

Breaking the Law with Love – Matthew 12:1-14

Introduction: Once a policeman pulled a guy over and he got out and asked the man if he knew why he was pulled over.

"No," the man replied. "You ran that stop sign back there," the officer explained. "But I slowed down!" the guy argued.

The officer said. "You are required to stop. That's why they're called stop signs." The man argued. "Stop, slow down -- what's the difference?"

That's when the officer pulled out his stick and said, "I'll show you the difference. When I start hitting you with my stick, you tell me if you want me to stop or slow down."

I think this story applies today because I see people who apparently don't know the difference between stop and slow down. They think approaching a red light means speed up!

But it's not just the laws of the road that people break; it's all kinds of laws. Some people live by the philosophy that says that laws are made to be broken. Well, can you imagine what it would be like to live with no traffic laws? No moral laws. No criminal laws? It would be chaos. People would soon destroy one another.

The law was given to help teach us what is right and what is wrong. Rom. 7:7 (NIV) says, "*What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law...*"

1 Tim. 1:8 (NIV) says, "*We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.*" And the same can be said of most man-made laws. They are good if used properly. Of course, there are those who are always trying to bend the law to suit themselves. Like the man who went to get his driver's license in another state. The application had the question: "*Have you ever been arrested?*" The man checked, "No." The next question was: "*Why?*" The man wrote, "*I've never been caught.*"

We all are guilty there. If we were honest we would have to admit that we have all been law breakers at some time in our lives. Today, as we think about the breaking the law and in particular, the law of God let's consider two questions. First:

1. What is Greater than the Law? (1-4)

It's been said that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, a set of encyclopedias is worth more than the value of the binding, the paper, and the ink.

A house is worth more than the value of the wood, the sheetrock, the wiring, and plumbing, etc..

We tend to think of God's law as being the total of everything in life and nothing is greater. But there is something greater according to Jesus! What is it?

A. Human Need is Greater than the Law

READ vs. 1-4. Jesus is saying that human need is greater than the law. In this case, hunger. Jesus and His disciples were hungry so they picked grain to eat. The Pharisees considered this as doing work on the Sabbath, which was against the law.

Of course, the Pharisees were known for stretching the law and putting things into it.

In the Mishnah, there are 24 chapters devoted to the various Sabbath laws that have been added by Jewish religious leaders. For example a person is forbidden to:

- Travel more than 3,000 feet from their house
- Carry anything that weighed more than a dried fig.
- Throw something with one hand and catch it with the other.
- Take a bath lest water splash on the floor and wash it.
- Women couldn't look in a mirror lest they saw a gray hair and pull it out.

I mean a person had to work harder at not working on the Sabbath than they did at their job. No wonder Jesus said that the people were "*heavy laden*."

Some traditions even turned out to be dangerous. For example, the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees tells of a time when Antiochus Epiphanes slaughtered a group of Jews under the command of Judas Maccabees because the Jews refused to pick up their weapons on the Sabbath. So keeping the man-made traditions came to be a big problem.

But what about this question of doing things on the Sabbath or on Sundays that are displeasing to the Lord? In the movie Chariots of Fire, Eric Liddell was a runner who had trained with the goal of winning the 100 yard

race at the 1924 Olympics. Liddell was heavily favored to win that race because he had already won the 100 and 220-yard races in other meets.

But when Liddell learned that the qualifying heats for the 100 yard dash were on Sunday, he dropped out because he believed he could not honor the Lord by running on Sunday. A few people praised him, but many people were outraged by his refusal to run. But through it all, Eric Liddell stood firm.

Liddell went on to enter the 400 yard dash. Now, that race was not what he had trained for, but he ran anyway. And he set a new world record! He gave all the glory to the Lord.

Eric Liddell would not run on Sunday because of his Christian conviction that it was wrong for him to do so. Was it wrong? For him it was, but for others it might not be.

My mother would have praised Eric Liddell because she believed that Sunday was a holy day of rest and worship and nothing else. When I was growing up, on Sundays we went to Sunday School and church, and when we got home, we ate dinner, (which she had prepared on Saturday night), then we went to our rooms and read or took a nap or played with our toys. There was no TV, no fishing, no swimming, no going to the amusement park or playing cards or playing pool or pinball machines (this not only applied to Sunday – but anytime). Then we went back to church on Sunday nights. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I got to go home with a friend on Sundays. And I made sure my friend's mom didn't care if we watched TV.

That is how my Mom was. Sundays were for worship and rest and nothing else! No work and hardly no play!

What about working on Sundays? Well, I work on Sunday and so do Doctors and Nurses and Chicken Farmers and Law Enforcement and Fire Fighters. They don't have any choice because human need is greater than the law.

