**Calvary Fellowship 8.21.2022 Matthew 12:1-21 “Rules of Engagement”**

* **So I used to be in a band years ago & in the summer of 1995 we set out on our 1st tour of America which was going to last most of the summer**
* Space was limited, so everyone was allowed 1 duffle bag to bring their clothes b/c most of the space was taken up w/ guitars, drums, amps & the stuff we sold
* So I get my clothes together for the tour & I throw a bottle of cologne in the bag
* B/c even if you’re going to be living out of a van for the next 3 months, U don’t have to smell like an animal
* Now, this was the mid-90’s - that was the summer that Batman Forever, the 1 that starred Val Kilmer as Batman came out - terrible movie
* Thankfully, it’s also the summer that the movie Braveheart was released
* The top 3 songs on Billboard’s top 100 were Gangsta’s Paradise by Coolio, Kiss from a Rose by Seal, & Waterfall by TLC
* So U get the idea about what was happening in the world at this time
* So I threw my JNCO jeans in my bag along w/ my cologne - Drakkar Noir (pic)
* 1995 was Drakkar’s prime & I was ready to brighten every room I walked in to
* Here was my problem: the cap to my Drakkar bottle was broken, so I taped the top of the bottle to keep it from spilling & I left for my tour
* Well, an interesting thing happened w/ my duffle bag - It got thrown in w/ everyone else’s bags in the back of the van
* My piece of tape holding the cap on my cologne became dislodged & Drakkar started pouring out - so much that is bled through my bag & into other bags
* We’re not even out of Palm Beach county when someone in our band yells, “Dude, what stinks in this car?” - I say, “I don’t know. I can’ smell anything.”
* So we pull over & find out that my Drakkar bottle had gotten into everyone’s clothes & now everyone smelled like a really potent version of me
* Needless to say, everyone was mad at me until we found a laundry after our 1st show in Virginia Beach
* **I tell U this story b/c truth be told, conflict stinks - we hate how conflict seeps into our lives & spices things up in a negative way**
* But the reality is, conflict is a part of life - even if U hate conflict & try to run from it, if U want to be a mature believer, you’re going to have to learn to deal w/ it
* And in the story we’re going to look at, there’s plenty of conflict
* Jesus & the religious leaders have been disagreeing about certain things, but as Jesus has grown in popularity, so has their interest in Him
* So now they’re digging in & finding fault w/ everything He does - listen, we’re going to see Jesus heal someone & they’re going to be upset about it
* But we’re going to learn a lesson in the midst of these interactions about how to deal w/ conflict & how to not blow our top & act unchristian when confronted
* And that means we need to deal w/ conflict in a different way than the rest of the world does - b/c our culture is out there trying to win an argument
* But wise people who follow Jesus know the the goal is to win the relationship…

