

**The Way  
Greater than the Temple  
Matthew 12:1-8**

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." <sup>3</sup>He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? <sup>6</sup>I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup>And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. <sup>8</sup>For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

**Introduction:** We have talked about the moral law and physical laws that govern God's creation. We have mentioned that if you cannot challenge these laws you will suffer the consequences. In fact you don't break them but you prove them. The Lord Jesus came to earth and lived a life of complete moral perfection that was totally expressive of the truth of this moral law that governs God's creation. Now—He kept the way of the Law because the way of that law is a reflection of Himself. **He is the Way of life and truth.** He was living not in conformity to a moral law but was living in conformity to Himself... He was being Himself and the law is a reflection of what is true of God... what is true of the Lord Jesus. This means that our following of the Way, **does** have a moral expression, **but** it is much more than the following of external behaviors... more than a pursuing of right actions and attitudes... more than an outward conformity to even Divine standards. No. **Our following of the Way is a pursuit of the Lord Jesus Christ.** It is a treading upon His own life and into that life as the Way of life.

**I. I want to say something here about Markers and then something about Centers...** 1<sup>st</sup> about Markers and by this I mean trail signs that guide us in our journey. Ex. We recently took a trip to the Oregon Coast and enjoyed walking on a number of the trails that wind through the lush thick woods. Some of those trails were false trails that actually led to the edge of some dangerous cliffs. But if we were attentive in our walk we could see that there were clear markers establishing the right paths to walk in that were safe and brought you to the best views of the beach. **God has through the spiritual history of mankind set out markers to direct people to know Himself and to educate them on how they are to approach Him and live before Him and act so as to please Him.** These markers were set before people in **the example of great men**, they were set before them in **moral laws**, they were set in **religious ordinances**, they are set forward in **acts of service and ministry** that God called the people to and they were set forward in **great doctrinal truths** that God began to progressively reveal to His people... all these things have and do to lead people to Christ. **But these things are not Christ...** They are only markers guiding us to Him. **WE must press on through them to know and find Christ and to enjoy Him. For the Christian, Christ is at the center of their lives or He ought to be. There a problem when we take the markers God has given us and we live around them and make them our center. When we do that we never reach the great vistas or explore the outreaches of the trail God has set us on.**

E. Stanley Jones posulated that... “*The two most important things in life will be your center and your circumference.*” **What is at the center of your life will determine the outward bounds of your life... how far and how full your life will be; your circumference.** <sup>1</sup>

- If your center is an earthly pursuit – no matter how glorious – it will end in the dust...
- If your center is the worship of your body then your circumference will be established by a tape measure and bath room scales and by what the mirror reflects throughout the years.
- If your center is your country then your circumference will be its fortunes through the years. And history proves that every nation and civilization eventually passes over the horizon line of time.
- If your center is the almighty dollar your circumference will be measured by the markets and by its value or its devaluation.
- You get it... you only go so far in the outward bounds of your spirit and life as your center and there your life stops and stands at the end of a chain.
- The post-modernist has denied that there is any the before truth. There is at the center of their lives only my truth and your truth. **At the center of their lives is their present, personal constructions of meaning.** As a result their circumference goes no further than their own power to project their meaning on things. In other words their circumference ends at the ends of their noses or at the end of someone else’s gun. If at the center I say truth is no greater than a person’s power to make it true than ultimately power is its own justification and the one who expresses the greatest power gets to establish the dominating ‘truth.’ The historian Paul Johnson has said that the idea that truth is relative has given rise to a world full of ‘*gangster statesman*’ and therefore thugs rule the day.
- The post-modernist also has at the center of their lives the idea that meaning is what they create in the moment. As a result they have lost the past and the future. There is no meaning in the past for they are not there; and there is no meaning in the future for they are not there either. There is only meaning in an ever meaningless present. That is their circumference... the cage of the now.

**But if Christ is your center where will your circumference be?** When the Christian has Christ at the center of their lives they have as their circumference the one who is the eternal God. All eternity is around us and ours is the unending more and more of His certainty... the certainty of His love and holiness and goodness and kindness... the infinite progression of His infinite revelations of knowledge and beauty. He is not stuck with us in the present... He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the one who was, and is and is to come... And His life and His all is our entire circumference.

**Ex.** The Center in **1 Cor. 2:2** and the Circumference in **1 Cor. 2:9-16**; The Center in **1 Cor. 3:11,16** and the Circumference in **1 Cor. 3:18-23**; The Center in **Eph. 3:16-17** and the Circumference in **Eph. 3:18-22**.

