

Jesus Lord Of The Sabbath

Luke 6:1-11

Pastor John Miller

In the Gospel of Luke, we have seen Jesus displaying His authority. We saw His authority over demons, His authority over sickness and disease, His authority over nature, His authority over leprosy, His authority to forgive sins—only God can forgive sins, and Jesus is God—His authority over the traditions of men. Now we will see Jesus' authority over the Sabbath day.

Nothing brought Jesus into more conflict with the religious leaders of His day, the scribes and Pharisees, than the Sabbath day. They thought Jesus was breaking the Sabbath day, so they were going to conspire to kill Jesus. That would ultimately lead to His Crucifixion. But Jesus being Lord over the Sabbath will be revealed in our passage.

There are two episodes in our text. One is the Sabbath day that took place out in the grain fields of wheat or barley. The other took place in a synagogue where Jesus healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath day.

The first episode is in the grain fields, in Luke 6:1-5. "Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. And some of the Pharisees said to them, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?' But Jesus answering them said, 'Have you not even read this...' or 'Don't you read your Bibles?!' "...what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he went into the house of God..." referring to the tabernacle before the Temple was built "...took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" David ate showbread, which is against the law of God to do. But God was concerned about their need for food. Now Jesus said this, which is the key. "And He said to them, 'The Son of Man...' which is a title for Messiah, referring to Himself "...is also Lord of the Sabbath.'"

So Jesus is saying that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and as such, He has the authority to interpret it, explain it and apply it as it was intended to be applied.

Now in verses 1-2, we see the setting of this conflict over the Sabbath day. "Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first." In a modern translation, it might just say, "the Sabbath." That's probably the most accurate way to translate that statement. Some feel it might refer to the second Sabbath after Passover. There were seven Sabbaths between Passover and Pentecost. So this could be a reference to the second Sabbath after Passover. The point is that this occurred on the Sabbath day.

The disciples went into the wheat fields and they plucked or pulled off the wheat, and they rubbed the wheat between their hands. When the Pharisees saw that, they said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?"

This story is also recorded in Matthew 12 and in Mark 2-3. It gives us a little bit more information than what Luke has about the grain fields and what happened in the synagogue.

What was the big deal? In Deuteronomy 23, God had made provision for the poor. They could go into the farmers' fields. They could eat the grain, grapes or fruit, as long as they didn't harvest it or use a sickle. They couldn't use a sickle for the wheat or a basket to fill with food. They could only go into the field, walk through the field and eat as much as they wanted and then go home. That's pretty cool! So God is concerned for the poor.

This also indicates that Jesus and His disciples were poor. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). And in our text, the disciples and Jesus had nowhere to eat. There were no restaurants around. So they went into the field and were just eating the grain because they were hungry.

What they were doing was grabbing the head of the grain, the wheat, rubbing it in their hands to separate the wheat from the chaff, blow the chaff away and put the wheat in their mouths and eat it. It was kind of like granola. That was not against God's law in Deuteronomy 23.

But what the Pharisees said was that when the disciples and Jesus picked the grain, it was harvesting, which was against the Sabbath law; when they rubbed the grain, they were threshing, which was also against the law; when they blew on the chaff, that was winnowing, which was against the law; and then when they ate it, that was preparing a meal, which was against the law. They were working on the Sabbath.

My question was, "What were the Pharisees, the religious leaders, doing in the grain fields in the first place?" They were spying on those who were eating the grain. They were "sin sniffing and flesh finding." And what happens to a legalist is that they become critical, judgmental and fault-finding toward others. They look down on others who don't keep their standards of righteousness. So be careful.

They showed no mercy to those who were in need; the disciples were hungry and needed to eat. God cares about our needs. When you're hungry, God cares about that. And getting hungry is a God-given desire. Thank God for an appetite! Thank God for food!

So the problem wasn't just that the disciples were eating food; according to the legalistic standards of the scribes and Pharisees, they were harvesting, threshing, winnowing and preparing a meal on the Sabbath day.

Now what did Jesus do? Jesus gave the Pharisees a lesson, in verses 3-5, which was a response to their criticism in verse 2, of, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" Verse 3, "But Jesus answering them said, 'Have you not even read this...?'" One of our biggest problems is that we don't read the Bible.

People come to me with questions, which is great, but most of the answers are in the Bible. "The B-i-b-l-e; yes, that's the book for me." So if you have a question, look it up in the Bible,

read the Word of God! He has “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). So Jesus said to these “religious leaders” that their problem was that they didn’t read the Bible!