**———(v. 1-8)———**

**#1 - Understand the Goal of the Conflict**

* **Now, it can’t be understated how important the Sabbath was & continues to be in Jewish life - it’s at the heart of**
* The Jews went 19 centuries w/o a homeland & still maintained their national identity - no people group has ever survived more than 3
* That’s why you’ve never met a Babylonian or a Hittite or an Ammonite or an uptight - well, you’re probably met a few of those
* But no people group survives not having a homeland for more than 3 centuries b/c the people always end up blending into the new culture
* The Jews did not & if U ask them why that is the case, they’ll tell U that the Jews kept the Sabbath & the Sabbath kept the Jews
* **Now, how were the disciples in violation of the Sabbath?**
* Well, what the disciples were doing was allowed by the law of Moses
* There was a law in the Torah where any person could walk through any field & eat from the field as they were walking through
* Now they weren’t allowed to back up a truck, but they could eat as they walked
* “When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container.When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.” (Deuteronomy 23:24-25)
* Why did God command this? B/c it made land owners cognizant of the fact that there were poor people around them & it gave the poor the dignity of working
* They weren’t just handed food - they went into a neighboring field & worked for whatever food they were eating
* OK, if that’s the case, why are the religious leaders upset? B/c they were doing this on the Sabbath & the had an oral tradition about this that said this was sin
* It wasn’t in the Bible, but they had created their own interpretations that they elevated to the level of Scripture
* So the Pharisees were saying that the disciples were guilty of 4 things:
* Reaping = plucking the grain/ Threshing = rolling it in their hands
* Winnowing = blowing away the husk/ Preparing a meal = this was their food
* What I love is that instead of arguing about the validity of the oral law, Jesus goes to the Bible to a place where they both would agree & gives them 3 points
* And He quotes a story in 1 Samuel 21, when David was on the run from King Saul & he was hungry, that the priest gives David the showbread
* This was bread that was only for the priests, but the priest let him eat it
* There’s a parallel here that’s important to note - David was the rightful king, but someone else was ruling - had David been king, eating the holy bread would have been unnecessary
* In the same way, Jesus is the rightful king of Israel, but the religious leaders did not receive Him - If Jesus were in His rightful place, this would be unnecessary
* **I have a friend who like me, grew up Catholic & went to Catholic School**
* Well, 1 day he forgot his lunch at home & his parents weren’t home to pick up the phone & his friends weren’t excited about sharing their lunch w/ him
* So he went into the Catholic Church b/c he remembered that during Lent there was Mass everyday & the priests left some of the host in the Tabernacle
* So he went in & ate some of the bread & he felt so guilty about it later
* Then he became a Christian & started reading the Bible & he got to this passage & he said, “It’s ok. David did it too & Jesus was OK w/ it”
* Jesus doubles down & talked about how the priests in the temple are serving on the Sabbath so other can worship & enjoy rest
* But then He gets to the heart of the matter & says, “Here’s the real problem: U just don’t have any mercy on people who are hurting.”
* It’s not like they were trying to break the law - but people were hurting & they just didn’t care about the pain people were experiencing
* **Listen, whenever there’s conflict - you’re never going to get anywhere if you’re both obsessed over being right**
* There has to be a decision both sides that says, “We love each other. We care about each other & we want to fix this.”
* But listen, if there is no mercy, there won’t be any relationship
* And listen, if anyone understands mercy, it should be us
* I shared this story a few months ago, so forgive me for repeating it
* **When I was 9, I was hungry 1 day so I grabbed a package of Doritos**
* The problem was I was feeling a bit lazy & I didn’t want to chew
* But I still wanted the cheesy flavor, so I decided to lick the cheese off every chip, then b/c they were still intact, I put them back in the bag
* Feel free to imagine a bag full of moist, wet from saliva Doritos
* Everything was fine until about an hour later when my mom started freaking out when she decided to bite into a chip & nearly threw up
* She walked into my room w/ the Doritos in 1 hand & a belt in the other - that’s when things got ugly & when I regained consciousness, I never did that again
* **Fast forward 28 years & I grab a bag of Doritos out of our pantry**
* I grab a chip & take a bite & they’re all wet - my then 3 year old daughter Mia had decided to lick all the cheese off the Doritos & put them back in the bag
* What do U do? I laughed - I told Mia that’s a really disgusting thing to do
* Here’s the key - I knew what it’s like to be guilty of the same thing & forgiving her brought me great joy b/c that’s what I would have wanted for myself
* **Being a Christian means that we are sinners, but we have been shown great mercy - if anyone understands mercy, it should be us**
* These religious leaders had no mercy b/c they didn’t see themselves as recipients of mercy - they thought they had earned God’s favor by keeping the law down to the letter & they were missing the point entirely
* And this is what happens when there’s conflict & we lose a relationship for the sake of wanting to be right - we end up losing all the things that matter

