



## **Matthew 12:9–14**

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” 11 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? 12 How much more valuable is a person than a

sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

## **Reflection**

(Today’s talk is given by Justin Moffatt)

Only a couple of weeks ago, Cincinnati zoo workers shot dead Harambe, a 17-year-old silverback gorilla, out of fear that he would hurt little Isaiah Dickerson, a 4 year old who had fallen into the enclosure. Not being there, and not really knowing about gorillas and how they respond to humans,

I'm happy to say that I don't know whether it was the right thing to do. I assume it was. I have to trust the zoo. But it is fair to say that millions more did have an opinion. One online survey I read had 70% say that the zoo workers did the wrong thing: that the gorilla should not have been shot.

What was at the heart of that debate? At the heart of the debate is a question: what is a human being? And how much is a human being worth against the life of a Gorilla?

The zoo workers would normally take great care over this beautiful beast, and had done for 17 years (I assume). But on the day, they have to make a decision that principal trumps regular practise: the boy's life is more important.

It's a good illustration of what happens in our text today. Jesus says: you are commanded to keep a Sabbath to the Lord your God (Exodus 20) but it is even more important that you 'do good on the Sabbath'. That's what's 'lawful'.

They had certain principles about the Sabbath (much of it had been made up by the Pharisees), but, he says: don't let those rules stop you from 'doing the right thing', or 'doing good.'

11 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?'

See that? Everyone there would have said:

‘of course’. So why not heal the man on the Sabbath!? You care about sheep. You wouldn’t just let him die because you were wondering about Sabbath keeping. You’d do what was needed to give life to a sheep normally, but someone created in God’s image even more. So Jesus says: you lift the sheep out on the Sabbath. Well...

12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’

And then to make the point, Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, who had been in a Jewish synagogue with him on a Sabbath:

13 ‘Stretch out your hand.’ So he stretched it out and it was complete-

ly restored, just as sound as the other.

Jesus does 'good' on the Sabbath; he 'works'; he gives him life. And it's what you are supposed to do! That seems obvious, to us, but not to people back then. We'll come to that.

## **Think**

Have a think about your life. Why do we take Sabbaths? Leaving aside (because of time) the question of whether or not the Sabbath ought to be a Saturday or a Sunday, I think we just think of Sabbaths (days off) as a chance to unwind, since we've been so wound up during the week. But in the bible, there are three things I think that are good on the Sabbath.

First, take the time to be a part of a church. Make it regular. Make it weekly. Worship together. Do it no matter what. The habit itself will begin to go to work on your character. And the habit of not doing it will form you negatively. Hebrews 10:25. You'll be more likely to serve and love others (you'll see them regularly). You'll be more attuned to how you can serve the body. You are more likely to know who the 'lost' are so that you can 'do good' and reach them.

Second, as much as possible, find a way to 'do good'. Jesus said that pulling a sheep out of a ditch, and even more importantly, 'working' to give a human being life is a worthy Sabbath pursuit. We have the City Care Lunch on this Sunday. It's good to

do both on a Sunday: worship God and serve the homeless. Give a man his hand back.

Third, do something with those you love: friends, family, neighbours. Be intentional about doing things that restore your soul, which often takes a battering during the week. You can do all those things in a day.

Jesus said that he's the Lord of the Sabbath. He owns it. And what does he do with it? He gives it to you for spiritual, emotional, domestic and physical nourishment. He gives it to you to give you life!

I once heard of Sabbath as being 'resistance'. A protest. Our society can see us as machines, and we need only rest a machine in order to produce more. How about



taking a Sabbath as a protest to that view?

Now, back to the context of our passage, it's conflict. Like our passage yesterday (Matthew has placed this side by side), the Pharisees want to get Jesus. They want him dead. And the Sabbath keeping rules were so important that they could be used to have him killed. They are looking for a way to kill him. Verse 14.

I find it wonderfully ironic that Jesus was killed on a Friday. He was laid in a tomb on the Sabbath, and rose very early on the first day of the week. The majority of his time dead was over the Sabbath. It's ironic, because their desire to have him killed will mean that over one Sabbath weekend, Jesus would work to bring me life.

# Pray

So take the time now to thank him. Thank him for giving you life on that Sabbath weekend. And write down those three things to do on a Sabbath, and plan to do all three on your next Sabbath day. I am. I'll be there on Sunday at the City Care Lunch. And then take the time to pray about it.