

(Matt. 12:1) - *“AT THAT TIME JESUS WENT ON THE SABBATH DAY THROUGH THE CORN”* - The timing here is very significant as the Lord will make one of the most profound points of truth concerning His glorious Person and finished work to redeem His people from their sins. It is also significant because here we see how the hatred of the unbelieving Jews, especially the Pharisees, against Jesus came to such a point that they began to conspire *“how they might destroy Him”* (Matt. 12:14). The issue here concerns *“the sabbath day”* which was given to Israel by God through Moses and was a very significant part of the Old Covenant law as it was one of the signs of the covenant God made with Israel (Exodus 31:13-17). The keeping of sabbath days and weeks were significations - tokens of the covenant between them, of God being their God and they His people in a national, temporal sense. There were strict rules given to them by God for the sabbath, and the punishment for breaking it was death (Exod. 35:1-3). So, keeping the sabbath was extremely important to the Pharisees, but, as they did all the law, they turned sabbath-keeping into a legal, self-righteous means of being saved and making themselves righteous in God’s sight. They also added their own self-righteous rules and commandments to the original sabbath laws by which they would judge themselves righteous and condemn others.

The Pharisees did not understand or believe that the sabbath was originally given to be a picture of a believing sinner’s spiritual and eternal rest in Christ and His finished work of redemption for His people (Heb. 4:1-11). Recall how the Lord had stated earlier, *“Come unto ME, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matt. 11:28). Salvation is totally by God’s grace based on the works (labors) of Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. His work, fulfilled and completed in His obedience unto death for us, is our righteousness, and our works are totally excluded from this ground of our salvation. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ, we literally enter into HIS rest by resting in Him. HE IS OUR SABBATH! It was in this context that *“at that time”* the Lord and His disciples went through a cornfield on the sabbath. *“AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE AN HUNGRED, AND BEGAN TO PLUCK THE EARS OF CORN, AND TO EAT”* - Christ purposely led His disciples through this cornfield because they were hungry. They were on their way to worship in the synagogue on the sabbath (Matt. 12:9). His disciples began to pick the corn and eat it.

(Matt. 12:2) - When the Pharisees saw the disciples picking and eating the corn, they said, *“BEHOLD, THY DISCIPLES DO THAT WHICH IS NOT LAWFUL TO DO UPON THE SABBATH DAY.”* So, they accused them of breaking the sabbath law, and they accused the Lord of breaking the law because He allowed them to do it. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ kept the law perfectly. He fulfilled it in every point showing that He had come to fulfill all righteousness for His chosen people (Matt. 5:17-19). He taught that for sinners to be saved and enter the kingdom of heaven they need a righteousness that far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20; cf. Rom. 9:31–10:3). They need the very righteousness of God which He had come to establish for His people by His obedience unto death and which the Lord God imputes to His people for their justification (Rom. 1:16-17; 4:1-8; 10:4).

(Matt. 12:3-5) - The Lord, then, appeals to two historical events recorded in the Old Testament to prove how the sabbath law forbade neither acts of necessity nor acts of mercy. In doing this, He exposes how the Pharisees had perverted the sabbath law for their own self-righteous purposes. By saying, *“HAVE YE NOT READ,”* He exposes their ignorance of the Old Testament scriptures on which they claimed to be experts (cf. John 5:39-47; Matt. 22:29). First, the law allowed strangers, if hungry, to pause in a field and eat some corn or grain (Deut. 23:25). Then, He cited the episode where it was necessary for King David and his men

to eat the shewbread meant only for the priests because there was nothing else to eat to preserve their strength (1 Sam. 21:1-6). The Lord cited another act of necessity performed by the priests who labored extensively, even on sabbath days. They baked and prepared the shewbread and offered the morning and evening sacrifices, yet no one ever brought a charge against them for breaking the sabbath. They did this in the service of temple as it was necessary for proper worship. Because of the necessity of these acts, they were not considered under the law to be a violation of the Sabbath.

(Matt. 12:6) - Here Christ declared Himself to be greater than the temple. The temple was a type of Christ and His church. It set forth Jesus as the Lord and Savior of His people, God's elect out of every nation. He Himself is the Temple of God (John 2:18-22; cf. Matt. 26:61). His point is simply this - If the Sabbath law of the Old Testament was subordinate to the ministry of the priests as they carried out their priestly activities on the Sabbath, but yet not breaking the sabbath, and if the Sabbath law was regarded as subservient to the sanctuary law, how much more are these laws of the Old Testament regarding the Sabbath subordinated to the ministry of someone who is even greater than the tabernacle and the temple? They all were instrumentalities that pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. These priestly duties were all acts of necessity and mercy relating to Israel's covenantal, ceremonial, and temporal relationship with God. Christ was (and is) greater than the temple in that the temple was physical and temporary. Christ is eternal. Christ's priesthood was (and is) greater than the earthly priesthood in that His priesthood is eternal and effectual for spiritual and eternal salvation (Heb. 7:11-25). His sacrifice of Himself was (and is) better than the temple sacrifices of animals as His sacrifice purged our sins and brought in everlasting righteousness by which God is just to justify His people (Heb. 10:1-18).

(Matt. 12:7) - The sabbath law was strict, but it was never intended to be a drudgery, causing people to be anxious about every action performed on that day. It was to be a day of rest and worship when the people of God gathered together to praise the Lord, to rejoice in Him, and reflect upon His grace, power, and goodness. Due to the added strictness imposed by the legalists who affixed many restrictions to this day, the sabbath had become such a burden and a day dreaded by the average Jew, one in which they were constantly looking over their shoulders to see if the Pharisees were watching them. It was not a day of joy and peace for them. Again, these self-righteous legalists needed to learn that deeds of mercy were always allowed on the sabbath, for the Lord desires compassion, kindness, and mercy over the ritualistic, heartless observance of religious ceremonies (Isa. 1:10-18). Rituals and sacrifices mean nothing apart from God's grace and truth in Christ and apart from a heart of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion towards others. If they had known this, they would not have accused the disciples of being guilty of breaking the sabbath and not have condemned them.

(Matt. 12:8) - *"FOR THE SON OF MAN IS LORD EVEN OF THE SABBATH DAY"* - Christ, the Messiah, is Lord of the sabbath and answers to its meaning (typology). As the sabbath carried with it the meaning of ceasing from our labors and resting, so Christ is the sinner's spiritual and eternal Sabbath. There is rest for our souls in Him Who finished all the work necessary to save us, purge our sins, make us righteous before God, give us spiritual and eternal life, and bring us to glory. Those who seek righteousness by their works deny the one true Sabbath, Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. The believer's sabbath is not a day; it is Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).