

April 19, 2009

JESUS: THE REST-GIVER
MATTHEW 12.1-21

Jesus, as the Father's true Servant-King, embodies the authority of the Father by giving rest to those under his rule.

Structure of Matthew: 5 speeches/discourses with narratives concerning Jesus' kingdom-inauguration works.

Chs 11-12 (narrative) - arranged in triads: unbelief/rejection, unbelief/rejection, invitation/acceptance.

Note: 5.17-19 should control thinking as we go through this passage (i.e., that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it; those who teach others to break the Law are least in the kingdom). Jesus is giving the true meaning of the Law.

1. GOD FEEDS HIS PEOPLE ON THE SABBATH (1-8)

"At that time" (1): refers back to 11.25-30 and the invitation to find rest for their souls. This is now expanded upon.

Authorities in Israel were to reflect God's character and give the people rest, Sabbath. But they did not.

The accusation of the Pharisees (1-2): Legality of plucking grain: cf. gleaning laws in Lev 19.9-10; Dt 24.20-22 as well as laws concerning those hungry in Dt 23.24-25.

The Pharisees believe it is unlawful to do this *on the Sabbath*. Whose law: God's or man's?

Some believe that Jesus is making allowable exceptions to God's law; essentially giving legitimate reasons to break God's law. But cf. 5.17-19 as well as Jesus' words in vv. 5, 7 about their "innocence."

David, his men, and the Bread of the Presence (3-4): cf. 1Sam 21.1ff.: David is the anointed-but-not-yet-enthroned king who is on the run from the apostate king, Saul. David refuses to confront Saul and kill him, not wanting to lift his hand against God's anointed. So, instead he goes into exile and runs until the time comes for him to accede the throne.

Bread of the Presence = the bread on the table opposite the lampstand (12 loaves = 12 tribes of Israel). Priests eat the bread on the Sabbath when it is changed out for fresh bread (Lev 24.5-9).

David & men are "holy," not just "clean." "Holy" is a status of being able to draw nearer to God. David & men are holy warriors, similar to Nazarites. They are priestly warriors. This gives them the ability to eat the Bread.

Note Saul eating the priests portion when anointed as king (1Sam 9.23-24). This indicated that Saul was being given the kingdom of Israel, which as God tells us in Ex 19 is a "kingdom of priests." The king is the king of priests as it were.

Jesus is communicating *the nature of his mission*. Jesus is a holy warrior, set apart to conduct holy war and bring in the kingdom.

Jesus is communicating *the nature of his position/authority*. Jesus is the new David: the anointed-but-not-yet-enthroned king of Israel. He was anointed in his baptism, but Saul still sits on the throne.

Jesus is communicating *the nature of his opponents*. The Pharisees are in opposition to God's true King and, thus, on the side of Saul and Doeg the Edomite.

The priests, the service, and the Temple (5-6): priests offer up sacrifices for the people.

The 4th Word is directed toward authorities. It is more concerned about authorities *giving* rest than it is about *taking* rest.

Rooted in creation (Ex 20, God rests the 7th day) and redemption (Dt 5, God gave rest from Egyptian bondage). When authorities give rest they reflect God's authority properly.

God's intention for the Sabbath: *give rest*, which includes feeding God's people when they are hungry.

"One greater than the Temple:" emphasizes his authority to determine who is obeying and disobeying the Sabbath. But if he has this authority, if he is indeed greater than the Temple, who is he? YHWH in the flesh.

Lord of the Sabbath (7-8): Quote from Hosea 6.6. “Mercy” = covenant faithfulness/love/lovingkindness. “Sacrifice” may refer specifically to the peace sacrifice; the only offering in which the worshiper could eat.

The Pharisees were keeping people at a distance by their laws that God wanted to draw near to him. This is the intent of God’s Law: mercy not graceless, meticulous law-keeping that excludes people and starves them.

2. GOD HEALS HIS PEOPLE ON THE SABBATH (9-14)

Seeking to accuse (9-10): deformities kept priests from drawing near. It was the revelation of the curse.

God desired that people draw near. Jesus reveals this in his healing ministry and it would ultimately be accomplished in Jesus taking our deformities/infirmities at the cross and then rising from the dead in a new, transformed body. We in him will be transformed and able to draw near to God no matter our physical malady. We are the body of Christ, which is perfected.

Note also that the *hand* is withered. The ordination of a priest and, therefore, his authority to draw near involved the filling of his hand. God put bread in his hand. That defined the nature of his office. This man’s hand could not be filled.

The Sabbath was a time to draw near to God and be in his life-giving presence. The Pharisees would rather a man be kept at a distance from God than to be made able to draw near to God. They missed the intent of the Law.

Restoring the body to health and freeing it from deformity fulfills the intent of the Sabbath.

Giving rest to sheep (11-12): The Pharisees would have agreed that you deliver a sheep. The 4th Word commands giving rest to animals.

Also note that sheep refer to God’s people (cf. e.g. Ps 100). When one of God’s people is struggling for life and can be eased or given rest through your healing, helping hands, you should not neglect to give the person rest.

Healing and destruction (13-14): Pharisees are put in stark contrast to Jesus. They seek to destroy Jesus (like Saul and Doeg).

3. GOD’S SERVANT BRINGS THE NATIONS INTO SABBATH (15-21)

Withdrawal as the way to victory (15-16): Just as David withdrew from Saul and went into exile with his men—a group that continued to grow—so the true David, Jesus, is going into further exile with his men.

Jesus’ exile does not keep him from his ministry. He is fulfilling his ministry while in exile as he heals all who follow him. Jesus is the life-giver, the one who brings in God’s true Sabbath: rest for the world.

Jesus does not want people to “make him known.” Like David, Jesus is not exerting himself and his rights to the throne. Jesus was not bringing about revolution to get the changes in Israel that were needed at the time.

The Servant of YHWH (17-21): Isa 42.1-4, a “Servant Song.” The Servant of YHWH is Israel’s true king who suffers for the sake of Israel and the world.

Two aspects emphasized by Matthew: justice and gentleness.

Justice = the way things ought to be (i.e. the way God intended them). God’s intention = all nations being one family. Isaiah prophesies that the Servant of YHWH will bring justice to the Gentiles. Jesus will bring in the outcasts. He will unite what sin divided. This is true justice.

Gentleness: through his gentleness that “he will send forth his justice into victory.” Victory will come through gentleness not self-exertion. He does not crush the weak and helpless.

1. *Christian authorities are obligated to give rest and not simply take rest.*

2. *Self-exalting revolution is not God’s way to victory.*