

I can't think of a better example of someone who understood who Jesus is than Billy Graham. Millions watched his memorial service on Friday. I was struck as I was looking at our passage this morning, that Billy understood Jesus' authority over his life. The man who preached Christ face to face to over 200 million people in his 60 years of ministry, counseled presidents, kings, and queens had these humble words written on his grave marker: "Preacher of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ."

It was never about Billy's authority. It was always about Jesus' authority. And it was never about Billy's magnitude. It was always about Jesus' mercy to him and to the people who received his message.

As one of Billy's sons delivered his eulogy, he recalled one of his father's frequent sayings, "People shouldn't believe it when they hear that I have died." He said, "I'll be more alive than I am now. I'll have just changed addresses, that's all."

I remember the first time I heard Billy speak live, Julie and I were at a missions conference called Urbana 84 at the University of Illinois in Champaign. 50,000 college kids heard him speak and then a smaller group of us got to go to a Q and A breakout session with him. And I will never forget his answer to a question one student asked him, "What do you struggle with in your walk with Christ right now?"

Here was his answer, "I waste too much time watching meaningless TV. You could pray for me on that." That transparent answer allowed me to connect with his heart. This is a guy who is humble and wants to grow and is a lifelong learner.

Another of Billy's sons said this at the memorial service. "My dad was FAT. He was Faithful. Available and Teachable." Billy never considered himself to be a bible scholar. There were things in the Scriptures that he didn't understand, but he believed the Scriptures and he loved the Scriptures. He loved Jesus. And he knew Jesus to be the Jesus we will see revealed in Matthew 12 verses 1-19 this morning. He knew Jesus as the true authority in his life and he knew Jesus, his Savior as the one who rules with Mercy and Justice. And that gave him hope. So our big idea this morning is this; *As followers of Jesus, we have hope because we know Jesus has Authority and rules with Mercy and Justice.*

The passage this morning gives us three answers to this one question, "Who is Jesus?"

The last two chapters, ten and eleven, showed us opposition to Jesus was growing. The chief instigators of this opposition

were an elite body of religious professionals we know as Pharisees. They were continually in His face every step of the way here in chapter twelve, looking for ways to accuse, discredit and rebuke Him.

Why did they hate Jesus? Why didn't they see him for who he was? Why didn't they love Him? First, they saw Jesus as disrespectful of their traditions, disrespectful of their interpretations of their way of doing religion. They despised the fact Jesus totally disregarded all their detailed rules for how they thought one should keep the Sabbath. Their rules were difficult to understand, follow and were heavy burdens for people to bear. Also, they saw their own power and control over the people being threatened by Jesus. If we remember from last week, Gary ended his message, with Jesus' words in chapter 11 verses 29-30. Jesus invites the common people to come out from under the heavy yoke of the elites and follow Him promising, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Why is following Jesus considered a light burden? We can better understand that when we examine three answers the question, "Who is Jesus?"

### **Who is Jesus? He is Lord of the Sabbath**

**At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-2)**

As I picture this, I see some of Jesus disciples walking on the road, which ran adjacent to some grain fields. They were hungry and they did what was acceptable for anyone to do back then. They reached out as they walked along the road, and picked some grain that was growing next to the road. Then they plucked off the heads of the grain and ate them. I picture Jesus walking a little ways behind His disciples with some Pharisees who looked up and saw what they were doing.

We should know that everyone on that road knew the law didn't forbid travelers plucking the heads off of grain and having a light lunch. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, "*If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.*" The disciples didn't pull up in a John Deere tractor and start harvesting someone else's grain. They simply reached out and picked some grain while standing on the road.

Considering Deuteronomy, what was the Pharisees' problem? The Pharisees believed they had caught Jesus' disciples red-handed breaking the Law of God. They believed they had them because of that final prepositional phrase, "on the Sabbath".

The disciples were picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, which was designed to be a day to rest, to worship, and a day to not work. Here is what was going on in their minds. By plucking grain Jesus' disciples were guilty of reaping. By rubbing the grain in their hands they were guilty of threshing. And by blowing away the chaff they were guilty of winnowing. By putting all those acts together, they were guilty of preparing a meal on the Sabbath. That's how these guys thought!

What is the right thing here? The Law of God purposely didn't give detailed answers to every conceivable question someone might ask about how to interpret the Sabbath. The challenge for a follower of God was to understand and apply the Spirit of the Law. The Spirit of the Sabbath law was to value rest, worship, and to meet genuine needs.

But our human nature is to build systems as attempts to give specific answers to every conceivable question that anyone might ask. God's intention for the original Ten Commandments from God was to reveal to His people the heart of God and give shape to the way to glorify God. But religious men turned these original commandments into a law library full new rules and regulations and boundaries not found in the Scripture. They rolled out new law after new law and these new laws, made by men, barely resembled the intent of God's original commandments.

