

He's a very smart man who knows a lot about human intelligence. He's a brilliant psychologist... and a Nobel-prize winning economist. ... Early in his career... he advised the Israeli military on how to train fighter pilots (presumably not on how to fly planes but on how to make good decisions). In 2005... he was voted the 101st-greatest Israeli of all time... in a poll by the Israeli news website Ynet. ... In 2011... he made the Bloomberg 50 most influential people in global finance. ... He has written a book titled *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. ... So you get the idea: he has studied extensively the human mind and the way we think. His name is Daniel Kahneman, and here's what he said in a Time magazine interview about the quality of our rational thinking:

We are normally blind about our own blindness. We're generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments. We exaggerate how knowable the world is

What psychology and behavioral economics have shown is that people don't think very carefully. They're influenced by all sorts of superficial things in their decision-making, and they procrastinate and don't read the small print.

In Matthew... chapter 12... we get another stunning picture of King Jesus presenting Himself to the religious leaders... and their rejection of Him. I think that it is safe to say that they were blind about their own blindness...

Many people in the first century who saw Jesus in the flesh... especially the religious leaders... were overconfident in their opinions... and their impressions and judgments... The result was that they were hardened by their encounter with Jesus.

We might refer to Pharisees as legalists - a term that needs some explanation.

Legalism involves working in our own power (sometimes according to God's law and other times according to our own rules)... in order to earn God's favor. ... We think that if we can do certain things — good things no doubt — we can be righteous before God.

Now... before we go any further... and quickly disconnect ourselves from the Pharisees... we need to be reminded that **we are all** born with a legalistic heart... a heart that thinks there is something we can do to merit our way to God. ... It's the foundation of all the religions of the world... whether it's paying homage to Hindu gods at an Asian temple... or bowing to Allah in a Muslim mosque. ... At their core... all other religions call us to follow religious rules and regulations.

Now... when we don't think very carefully... (when we allow ourselves to be influenced by the superficial... this kind of thinking becomes the foundation for how we live as Christians. ... We begin to think that if we pray enough... if we study the Bible enough... if we avoid certain sins... if we come to worship... if we help other people... if we go overseas in missions... if we do any number of things... we will become more acceptable to God.

This is what the Pharisees had done: they took the law of God... and not only had they used it as a basis for righteousness before God... but they had added all kinds of other rules and regulations to it.

As legalists... the Pharisees were in serious error in at least three different ways. ... First... they added to the requirements of the law. For example...

the law simply said you couldn't travel on the Sabbath (Exod 16:29). ... This naturally leads us to ask... "What is considered traveling?... Can you travel around your house? ... Can you travel to someone else's house? ... If you travel beyond someone else's house, how far can you go? The Pharisees answered such questions by saying that someone was permitted to travel up to three thousand feet from their house... a permissible Sabbath day's journey. ... That is... unless you have some food that is within 3,000 feet of your house... and if that's the case... then that food is an extension of your house... thus allowing you to journey another 3,000 feet. ... If you went any further than that... it was sin.

Another example of the Pharisees' approach to the law concerned God's command not to carry a load on the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11; Jer 17:21-22). Once again... the question naturally arose... "What constitutes a load?"... For instance... are your clothes a load? ... The Pharisees said no... not if your clothes are worn... only if you are carrying your clothes... are they considered a load. ... So it would be okay to wear a jacket on the Sabbath... but it would be a sin to carry a jacket. John MacArthur describes the absurdity of it all:

Tailors did not carry a needle with them on the Sabbath for fear they might be tempted to mend a garment and thereby perform work. Nothing could be bought or sold, and clothing could not be dyed or washed. A letter could not be dispatched, even if by the hand of a Gentile. No fire could be lit or extinguished—including fire for a lamp—although a fire already lit could be used within certain limits. For that reason, some orthodox Jews today use automatic timers to turn on lights in their homes well before the Sabbath begins. Otherwise they might forget to turn them on in time and have to spend the night in the dark. Baths could not be taken for fear some of the water might spill onto the floor and "wash" it. Chairs could not be

moved because dragging them might make a furrow in the ground, and a woman was not to look in a mirror lest she see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out. (MacArthur, Matthew 8-15, 282)

With such strict regulations, we can begin to understand the kind of approach to God that Jesus had addressed at the end of Matthew 11 when He said, "*Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened*" (v. 28). The weary and burdened were those who had the law heaped upon them... with the idea that their righteousness depended on keeping certain rules and regulations. This wasn't God's law. It was man's application of it.

