**Matthew 12:1-8**

Introduction

I. The coat hanger analogy: The coat hanger was invented for a particular purpose, but over the years it has been used for a variety of purposes.

II. God created the Sabbath for a particular purpose, but over the years it was twisted and distorted so that by Jesus’ time, many people had lost sight of the original purpose.

The Passage

I. God’s original intention for the Sabbath

A. A day to rest (stop) and rejoice in God, recognizing his control over time (Ex 20:8)

-The word “Sabbath” means “cease, stop.”

B. A day to remember God’s saving work (Dt 5:15)

-Sabbath is connected with remembering that we were rescued from slavery (for Israel that was slavery to Egypt, for us it’s slavery to sin)

C. A day to remember who we are as the people of God (Ex 31:13)

-God took the Sabbath command seriously and prescribed death to those who failed to honor it because to deny the Sabbath was essentially to deny your relationship with God

II. The Pharisees’ distortion of God’s intention for the Sabbath (v. 1-2)

A. The Pharisees turned the Sabbath into a religious marker that determined who was “in” and who was “out” (very us vs. them mentality)

B. Their goal was to maintain the purity of the “in” people (= the Jews), and they basically believed all the other “out” people could and should go to hell. They simply hunkered down and tried to maintain the purity of the in crowd.

C. What religious markers have we created today to determine who is in and who is out?

-examples: baptism, church attendance, growing up in a Christian home, tithing

-Where have we become an evangelical border patrol?

D. There is only one true religious marker of the people of God = faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

III. What does Jesus have to say about the Sabbath?

A. The story of David (v. 3-4)

1. David and his companions violated the Sabbath because extenuating circumstances dictated that something in the moment (human life) was more important than observing the Sabbath

2. There will be times in our lives where situations will prevent us from observing the Sabbath, and God has room for that

B. The Priests in the temple (v. 5)

-The priests themselves were actually required by God to (technically) violate the Sabbath when they offered a sacrifice (= did work) on the Sabbath

C. The big point

1. Something greater than the Temple is here (v. 6)

a. Whereas, before, the Temple was the place of God’s presence on earth, now in Jesus himself God is present in a more powerful and immediate way

b. Therefore, Jesus has the authority to properly interpret the Sabbath (the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath)

2. I desire mercy, not sacrifice (v. 7)

God is not interested in the symbolic religious acts we do; he is interested in a transformed heart that expresses itself in love and mercy to others

Conclusion

I. Where are we like the Pharisees and where do we need to have Jesus’ heart?

A. Are we like the Pharisees: have markers to identify the in crowd, hunker down, and let God bring judgment on the rest

B. Or are we like Jesus: a life that is a blessing to the nations; a life of love, mercy, joy. Properly celebrating the Sabbath is a way we can be a blessing to our neighbors

II. Addressing two key questions

A. Do we have to observe the Sabbath as New Testament Christians?

-No, but why would we not want to live the life God intends for us?

-No we don’t, but neither do we have to attend church, read our bibles, or pray, but God has given us those things to bring fulfilment to our lives

B. Do we have to observe the Sabbath on Sunday?

-No, but we need to remember that God’s way of living is not subject to our lifestyle choices

-We try to squeeze God’s program into our schedule, but Sabbath is all about squeezing our schedule into God’s program

**Discussion Questions**

1. Consider God’s original intention for the Sabbath (the three points mentioned in Section I above). How did those points add to or change your prior understanding of the Sabbath? How do they impact the way you want to practice the Sabbath?

2. Consider the Pharisees perspective on Sabbath as an external religious boundary that marks off the religiously “in” crowd from the “out” crowd.

* Can you identify any area(s) in your own life (e.g. church attendance, prayers, Bible reading, etc.) where you may be simply “going through the motions” and consequently missing out on God's true purposes for your actions?
* As you look at your own life, are you, like the Pharisees, simply “hunkering down” with your own people and waiting for the coming judgment, or are you moving out into the world with the mercy and love of Jesus?

3. What did you think of the response given on Sunday to this common question: “Do we still have to observe the Sabbath as New Testament Christians?”

4. What has been your own experience with the Sabbath? Have you historically observed a full day of intentional rest? What blessings has the Sabbath brought to you?

5. What are the biggest barriers to you regularly celebrating the Sabbath (they may be psychological, theological, practical, relational, etc.). How comfortable are you with extended periods of rest where you are doing nothing productive and you aren’t being entertained by something? What surfaces in you during those times?