

Matthew 11:20-12:14  
Ezekiel 28  
Psalm 87

The Lord of the Sabbath Gives Rest

April 26, 2015 (Peter)

Some people think that the language of Ezekiel 28 is really about Satan.

Ezekiel 28:13 says that “You were in Eden, the garden of God.”

That sounds like Satan, right?

But hear that verse in context:

*Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me:*

*Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him,*

*Thus says the LORD:*

*You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*You were in Eden, the garden of God . . .*

Ezekiel is told to raise a lament over the king of Tyre,

and the second sentence of that lament says that the king of Tyre was in Eden.

How could this be said of the King of Tyre?

Remember that the king of Tyre had helped to build the temple?

In the days of David and Solomon, Hiram of Tyre had made a covenant with David.

Tyre provided many resources for the building of the temple.

The temple was designed to be the place where God dwelt with his people.

The temple was designed as a recreation of Eden—

the one place on earth where the new creation was taking root.

In that sense, the king of Tyre *was* in the garden of Eden.

He had yielded obedience to the Son of David

*Every precious stone was your covering—*

and then Ezekiel lists 9 of the precious stones

that were on the High Priest’s breastpiece.

The king of Tyre was covered by the High Priest’s intercession.

He was an anointed guardian cherub who protected the holy place

through his alliance with the Son of David.

But then he rejected the kingdom of God—

he rejected the Son of David—

and he sought to exalt himself.

Tyre refused to follow Yahweh but the king of Tyre claimed divine status.

Ezekiel 28 speaks of the rebellion of Tyre and Sidon

and warns of God’s judgment against these cities

that had refused to heed the proclamation of God’s kingdom.

And so Ezekiel proclaims that God will cast Tyre down and destroy it.

And while Ezekiel does not provide much hope for Tyre,

Psalm 87 reminds us that God’s purpose is to bring all nations together in his Son.

Sing Psalm 87

Read Matthew 11:20-12:14

What will you do with Jesus?

John is wondering “Are you the one who is to come?”

Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen his mighty works.

The Pharisees want to destroy him.

What will you do with Jesus?

The question itself *begs* for one of those responses!

Skepticism, hypothetical repentance, rejection.

The question, “What will you do with Jesus?” imagines a situation

where you are a disinterested spectator –

mulling over a curious scene.

What are *you* going to do?

Jesus does not pose any such question to you.

There is no question.

There is only a command:

“Come.”

It’s why the Pharisees despise him.

He claims all authority.

He claims to be the Son of Man.

He claims a unique relationship to God.

And he commands *you* to come!

## **1. “They Would Have Repented” – What Is the Role of God’s Mighty Works? (11:20-24)**

I think that we tend to have a distorted view of Jesus.

I remember that when I was a teenager – and into my early twenties –

I wished that God would reveal himself more clearly.

If only he would do mighty works!

I joined the charismatic movement –

hoping to see mighty deeds.

It was passages like Matthew 11

that forced me to reconsider whether I really wanted to see mighty deeds!

*Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.*

The mighty works of Jesus did not produce repentance.

Think of all the times in history when God did many mighty deeds:

The Exodus – what happened to those who saw the mighty deeds?

They perished in the wilderness because of their rebellion!

In the days of Elijah and Elisha – what happened to Ahab and Israel?

They were destroyed because of their unbelief!

And most powerfully and wonderfully in Jesus and the apostles –  
but what was the result?

Yes, a few thousand people believed –  
but most did not.

The result for Jesus was the cross (where he worked his mightiest deed!).

The result for the apostles was martyrdom – where they shared in the sufferings of Christ.

So what is the purpose of God’s mighty works?

After all, Jesus *says* that “if the mighty works” (that he had done)

had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago!

The mighty works of God are designed to say,

“Hey, you! Pay attention! Listen up!”

The mighty works do not *produce* faith or repentance.

They simply get people’s attention.

The problem is that people are not paying attention to Jesus!

<sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Jesus is reflecting on what we heard earlier from Ezekiel 28 (and many other passages).

Tyre and Sidon came under God’s judgment because they had once yielded to David,  
but then rejected God’s kingdom.

And Jesus says that if the works that he performed

in the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida

had been performed in Tyre and Sidon,

Tyre and Sidon would have repented.

We tend to think of ourselves as better and smarter than people from long ago.

But Jesus says that the people from long ago would have repented

if they had seen what you have seen.

At this point, you might be tempted to say:

“Wait, pastor, you just said that mighty works are *not* designed to produce repentance.”

And yet Jesus says that if Tyre and Sidon had seen the signs and wonders he had done,

Tyre and Sidon would have repented.

