

The Folly of Religion

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Date: 07 November 2010

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[0 : 00] We're making our way through Luke chapter 4 to 6 at the moment. This is our series on Luke chapter 4 to 6. And one of the themes that's really been emerging, if you've been around or if you've read through it before, is that Jesus just keeps butting heads with the religious authorities of the day.

The scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, he keeps butting heads with them. And it's really around their understanding of how to be righteous or what makes someone righteous. What is it to have faith in God?

Who's in and who's out? We saw last week that they disagreed with Jesus about who he should have been having dinner with. He thought that it was a good idea to have dinner with tax collectors and sinners and prostitutes and the scum of the world.

And they thought he should be having dinner with the religious guys. And as you know, in the end, it's the religious guys that killed Jesus. So they've been on a collision course all through Luke.

And we're going to see them butting heads again today. And it's going to be around the issue of the Sabbath. That's the battleground that they're facing each other on today is this issue of the Sabbath.

[1 : 03] And what you'll see if you read through the Gospels is that, and even if you just look around today at the religious people of today, is that religious people love to taste something that God has given us which is good and add so many rules and regulations to it that it suddenly becomes something very tedious and oppressive and bad.

And so, for example, I can think of an illustration from my own life. So I grew up with a younger brother and an older brother, three brothers. We had a big property.

We had a creek. We had trees to climb. We had sheds. We had snakes. We had everything that little kids would want to have. And we had a really good sense of competition and generally just enjoyed beating each other up.

And so it was fun growing up for me. And what we used to do, we didn't have video games. Oh, I'm that old. We did eventually get an Atari 2600.

Is that right? All right. But long before then, we had our own games. We made our own fun back in my day. So what we used to do was go down to the back of our property and just make up games.

[2 : 11] And this is what invariably happened. We would come up very quickly with a very good idea for a game. For example, first one to hit the cow with a rock wins.

Right? So not complex. Just good, wholesome fun. But what would happen, and you know this if you've ever made up a game with brothers and sisters, pretty soon you get bored of that game.

And so what we used to do was just add rules to the original good game and just add rules like now you've got to do it on one leg and you've got to close one eye or whatever.

Say the alphabet backwards while you did it. And what ended up happening every time was that a really good, simple game became really tedious and hard and boring.

And really that's what the Jews of Jesus' day had done with the law that God had given His people that was good and life-giving. And they had added so many rules and regulations to it that it was just oppressive and impossible.

[3 : 12] Just made people feel guilty and depressed. And so that's what we see with the Sabbath. It was a good idea. Am I right? Can I get an amen on that? The Sabbath is a good idea. Right?

So if you go back to Genesis chapter 2, God creates heaven and the earth in six days and on the seventh day He rested. And then He says when He gives the law to His people, He says, just like what I did, you should work for six days and take the seventh day off.

That'll be a Sabbath. Don't do any work. Just relax. Kick back. Spend time with the family. Worship. Reflect. That's a good idea. I'm all for that. I would have pushed for two and we've kind of done that in our culture with our weekend.

But one day off a week is a good idea. And so what the religious people of Jesus' day had done had taken a good idea and had added an enormous amount of regulations and rules to it to the point where it became oppressive and cruel, as we'll see.

So that sets the scene for tonight. If you turn with me to chapter 6, we'll pick it up at verse 1. I'm just going to go through it with you tonight.

[4 : 22] So Luke writes, One Sabbath while Jesus was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

So this is the situation. Jesus with his disciples. Back in those days, to be a disciple was to be more than a student. It's not a student-teacher relationship that happens within boundaries of time and place.

But to be a disciple would mean that you would follow your teacher around. So the disciples literally lived with Jesus almost 24 hours a day, just following in his footsteps. This is a great way to learn.

This is how I learn. I learn by doing things on the job, by imitating, by doing rather than hearing. And this is the way I reckon we should be learning today.

Anyway, this is what they did back in the day. Jesus would walk around, he would teach, he would do, and his disciples would imitate him. So that's what they're doing here. They're walking through a field, Jesus is teaching, and they're following him around.

[5 : 27] And as they go, they start picking off some grain and eating it, because they're hungry. And then all of a sudden, these Pharisees pop up. Where are they?

They're in a field. And the Pharisees have popped up in the middle of this field to tell them off. This is what religious people do.

They just look and wait and watch and spy on people, waiting for them to screw up so that they can jump and pounce on them. We're going to see this in the next story as well.

Pharisees, following Jesus around, trying to catch him out. I had a teacher at high school who was like this. I won't say his name, but he was a former ASIO agent. He had cameras in my locker.

