge us? And ultimately, won't you bring us to the feet of Jesus? Won't you help us to love you and trust you and obey you? Christ, come and have your way.

In your wonderful and your gracious name we pray. Amen. Amen. I grew up in South Africa, many of you will know, and in South Africa, one of the sports that South Africans love to play is the game of rugby.

Okay? I don't know how much you know about rugby. You might say it's kind of like American football, but not. Sorry, Bernard and any other Australians or New Zealanders. But so you've got this field and there's two posts on either end and there's a halfway line and the one team's got to get the ball to the other side and kind of put it down in the end goal area.

Okay? But the thing with rugby is there are all these lines in the field. So there's the halfway line, then there's the 10-meter line, then there's the 22-meter line, the 5-meter line, and eventually the tri-line.

Okay? So it can be a bit confusing sometimes. And I have a good friend. His name is Greg. And when we were at school one day, Greg played on the wing, which means he was pretty fast, and his job was to get the ball and then sprint down the wing as fast as he could and get it over the tri-line.

[4 : 02] And so he's playing, and his team's got the ball, and they're passing along, passing along, and eventually they pass the ball to him, and Greg reckons this is his moment to shine. And so he puts his head down, arm under the ball, and he runs like crazy down the line.

And he sees the line in front of him, and he thinks this is his moment of glory. And so he thinks all the TV cameras are on him, and he dives this glorious, like, super sport dive, puts the ball down, throws it up in the air, and cheers.

Yeah! And he catches the ball again, and the opposition just come and tackle him down to the ground. And I'm sure you can guess what happened.

He dived over the wrong line, right? And so he was still in the field of play, and he thought he was on the tri-line, and he celebrated like Cristiano Ronaldo, and he had completely dived over the wrong line, and it was all for nothing.

I'll tell you that story because this morning the passage we're going to look at is very similar, but in a very dissimilar way. It tells us, this morning we're going to look at a passage that shows us how dangerous it is and what it's like when we're confused about what's real and what's false, about what it looks like in our Christian lives when we get confused about the reality of who God is and what he's called us to do.

[5 : 29] This morning we're talking about when religion misses the point. And so look at what's happening in the passage here today. Matthew tells us that Jesus is walking with his disciples through some grain fields.

It's on the Saturday morning, which is, of course, the Sabbath, and the disciples are a little hungry. It's still a little while until yamcha, and so they're picking the heads of grain, and they are snacking to get them through to lunchtime, okay?

And while they do this, some Pharisees who are the religious leaders, they see what's going on, and they are freaking out. And so they protest at Jesus. They throw their hands in the air.

Jesus, what are your disciples doing? Look at what they say in verse 2. Jesus, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.

Now, the issue here is not that the disciples are stealing some farmer's grain. In the Old Testament, God made a law that said the farmers, when they harvest their crops, they're not to harvest the whole field.

[6 : 31] They're to leave the edges so that the poor and the marginalized, especially widows or orphans or foreigners, can pick up some of the food. So the issue is not that they're taking some farmer's food.

The issue is that they are doing this on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath. Now, why is that an issue? Well, in the Old Testament, God commanded His people to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember, we looked at this last year when we did the Ten Commandments. It's a day, the purpose of observing the Sabbath was threefold. Firstly, it's a day of rest and no work.

No work to be done. Secondly, it's a day of community worship, of worshiping God, of filling your souls with who God is, revitalizing, and filling your souls, delighting in who God is.

And these two things together, no work and community worship, lead us to the third thing. The point of the Sabbath was to remind God's people, as well as the nations around them, that God's people, their future and their provision and their safety and their security was not in their hard work or their abundance of their productivity, but in who God was and who they were in God.

[7 : 48] So when all the other nations around them are working seven days a week, are harvesting their crops, are picking up their swords and their shields and defending themselves, when all the other nations are saying, our future depends on our hands, God built this once a week rhythm into play in the nation of Israel so that once a week they're reminded, our future doesn't depend on us, Israel does not depend on hard work alone, but the grace and the faithfulness of God.