It is important that we understand this. Because this morning we will see one of the several occasions... where Jesus deliberately violated the Sabbath traditions. He wanted to teach us that mere external laws can never make us holy... or save us. True righteousness must come from the heart.

Due to the fact that our hearts are naturally sinful... this is how all of us would respond to Jesus apart from the grace of God. ... In reality... when anyone sees Christ for who He is... there are really only two options: (1) we will humble ourselves before Him, or (2) we will harden our hearts toward Him.

After our time together today in Matthew chapter 12... we should have a fuller and more glorious picture of Jesus... than we previously had. ... And by God's grace... I pray that we will be willing to ask ourselves... if we are blind to some blindness in our thinking about Christ.

Listen to these words from Andrew Greeley, an American sociologist... journalist... popular novelist... and religion writer for the Chicago Sun-Times:

If Jesus makes you feel comfortable with your agenda, then he's not Jesus.... Once you domesticate Jesus, he isn't there any more.

Jesus shocked those He came in contact with. You and I still need to be shocked by Him... and allow Him to upset our agenda. We need to permit Him to show us where we are blind to our blindness.

Jesus does this with the religious leaders. Matthew has just pointed out... that Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28 (ESV)

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you...” (What?)... “rest.”

The Hebrew word “sabat” means “ease” or “rest,” which explains why Matthew introduced these Sabbath conflicts at this point. Right after Matthew introduces us to Jesus saying that He will give true rest... Matthew shows Him confronting the blind thinking... of the religious community... about “sabat.” (He challenges their overconfident opinions... impressions... and judgements about sabbath.)

Matthew 12:1-2

Verse one begins with the phrase – “at that time.” ... Matthew places the events of chapter 12... during the days of opposition.

Jesus was born the King of Kings... and he delivered what we call the Sermon on the Mount... (which is the manifesto of the King.) He demonstrated that He is Who He said He is... by the dynamic of the miracles that He performed. Then He sent out His apostles. The reaction was rejection! ... Last week's passage showed Jesus pronouncing judgment on the cities. The King will always have the last word. (Keep that in mind when you face opposition... because of your faith!)

Now... here... in chapter 12... Jesus will break out in an open conflict with the religious rulers of His day. Apparently, they were friendly to Him at first... but now they break with Him over the question of the Sabbath day.

The Pharisees were now dogging Jesus' footsteps... looking for things to criticize. They pounced the moment the disciples began to pluck... husk... and eat corn on the sabbath. The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of stealing... because such gleaning was legal.

Deuteronomy 23:25 (ESV)

If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.

Stealing from the farmer who owned the crop was not the issue. ... The Pharisees accused them of breaking the sabbath. ... According to the rabbis' rules in applying God's Law... plucking corn constituted reaping... and rubbing corn in the hand... was threshing (work!) ... In their view these activities were illegal. ... The Lord's disciples... (evidently with His approval) were seen as violators of the sabbath. This was the provocation.

But let's be clear... The controversy centered **not** on the law... but on its application. ... The rabbis (you see...) had elevated their traditions above God's Word.

Matthew 12:3-4

The Lord drew the attention of the Pharisees to an incident in the life of David. (We read of it in 1 Samuel 21). ... David and his followers were in flight from King Saul. They were hungry so they appealed to the high priest (Ahimelech) for bread. The only bread available... was the sacred shewbread... which was placed on the table in the holy place of the tabernacle once a week. ... This bread was **ONLY** to be eaten by the priests and their families. (Now this **was law** – not the rabbi's application.) However... the high priest (with a certain amount of hesitation) gave the twelve loaves to David and his men... and God's wrath did not descend.