For the Sabbath alone, there were 39 classes of work that profaned the Sabbath. If you sewed a stitch on Saturday you profaned the law against working on the Sabbath. If you wrote one letter you were okay, but if you wrote two letters you violated the law against working on the Sabbath. Here is another example. One rule stated, "If a building fell down on the Sabbath, enough rubble could be removed to discover if any victims were dead or alive. If alive they could be rescued, but if dead, the corpses must be left until sunset." To these Pharisees touching the heads of grain were just as damning as touching a corpse.

So how would Jesus answer them? He taught them from the Scripture and pointed them to the Spirit of the Law and the original intention of the fourth commandment to honor the Sabbath.

**He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. (verses 3–4)**

This story is found in 1 Samuel 21. David had been anointed the new king over Israel and was hated by the old King, Saul, who wanted to kill him. David fled for his life to the town of Nob.

Hungry and tired with nowhere else to turn, David and his companions arrived and went to the local priest in the tabernacle to ask for food. The only food the priest had was the "consecrated bread," which was the 12 loaves of showbread. The loaves were on a table in the holy place to signify the fellowship between God's people and God. The bread was sacred, set apart, but what did the priest do? He went into the holy place and gathered the loaves and gave them to David and his companions to eat.

The Pharisees should have known that the needs of David superseded the normal rules. The Pharisees should have known the law was made for the benefit of the people and not to hurt us or make life difficult. As Jesus said in Mark chapter two, "*the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" Jesus goes to the scriptures a second time.

**Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? (verse 5)**

Jesus reminds the Pharisees that there was work to be done, hard work to be done by the priests every Sabbath to get the temple ready for worship. The book of Leviticus in the Old Testament tells us the priests had to put on their robes, they had to bake the 12 loaves of showbread, they had to get the incense to burn, fill the lamps with oil, cut the wood to make up burnt offerings. Their hard work totally violated the "no working on the Sabbath clause," yet no one complained about them. Why? Because Sabbath temple work trumps Sabbath rest. If the Pharisees would have had a chance to interject between verse five and six, they would have likely said to Jesus, "Are you comparing yourself to our great King David, or to these wonderful temple workers? You don't see yourself as equal to them do you?" Jesus replies,

**I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. (verse 6)**

Jesus tells them, "Not only am I greater than a priest, I am greater than the priesthood. And I am greater than the place the priests work." It's as if we can hear them tear their robes as the word "blasphemy" is being whispered among them. Why? Because only God was greater than the temple.

Do you see Jesus' argument here? If what King David did by eating the temple bread trumps the temple, and if the work the temple priests did trumps the command, "Do not work on the Sabbath." then it follows logically Jesus is claiming some kind of special authority when He says, "Something greater than the temple is here." Then Jesus quotes for a second time in Matthew, Hosea 6:6. Which basically says, "you can make all the rules and regulations you want, but if your heart isn't right and you don't have mercy, you gain nothing."

**If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice, ' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' (verses 7–8)**

For some of us today we need to ask ourselves these questions, "Has our religion gotten in the way of our love? Has our religion gotten in the way of serving those we are called to serve? Or, in our attempts to serve God we have we lost our way when it comes to being merciful to those we serve?" In other words, when we love people, no matter what day it is, we love God and His law.

So who is Jesus? Once again in Matthew Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. He is the divine king prophesied about in the seventh chapter of Daniel, who was given an everlasting dominion, and a kingdom that shall not be destroyed. The "Son of Man" possesses authority over all creation and so the "Son of Man" also possesses this same authority over the Sabbath. He has the right to dictate what is lawful or unlawful including whether or not His disciples could have a light lunch on the Sabbath. His authority gives Him the right to remove extra rules and regulations, which were written by men in order to return people to the heart of God and the heart of His law.

Now Matthew adds a second story, the healing of a man with a shriveled hand, to show that no matter what day it is, it is always right to do good and show mercy.

### **Who is Jesus? He is the Lord of Mercy**

**Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" (verses 9–10)**

For these guys to ask Jesus this question after what we just read tells us that they had no desire to connect with the heart of God. In their interpretation, it was unlawful to set a broken bone on the Sabbath. In the wheat field, Jesus defended Himself with Scripture. And now in the Synagogue Jesus defended Himself by calling on common sense, our common sense of empathy. He told them to use their heads and their hearts.

**He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (verses 11–12)**

Jesus said, "The Sabbath is all about worshipping God." But Jesus got to the heart of it. It reminds me of what the Apostle John said in 1 John 4:20–21, How can you say you love God if you can't love your brother? To love one's neighbor is Sabbath law. It's worship. It is lawful to love and show mercy whether it's on Saturday, Sunday or any other day of the week. So on the Sabbath Jesus said to the man,

**"Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. (verses 13–14)**

In total control of the situation, Jesus initiated and showed that He is Lord of both the Sabbath and of Mercy. It is at this point in Matthew that we see that Jesus' destiny would be death. It's our first glimpse at the dark shadow of the cross, which will be growing as we move into the following chapters.