Okay, so these three things, no work, community worship, delighting in God, and a reminder that they're God's people and that their life and their safety depends not on themselves, but on who God is.

And this is so important that the people of God know and remember and build this into their weekly rhythm, that they're God's people, not their own, that observing the Sabbath was a matter of life and death.

In the Old Testament, to break the Sabbath was a capital offense. You could be put to death for it. It was so serious, and the reason it's so serious is because Israel knows that not only individuals' lives, but the nation's life or death depends on their faithfulness to who God is and finding their identity and security in God.

And so Israel knows that if the people of Israel forsake God and start taking matters into their own hands, if they start thinking, God doesn't have us, we've got ourselves, or our future's in our hands, Israel's in trouble.

[9 : 20] But if they can remain faithful to God and constantly, week by week, say, Lord, our life is not in our hands, it's in you, they will flourish. And so the nation of Israel, it's a matter of life and death.

As they trust God, they're going to flourish and grow in life. As they trust themselves, they're going to move towards death. And so what happened is that when, and so, for the observance of the Sabbath is like the quintessential symbol of whether Israel is trusting God or trusting in themselves.

Now, the prime example of this, of course, of Israel trusting in themselves and things going badly is when Israel go to Babylon. Remember, we looked at this in the Daniel series.

For 70 years, the nation of Israel has marched off to Babylon. They're slaves there in exile. Babylon is mastering over them. And all this is because they've abandoned God.

And the prophets constantly say, they pick up on this thing of you've abandoned the Sabbath. Rather than trusting and delighting God, you've trusted and delighted in yourself. And because of this, we're ending up in Babylon.

[10 : 34] And now 700 years fast forward, Israel's in the same position. Except now, it's not Babylon who's mastering them, it's the Romans. The Romans have got Israel under enemy occupation, right?

And so, for Israel, the sign that the Romans are on top of them is the sign that they've abandoned God, they've forsaken His ways, they've trusted themselves, and they are now in deep trouble.

And so, the Pharisees, the religious leaders who hate the Romans, their big idea is, we've got to do everything we can to get Israel to return to God.

For the Pharisees, returning to God, returning to obedience, taking God's laws seriously, is the way to freedom and the way to get rid of the Romans.

Because if Israel can take God's word seriously, if they can return to Him rather than themselves, if they can trust in Him rather than themselves, God will raise up a deliverer, a mighty king like David, who will overthrow the Romans and bring freedom and deliverance.

[11 : 36] If Israel can return to God rather than trusting in themselves, the temple will be cleaned and God's presence will come down. If Israel can return to God rather than trusting in themselves, all the great and glorious promises that God had spoken in His Old Testament will be fulfilled.

And so, the Pharisees have read the Old Testament. They've read things like Isaiah chapter 2 that says, God is going to restore Israel like a mighty mountain and all the nations of the world will flood to the highest mountain on earth.

Now, have you ever read Isaiah chapter 60 that says, behold, the light is going to shine on you and the kings of the earth are going to be drawn to your dawn. And so, the Pharisees are looking around them and saying, we are not obeying God.

We're not working hard enough. We're not obeying the Sabbath. Because of immoral people like you disciples that are breaking God's law, these Romans are occupying us and now we end the enemy occupation.

And so, the Pharisees aren't just trying to be religious nerds or legalistics or moralists. They deeply want Israel to be restored, the promises of God that He's spoken in the Old Testament to come to pass.

[12 : 47] For them, it's a matter of life and death. Israel's life or Israel's death. And so, the Sabbath is like the picture of who Israel's trusting, themselves or God.

In fact, the Sabbath was so important that a couple of times in Israel's history, about a hundred years before Jesus comes, the Jews are being attacked by another nation.