In Matthew 19:3-6, the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Then Jesus answered them and said, “Have you not read...?” The problem was they hadn’t read the Bible. They didn’t know the Scriptures. Jesus always went back to the Scriptures. He took them back to Genesis and said, “He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” So God, in His Word, describes what marriage is.

Now Jesus first gives the Pharisees a lesson from David, who at the time was fleeing from Saul. Jesus said, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him...?” David’s men were with him, and he was not yet king of Israel. This story is found in 1 Samuel 21. “...how he went into the house of God...” which was the tabernacle. It was the tent in the Old Testament where God’s presence dwelt. They had the Holy of Holies and the outer court. It was where you would approach God. So David and his men went into the tabernacle and “...took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?”

What is the showbread? When you entered into the holy place—and only the priest could go in there—on the right-hand side of that room, there was the golden table with 12 loaves of bread on it, representing the 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus, the Bread of Life. Every Sabbath or Shabbat, the old bread would be taken out, and the priests could eat it. Then they would replace it with fresh bread.

So David got this bread that was set apart for a specific purpose. It was only the priests who could eat that bread. Yet God cared more about the human needs of David and his men than He did this regulation, rule or law. That says something about God: He cares about our needs. And it was necessary that David and his men would eat this bread, because it was the only food around. David would have starved with his men if they had not eaten this bread that God provided.

The message is that God is more interested in meeting human needs than He is in protecting rules, rites and rituals. We become so locked in to our rules that we don’t show love and mercy to others.

Years ago I was in my office at home working on a Saturday, as I often do, on my sermon. The sermon was going to be on the love of God. Then the door flew open, and my three daughters ran in saying, “Dad, Dad, Dad!” They had something they wanted to tell me, but I reacted in anger toward them. “Get outta here! Leave me alone! Shut the door!” I yelled at them, “I’m trying to put a sermon together on the love of God!” I slammed the door and went back to my

love-of-God sermon. Then I thought, How do I do this?! I totally didn't show God's love to my girls! So I had to stop what I was doing, go to them and ask them to forgive me. They forgave me, we prayed and talked about it. What a blessing they were!

How do we do things like that when we should be showing God's love? Our Christianity should make us more compassionate and loving toward others.

Now it's not in our Luke text, but in Matthew 12:5, Jesus said, "Have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" What is He saying? He's saying that on the Sabbath day, the priests go into the temple and do their work. They fill the oil, they light the candles, they change the bread, they offer the sacrifices. They work on the Sabbath day, but they aren't held responsible for breaking the Sabbath.

Next, Jesus gives a lesson from a prophet. In Matthew 12:7, Jesus is quoting Hosea 6:6. He said, "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." So Jesus calls His disciples "guiltless" and says that what God wants is for us to show mercy and not to be legalistic and not to condemn the guiltless.

And lastly, in Luke 6:5, Jesus gives a lesson about His own, true identity. "And He said to them, 'The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.'" The term "Son of Man" is a Messianic title. I believe that it means not only His humanity—that Messiah is a man—but it also conveys His deity. When you read the descriptions in Ezekiel and Daniel of "the Son of Man," He is often called "the Ancient of Days." So the Messiah, who is God, is Lord of the Sabbath day.

What does that mean? It means that the Sabbath is a divine institution; it's the fourth Commandment in the Decalogue. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God (Exodus 20:8-10). On the seventh day, God rested. Not because He was tired. He stopped to show us we needed a day of rest. We need rest; not God. And this was a Commandment that God gave Israel, not the church. So the Commandment is to be a blessing to us; not a burden.

And Jesus, being Lord of the Sabbath, doesn't mean He has a right to break it. Jesus never violated God's law. Don't ever read this passage, and the one we have next, and conclude that Jesus broke the Sabbath. He did not. He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

What Jesus was saying was that He was the authoritative interpreter of the law. It's a divine institution, and He is the one who can interpret it, because He is God in flesh. So Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

There are a couple of application points here. The religious legalists became judgmental and fault-finding. This is what happens when we become legalistic. When we put all the emphasis on rules and regulations, rather than on our relationship to God and being filled with God's love, grace and mercy toward others, we become critical, judgmental and censorious in our attitude.