And one time, for example, I got my license in March of my year 12 year. Parents, don't ever let your kids do this. But I had it for the whole year. It was good for me, because I had to travel an hour to get to school.

[6 : 29] But I would generally get there, pick up my mates, and leave. And one day, we'd done this, and I was down an alley, a back alley, nowhere near a main road, about four suburbs over from the school.

And we were kicking back, listening to music, doing whatever, and I looked in my rear view mirror, and this guy was standing at the end of the alleyway. Not kidding. I don't know how he did it to this day, but he had some kind of mind control that made me fess up to everything that I ever did wrong. And this is what the Pharisees are like. They just pop up wherever Jesus goes, looking to get him into trouble, to give him a detention, to take away his license.

And so, this is what they were like. Jesus was doing nothing wrong. His disciples were doing nothing wrong, according to the Old Testament law. So, Deuteronomy 23, I think it's verse 20, talks about a provision for people, as they travel through farmlands, to be gleaning the grain.

So, they could walk through someone's field, and as long as they didn't take out, like a scythe, or a harvester, or something, as long as they didn't clean the guy out, they could take some grain from him, and, and, you know, have a bit of lunch, as they go.

[7 : 45] It was God's provision for people, as they traveled through fields. So, they're not doing anything wrong, according to, uh, Old Testament law, but they are, defying a few laws, that the Pharisees, that the scribes, had made up, since God's law was given.

So, you've got the Mishnah, which is a, a book of law, that the Jews had developed, and in that, there is 39, rules and regulations, pertaining to what you can, and can't do on the Sabbath.

And each has about, six subsections. So, this is how detailed, they got with their extra rules. You can see how oppressive, this, this would be, trying to remember, all those rules and regulations, so you don't get busted, by these guys.

And so, they turn up, and they've got a problem, with, with Jesus' disciples, because, according to their law, they have been, reaping, by picking grain, reaping, they've been threshing, by rubbing it together, in their hands, that's another one.

They are also winnowing, by separating the, the wheat from the chaff, that's three, and fourth, they were preparing food, on the Sabbath, by, doing all of that.

[8 : 53] They were preparing themselves, a meal apparently. So, according to their strict, extra biblical rules, Jesus got four out of four. So, they're angry, at him, for breaking their laws, on the Sabbath.

This is what religious people do, they make up extra rules, extra regulations, and then they bust you, for stepping over the line. Let's see what Jesus' response is, verse three. Jesus answered, have you not read, what David did, when he and his companions, were hungry?

He entered the house of God, and took, and ate the bread, of the presence, which it is not lawful, for any, but the priests to eat, and gave some, to his companions. Won't go into the whole story, but you can look it up, if you like.

It's in 1 Samuel 21, 1 to 6, and it's where, David, who was going to be the king, not yet king, but set apart by God, to be king, he's fleeing from the king, King Saul, who's taken to, throwing spears at him, and he's run with his men, away from him, and he's, during the process of running away, these guys are getting hungry, they're on the run, from the authorities, and so he goes, into the tabernacle, and they end up eating, five loaves, that they're not supposed to eat, they're just for the priests, alright, so these are special loaves of bread, that are being consecrated, by the priests, and he eats them, and thereby, really breaks a law, of the Old Testament, and so Jesus, gives them this example, because David, was not condemned, for breaking that law, and Jesus, as so often he does, throws a question, back to the Pharisees, and sees what their response, will be, see Jesus, could have, appealed to the fact, that, the law they were breaking, wasn't even God's law, it was just the, particulars, of their extraneous laws, that they were breaking, but instead, he throws back, a bit of scripture at them, and says, what are you going to do, with this, notice he doesn't say, the law doesn't apply, anymore, remember last week, we talked about, new wine, and old wine, and he's not saying, no, the laws, doesn't apply, because I'm here, he doesn't say, oh the Sabbath, is Old Testament, we're in the New Testament now, in fact he goes on, to say in the next verse, I am Lord of the Sabbath, he's not discarding, the law, but what he's saying, is this, using David's story, as an analogy, for his, remember, David, is with his companions, and they're in need, of food, Jesus, is with his companions, and they're in need, of food, and what he's saying, is, compassion, trumps, legalism, love, trumps law, especially, barren, laws, that are just there, to oppress people, if someone's hungry, you need to feed them, don't be bound, to laws, and regulations, when it's clear, what the godly thing, is to do, love, trumps law, human need, can't be subjected, to barren laws, and regulations, but he doesn't stop there, he doesn't just stop, at human need, he goes on, verse 5, he says, then he said to them, the son of man, is lord of the sabbath, he doesn't just stop, at saying that, compassion, trumps law, he goes on to say, that he is, the lord of the law, he says, you know about, god's word, but I'm the son of god, it is my word,