And the nation attacks them on the Sabbath. But the Jews figure, it's the Sabbath day. Rather be attacked by our enemies than coming to God's judgment. And so, they all put down their swords, they put down their shields, they open up the city gates, and the enemy march in and desecrate them.

They'd rather be killed by the enemy than fall under God's judgment. It's a matter of life and death. Okay, this is all kind of background. We're getting to the passage. Now, to make sure that nobody in any possible way, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, would break the Sabbath commandments, the Jewish leaders came up with a list of 39 categories of work that no one was allowed to do on the Sabbath.

And each of those categories have like between three and ten rules forbidding certain things that you can do. Okay? So, for instance, you got a glass of water, you can't throw the water out the window because the water may fall on some plants and then you water your crops and then that's breaking the Sabbath.

[14 : 22] Okay? One of the laws said that if you got a building and a wall falls down, okay, the side of your building falls down and there are people that are trapped underneath, if they're still alive, you can rescue them because that's life or death but if they're dead, you can't touch it.

It's the Sabbath. You've got to leave it until the next day to go and restore the dead bodies. Okay? So, there are all these hundreds of rules, 39 categories times 10 different rules, hundreds of rules of what you can and can't do on the Sabbath.

And this, as we said, isn't because they're just trying to be legalistic. They so absolutely want to make sure that they are honoring God. But here's what happened.

Okay? This is the key to understanding this passage. Invariably what happened is that what was meant to be a gift of God's grace, okay, don't open your emails, don't open your computer, put away your phone, don't check social media, don't work, quieten your soul, focus on God.

What was meant to be a gift of grace, turned into a system of rules. Don't do this, don't do this, don't water the plants, don't get in your car, don't turn on the lights. Okay?

[15 : 33] And what became a system of rules turned into a system of righteousness. Who was in and who was out? Who was righteous and who was a sinner?

Who was good in God's eyes and who was bad? And so the person that throws the water out the window is an unrighteous sinner. But the person that sits quietly at home and doesn't do anything, well, they're good in God's eyes.

And the person that gets in their car to go to the shops, oh, what a wicked, evil person. But the person that stays at home, oh, they must be really God-honoring, God-fearing.

And so what is meant to be a gift of grace becomes a system of rules and the system of rules becomes a system of who's in and who's out, a system of righteousness.

And so look what happens here with the Pharisees. They see the disciples of Jesus and they see them doing something that they consider a flagrant breaking of the rules, like rule 37 or something.

[16 : 32] And look at what they're doing. They're breaking four rules. They are reaping, okay, they're picking the harvest. They are winnowing, which means they're breaking the stalk off the head. They are threshing, which means they're taking the husk away from the actual core.

And they're preparing a meal. Four of these great rules of the Pharisees that these disciples are breaking. And now they look at Jesus and say, Jesus, you meant to be a rabbi and your disciples are breaking the rules.

Just what kind of rabbi are you? So what is Jesus going to say? What is Jesus going to say? Well, Jesus gives them three replies, all from the scriptures, to show them how they've dived over the wrong line.

He's showing them that though they are fastidious in their rules and their regulations, they've completely missed the whole point. Look what Jesus says in verse three to five.

He says to them, have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him, how he entered into the house of God and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for him to do, nor for those who are with him, but only for the priests.

[17 : 49] Now, Jesus is being a little cheeky here because he says, haven't you read your Old Testament? But the Pharisees haven't just read the Old Testament, they've memorized the whole thing, they know it off by heart.

So he's kind of digging at them a little bit. And he's saying to them, don't you remember Samuel 21, right? When David, King David, are with his band of soldiers.

Now, the story here is that David has been anointed king of Israel. He's not on the throne yet, Saul is still on the throne, but David's been anointed. He's the king elect.

And Saul is jealous because of David. And so Saul wants to kill him. And so David and his friends run into the wilderness, they flee from Saul's army.

And while they're in the wilderness, they run out of food, but they walk past the tabernacle. Now, the tabernacle is a precursor to the temple. And they know that inside the tabernacle is a whole lot of bread.