**———(v. 9-14)———**

**#2 - Get to the Heart of the Matter**

* **Here’s what I find amazing: the enemies of Jesus knew if Jesus saw that man who was suffering, that Jesus would do something to help Him**
* That’s a pretty awesome thing - when people who dislike U know that U can’t help but do good to people
* But they end up having a similar conversation as they did when they in the field eating the grain - what is lawful to do on the Sabbath?
* But the more I read this, the more I see that there are 2 different conversations happening - the religious leaders are trying to talk to Jesus about technicalities
* And Jesus is trying to talk to them about caring about hurting people
* B/c that’s the heart of the matter here - the Pharisees just don’t care about this hurting man - he’s just a prop in their battle w/ Jesus about who’s right
* The oral tradition taught that U could only give medicine on the Sabbath if it was life or death - anything less than that should be handled the next day
* That’s how the Pharisees got to no healing on the Sabbath
* **So they ask Jesus if it’s lawful to heal on the Sabbath - I’m telling U, if I were Jesus I would have answered differently**
* I would have said, “What days do U guys normally heal on?” - "Oh none. Then why do U feel like U should be involved in this conversation?”
* But Jesus is much kinder & He answers them in a way they should have understood - He answers them w/ a philosophical question
* This is the kind of question that would have required debate from expert rabbis
* **Jesus presents this scenario - a man has 1 sheep & it falls into a ditch**
* Understand, this sheep wasn’t his pet - this was his livelihood - this sheep was how he was going to feed his family - to let this sheep be harmed was going to harm this family & that’s saying nothing of the fact that will harm the animal
* Here’s what I find interesting - after this, the next generation of rabbis began to debate this topic & agreed w/ Jesus not the Pharisees
* They said it was lawful to break the Sabbath to alleviate suffering
* In fact, there’s this saying in Judaism, “My ox fell into a ditch” - that’s code for, “I had to break Sabbath b/c there was an emergency”
* **But here’s the point that meets us where we are we deal w/ conflict - that is, are we concerned w/ being right or fixing the relationship?**
* Here’s the thing we need to learn - not everything is worth fighting over
* Honestly, most things are not worth fighting over - if someone doesn’t agree w/ U, move on - your mission in life isn’t to convince everyone of everything
* Sometimes the most loving thing U can do is just leave it alone
* **About 20 years ago, a couple walk into my office & said they wanted a divorce - don’t worry, I have their permission to tell U this story**
* They had only been married about 6 months - I asked why & they went through a whole list of reasons, but it boils down tot he fact that they can’t get along
* To illustrate, they told me a story about sitting on their porch on a Saturday AM reading the paper when this fly kept buzzing around them
* Then it landed on the arm of her chair, so he rolled up the newspaper to kill it, but she just shooed it away - and that dude lost his mind
* “Didn’t U see how I was trying to kill the fly? Why do U do that? Why are U always killing my dreams?”
* I listened to what could be most fascinating story ever & I said, “Do U know you’re ready to get divorced over a fly? Doesn’t that bug U?”
* Then I got their permission to tell this story b/c I said, “I’m going to be telling this story for the rest of my natural life.”
* This is the problem: many times couples don’t know what battles to fight
* But honestly, U will live a much happier life if U will let the dumb stuff go
* I know people who haven’t spoken to family members in years & they don’t even remember what the fight was about - that’s insane
* So if U want your relationships to change - then some internal change needs to happen by way of wisdom where U decide to let the dumb stuff go
* That doesn’t mean U don’t answer anyone or U let yourself be walked all over
* **People can’t talk to U however they want - but sometimes U just have to let dumb stuff go - b/c it’s not worth the energy to talk w/ crazy people**
* And U have to be wise enough to know the difference between a person who’s going through a tough time & they’re just unloading on the nearest person & someone who’s just toxic & U need to walk away for good
* And the way U know is that the dumb stuff is the exception rather than the rule
* **There’s 2 questions I like to when someone asks me something argumentative: “Will anything I say change your mind?”**
* If they say, “No b/c I’m right.” - then I say, “Then why are we having this conversation? There’s no point b/c U don’t want to exchange ideas.”
* The 2nd question is, “How that working out for U?” - they don’t like that 1 at all
* The reason is, argumentative people are generally miserable & unhappy
* So when I say, “How that worldview/ teaching/ idea/ or philosophy working out for U?” They get upset b/c I’ve called their bluff
* They aren’t happy & the only thing that brings them any joy is seeing other people as miserable as they are