In Matthew 7:1, Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged." The "Judge not" means "Don't be critical, don't be judgmental, don't be fault-finding, don't be censorious in your attitude toward others." He's not saying we shouldn't be discerning of what is right and what is wrong. Sometimes you see someone doing something wrong, and you challenge them based on Scripture. They say, "Well, don't judge me!"

Then I say, "I'm not judging you; I'm just telling you that God says in His Word what you are doing is wrong."

"No; you're judging me!"

"Well, you're judging me by saying I'm judging you." See how stupid that its?

Jesus isn't telling us that we should not make judgments about moral issues; He's saying not to be critical of others. Don't be fault-finding. "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5). Jesus said that these legalists "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24). They're worried about swallowing a gnat, yet they swallow a camel! Jesus uses humor here. So we need to be careful not to become critical and fault-finding of others.

Also, must we keep the Sabbath today? Not in a legalistic sense. In Colossian 2:16, Paul said, "Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." Don't let anyone tell you that you have to worship on Saturdays.

Do you think God looks at the calendar when we worship? No. The Sabbath is not repeated in the New Testament for the church to keep. Does that mean we break it? No. But if we want to transfer Sabbath Saturday to Sunday and make Sunday a law, then you can't smile, you can't have any fun; it's the Lord's Day, be miserable.

I had a friend who had young children, and he was so hung up on the Sabbath that he would come to church, go home from church, and his kids had to literally sit in the house and not do anything all day, because it's "the Lord's Day"; be miserable. That's silly. The Sabbath was made for man's blessing and benefit.

But the Pharisees turned it around and made man for the Sabbath. But that's not God's heart. That's not God's purpose or plan.

So the New Testament does not tell us we must worship on Saturday or the Sabbath. Sunday was the Lord's Day when He rose from the dead, the first day of the week. That's why Christians gather on Sunday. But it's not a legalistic, binding thing at all.

The second story in our text is in verses 6-11. We move from the fields of grain to the synagogue. "Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered." Dr. Luke alone describes this man who had a withered, crippled, right hand. "So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him

closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath....” They were spying on Jesus. “...that they might find an accusation against Him.” They weren’t concerned about the man being healed. They weren’t praying that they hoped Jesus would heal this man. No; they were going to see if Jesus healed on the Sabbath, which was against their law.

Verse 8, “But He knew their thoughts and said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Arise and stand here.’” He put the man in the middle of the synagogue. “And he arose and stood. Then Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?’ And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. But they were filled with rage...” or “flipping out” and losing their minds over this “...and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.” And another Gospel says, “...how they might kill Him.”

Now some believe—but it’s just speculation—that the Pharisees planted the man with the withered hand here, knowing that Jesus, with His compassion, mercy and love, would heal this man in need on the Sabbath. Whenever Jesus was in the presence of human need, He met that need. It’s the same today; He cares about our needs. He promised to provide all of our needs. This man needed a healing, so Jesus would heal him. So the Pharisees are spying on Jesus to see what would happen.

Verse 8 says that “He knew their thoughts....” And today He still knows our thoughts. “...and said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Arise and stand here.’” Jesus could have healed this man after the synagogue service was over in secret. That’s what I would have done.

But Jesus was angry. The other Gospels tell us that Jesus looked at them with a gaze of knowing their thoughts. Mark 3:5 says, “He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts....”

Can you imagine Jesus looking angrily at you? “Wow. I’m so busted right now!”

This is called “righteous indignation.” The Bible says, “Be angry and do not sin” (Psalm 4:4). We get angry and sin. But we can have a righteous anger that is not for selfish reasons but for the glory of God and for righteous reasons. Or we can have a self-centered anger that causes us to sin. But Jesus angrily looks at them, being grieved.

Now I want to look at verse 9. Jesus asked, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?” How could you answer this rhetorical question? “No; it’s not lawful to do good”? No. The answer is, “You can’t do evil.” Obviously they couldn’t answer the question. Do we save life or destroy it?

What Jesus is saying here in verse 9 is that good omitted is evil committed. There is a sin of omission. It means that to know to do good and not do it is a sin. “I’ll just sit here and do nothing. I won’t speak up. I won’t relieve the suffering. I won’t protect the weak and innocent.”

Right now I'm thinking about the heinous, horrible sin of our nation: abortion. It's going to be one of the hottest topics of the election in the fall. Abortion is the killing of a human being from the moment of conception. And we say, "Well, I won't say anything. I won't stand for the right-to-life. I won't defend the weak or the helpless. I'm a Christian, but I don't want to get involved. I don't want to upset people. I don't want to lose my job. I don't want to take a stand." Good omitted is evil committed.

