

Matthew 12:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

Analysis

Jesus appeals to Scripture: 'Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him' (οὐκ ανεγνωτε τι εποιησεν Δαυιδ οτε επεινασεν καὶ οἱ μετ αὐτοῦ). 'Have ye not read' (οὐκ ανεγνωτε) is rhetorical rebuke—of course they've read it; they're Scripture scholars. Jesus references 1 Samuel 21:1-6 where David, fleeing Saul, ate showbread reserved for priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). Technically unlawful, but God didn't condemn David because human need took precedence over ceremonial law. Jesus argues from Scripture itself: the very text you claim to uphold supports prioritizing compassion over ceremony. This devastates their argument: biblical precedent justifies the disciples' actions.

Historical Context

David's eating of showbread was well-known biblical account. Rabbis acknowledged this apparent law violation. Jesus uses their own Scripture to dismantle their accusation. The showbread sat on the table in the tabernacle, twelve loaves representing Israel's tribes, replaced weekly with fresh bread. Old loaves went to priests only (Leviticus 24:9). David's emergency situation justified exception. Jesus establishes interpretive principle: ceremonial laws serve human flourishing; when conflict arises, mercy wins. Early church applied this principle to food laws (Mark 7:19, Acts 10), recognizing ceremonial laws' subordination to love.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus model using Scripture to interpret Scripture?
2. What does David's example teach about mercy over ceremony?
3. How can we discern when human need legitimately takes precedence over religious rules?

Interlinear Text

ο	δὲ	εἰπεν	αὐτοῦ	Οὐκ	ἀνέγνωτε	τί	ἐποίησεν
G3588	But	he said	that were with him	G3756	Have ye	what	did
G1161	G2036		G846		G314	G5101	G4160
Δαβὶδ,	ὅτε	ἐπείνασεν	αὐτοῦ	καὶ	οἱ	μετ'	
David	when	he was an hungred	that were with him	and	G3588	they	
G1138	G3753	G3983	G846	G2532		G3326	
αὐτοῦ							
that were with him							
G846							

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:3 (References David): And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him;

Mark 12:10 (Parallel theme): And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

Matthew 21:16 (Parallel theme): And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Mark 12:26 (Parallel theme): And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?

Matthew 22:31 (Parallel theme): But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

Matthew 12:5 (Parallel theme): Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

Matthew 19:4 (Parallel theme): And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

Luke 10:26 (Parallel theme): He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?