

## **Sermon Outline**

### **“Rule-igion”, Matthew: Life and Words of Jesus, Part 37 – Matthew 12:1-14 – Joshua Harris – April 28, 2013**

#### **Introduction**

1. “Rule-igion” is the idea that a right relationship with God is earned through rule keeping. “Rule-igion” says that we have to earn God’s favor and love by our performance, obedience and good deeds: we follow the rules; we live a good life and God is in our debt.
2. “Rule-igion” is completely at odds with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that salvation is a *free gift*. We are not saved by our works. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life and fulfilled the Law on our behalf. On the cross, Jesus took our sin and the punishment of death that we deserved. Then he rose again to give us eternal life. True salvation and right standing with God is not something we earn. It was something that Jesus did for us.
3. In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus interacted with a group of Pharisees who were so caught up in their rules that they were blind to the fact that God’s Son was standing in front of them. The Pharisees were trapped in “rule-igion.” But they are not the only legalists; we can fall prey to “rule-igion”, too.

#### **Don’t let the Law obscure the Lawgiver (verses 1-8)**

1. The chapter begins with a story: Jesus is walking with his disciples through a grain field. The disciples are hungry. So they plucked a few heads of grain to chew on. Immediately, the Pharisees pounce and accuse the disciples of doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.
  - a. For the Jews, the Sabbath was Saturday, the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week. The Law of Moses designated the Sabbath as a holy day. On this day, they rested from their work. (See Exodus 20:8-12, Deuteronomy 5:12, 15). The Sabbath was a day to remember how much God loved them and how he had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. So the Sabbath was a reminder of the special relationship God had with his people. It was a time to draw near to God, to enjoy God, and to be refreshed.
2. In their obsession over the details of how best to keep the Law, the Pharisees were blind to God’s original intention of the Law. In their zeal to get the rules right, they burdened themselves and their followers. Lost in the midst of all their rules and rule-keeping was the awareness that the Law was given to draw them to the Lord.
3. So what does Jesus do? He goes to Scripture and begins to show them that their interpretations and application of the law are misguided. He reminds them of a story from the life of David (1 Samuel 21) and of the priests who serve (“work”) in the temple on the Sabbath. And in both cases he’s trying to show them that the Lord who gave the Law

## **Sermon Outline**

has the right to interpret the Law. Why? Because someone greater than David and the temple are in their midst. Jesus sums it all up in verse 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus has the authority to rightly interpret the law. He takes priority over everything else.

4. The mistake of the Pharisees is a mistake that we can easily make: they let the Law become bigger in their eyes than the Lawgiver. Instead of the Law drawing them to a deeper relationship and love, they allowed the Law to obscure the one who gave the law.

### **Don't let the letter of the Law obscure the heart of the Law (verses 7, 9-14)**

1. In verse 7, Jesus says, "And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." Quoting from Hosea, Jesus challenges these men that they've misinterpreted and misunderstood God's intention. The heart of God's law is to love God with their whole being and to love their neighbor as themselves. The Pharisees' hearts were blind to these truths.
2. We see the two Great Commandments illustrated in the healing of the man with the withered hand. The Pharisees' only concern is to trap Jesus in disobedience. In effect, the Pharisees are saying, "You can't heal a man on the Sabbath because healing is work and you can't work on the Sabbath." They didn't ask themselves the weightier question, "What is the heart of God for this man?" The letter of the law is all they see. Jesus calls them on their hypocrisy by using the story of a sheep needing rescue. They are willing to bend the Sabbath Law for a sheep and pull him out. But they are not willing to permit healing for a man made in God's image, one much more important than sheep. Then Jesus delivers the all-important punch line, "So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."
  - a. When we lose sight of the heart of God's laws – which is always love for God and others – we will begin to use the law to control and manipulate others. Instead of being a means of loving God and loving others, the Law will become a tool to build our own little kingdom of self.
3. After Jesus heals the man's hand, the Pharisees go out and begin to plot how to destroy him. What incredible duplicity! They're tied up in knots over this supposed infraction of a Sabbath Law. But their hearts are filled with malice and hatred and they're plotting murder, a violation of the sixth commandment.
  - a. But aren't we the same? We can dress up on the outside and be all smiles at church but hate our brother or sister on the inside. We can be faithful to give our tithe and begrudge giving generously toward someone in need. And the list could go on. Where is your life lacking genuine, heartfelt love for God and your neighbor?