[12 : 40] I'm the lord, of the sabbath, it's an astounding claim, he's basically saying, I am god, I wrote that thing, I wrote the ten commandments, on the clay tablets, I'm lord of the sabbath, I'll determine, what the law says, so the story goes on, and we skip ahead to, it doesn't say when, this next story happened, but it was on another sabbath, verse 6, on another sabbath, he entered the synagogue, and taught, and there was a man there, whose right hand was withered, the scribes, and the Pharisees, watched him, to see whether he would cure, on the sabbath, so that they might find, an accusation against him, so you got this man, he's sitting in church, his right hand is just, completely withered, like a dried up stick, law of averages says, that this guy is probably, right handed, and so there goes, his entire livelihood, he can't work, he can't feed his family, if he has one, probably can't feed himself, he can't do anything, in that agrarian society, he's completely disabled, there's no center link, there's no social security, and so he's in church that day, to hear Jesus preach, and instead, of being there, to see if God, would do an incredible work, in this man's life, what are the religious guys doing, instead of watching, to see if God, is going to do a miracle, and save this guy's life, what are they doing, the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would cure, on the Sabbath, this is what religious people do, they take good things, great things, and turn them into opportunities, to accuse people, it's the same thing today, you get religious people, in churches, and right throughout the sermon, they'll be sitting there, just waiting, waiting for one

wrong word, they'll be there singing, and looking at every word, to see if there's one, missing piece of theology, it's religion, it's nitpicking, theological nitpicks, just waste of time, people, people that come along, to churches like ours, they get attracted, to churches like ours, because we're known, as the Bible teaching church, and so they want to come here, and see if they can take on, even the people, who claim to be Bible teachers, they want to sit there, and wait for the wrong sentence, instead of sitting in church, and waiting to see, what miracle God might do, in the heart of someone, to bring them to faith, instead of going to a prayer meeting, and seeing if someone, might get healed, they sit, and they wait, just waiting to pounce, nitpickers, just a waste of my time, they're the first ones, to write the email, the first ones, to make the phone call, the first one, waiting to get you, as you come down, from the pulpit, just to pick you up, on that mispronounced word, or that wrong bit of theology, or whatever, nitpickers, and this is what they're doing here, they're just waiting, just waiting, for an opportunity, to jump on Jesus, you know what,

I caught myself doing this last week, if you didn't see me last week, I spent the weekend, visiting other churches, and I deliberately went to churches, that are really different from ours, see if they're doing things, that we could do better here, and you know what I did, I went to, a church, I won't tell you which one it was, but I thought, these guys are going to be saying things, from the pulpit, that I'm not going to agree with, and so I found myself, sitting there, and instead of taking in a message, that would have blessed me, a biblical message, that would have taught me, something about God, and something about Christ, I just sat there, waiting for them to say the wrong thing, that was my major concern, you might be like this yourself, and you need to repent, like I need to repent, because I think Jesus hates that, hates that tendency in us, let's keep going, verse 8, he says, even though he knew, what they were thinking, remember in chapter 2,

Jesus, the prophet, Ananias, might have got it wrong there, you'll tell me, if you're here tonight, and you're a nitpicker, he prophesied over Mary, at the temple, and said, you know, this child, he's going to cause the downfall, of those who are great, he's going to expose, the secret thoughts of men, this is what Jesus is doing here, he knows what they're thinking, he knows that the Pharisees, are just waiting to pounce on him, but despite that, even though he knew, what they were thinking, he said to the man, who had the withered hand, come and stand here, Jesus, in the prominent place, at the front of the temple, teaching, says to the guy, with the withered hand, come and stand here, and you can imagine, what the guy's thinking, is he going to embarrass me, is he going to expose, this disability, that I have, many in the day, would have presumed, that he was some kind of sinner, to be afflicted like this, remember my second day, of primary school, great prep,

I had this buddy named Trevor, and me and Trevor, were sitting together, in the class, and I looked over, and I saw a big wet patch, around Trevor, he'd wet his pants, so I put my hand up, trying to be helpful, and just said, excuse me, Trevor has wet his pants, you know what the teacher did, said Trevor, come up and stand up the front here, and show everyone, what you've done, exposed him, made fun of him, embarrassed him, I wonder if that's what this guy, is thinking, as Jesus says, come and stand here, at the front, but it's not to expose him, it's not to embarrass him, let's keep going, he said, he got up, and stood there, he went ahead, in faith, verse 9, and Jesus said to him, to them, to the Pharisees, to the religious guys, to the scribes, I ask you, is it lawful to do good, or to do harm, on the Sabbath, to save life, or to destroy it, this is the key question, in both the stories tonight, what's the right thing to do, is it right to do good, is it right to have compassion, is it right to love people, or is it right to destroy, all of that, for the sake of, barren legalism, it's a rhetorical question, it's a rebuke, he doesn't wait for an answer, if he had waited for an answer, you know what they would have said, they would have said, no it's not lawful, because in the law, you could only heal someone, on the Sabbath, if it was a life threatening situation, if someone was having a baby, if someone was dying, then you could heal them, but otherwise you have to wait, to the next day,