Jesus' point is this: If David broke the clear teaching of the law and was not condemned... then why are Jesus' disciples being condemned for breaking a much lesser (man-made) interpretation of the law...? If you condemn them... then you must... (more-so) condemn King David! (Which they obviously were not willing to do.) *“Hey guys... your system is not very consistent!”* ... *“You are not thinking very clearly.”* *You are blind to your blindness...*

Jesus is working up to His argument... that discernment and compassion must be the foundation of all spiritual activity. (He will say this directly in a few verses.) But first... He has to shock them a little more... He continues to display the overconfidence they had in their opinions and their impressions and judgments.

Matthew 12:5

The duties of the priests in the temple entailed ***hard*** work. The sabbath was the busiest day of the week for them.

They had to bake the shewbread and perform the sabbath day sacrifices (Again... this is clear law - Numbers 28:9). Two lambs were added to the daily sacrifice on the sabbath. Think of what was involved in physical labor alone. First the priests had to inspect the animals to make sure they were without blemish. Then, paying special attention to the rituals involved, the priests had to slaughter the animals. The wood had to be brought to the tabernacle and placed on the altar. The animals had to be flayed and lifted upon the flames. In the sanctuary the lamps had to be trimmed, the table had to be tended, and the incense had to be burned on the golden altar.

This suggests that man's traditions about the Sabbath were wrong, for they contradicted God's own Law. ... Jesus prompted the Pharisees to observe this apparent contradiction in their application of Moses' law... and understand that it was more of a general directive... some things can rightfully supersede it.

So far so good. You have them on the ropes Jesus! Way to go! Impeccable logic. You are right and they are wrong. Now just walk away with Your disciples. Uh-oh! Jesus has something else to add.

Matthew 12:6

“Oh no... Jesus! You were home free... Why did you say that...? Why pick this fight...?” Jesus claimed here... superiority over the most

holy center of their religious life... the Temple! ... As far as the Pharisees were concerned... now He had **REALLY** blasphemed! ... Before adding that... He might have started a loosening of their *overconfident opinions... impressions... and judgments*. So why risk ruining Your progress with this statement that they would think was clear blasphemy...?

Jesus brought their attention back to Himself. Sabbath traditions are far less important. ... This is something that we must do... whenever we discuss spiritual matters. ... Make sure they have an opportunity to either reject... or accept Who Jesus is. ... **That** is the bigger issue.

Matthew 12:7

Jesus again quoted from the prophet Hosea as he had earlier (Matthew 9:13) when he urged the Pharisees to go search what that passage meant. "I want your loyalty, not your sacrifices. I want you to know me, not to give me burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). If they truly understood all that the passage conveyed, they would likely have never asked the question in the first place. Their very question revealed their real theological position—they were mired in tradition and law and had lost sight of their God.

Any religious law that is contrary to mercy and the care of nature should be looked on with suspicion. God wants mercy - not religious sacrifice. ... He wants love - not legalism. ... The Pharisees who sacrificed to obey their Sabbath laws **thought** they were serving God. ... When they accused Christ and His disciples... they thought they were defending God. ... This is so much like religious legalists today!

Some culturally conservative churches today interpret the Bible the way the Pharisees in this passage do... They build an ever tighter fence around the strictest interpretation of a verse of Scripture... to keep from breaking it. For example... I have known firsthand of some that misconstrue Scripture to condemn all divorced people... women's wearing slacks to church... contemporary music... new translations of the Bible... and anything else that violates their tradition... and applications.

Conservatives can dishonor God's Word through abuse and neglect... just as liberals can dishonor it through neglect and rejection. We do it whenever we make our rules more important than showing mercy. We do it anytime we emphasize good and rightful things – but forget about... and ignore mercy. Whenever we do not treat our showing mercy to others... we dishonor God's Word as badly as a liberal theologian.

What God wants from us (this thing called “mercy”)... demands far more from us than the extrapolated rules... that we often chose to use as markers... for how well we are doing spiritually. ... “*Did you go to church this week?*” ... “*For the past two Sundays...? Wow! You're doing great!...*” “*Been reading your Bible every day...? – You're good to go!...*”

Mercy is what God wants from us. Here is our marker! But let me tell you this. Nothing messes up a person's schedule quite like showing mercy to someone else. It alters it. It throws it out of kilter. ... And God often reveals people's needs to us... at the most inconvenient times. Showing mercy is so annoying to task driven people.