[18 : 44] It's the holy bread that the priests bake every day and put there as a kind of offering to God. And so David goes to the priests and says, listen, we hungry, we need some bread, we know there's some bread in there, can we eat the holy bread?

And the priests deliberate a bit, I'm not so sure, this is breaking the law. But David says, listen, it's a matter of life and death. And so they're okay. And they give David the holy bread.

And David and his friends eat it. And Jesus says, what does God say about this? Is David condemned? Is he written off as this unrighteous sinner?

The scripture says nothing. It doesn't condemn him as a heretic. It doesn't write him off as a sinner. It doesn't moan about him as breaking God's law. God's word says nothing about this flagrant breaking of the law.

Why? Because it's a matter of life and death. God knows that David's men, their life is more important than the technicalities of the law. But what does scripture say about David?

[19 : 49] It says that he's a man after God's own heart. A man after God's own heart. And Jesus points that if the great king David committed a far greater breach of the Sabbath laws when he was in need when it really was life and death, well then you've got to extend a bit of grace to these disciples themselves.

Now, if you are one of the Pharisees, what do you say to this? Well I imagine the Pharisees have probably said something like, okay, good point. But, that's David, right?

David is the greatest king Israel ever had. David is the great rescuer, the redeemer, the restorer of Israel. David is the guy who brought us peace and security.

When all our enemies were attacking us, David is the one guy that brought Israel the most peace. David is the greatest king we've ever had. Jesus, who are you? And that's the question, isn't it?

Jesus, who are you? Well, Jesus doesn't answer the question because Jesus goes on and he tells them another example. He says, well consider the fact that on the Sabbath, when everyone's meant to be resting from work, when everyone's meant to be worshipping God, who is running around crazy working hard?

[21 : 09] It's the priests. The priests are meant to be the most sanctimonious, the most religious, the most dedicated to God. And yet they're the one people that on the Sabbath day are running around working doubly hard.

And what does scripture say about them? Does God condemn them? No, he doesn't. Because the reality of worship trumps the regulations about the Sabbath.

The gift of grace is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The purpose of the Sabbath is to promote worship, not to be worshipped.

It promotes rest and faithfulness, joy, not regulations and rituals and levels of righteousness. righteousness. The Sabbath is meant to lead us to Christ, not meant to be a scorecard by which we measure how righteous we are.

Jesus says that worship trumps ritual any day of the week. Now, if you're the Pharisees, what do you say to that? Say, okay, good point.

[22 : 16] But, those are the priests. I mean, the priests are those that are anointed and set apart for God's service. the priests are the ones that bring us forgiveness of sins and offer sacrifice and offering.

If the priests stop doing their work, who's going to bring us forgiveness? Who's going to atone for our guilt? Who's going to offer the sacrifices and the offerings? If the priests stop doing their work, Israel's in trouble.

Jesus, we need the priests, but Jesus, who are you? And Jesus gives them an answer, which may sound simple and well-established to us, but if you're first-century Israel, it is a bombshell.

Jesus says something that is so provocative, so blasphemous, that it gets the hair on the back of the neck standing up. Look at what Jesus says in verse 6. He says, I tell you the truth, something greater than the temple is here.

Now, if you're first-century Jew, that is like the worst thing in the whole world that you can say, right? The temple is the one place where God's presence dwells. The temple is the one place that is so holy, so sacred, that the high priest can only go in there in the holy place once a year.

[23 : 35] The temple is the place where the Shekinah glory of God dwells. Remember when Uzzah, the cart, the ark is being brought back to Israel, Uzzah reaches out and touches it and he falls down dead because God's glory strikes him?

Well, the temple is the place where God's glory dwells. It's heaven on earth and Jesus, this man whose disciples are breaking his Sabbath rules, says, something greater than the temple is in your midst.

Me. What's Jesus saying? He's saying all those sacrifices, all those offerings, all the thousands of rules that are all surrounded the temple are ultimately found in me.