Ours is not a personal meaning... a construction of our own finite making. Ours is the meaning that rules the universe and extends beyond time. It is the way, the truth and the life... This is our center and this is our circumference. **WE LIVE IN A LARGE PLACE...**

**II. But the danger for the Christian is that we can get our markers mixed up with our center.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Way, E. Stanley Jones

We can set at the center of our lives the markers directing us into God, in the place of God Himself... the markers revealing Christ to us, in the place of Christ Himself.

**This is what is happening in our passage among the Jews.**

God had given to the people of Israel individuals to signal His Divine leadership and promised future salvation. One of those individuals that was exalted as a key marker to the nation of Israel was King David. The Jews had exalted David in their minds as the central image of national identity.

God had also given to the Jews laws that spoke of his care and the intended rest that He was one day going to bring to all His creation. A key marker of this truth was the law of the Sabbath rest. The Jews had taken the general command to rest on the Sabbath day and so keep it holy and turned it into a national fixation that almost exhausted them. The disciples of Jesus were walking between the fields on the Sabbath. That in itself was likely a breaking of the Sabbath because the little laws the Jews had made up restricted travel to around 1500 yards at that time before it was considered they had failed to rest. Also they had determined that one could not reap, winnow or prepare a meal on the Sabbath. As the disciples were walking through a grain field they took the heads of grain casually up in their hands... rubbed loose the chaff and blew it away and then ate the grain. In that act they had reaped, winnowed and prepared a meal. All acts that broke the little laws of the Jews. This little laws that were derived from the marker God had once set for them had become central to their existence and conduct.

God had given the Jews the Temple as a marker of His life as well. The temple with all its ordinances and all its laws and rituals, with its priest and sacrifices... It was in the temple that the law given on Sinai was to be stored in the Arc of the covenant. It was in the temple that the people were to have in word and in practice a way to discover and learn what God is like and what God requires of His people in order to approach Him. It was in the Temple that they were to learn to fear Him and to worship Him. It was in the Temple that they were to face their sin and find a provision from God for the forgiveness of their sins. The Temple was a place where God was making Himself known to the people... And for this great marker leading them to know God had become the complete center of Jewish life.

Now the one who is meant to the center of all things... The Way... The Lord Jesus was before them and they were missing Him because they had settled down to live their lives around these markers... and to put them at their center in place of God Himself.

They complained to the Lord Jesus when they noticed his disciples breaking this law of the Sabbath. Christ answer is stunning and wonderful. In the statement he directs them away from their markers to the center of all things

**III. Christ is the Center of all Things**

- In 1 Samuel 21...David broke law and the feed himself and his fellow soldiers during his flight from Saul. He ate for himself and gave to those with him the shew bread which was intended only for the priest of God.
- The priest break the law of the Sabbath every Sabbath for the work twice as hard on this day as it is a day in which the burnt offerings that are offered are doubled.

- The Jews were not bothered that David ate the shew bread and set aside the law God had established there because they consider David's greatness superseded those laws. Jesus is saying... *I am greater than David...*
- They were not bothered by the work of the priest on the Sabbath for they understood that the worship in the Temple before God was greater than the law of rest on the Sabbath. God himself had so ordained it by setting up the rule of double offerings on the Sabbath. *The Temple was greater than the law of rest...* Worshipping God trumped everything else. Jesus says... *I am greater than the Temple.*

The point here is that the Lord Jesus corrects their rallying around the markers and calls them to put Him at the center of their lives. *One greater than the Temple is here and you are nit picking over the margins of your markers and missing the central figure of all Life. I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life...*

**Extending this Principle:** Before judging those Pharisee's and religious Jews to harshly consider that we know more of the Lord Jesus than they by a long shot and yet we too often are found replacing Him with the markers He has given us to lead us to Him. Consider for a moment what else the Lord Jesus is greater than...

**A. The Lord Jesus is Greater than the Word of God – John 5:39-40**

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;*<sup>40</sup> *and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.*

Like the Pharisee's the Lord Jesus was rebuking we to believe that in the scriptures we have marked the pathway into eternal life. We love word as the perfect, flawless Word of the living God. We believe that it is pulsating with the breath of God to such an extent that we see it as a living Word. And yet we err when we make this book an end in itself... a center instead of a marker.

