



# MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 11:28 – 12:1-8

## Plug In...

Jesus makes a series of colossal claims in this passage. We'll unpack them over the next few days, but beforehand, we must see they flow from this big claim that Jesus will give 'rest'.

*Rest* is a pervasive theological theme from the Old Testament. Here's a quick sketch of what 'rest' meant to Israel:

- God rested at the end of creation, it marked completion and arrival (Gen. 2:2-3). [NB: Hebrew verb for rest is 'Sabbath'.]
- Curse upon Cain was to be *restless* (Gen. 4:14).
- The name *Noah* is another Hebrew verb 'to rest'. [NB: When born, Noah's father names him saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us rest" (Gen. 5:59). Genesis 8 is replete with word plays on Noah's name as it tells the story of the 'rest-man', "Noah" coming *to rest* in the Ark, and *to rest* on Mount Ararat.
- Upon fleeing Egypt and in the desert, the Israelites are told to rest up from collecting manna on the seventh day for God will provide enough the day before (Exod. 16).
- As the people marched from Sinai they were led by the Ark of God until it came to rest (Num. 10:33).
- Entering the promised land is called 'rest' (Deut. 3:20), in fact, the land is named "the land of rest" (Deut. 12:9-10).

- David at the height of his kingdom is described as receiving *rest* from the LORD (2 Sam. 7:1).

### **Chew It Over...**

Rest includes psychological-emotional release from pain and strain; it is security from enemies and peace in relationships. These are all characteristics of what the rest looks and feels like. However, remember Jesus is saying He'll give rest to an audience with all the biblical ideas of rest.

Given the sketch above, can you arrive at what triggers that rest? Keep thinking, how is that rest experienced?

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask God to help you to live in the light of this rest, to experience it now and anticipate it fully for later.



## TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 12:1-8 & 1 Samuel 21:1-9

### **Plug In...**

In this passage, Jesus places Himself above three extremely important realities for Israel. As we don't live Israelite religion day-in-day-out, we miss the impact of Jesus' claims. Those local and parochial don't. This explains the Pharisees' response in v.14 and the following political argy-bargy to come – vv.22-24. We'll explore each of these three realities for the remainder of the week. Today, let's get into how Jesus justifies placing Himself above as He tells an episode from David's life. Read the story and think through the comparison.

### **Chew It Over...**

The comparison can't be that David was in a life-and-death situation for the disciples of Jesus clearly are not. It is too simplistic to say this is mercy trumping law, for the context of Hosea is not promoting abandoning Sabbath/sacrificial rules because mercy is better, rather it endorses possessing a right attitude toward God while doing them (plus, the sacrifices were all about God's mercy, teaching it, showing it, dispensing it). Additionally, it is probably not fair to say the Pharisees were being legalistic as sometimes there is wisdom in making sure we do not drive as close to the speed limit as we can.

Nevertheless, Jesus' examples of David and the priests show that in principle the Sabbath law could be overturned given other considerations. So, what are those considerations? What was it about David that Ahimelek recognised that allowed him to overturn the holy bread regulations? [You may want to scan further around the David on the run story to figure out why he's homeless and desperate – 1 Samuel 18-22.]

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask God to help us further delve into the stories of David so we might see more clearly who Jesus is and understand the depths of what Jesus is doing.



## WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Read: Matthew 12:6

#### **Plug In...**

That Jesus went to a story about David shows the laws about bread, temple, Sabbaths, all operate within a story. They are not an end in themselves. They teach, show, explain something greater.

Jesus' points out the obvious to the Pharisees, there are clashes and technicalities within the letter of the law. For example, the Sabbath law conflict for priests whose role is to offer *daily* sacrifices but then the Sabbath rolls around. On what grounds is one or the other set aside in this conflict? It seems to be what serves what? So, the Sabbath is time to enjoy God's presence. The priest is in the temple on the Sabbath performing sacrifices which God said enables the people to endure His presence. For the priest, the law of the Sabbath is set aside at this point. The Sabbath law is important, but if you are standing in the temple as priest, then that *position-place* trumps the rules about Sabbath. So, if the temple trumps the Sabbath and something greater than the temple is here, then that greater thing trumps the temple.

#### **Chew It Over...**

Get into the shoes of the first century religious Jew. What would they name if asked to consider what is greater than the temple?  
What is Jesus saying about Himself?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Thank God that Jesus is the enablement of God dwelling with humans. Thank God that Jesus made it possible to withstand and enjoy God's presence forever.



## THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 12:7 & Hosea 6:1-10

### **Plug In...**

"I desire mercy not sacrifice" is often used to polarise. Framed as: God's compassion *versus* laws. More accurately, the context of Hosea 6:6 presents two types of person. The person who knows (i.e. loves) God and therefore obeys with sacrifices and appropriate rituals versus the person who can say all the right things (see Hos. 6:1-3) and perfunctorily does the offerings and sacrifices but really continues on with their wickedness. Notice the logic of Hosea 6:6, this ends up displaying the person's ignorance of who God is and what makes Him tick. The Old Testament views all the laws as gracious. They are from a God who has saved people and tells them how to enjoy life to the full (laws, statutes, commandments) – the laws in the Old Testament are merciful.

Yet, many of the laws functioned directly to Israel to keep teaching them about God's mercy while pointing to a time when God's people would be much larger, and encompass the whole earth. This time is bound up with the age of the Messiah. The Old Testament faithful people knew this is where things were heading and so knew many of the detailed laws were temporary for Israel and would be transcended (some of the explicit examples: Exod. 25:8-9, 40; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 78:69).

### **Chew It Over...**

The laws are not overturned because they don't contain mercy, they were all about mercy. The Old Testament laws are no longer applicable because in Jesus things have been transposed from Israel to Jesus (God dwelling not in the physical temple, but in the man Jesus Christ). For example, the Sabbath law provided a tangible temporary rest for Israel, but that was not the end in itself. It pointed to an eternal rest. In a context where there was no enduring rest, it was a powerful reminder to Israel of things to come.

Have you given thought to how Old Testament laws given to Israel apply or don't apply to Christians? Many debate this. One of the biggest points of contention is the Sabbath. Many Christians will hold the Sabbath should be kept because it is part of the Ten Commandments. How would you argue for or against that view trying to capture the reality of Jesus and His teaching (no less this story in Matthew)?

What do you find helpful or unhelpful about this statement: "The Sabbath has now become the Lord's Day, Sunday"?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

We praise God that the good things He provided for His people have become greater and that we have access to the privileges through the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to spend every day resting in Jesus and dedicating it to Him while we wait for His return.



# FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## Read: Matthew 12:8

### **Plug In...**

“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Jesus has the right to break the Sabbath because He’s like David (in fact greater), therefore, the Messiah; He’s greater than the Temple, therefore God. Now Jesus draws together these claims and buttresses them with the figure of the Son of Man. If people started to balk at Jesus claiming to be greater than the temple, claiming to be God, then Jesus directs them to God’s promise of a *man* being given by God all God’s power, glory, and authority (see: Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus is not giving new teaching. He shocked His audience though, for He claimed He is *that* guy.

### **Chew It Over...**

Many other cults and religions, including the religions of Islam and Judaism, take umbrage at calling Jesus God. They’re happy to say highest prophet, most impressive man, even sometimes talking about Jesus as semi-divine (whatever that means), but always stop short at Jesus is in fact God Himself. This identity of Jesus we read in the Gospels is indeed a bold statement. The only way into the logic of seeing Jesus as a man being fully divine is to understand God’s mercy: “He desires mercy”. In mercy, He becomes man as perfect substitute for man.

How can you make the next doorstep conversation with a Jehovah's Witness or the like come to the issue of mercy? How can we awaken a person's desire for mercy so that they might see God providing that for them? So often conversations get derailed by debates that can go on and on for eternity (e.g. Genesis and evolution; signs that Jesus is coming back this decade). Resolve to go for the heart. Most people want mercy. You probably won't "close the deal" with a doorstep conversation, but you can probably achieve putting a stone in the shoe. Give them something that keeps them going, "You know what, deep down that kind of mercy is what I want".

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Lord give us opportunities with others. Enable us to take the opportunities. Let us speak about your mercy and grace. Help us navigate conversations away from unanswerable rabbit-holes and back to the heart of the Gospel.





## WEEKEND 25-26 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 12:9-14

### **Plug In...**

The following story contrasts when good and proper God-given laws are extracted from their context.

### **Chew It Over...**

What inner motivations drive your rhythms and rituals? Think about your own patterns of life (i.e. what you do regularly) and ask whether they on balance help your family and others into the Kingdom, or prevent them? What grid do we use to define the good thing to do?

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask that the Lord will make clear the good you can do today. Ask this prayer daily.