And if you don't come to me, if you obey all those rules but you don't come to me, you've missed the point completely. Jesus doesn't say it, but I think the disciples would have picked up on it, someone greater than David is here.

David, the great king of Israel who brought peace and security, the true and better David is here. David, the great king, the redeemer and the restorer, the one that fought off their enemies and brought peace and security, Jesus is the true and better David is here.

[24 : 56] In other words, if you have a thousand Davids in your midst, a thousand great kings and leaders and rescuers and restorers, but you have not me, you have nothing.

You see what Jesus is saying? Jesus is saying that everything in the Old Testament, all the writings, all the rules, all the promises, all the hopes, everything the Pharisees longed for and were praying for and hoping for, all of it comes down to him.

In the New Testament book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes this in chapter 2 verse 16, he says, Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food or drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or the Sabbath.

These are but a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. These things are a shadow. It's like a silhouette.

Have you ever seen a silhouette and you go up, have you ever tried to give a silhouette a hug? Or have you ever tried to have a conversation with the silhouette? It's not going to be very fruitful. All the thousands of things, the rules and the regulations, the Sabbath, the sacrifices, the offerings, the temple, the priests, the thousands of things in God's word are all just a shadow, a silhouette, but the substance is in Jesus.

[26 : 29] And what Jesus is saying here is that the Pharisees are freaking out because his disciples are breaking their man-made rules. They think they're desecrating the Sabbath because they're making a mockery of all that's sacred and holy.

And Jesus says that the true and ultimate embodiment and fulfillment of everything God's law spoke about is found in him. Friends, you know that we do the same thing?

We can be so busy in church. We can run around and we can serve in ICF and serve in youth ministry and serve in kids ministry and serve in the band. We can run around doing a thousand things and miss Jesus.

And we can come to church and we can sing the songs and we can take communion and we can pray with people afterwards and we can miss Jesus. And we can be involved in outreach opportunities and serve the poor and be part of a CG and be part of a TG and be part of an FG and be a part of some other G and do a thousand things and our hearts can be cold and numb to Jesus.

Friends, Jesus says the true and lasting rest is not found in a Sabbath or in one day of the week. It's found in coming to him. Jesus says that peace with God is not found in the sacrifices and the offerings.

[27 : 52] It's found in coming to him. Jesus says that forgiveness and cleansing and redemption from judgment to come is not found in traveling hundreds of miles to the temple.

It's found in the sacrifice and the offering that Jesus would offer on the cross. It's found in him. And Jesus claims to be embodiment of everything that Israel held sacred.

The temple, the perfection of the law, the Sabbath day principle, the great king David. Jesus says all of these come to me. And therefore Jesus is saying that salvation, not just from judgment and hell, that's true, but the life that God offers, the fullness of life, the abundance of life that Christianity preaches and declares are not found in any ritual or tradition or system of righteousness, they're not even found in the gifts that God gives us, they are found in those gifts leading us to King Jesus.

For the Jews, the Sabbath was a matter of life and death, but friends, it's so true for us as well. It's a matter of life and death whether we come to Jesus. Sam Albury tells this great story and I want to share it with you.

He tells the story of he had a friend who wanted to become a pastor and so he went off to seminary. Now seminary is like where you train to become a pastor. And so his friend goes to seminary and he's learning all these amazing things about the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament and these big words and how to study the Bible and homiletics and all these wonderful things and he's so proud of himself and what he's learning and how well he knows the Bible.

[29 : 40] And during one of his school holidays, he goes back home to his small rural town and he goes to church with his family and the pastor uses some big words like eschatological or something like that.

And he's so proud of himself that he knows what this means. And so he turns to his dad and he says, Hey dad, do you know what eschatology means? And his dad just whispers, isn't that when you love Jesus very, very much?

And what his dad was saying was, you can know all the big words, son, but if you don't love Jesus, it's all a pile of nothing. And his dad was just very deliberately, very subtly saying, who cares about the big words in all your education?