If Jesus makes you feel comfortable with your agenda, then he's not Jesus.... Once you domesticate Jesus, he isn't there any more.

Matthew 12:8

In declaring Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus was actually affirming equality with God. ... Jesus had the authority to overrule their traditions and regulations. ... And if Jesus is Lord of your life... He has authority to overrule our schedules.

Matthew 12:9-10

Jesus left the scene of confrontation with the Pharisees and went directly into a synagogue. It is plain to see that the entire entourage followed him—disciples, the crowds, and the Pharisees. They were not yet finished with the debate about their Sabbath rules. ... So... Jesus made it clear how ridiculous and petty their rules were. God is a God of people, not rules.

Here are some observations of J. Vernon McGee:

Was this man with the withered hand "planted" there, deliberately, by the Pharisees to trap Jesus into healing him? If so, then there are two important admissions on the part of the enemies of Jesus:

1. They admitted He had power to heal the sick. As we have seen, the enemies of Jesus never questioned His ability to perform miracles. You have to be two thousand years away from it and working in a musty library on a master's or doctor's degree before you can question His miracles. The Pharisees freely admitted that He had power to heal the sick. This is why they planted this man with the withered hand.

2. They acknowledged that when a helpless man was placed in His pathway, He was moved by compassion to heal him, even on the Sabbath day. What an admission!

Their question about the legality of healing on the Sabbath day was designed to trap Him. But Jesus actually trapped His

enemies. They conceded that a sheep should be rescued on the Sabbath day -- in fact, the Mosaic Law made allowances for that.

Matthew 12:11-14

They were to love mercy and knowledge of God more than sacrifices and burnt offerings. He faced the Pharisees and debated their faulty interpretations with Scripture and with reason. By these methods, he demonstrated that the Pharisees did not genuinely understand either their history or their God. To them, the rules had become supreme and governed their daily life. In the resulting theological chaos, their eyes were off of God, so they could not see that their Messiah was before them. Jesus, therefore, centered the focus of his debate around his divine nature.

In every encounter with the Pharisees... Jesus brought the focus back to the reality of Who He was. ... It was not the rules of the Sabbath that these men had to contend with — it was the Lord Himself Who had initiated the Sabbath.

So too... it is proper for us to reexamine the forces that drive us through our "religious duties." ... Are we merely going through the motions and forgetting the God who made us? ... Are we serving an organization... and forgetting Who created the organization? ... Are we pledging allegiance to some great cause... and forgetting the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins?... ... Jesus calls us back to Himself... declaring that He is Lord of the Sabbath and the Lord of our lives... (and schedules.)

Matthew 12:14

The legal dispute is one thing, but it led the Pharisees to take steps to end the dispute by eliminating Jesus. At first glance, this seems to be a rather draconian solution to a religious dispute. Perhaps the Pharisees feared that Jesus' followers would become a riotous mob... which the Roman authorities would view as a threat to their rule over Judea. ... At any rate... it is not a little ironic... that a dispute over the finer points of Sabbath law... led the Pharisees to plan to break the sixth commandment... "you shall not murder."

Up to this point the Pharisees had been friendly. They had wanted to hitch their wagon to His star and go with Him. But the Lord refused to go along with them... and they became His enemies. ... The break is made over the question of the Sabbath day... and the conflict comes out in the open. From here on these bloodhounds of hate get on His trail and never let up until they fold their arms beneath His cross. ... They begin now to plot His death.

Matthew 12:15-16

The action of the Pharisees led Jesus to withdraw temporarily because His hour had not yet come. They will not touch Him until the appointed time. Jesus avoided direct conflict with His enemies... that He might stay on the "divine timetable" and be crucified on schedule. ... Also, during that time... He taught His disciples and prepared them for His crucifixion.