Jesus explains his point in verses 23-24:

<sup>23</sup> *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*

<sup>24</sup> *But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”*

Here Jesus ratchets up the rhetoric.

Tyre and Sidon were regular objects of prophetic denunciation –  
because Tyre and Sidon had introduced Baal worship into Israel.  
But Sodom was the city that God had destroyed with fire from heaven –  
making it a top candidate for “worst city ever.”

Ezekiel had something similar in Ezekiel 16.

In Ezekiel 16, the prophet says that Sodom is more righteous than Jerusalem.

Now Jesus says that on the day of judgment it will go better for Sodom than for Capernaum.

Jesus’ point is very simple:

you are responsible for what you have seen and heard.

Sodom had seen very little of God’s mighty works.

Sodom had heard very little of God’s Word.

Therefore, Sodom is guilty of very little.

But you, Capernaum, have seen the mighty works of God.

You have heard the gospel – the good news of the kingdom.

Therefore, you are guilty of rejecting God’s clearest revelation –  
his own Son.

That’s why Matthew says,

“At that time Jesus declared...”

In other words, *what Jesus says next* is bound closely together  
with his denunciation of the cities.

## **2. “I Will Give You Rest” – The Uniqueness of the Son (11:25-30)**

In verse 25, when Jesus says, “I thank you, Father,”

it’s worth noting that the word “to thank” is a word that elsewhere means “to confess.”

In the LXX it is often used to translate the Hebrew word “to know” –  
in the sense of “I make known” or “I declare.”

And when you look at the *content* of verses 25-27,

you can see how this forms the basis of the Christian confession as well:

**a. “Revealed to Little Children” – The Father Gives All Things to the Son (v25-27)**

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

At the heart of the Christian confession is the revelation of God as Father.

Not just in a general sense –  
the OT spoke of God as the Father of Israel –  
and in a broad sense, of all humanity.  
Indeed, you can find OT prayers that address God as “our Father” (Isaiah 63, 64).

But for an individual to address God *simply* as “Father,”  
is unheard of – until Jesus did it.

And Jesus is very clear that he does not mean “our Father.”  
“All things have been handed over to me by *my Father*  
and no one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son  
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Jesus is saying something very shocking to the Jewish ear:  
the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
is *my Father* – and if you want to know him, only I can reveal him to you.

It’s the same point you see in John’s gospel:  
“I am the way, the truth, and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6)

If you want to know God, you have to come through Jesus.  
Talk to any Muslim –  
this is *the* stumbling block that Muhammad placed before their feet.  
The confession of Islam is that God has no son.

But this is the central confession of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
God is *my father*.  
We saw at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel  
that Jesus had no human father.  
He was born of the virgin Mary:  
“that which is conceived of her is from the Holy Spirit.”  
Therefore God called Joseph to adopt him, in order that he might be the Son of David.

But by nature, he is the Son of God from all eternity.  
He has always been the Son of God.

And you can see something of the nature of the Trinity in the way Jesus says this:  
“no one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son” –

there is a mutual knowing of the Father and the Son that is unique to the Godhead.

(Some might ask, “But where is the Holy Spirit?”

The short answer is in the next chapter! [Mt 12]

The slightly longer answer is

that the Gospels focus on the revelation of the Father and the Son –  
while Acts and the Epistles reveal the place of the Holy Spirit.

After all, we hear of the incarnation of the Son in the Gospels –

while we only hear of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.)

So Jesus is claiming a unique relationship to *his* Father –

and he says that if you want to know God,

then you will have to come to Jesus –

because only Jesus can reveal the Father to you.

If you want to know God, but you don't want Jesus,

then you don't *really* want to know God –

because Jesus *is* God.

Anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is *God in the flesh* does not worship God.

This is why we cannot have *Christian* fellowship

with Mormons, Muslims, or other Unitarians.

They worship a different God.

They do not baptize in the *name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This is at the heart of Jesus' confession.

That's also why it is hidden from the wise and understanding.

The wise – the influential – the “scholars” of the day –  
think that they *know God*.

They don't need Jesus to “reveal him”!

They have the scriptures!

If you have the scriptures, but you *don't* come to Jesus,  
then you do not *know* God.

In the book of Proverbs,

this is the language of Wisdom, as she calls the simple to come to her.

Jesus is claiming to *be* Wisdom.

He is the Word who became flesh.

He is the Wisdom of God incarnate.

If you want to know God, you must come to Jesus.

**b. “Come to Me” – Jesus Gives Rest to the Weary (v28-30)**

<sup>28</sup> *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup> *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*  
<sup>30</sup> *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

When you think of a “yoke” you probably think of two animals “yoked” together.