You can know the Greek and the Hebrew. You can know eschatology and homiletics and soteriology and all those things. But if that doesn't lead you to love Jesus, it's all for nothing. Friends, what about you and I?

I know that as a church, we're really busy and we're doing lots of things. We'll talk about that in a minute. Are God's gifts of grace like CG and church worship and Bible reading and prayer, are these things leading you to the wonder and the beauty of Jesus?

[31 : 01] Are these things leading you to love and trust Jesus more? Are these just gifts of grace that have become rules of regulation that are soon going to become rules of righteousness?

Friends, Jesus calls us back to himself and says, what are you doing with me? What are you doing with me? John Stott says that the Pharisees were so anxious to study what the scriptures said that they could not see what the scriptures meant.

And what is the meaning of scripture? The meaning of the scripture is actually what Celeste read to us in chapter 11. Look at how Jesus puts it in chapter 11. He says, you who are weary and heavy laden, you who are so burdened by the rules of the law, you who are so burdened by the rules and this and that and do this and don't do this and the Sabbath day and this and this and that, you who are anxious and weary and exhausted and burnt out, come to me.

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I, says Jesus, will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Friends, are you exhausted or burnt out from all your serving? Maybe each time you walk into church, you think to yourself, I hope nobody asks me to do anything today. Or maybe worse, you walk into church and you think, what is God going to ask me to do today?

[32 : 37] One more burden, one more thing that the preacher in the front is going to tell me to do. One more duty to perform to be a good Christian. Friends, are you exhausted and burnt out?

Do you feel like your shoulders are weighed down by all the things that God and church and preachers and Christians ask you to do? Friends, you may be extremely busy doing a thousand things and may not even be a Christian at all because you've never come to Jesus and found your rest in Him.

Jesus says, come to me. Come to me. Now, before we get to application, there's one last thing we need to see in this passage and that is Jesus gives us a clue, a hint, almost a symptom that we can see of how we know whether our religion is missing the point.

How we know whether we are coming to Jesus or whether we are religious. Because let's be honest, it's pretty hard to tell. Sometimes we come to church and we do all the things and we think we're on track and we actually have not even realized that we've missed the point completely.

Look at what Jesus says in verse 7. Jesus actually tells us how we know whether we're missing Jesus or whether we are whether we are coming to Jesus or whether we're being religious is the way that we treat other people.

[34 : 19] Look what He says in verse 7. If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. Now, Jesus is quoting from Hosea chapter 6.

It's one of His favorite quotes. He quotes it a couple of times throughout the gospels. And when Hosea says that God desires mercy, He's not talking about the mercy we receive from God. He's not talking about the mercy we give to God.

He's talking about the mercy that we extend to one another. What God is saying here is that you can come to church and offer a hundred thousand bills as sacrifice or drop a million dollars in the offering basket.

But if you've trampled over the beggar on the way to church or if you've screamed and shouted at your spouse and told them what an idiot they are and then you come and worship Christ at church, it's all for nothing.

I desire mercy and steadfast love to the brothers and sisters around you far more than I desire offering and sacrifice. And what Jesus is saying is that one of the symptoms that we know whether we really come to Him, whether our hearts are really trusting in Him, whether we're loving and trusting and obeying Jesus as opposed to ourselves, will be manifest in the way that we treat one another.

