

Jesus and the Pharisees: (part seven of a twelve part series)

One of the most consistent points of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees involves matters pertaining to the Sabbath. No one can deny that under the Mosaic Covenant, the Sabbath rest was ordained of God as a positive benefit and blessing for the nation of Israel (Exodus 20:8-11). However, by the time Jesus appeared and presented Himself to the Jewish people as their Messiah, the Sabbath had been distorted into something other than its originally intended purpose. It had been reconfigured into a legalistic straight-jacket and proved to be more of a burden than a blessing to the people.

As a result, there was no other single issue where Christ was more confrontational with the Pharisees than the Sabbath. More often than not, the means by which the encounter took place consisted of our Lord healing someone on that day. So that in Luke 13:10-14, Jesus heals a woman crippled by a demon and is rebuked by a synagogue official, who if not a Pharisee himself, had been corrupted by the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. Jesus responds to the rebuke with a logic and common sense that is irrefutable, as recorded in Luke 13:15-16 –

“But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’”

Speaking of irrefutable, in Luke 14:1-4, Jesus heals a man with dropsy and asks a question in v5 with the answer, or lack thereof, recorded in v6 –

“And He said to them, ‘Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?’ And they could make no reply to this.”

In John 5:1-17, Jesus heals a lame man and tells him to pick up his pallet and walk. Since carrying the pallet was a violation of Pharisaical Sabbath keeping, the man is confronted about his violation rather than encouraged about his restoration. When they discover that Jesus told him to carry his pallet, they engage in a persecution of their promised Messiah (5:16). In John 9:1-17, Jesus heals a man born blind and after a lengthy interrogation of the man by the Pharisees in regard to what took place, Jesus finds the man, informs him of His identity, is worshipped, and then passes a stinging indictment on those who refused to believe in Him and the miraculous healing which He had performed (John 9:18-41).

Perhaps the Sabbath healing which is most instructive for all of us is recorded in both Matthew 12:1-14 and Mark 2:23-3:6. It will be our focus in part eight.