But there is another kind of yoke – the human yoke –

and that is probably the kind of yoke Jesus speaks of here.

The human yoke is a kind of harness that distributes weight evenly

so that a person can pull a load with minimum strain.

The rabbis often spoke of the “Law” as a sort of ‘yoke,’

and encouraged people to ‘take up the yoke of the Law’ freely. (France, 448)

But the Law was a burden that neither we, nor our fathers, could bear (Acts 15).

Jesus speaks to those who are wearing the ‘yoke of the Law’ and says

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

Come to me, all who are trying so hard to be good – but you just can’t be good enough!

Come to me, all who feel the weight of the Law dragging them down!

Come to me, all who see that they are helpless!

The scribes and Pharisees will call you to take the yoke of the Law and learn from them.

Jesus calls you “take my yoke upon you, and learn from me!”

The word “learn” is *mathetew* –

which is the verbal form of the word “disciple.”

This is precisely the thing that the wise and the understanding refused to do!

Jesus called them to be his disciples –

to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.

But they refused.

“Take my yoke upon you, and be disciplined by me.”

Learn from me.

“For I am gentle and lowly in heart”

This is a striking statement for one who has just said,

“All things have been handed over to me by my Father.”

But in Christ’s kingdom authority is expressed through *meekness*.

And thus “you shall find rest for your souls.”

Jesus is the one who gives rest.

Jesus is the one who provides *shalom* – well-being – to his people.

“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

It is a yoke.

And a yoke means bondage.

And we don't like bondage.  
We want to be free!  
We don't want someone else telling us what to do!  
And so we tell Jesus, "Forget it! I won't take your yoke!"

But in rejecting the yoke of Jesus you do not escape all yokes.  
Ever since the fall, all mankind has been under the yoke of sin and death.  
You cannot simply pretend that it isn't there!

That's why Jesus says,  
"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden..."  
The yoke of sin and death is a heavier burden than the yoke of Jesus!

Because the yoke of Jesus is precisely this:  
to accept the gracious gift of God – that *Jesus* paid for your sins!

*It is* a yoke.  
And a yoke means bondage.  
If you take the yoke of Jesus,  
then you *will* find rest for your souls,  
because his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Jesus paid it all.  
The only burden that you bear is the burden of *not* carrying the burden!

(And, given our tendency to delight in carrying burdens –  
this is harder than it sounds!)

But also, when you understand the contrast between "the yoke of the law" (in Pharisaic terms),  
and the "yoke of Jesus,"  
you start to see how the first part of chapter 12 is essential to this passage.

As we've seen throughout Matthew's gospel,  
Jesus is re-interpreting the Law.  
The scribes and Pharisees have fundamentally misunderstood the Law  
because they do not see *Jesus* as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

If you are going to take the yoke of Jesus and *learn from him*,  
then you need to think about the Law in the way that Jesus teaches you.

And since Jesus has just said that *he* will give you rest,  
Matthew tells us about Jesus is "Lord of the Sabbath,"  
using two examples of how Jesus gives rest to those who come to him.

### **3. The Sabbath Rest in Practice (12:1-14)**

#### **a. "Lord of the Sabbath" – Jesus Gives Rest to His Disciples (v1-8)**



12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields 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.”

One Sabbath the Pharisees catch Jesus’s disciples plucking grain and eating it.

This is harvesting.

And harvesting was forbidden on the Sabbath.

So they say, *Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?*

If you read Jesus’ answer simply as a piece of legal argument you will miss the point.

The legal argument looks like this:

Only the priests were supposed to eat the holy bread.

David ate the holy bread and gave it to his servants.

Therefore, the law should not be interpreted so strictly.

You Pharisees are being too legalistic.

That’s a good legal argument – it’s probably true.

But it’s *not* Jesus’ argument!

After all, in the argument I just gave, there is no point in the last line:

*the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*

Do you see what Jesus is doing?

It is not merely a legal argument.

It is a kingdom argument.

Why does he talk about David?

What was David doing in 1 Samuel 21?

David, the LORD’s anointed, was fleeing from Saul—who was trying to kill him.

He came to the priests and asked for bread.

They gave him the holy bread, which only the priests should eat.

But to understand Jesus’ point, you need to know the story better!

Do you remember what else happened in David’s day?

There was an Edomite named Doeg who spied on this meeting,

and reported it to Saul,

and then Doeg, at Saul’s command, slaughtered the priests.

Not only do the Pharisees have no taste for the new wine of the kingdom of God, they are like the Edomite spy who sold out—and then slaughtered—the priests of God.

Now we can understand what Jesus means by “the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Daniel had spoken of the Son of Man as the one who would spearhead  
the coming of the great victory of God over his enemies.