Unlike other earthly kings the Pharisees had known, Jesus uses His Lordship to do good. The man with the deformed hand was healed and the men with deformed hearts plotted his murder.

**Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: (verses 15–17)**

As Matthew takes all this in, he is reminded of the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1–4. The Messiah will have all authority and He will come and make things right. And Matthew is telling us Jesus is that Messiah who will bring about justice. He will do it totally different than any other leader. He will serve. He will not be political or violent. He will be a gentle servant.

**"Here is my servant whom I have chosen,  
the one I love, in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.  
(verse 18)**

God's servant will serve and by serving, Jesus will be the one to bring justice to all.

### **Who is Jesus? He is the Lord of Justice.**

And how will Jesus, the Lord of Justice accomplish His mission?

**He will not quarrel or cry out;  
no one will hear his voice in the streets. (verse 19)**

Jesus will go about bringing justice by going about His work quietly, humbly and eventually dying for His people. Be encouraged this morning; Jesus is especially attentive to the weak and struggling.

**A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,  
till he has brought justice through to victory.  
In his name the nations will put their hope."  
(verses 20–21)**

Matthew wants us to know here today, if we have been bruised by life we need to understand the Lord of Justice will not let you bend to the point of breaking and He will one day bring complete justice. Matthew wants us to know, if we are weak in faith and barely holding on, close to being snuffed out, hang on. You won't be snuffed out. Jesus will come along side and He will bring about justice.

History books are full of powerful kings with powerful armies. Yet these kingdoms of the world have all come to an end and all

kingdoms of the world today will soon come to an end. None of them ever succeeded at ushering in Justice.

The most unlikely kingdom, the kingdom we know as the kingdom of God, continues to advance. Why, because our leader demonstrated the way to victory. The way to victory for our kingdom is through gentleness, service and humility. Ultimately through His sacrifice on a cross, our leader gave His life to give us life.

We are encouraged to see God use bruised reeds and smoldering wicks to bring little signs of justice to our world. We are encouraged to see men acting like men going on patrols, committed to being instruments of justice through the ministry we heard about today called, "A Bunch of Guys." Ultimately we know these little signs of justice on earth are just a taste of the perfect justice, which will one day fill the whole earth. May the answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" bring us hope this morning. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of Mercy, and the Lord of Justice. May we see Him for who He is and may our lives change.

As we transition into communion, there is an illustration I want to offer, which I hope will help us understand how rules and religion can get in the way of the real thing.

As a kid I remember getting a paint-by-number kit as a gift. You remember those things, right? You have a bunch of lines, which form an outline of a picture and within these lines are little spaces with numbers in them. Each number corresponds to a certain color on your palette of paint. To paint a paint-by-number picture really well, you had to match the numbers precisely to the corresponding colors; and just as important, you had to paint within the lines. Painting by numbers isn't art. You don't need artistic talent to paint by numbers, you just need accuracy and a little neatness to stay between the lines.

A painting from a paint-by-number kit can look good from a distance, but if you get close it's obvious that it's an imitation. It is not the good but a copy of the good. And another thing

about painting by numbers, you are not really creating anything. You are simply trying to reproduce what the original artist created. Painting by numbers is not inspiring, in fact, it's boring. Matching colors and staying between some lines is not creative. It's not inspiring.

I think painting by numbers illustrates the difference between the law and Jesus. Jesus is the artist, and He created the perfect law for us to follow. Yes, the Law had lines and boundaries and colors. We find we could stay within the lines sometimes, and it looked pretty good. And other times we totally messed it up. We put red where we should have put green and we crossed the line and the picture got ugly fast. We realized we cannot re-create the original art of the original commandments.

But there is something good that comes from the experience of painting by numbers. We come to appreciate the real artwork. Lines, numbers and assigned colors can't help us to make perfect and beautiful art, but they can help us long for the perfect and beautiful art.

For thousands of years, God commanded his people to obey the perfect Law of God. And over thousands of years, the true heart behind the Law became covered up by a paint-by-number religion of rules and regulations.

Then Jesus came and confronted the paint-by-number religion and He exposed it for what it had become—an imitation that was no longer beautiful, no longer inspiring. It was an imitation, which became a burden. The imitation hid the true beauty.

Jesus restored the beauty. The real art was revealed to us in Jesus Christ and it is beautiful because it was painted with His Spirit. It is a masterpiece, which displays the colors and shapes of life, liberty, grace, mercy and justice. Jesus paints with colors and shapes, which inspire us to love and follow Him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*