## Sermon Outline

### Don't find rest in your rule keeping (Matthew 11:28-30)

1. These verses must be placed into their context. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus is talking to people who are laboring and who are heavy laden under the weight of a rule-based approach to God. He's talking to people who feel crushed by the Pharisees' yoke: rule layered on top of rule. Never doing enough. Never feeling good enough.
2. The stories of the Pharisees' approach to the Sabbath is an illustration of the heavy burden, the heavy yoke that "rule-igion" places on people. The lie of a works-based approach to God is that if I work hard enough, I will feel secure. I can find rest in my performance. I can find rest for my soul in my own effort. And it never works. We grow weak. We never know if we're doing enough. We fail. And there's always a fellow-Pharisee who is upping the ante by his example and making us feel guilty we aren't doing more. As someone has said, "*Law divorced from relationship is a great burden.*"
3. But Jesus comes to us and gently cares and loves us. Following Jesus isn't less demanding or arduous. In fact, following Jesus can involve giving up everything, even your very life. It involves work, effort and obedience. But his yoke is different. It's light because we are not obeying to earn salvation. We are obeying because Jesus has already won our salvation. His yoke is light because he is carrying the weight with us. It's light because we're not just obeying a rule; we're walking with our Savior and friend. He's the true Sabbath rest. So let's put down "rule-igion", run to Jesus and take on His grace-filled yoke.

### Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 12:1-14.
2. Is there a good work in your life that if you don't do it you feel you cannot pray or approach God? Has it become a burden for earning acceptance rather than a Spirit-enabled activity?
3. Is there something that causes you to "pounce" like the Pharisees on someone else for what you observe them doing?
4. What has been foremost in your heart lately – your all powerful, loving Savior or the things you need to do? Take some time to meditate on who He is and thank Him for taking you as His own.
5. Have you ever come to Christ for forgiveness of sin that burdens your soul and receive Him into your life as Lord and Savior? If not, He invites you to come. If so, have you begun to carry those burdens again?

## **Sermon Outline**

6. In what ways do you drift toward “rule-igion” instead of resting on Jesus? Consider the following list:
- Do you feel more confident and more accepted by God when you are doing well spiritually?
  - Do you wonder if God has forsaken you, turned His back or finds you unacceptable when having a bad spiritual day?
  - If God asked you, “Why should I answer your prayer?” would you inventory any unconfessed sins, remind God of your consistent quiet times or tell him of your good works towards others?
  - When reading your Bible, what does your heart and mind notice first and most – the things you need to do or the works done by the Savior?
  - Which are you more aware of – all the ways you need to grow or who you are in Christ?
  - Can other’s personal examples or practices bring guilt or discouragement?
  - Do you think that God’s forgiveness only kicks in after you have reached some mysterious level of remorse, repentance or suffering for your sin?
  - Do you find that being led by the Spirit and trusting in God’s sovereign wisdom is not nearly as appealing as having a set of rules that will settle every question?
  - When you hear teaching that includes practical instruction, do you tend to leave discouraged your already overwhelming task list just increased?
  - Are you discouraged or feel condemned when you fail, make a mistake or sin?
  - Do you tend to relate to Jesus as the new Lawgiver? Is your prayer and plea to ask the Lord how to do it?
  - Do you tend to be critical, perfectionistic, or self-righteous?
  - Do you find it difficult to relate to others who practice differently than you do on non-essential or disputable matters? Do your personal convictions on disputable matters tend to become laws everyone should follow?