A.W. Tozer said, *“as the scientist loses God in the wonders of the world so the theologian may lose God in the wonders of his Word.”*

E. Stanley Jones, *“The Bible is not the revelation of God. It is the inspired (flawless) record of the revelation of God. The revelation of God was seen in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

This was Jesus point. You search the scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify of Me... and what did Jesus say he was in John 11? “I am the resurrection and the life... he that believes in me shall never die.” The Apostle John in 1 John 1:2 identified Christ whom he had heard and seen and gazed upon and touched as... “That eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us...”

Hebrews 1:1-3 points out to us the Written Word of God is surpassed as a marker leading us to Christ who is central... *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,*<sup>2</sup> *in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*<sup>3</sup> *And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.*

Once again the Lord Jesus shows how his life goes beyond the Word of God when in John 13:34 he says, *“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you.”* The fact is that there was nothing new in the command to love one another. This was an old command. What was new is that now the command found its resting place in the life and example of the Way Jesus Christ... *“as I have loved you...”* **Christ is greater than this Word.**

**This doesn't mean we go without the Word. It doesn't mean we go against it. But it does mean we go beyond it... It is a guide to lead us into Christ but before Him we don't want to have our noses in the book we want to have our hearts laid out before the King.**

**B. Christ is greater than the creeds, He is greater than our doctrines... as good and true as they may be**

The truth of Christ established in the great doctrinal declarations of scripture are fixed and sure. This truth cannot be contradicted and it must be upheld and held on to, it is fixed and sure **but it is not complete.**

Christ virgin birth, his death, burial and resurrection, his redeeming work of lost sinners through his blood, the regenerating work of giving new and eternal life to his followers, the truth of his triune God head, his gifts of the Spirit, the truth of the invisible church of which he is the head, these are fixed truths or facts... but the full meaning and impact and implications and even the full enjoyment and wonder of these facts are **not yet** fully realized or understood or experienced. These truths are fixed and yet they are continuing to unfold and will throughout all eternity. They will be more and more deeply understood and experienced and known as we more and more deeply come to know the Lord Jesus. Even these truths we see through a dark veil but some day when the Lord Jesus returns and we shall see Him face to face *we will know him*, the bible say, *even as we are known*... and in that moment we will have opened up to us, more and more intensely, a sweeter knowledge of these facts. Only rest in the facts, so far as they leave you worshipping at the Throne of Jesus... only so far as they leave Him at the center.

**Illustration:** There is author who writes biographies of different great Christian leaders. I appreciate many of those biographies. One though bothered me just a little. It told the story of a man who spent his life as an apologist for a particular theological position that falls within the pale of orthodoxy. In fact his life's work was described as, "*His utter allegiance to and exaltation of the Reformed faith of the Westminster Confession.*"<sup>2</sup> On the day before he died he was very sick and called to his side a pastor friend and shared with him that he had, had a vision of heaven... then he said something to the effect... "*Isn't our doctrinal position or faith confession grand.*" I must say that having had a vision of heaven, I hope that the exaltation found will not be in the marker of doctrine but in the face of Christ Jesus to which it points me.

**C. Christ is greater than the sacraments or ordinances of the church.**

We have the Eucharist or what we call communion. We have also the sacrament of baptism... There may be others that various churches practice. They guides leading us into gracious memorials of the Life found in Jesus Christ. They are markers. And yet some make of them more than they are. As one old Baptist preacher was heard to say, "*Baptism is good but, 'you mustn't hang around the river too long.' If you do that river bed will dry up.*"

These expressions in the church are to be markers or lights shining out our way unto the Savior. But we must be careful for when these lights become central... when all we need is a eucharist celebration, all we need is a passage through baptism... well then these lights become a darkness to us for the have failed to lead us to Christ who is greater than all.

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper's bio of Machen

He is greater than the cross... He is greater than the resurrection. He is greater than the Church. He is greater than the Kingdom... for His is the Kingdom... He is greater than all the ministries God may give you and all the gifts He may pour upon you. He is greater than worship and its exercise. He is greater than the means of grace, your prayers, your meditations, your devotions, your church attendance and your bible study and your witness of the gospel. All these are good as markers leading into Christ but when they become the center and end of our your being they fail you...

**Conclusion:** One greater than the temple is here. Greater than this Bible, greater than our doctrines, greater than our sacraments, greater than our church, greater than our worship, our service, our witness and evangelism... and so in everything test its function and its place. Is it marker? Good let it be so and do its job. Praise God for it and don't remove markers they are fixed important. But what does it point you too? And is that your center?