- [35 : 37] Friends, maybe I can ask you, are you bitter and angry? Do you sometimes come to church and you think if one person asks one more thing of me, I swear I'm going to snap?
- Friends, maybe you've served in so many ways and you think, I'm doing everything I have got. I've given everything I have. I can't give anything more. Friends, come to Jesus.
- Don't come to Him with what you've done for Him. Come empty-handed. Come weary and heavy-laden. Come to Him and find your rest. Find your identity, find your security.
- Come and find your rest in Him. This is the big idea. Jesus says, true Sabbath rest is found not in what you do for Him, it's found in what He's done for you.
- Jesus is the true and better King, David, who brings us true peace and security. Jesus is the true and better sacrifice that atones for our sin and reconciles us with God.
- [36 : 42] Jesus is the true and better offering that presents us acceptable to God. Jesus is the true and better Lord, the one who really tells us how to live. Now, what does all this mean?
- Well, I've got two applications for us before we close. One corporate for us as a church family, one individual. The corporate one first.
- Watermark family, in case you haven't noticed, we are a very busy church. And over the last two years, we've become even more busy.
- I was just thinking this week of some of the things that we do. As elders, we've got a weekly prayer meeting where we pray for the church each week. We started about a year and a half ago a monthly prayer meeting where we as a church gather to pray together.
- We are trying to take massive ground in the social justice space. So we're doing things with safe families and single moms. We are looking after vulnerable children.
- [37 : 44] We're trying to engage with ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We are serving ladies in the red light districts of Hong Kong. We are trying to love and serve the foreign domestic workers of Hong Kong. We are looking to start an afternoon congregation in the coming months.
- We have revamped our youth ministry, and youth is going. Our university ministry, we just heard, is kicking it out the park and doing great stuff. We've started a couple of CGs this year.
- We've started one-to-one Bible reading. We are trying to better equip parents on how to disciple their kids. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Would you agree with me?
- We are a busy church. And we're doing this because we want to be faithful to Jesus. We want to become the kind of church that Jesus wants us to be. And yet the danger is what is meant to be gifts of grace that lead us to Jesus can easily become systems of rules and regulations that then become systems of righteousness and justification.
- And like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, we can be utterly convinced this is what it means to serve Jesus. And yet we do not come to Him because we are exhausted and burnt out, and the means of grace have become rules and regulations.
- [39 : 00] And maybe this is a bad idea. Elders, you can veto me at any point. But maybe, just maybe, we need to kill half the programs and become a church that just focuses on prayer and worship and coming to Jesus again and finding our rest in Him.
- Watermark, we are a busy church, and we are a wonderful church. But is it leading us to Jesus? Is it helping us trust Him and love Him and obey Him? Or is it becoming a system by which we pat ourselves on the back and say, look how busy we are?
- That's the corporate one. Here's the individual one. I think one of the warnings of this passage is that Jesus wants to demonstrate to us how easily the human heart turns gifts of grace into idols of justification.

For the Jews in Jesus' day, the Sabbath became a means of self-righteousness, a system of justifying how good and righteous and devout they were. And yet the irony is that it kept them from finding the one person in whom their righteousness, justification, and redemption was really held.

Friends, every one of us, Jesus calls us to engage in spiritual disciplines. But all those leading us to Jesus. And so tomorrow morning, I hope that most of us are going to get up early and we're going to read our Bibles and we're going to spend time in confession and repentance.

[40 : 24] And we're going to spend time and pray before we go to work and start off our day. But at the end of that time, is that going to be a box that we tick and say, I've done my job? Or is that going to lead us to come to Jesus, weary and heavy laden, and find our rest in Him?

Friends, tomorrow morning, I hope each one of us get up early and spend time in God's Word. But let it lead you to King Jesus. Let it lead you to the Gospel. Let it lead you to His grace and remember the Gospel and remind us that our life is found in Him.

Jesus, our true and better King. Jesus, the true and better temple. Jesus, our true and better Sabbath. Jesus, the one that it's all about. Jesus says, Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Come and take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we confess, God, that so easily we become like the Pharisees, and we turn what's meant to be a gift of grace into a system of rules and regulations, into a system of self-justification.

[41 : 47] Father, won't you open our eyes once again to see you for who you are? Father, won't you open our eyes to see our desperate need to you, to see that rest, true Sabbath rest, that everything that the great Sabbath was all about is found in coming to you.

Jesus, for those of us that are anxious and weary, tired and exhausted, draw us to yourself, we pray, and come and help us to find our rest in you.

Amen.