**———(v. 15-21)———**

**#3 - Don’t Give Up on People**

* **There’s 1 final thing I want to show U in this section that’s very subtle, but I believe, very important for the conversation we’re having about conflict**
* Matthew looks at what Jesus is doing in the Galilee area & says, “This is what the prophets were talking about” - this is a quote from Isaiah 42:1-4
* It speaks of how the Messiah won’t be shouting His own name from the rooftops until the right time - which we’ll see in Matthew 21
* But it gives us this description that we can miss if we aren’t careful
* “A bruised reed He will not break & a smoking flax He will not quench”
* Reed in that culture were used for many purposes - 1 of those purposes is that shepherds would turn them into a flute-type instrument
* They’d use it to play soft music that would calm the sheep down
* But if a reed became bruised or bent, it lost its use & would get thrown away
* When a lamp burned down to the end of the wick, it would only smolder and smoke without making any light - it was useless
* Just like the bruised reed, the smoking flax would get thrown out as well
* Here’s what that means - the people who the world would normally give up on, He doesn’t give up on - He transforms them into something wonderful
* “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)
* **There is something that God seems to enjoy - that is, taking the cultural norm & flipping it on its head - never choosing the person you’d expect**
* He never chooses the oldest son as is the order of things
* God works through Abel, not Cain to turn things on its head
* He chooses Isaac, not Ishmael - He chooses Jacob, not Esau
* He works through Judah, not Reuben -He chooses David, not his older brothers
* This reality that Paul lays out has been God’s plan from the beginning so that everyone would know that He’s the 1 doing the work
* **Now let me tell U the danger is just reading this & not really thinking**
* It’s that we start to think that it’s a great thing to be an idiot & somehow God is more glorified the dumber we are - that’s not what the text is saying
* **Some of U know my story - I was on the 5 year plan to graduate HS**
* That’s why I tell people that being a Senior was the best 2 years of my life
* I failed all 4 years of English in High School & had to go to Summer School every year to take English for the 2nd time
* And I remember about 15 years ago when I started writing my 1st book - I didn’t think I could do it & guess what? I was right - I was a grammatical disaster
* So I starting reading books on grammar - now friends, there is no topic more boring than grammar - 1 book I read was called, “The Glamor of Grammar”
* They had 1 chapter just dedicated to the proper use of a semi-colon
* I had never used a semi-colon in my life - in High School I thought a semi-colon was a comma that wouldn’t really commit to its true calling
* But fast forward & I’ve written 7 books & that little book “Begin” is in its 6th printing & I get messages from people all over the world who have read it
* Here’s my point - just b/c U were foolish when God called U doesn’t mean that’s the place where God wants to keep U
* **I had this experience a couple of years ago when I was talking to a friend who I hadn’t spoken to since becoming a Christian**
* After 5 minutes on the phone, he said, “Bob, U sound smarter.”
* I said, “So was I an idiot before?” He didn’t answer the question & changed the subject - I thought, “Thank U Jesus for saving me from being an idiot too!”
* Listen - the apostle Paul was the most educated of any of the apostles
* He was a voracious reader - he understood culture - he had the best teachers
* “Then he said:**‘**I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.’” (Acts 22:2-3)
* But Paul was so zealous for the OT law that he persecuted & imprisoned Christians - until he had an experience w/ Jesus that changed him forever
* And he became exactly the thing that he is talking about - the guy who was the most likely person not to convert to Christianity had become its’ spokesperson
* Christianity flips the script b/c God calls unlikely people to do amazing things
* But He challenges us to become more than we are so we can serve Him to a greater degree & when it happens, God is glorified in our lives
* B/c we look on & say, “If God could do that in their lives, He could do it in mine.”
* B/c all of us are a bruised reed & smoking flax - but then He comes into our lives & He makes us strong in His power & a light that shines His brightness
* And should comfort us b/c if your marriage is a bruised reed right now, there’s hope that it won’t always be that way if we’ll embrace & trust Him & walk w/ Him
* If your career is a smoking flax & the future is a little smokey, then embrace Him & the smoke will begin to clear & He will give U light & vision
* But here’s what He won’t do - give up on U - He’s w/ U & He’s never going leave U or forsake U…