Remember the two religious guys in the story of the good Samaritan? The first two guys found the man beaten, bloodied and robbed on the road. They went "Ooh!" They pulled their robes up around them, so they wouldn't be defiled. "I'm on the way to church right now; I can't help this guy! I'm going to worship God!" So they passed right by him and did nothing. It was the good Samaritan who came by and rolled up his sleeves, put the man on his donkey, poured oil on his wounds, took him to the inn and paid for his care.

Jesus is saying that there is no third option here. You're either doing good or you're doing evil. If you're not doing good, then you're doing evil. There is no other option. We need to take a stand for what is right and be obedient to God.

Verse 10, "And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'" Now the man's hand was crippled, so how was he to stretch it forth? His right hand probably was all crippled up against his side. He could have thought, What?! Are you harassing me?! My hand is crippled! But believing what Jesus said and taking a step of faith, "He did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other." In faith as he opened his hand, it was restored. That is awesome!

This is a classic example in the Bible that what God commands, God enables. If God says, "Stretch out your hand," you can stretch out your hand.

Another example is where God says, "Husbands, love your wives" (Colossians 3:19) Guys, you can love your wives. You may say, "Well, that was written before my wife was born. If my wife had been around, Paul would never have said that!" The Bible also says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands" (Colossians 3:18). You may say, "Oh, not to my husband! Have you seen him? He's so messed up! Maybe that one over there, but not mine!"

What God commands us to do, God enables us to do. Don't tell me you can't love your wife as Christ loves the church! If God tells you to "stretch out your hand," then stretch out your hand! Take a step of faith and obedience and do what God says, and you'll find that the ability comes. If God says to "submit to your own husband," He'll give you that ability. That's God's design for marriage. Whatever God commands, God enables us to do.

Verse 10 says, "When He had looked around at them all..." But Mark's Gospel says, "He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts..." It grieved the heart of God.

Now wouldn't you expect, after the healing in verse 10, that verse 11 would say, "And they all

began to be filled with praise and give glory to God for the miracle that He wrought"? I would think that's what the verse would say. But instead, it says, "They were filled with rage." In the Greek, that word "rage" means that they were "out of their minds." We use the words "They flipped out in anger." And verse 11 says that they "discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."

The Pharisees were utterly lost. How do we know? They were utterly unmerciful. Show me a person who has no mercy, no compassion, no care for other people, and I'll show you a person who probably isn't a real Christian. They may never have been born again. Mercy received becomes mercy dispensed. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Having received mercy, we can then share mercy. Having been forgiven by God, having experienced the compassion and love of God, how can I not then turn to others and be compassionate, merciful, kind and loving? True faith produces mercy.

If God forgave you, shouldn't you forgive others? If God's been merciful to you—and He has—shouldn't you be merciful to others? If God has been gracious to you, how can you be ungracious to others? If God has been kind to you, how can you be unkind to others?

So these "religious leaders" put all the emphasis on rules. They didn't really care about people. No matter how "religious" you are, if you don't have love, mercy and compassion toward others, your "Christianity" is not authentic and genuine.

Notice also that the man was made whole on the Sabbath day, because "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). It was to be a blessing; not a burden.

What a contrast we have here. The legalists were interested only in precepts; Jesus was interested in people. The legalists used people for selfish gain; Jesus served people and gave up His rights for others. The legalists shut up the kingdom of God for others by their rules; Jesus opened up the kingdom of God by exposing and stripping away man-made rules. The legalists put people under bondage; Jesus "set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). So we aren't to be legalists.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath as well as Lord of our lives. So He can interpret the Sabbath as He sees fit, and we should be obedient to Jesus. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He was speaking to people who were under the burden of the legalists. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Christianity is releasing us from the burdens; not putting us under bondage. So we don't want to walk in legalism. And we don't want to live in license, which is disregard of God's law. We want to walk "in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

The book of Hebrews says that Christ is our Sabbath. When we believe in Jesus, we enter into

His rest (Hebrews 4:3). That is His finished work on the Cross. Just before Jesus died on the Cross, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and He paid for our sins in full. So we don't work our souls in an attempt to save ourselves. We just need to reach out our empty hands and receive the free gift of eternal life by faith.