Jesus is claiming that he is the Son of Man.

And as the Son of Man, he is lord of the Sabbath.

If David had the authority to eat the priests’ holy bread and give it to his servants,  
then surely the Son of Man, who is restoring David’s kingdom,  
has authority to give common grain to his disciples on the Sabbath!

When Jesus says that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,  
he makes it clear that the Sabbath command is still valid.

The key is that now the Sabbath must be oriented around him.

Taking the “yoke of Jesus” means to learn from *him*  
how we should think about the Law (including the Sabbath).

Jesus does not *abolish* the Sabbath.

He says that he is *Lord of the Sabbath*.

And as Lord of the Sabbath,

Jesus now gives rest to his people.

He feeds us every Lord’s Day with his Word and Sacraments.

This is not the place to talk about why we worship on Sunday instead of Saturday,  
but it is appropriate to remember that Jesus is teaching us here  
that he is the one who feeds us with the holy bread from heaven.

He is the Lord of the Sabbath:

he has given us this day of rest and worship—  
a day of rejoicing and gladness.

We sometimes get caught up in debates about what is okay or not okay on Sunday.

But the best way to deal with those issues is to focus on what the day is for.

It is a day for rest and worship.

Perhaps an analogy might help:

you need to build a fire--

you’ve got a pile of split logs and a grand piano.

Both are made of wood.

Which should you burn?

“You can use a grand piano for firewood, but why would you want to?”

(Dan McCartney)

In the same way,

you have seven days each week—six of which were designed by God for work and labor,  
and one of which is designed for rest and worship.

But Jesus isn’t finished explaining the Sabbath to us.

Once again, *learn from Jesus* what it means to follow him:

**b. Doing Good on the Sabbath – Jesus Gives Rest to the Lame (v9-14)**

<sup>9</sup> *He went on from there and entered their synagogue.* <sup>10</sup> *And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse him.* <sup>11</sup> *He said to them, “Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?”* <sup>12</sup> *Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”* <sup>13</sup> *Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.*

Notice that when Jesus gives rest to others on the Sabbath,  
he does it himself.

He doesn't make one person work in order to give rest to another.  
(Jesus doesn't say, “hey, Bartholomew, come heal this fellow!”)

It is one of the basic principles of the Fourth Commandment  
that those in authority are to give rest to those under their care.

So for instance,

Some people say that they go out to eat on Sunday  
in order to give their wife a rest.

But that is like Jesus saying, “Bartholomew, why don't you heal this man?”

If you want to give your wife rest on Sunday afternoon,  
make lunch yourself,  
or pick up the food on Saturday night and put it in the fridge  
(and make sure you have enough paper plates so there is no clean-up!).

I'm not saying that it is always wrong to eat out on a Sunday.  
My point is simply that the principle of giving rest is a personal principle.

*You* are to give rest to those under your care,  
just as Jesus gives rest to those who are under his care!

Jesus did not hire someone else to go to the cross for us!

If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath,  
and a servant is not greater than his master,  
then should not we treat the Sabbath like our Lord?

The Sabbath is not our master,  
rather, the Sabbath is the Lord's Day—  
a day that is to be oriented around him.

<sup>14</sup> *But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.*

The funny thing is that the Pharisees agreed with Jesus' argument!

They agreed that it was lawful to save life on the Sabbath  
(as Jesus pointed out, the Pharisees agreed  
that you could pull your sheep out of a ditch on the Sabbath).  
They are not upset with Jesus because a man was healed on the Sabbath.  
Everyone knew that the point of the Sabbath is to give rest to others.

So then, why are the Pharisees upset with Jesus?  
They are upset with Jesus not so much because of what he *does*,  
but because of what he *says*.

Jesus claims to be Lord of the Sabbath.  
Jesus claims to have God's authority to forgive sins.  
Jesus claims to be the unique Son of God –  
and that the only way to know God, is to come to Jesus.

And if this man keeps performing these mighty deeds,  
the people just might believe him!

And if the people believe Jesus and follow him,  
then (according to the Pharisees)  
Israel will once again have failed to be what God called them to be.

This is one place where the Pharisees are right.  
They think that to follow Jesus would be to turn aside  
from striving to be all that Israel was supposed to be.  
And that's exactly right!

To follow Jesus means to renounce any claim to your own righteousness–  
your own status.

To follow Jesus means to acknowledge that you are unclean!  
To admit that you are sick.

To follow Jesus means to renounce the yoke of the Law –  
and to accept the yoke of the gospel.

The Pharisees only hope is that Israel will one day be righteous!  
Jesus says that your only hope is that *he* is righteous.