But there is something else that is greater than the Law:

B. Doing Good is Greater than the Law (READ 9-12).

My dad was a hard worker. Besides working his regular job, he was also the song leader and Deacon and R.A. Leader at the church. Besides that, it seemed he was always helping folks out when they needed a hand by fixing their plumbing, repairing their walls, remodeling their bathrooms.

Now suppose someone called him on a Sunday morning just as we were leaving for church to fix a leaky water heater that was flooding their house. Should he have said, *“I’m sorry but we have to go to church today, and after that we have to come home and rest, so you just wade in the water all day and I’ll come over tomorrow and fix your water heater.”*

What do you think God thinks about this? I think He would have wanted dad to do a good deed and help somebody out of a tight spot first, whether he was late for church or not. Why? Because human need and doing good is greater than the law or even what we consider to be the law of God.

READ 13-14. This is the goodest good of all. When Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath, He was saying that this was the right thing to do – the best thing to do, and that is greater than a strict observance of the Sabbath.

Performing an act of love and mercy is greater than the law. **Rom. 13:9-10 (NIV)** says, *“The commandments(the law)...are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

Regardless of which day you honor as your day of rest, Saturday or Sunday, doing good from a heart of love is greater!

Certainly there plenty of things we can do on Sunday and they not be offensive to God if they are doing good and honoring God. So let’s not get bogged down with following traditions. The second question about breaking the law is this:

2. Who is Greater than the Law? (5-14)

In a *“Peanuts”* comic strip one of the girls came to Charlie Brown and said, *“Yes sir, Abraham Lincoln was a great man. Charlie Brown, would you like to have been Abraham Lincoln?”*

Charlie Brown said, *“No, I am having a hard enough time being just plain old Charlie Brown....”*

Some people try to be someone they are not, and the real person inside never comes out. By the same token, some people think they are greater than the law of God and they can do anything they want, but there is only one person greater than the law and that’s the giver of the law! **Jesus Christ!**

READ 5-8. Jesus declared that He is the Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of all. And He wants us to demonstrate love and not be so concerned with offering a perfect sacrifice.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, and He has already offered Himself. There is someone greater than the law, greater than the temple, and greater than the Sabbath, and His name is Jesus.

Max Lucado wrote: *“Every day I have the honor of sitting down with a book that contains the words of the One who created me. Every day I have the opportunity to let him give me a thought or two on how to live.*

If I don’t do what he says, he doesn’t burn the book or cancel my subscription. If I disagree with what he says, lightning doesn’t split my swivel chair or an angel doesn’t mark my name off the holy list. If I don’t understand what he says, he doesn’t call me a dummy. In fact, he calls me ‘Son,’ and on a different page explains what I don’t understand. Remarkable.”

Once a new pastor asked an elderly man, *“Do you love Jesus?”* The old man’s face lit up with a smile and he said: *“Oh! I can tell you something better than that preacher.”* He said, *“It is that He loves me.”*

If God is anything at all, He is love. As Max Lucado said, *“You can’t take the wet out of water and still have water. You can’t take the heat out of fire and still have fire. In the same way, you can’t take the love out of [God]... and still have Him exist. For he was ... and is... Love.”*

And because God is love, He is also greater than His own law. And there are times when we may break God’s law, but only so we can demonstrate the higher law of love.

Conclusion: Is there a limit to God’s love? Well, John 3:16 says, *“For God so loved the world...”* That just about covers everything doesn’t it? If you could search the high heavens from where love abounds, you’d never find the beginning of God’s love. If you could explore the depths of the earth, you’d never find the end of God’s love. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba he couldn’t find the end of God’s love. When Paul stood as an accomplice to murder, he didn’t reach the end of God’s love. When Peter lied to the young lady, he never experienced the end of God’s love. You can also think of Moses the murderer, Jacob the deceiver, John Mark the deserter, or Thomas the doubter. When it came to life, they hit bottom. But when it came to God’s love, they never did. They all found their names in God’s book because of His great and limitless love.

As Vep Ellis wrote in a hymn, *“The love of God is greater far than gold or silver ever could afford. It reaches past the highest star and covers all the world. Its power is eternal. Its glory is supernal. When all this earth shall pass away there’ll always be the love of God.”*

We’ll never experience the end of God’s love. And by the same token, that is how our love should be. Why? Because love does the most good in this world. Love keeps going when religion stops. Love gives, love shows mercy, love forgives, love forbears, love ministers, love blesses, and love heals. Love is the fulfilling of the law and the exceeding of the law. Love never fails.

Have you experienced His love for you today? You can. Just come to Him and give up your effort to be good enough for heaven. Let Him make you good enough.