It is interesting to note in verse 15 that Jesus did not heal only a few in the crowd -- He healed them all. ... We cannot even conceive of the impression

that this made in that day. ... It was something absolutely astounding. They had to accept or reject Him. It was impossible to be neutral.

He is still controversial today. The enemy is still after Him. New dirty plays and dirty books are blaspheming Him every day. You will either be His friend or His enemy. He will be your Savior or your Judge. You cannot get rid of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord's response to their hatred was withdrawal. ... He did not openly fight His enemies... but instead... He fulfilled the prophecy (that Matthew next mentions) in Isaiah 42:1-4. His enemies were but broken reeds and smoking flax. ... Israel would reject her King... and the kingdom would then go to the Gentiles.

Matthew 12:17-21

Rather than an unconstrained political leader who sought confrontation, Matthew and Isaiah unveiled a Messiah who would withdraw from the crowds and teach his followers with quiet certainty. He would not seek to incite riot or rebellion by stirring the crowds with inflammatory rhetoric. ... The Prophet Isaiah predicted that the quiet unobtrusiveness of Messiah's victories... would prove to be more effective... than a loud and forceful leader of people in the streets. He would not demonstrate such grandeur.

Instead... the manner in which God's Appointed One would move in the lives of those who would follow Him... would be Slow... and relentless. The Lord's Anointed would persistently dispense His justice until victory would crown His head.

The people expected the Messiah to be a king. But Jesus had to remind the people from Isaiah 42:1-4... what *kind* of king — a gentle ruler who brings justice to the nations.

Like the crowd in Jesus' day... we may want Christ to rule as a king and bring bold and flamboyant victories in our life. ... “*Why are my enemies winning, Lord...? ... Go get ‘em! Crush em!*” ... Or... “*Why must I continue to contend with my illness...? Take it from me!*” ... But often Christ's work is quiet... and it happens according to **His** perfect timing... not ours. God's way is always effective.

We are normally blind about our own blindness. We're generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments.

The question arises from this passage: How could so many people witness the same series of events... and draw such opposing conclusions... (missing His truth)...?

The reason is that Jesus cannot be squeezed into any preconceived human mold. Even those of us who are ardent followers of Jesus Christ and avid seekers through His Word are repeatedly stunned by the ongoing revelation of His person. ... We try to put everything in order... in such a way that our world makes sense. ... We attempt to grasp every subject of our study with faultless logic. And many times... we approach Jesus in the same way—analytically and systematically.

Yet... time and again... He reveals himself to us in the simplest yet most profound ways. ... I believe that God may be gently challenging some who are here today... to think more carefully about what He wants from you.

Have you been more concerned about good things in your spiritual life... while paying little regard to His desire for you to show mercy to others...?

Patricia L. Miller, a former hospital staff person, writes:

While at work in the emergency room, I learned to stop crying at the pain around me. Each day it seemed I was becoming insensitive to people and their real needs. Five years of emergency room exposure had taken its toll. Then God intervened.

I was taking information for registering a young woman who had overdosed on drugs and had attempted suicide. Her mother sat before me as I typed the information into the computer. The mother was unkempt and bleary eyed. She had been awakened in the middle of the night by the police to come to the hospital. She could only speak to me in a whisper.

Hurry up, I said to myself, as she slowly gave me the information. My impatience was raw as I finished the report and jumped to the machine to copy the medical cards. That's when God stopped me—at the copy machine. He spoke to my heart so clearly: You didn't even look at her. He repeated it, gently: You didn't even look at her.

I felt his grief for her and for her daughter, and I bowed my head. I'm sorry, Lord. I am so sorry.

I sat down in front of the distraught woman and covered her hands with mine. I looked into her eyes with all the love that God could flood through me and said, "I care. Don't give up."

She wept and wept. She poured her heart out to me about the years of dealing with a rebellious daughter as a single mom. Finally, she looked up and thanked me. Me - the coldhearted one with no feelings.

My attitude changed that night. My Jesus came right into the workplace in spite of rules that tried to keep him out. He came in to set me free to care again. He gave himself to that woman through me. My God, who so loved the world, broke that self-imposed barrier around my heart. Now he could reach out, not only to me in my pain, but to a lost and hurting woman.