Jesus isn't waiting, the guy had a withered hand, he's not going to die, anytime soon, he probably was born like that, but he has compassion on him, he loves him, he doesn't want the pain, to go on anymore, he doesn't want the disability, to be there another minute, he doesn't want this guy, to go around feeling depressed, and rejected, for any more time, than is necessary, and so, verse 10, after looking around, at all of them, he said to him, stretch out your hand, stretch out your hand, coming from anyone else, it might have been another jibe, it might have been another joke, you know, like give us a wave buddy, or, not from Jesus, stretch out your hand, and what does the guy do, he acts in faith, he believes, that Jesus can heal him, he believes, that Jesus is who he says he

is, and so, as an act of faith, he stretches out his hand, and he's healed, he did so, and his hand was restored, he's had faith in Jesus, he believes in Jesus, he puts his hope in Jesus, and he finds restoration, and healing, not just for his hand, but for his soul, he's saved, now what's the response, from the religious guys, what's the response, from the church boys, who are there, week in and week out, what's the response, from the nitpickers, verse 11, but they, the scribes, the Pharisees, they were filled, with fury, and discussed, with one another, what they might do to Jesus, why are they filled, with fury, do you notice this, in the reading, what's annoyed them so much, it's not, that he's broken the Sabbath, that's what they were worried about, that Jesus was going to break the Sabbath, he hasn't broken the Sabbath, all he did was speak, he didn't bandage the guy, he didn't cut anything out, he didn't do any kind of healing, apart from speaking, you can speak on the Sabbath, he didn't break the Sabbath, why are they so annoyed, they're annoyed for two reasons, number one,

[22 : 46] God isn't meant to heal people, on the Sabbath, God is meant to obey their rules, they've got God in this box, of their rules and regulations, and he's meant to be obedient to them, but instead, he heals, he gives life, he has compassion, he restores, number two, they're angry, because Jesus' claim, has been validated, he calls himself, the Lord of the Sabbath, and this has proved it, beyond all shadow of a doubt, he speaks, and the lame are healed, he is the Lord of the Sabbath, he is the son of David, he is the son of man, he is the son of God, so when it comes to us, what about us, who are we, are we the guy, with the shriveled right hand, who comes to church, expecting, great things from God, are we like the religious hypocrites, who rely on our own standing, and our own good works, and our own understanding of God, to make ourselves feel good, it's just hypocrisy, remember in Matthew,

I think it's 23, verse 23, there's a whole section on, Jesus denouncing the scribes, and the Pharisees, and the religious guys of the day, but my favourite bit is verse 23 and 24, he says, woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, they tithe out of their spice rack, that's how religious they are, and have neglected, the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith, in these things, you ought to have practised, without neglecting the others, you blind guides, you strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel, the gnat pickers, this is what religious people do, they pick out gnats, and swallow camels, they worry about, right sentence construction, and forget about justice, and mercy, and compassion, and love, they'll spend their whole life, going to sermon after sermon, and reading theology, and learning Greek, and Hebrew, and they'll never once, give to the poor, you know the worst guys, I'm just going to keep ranting for a bit, because I'm on a lot of antihistamine, all right, the worst, are these young, guys, mainly young men, who read 200 blogs a week, have got their theological dictionaries, on their desk, maybe you've gone to Bible college, once or twice, maybe you listen to 15 sermons a week, and they do nothing, this is how I respond to these guys, because I hear from them all the time, about how I've got this or that wrong, and it's normally by email, anonymously, this is what I say, when's the last time, that you did one good thing for someone, that's normally the response, Jesus says, you think you're righteous, you think you know some things about God, show me what you've done, show me where you've shown compassion, show me one person that you've loved, show me one person that you've given a cup of water to, because if you do that, it's as if you're doing it for me, that's what Jesus says, so if you have a tendency like me, like I've confessed to you, to sit in a sermon, to sit in a church service, to sit in a conversation, and wait to pounce on the next wrong word, that someone says, the next bit of bad theology, you need to repent, don't be like scribes, don't be like Pharisees,

Jesus didn't really get along with them, so stay away from trying to pounce on every error, this is another one, stop doubting the work that God can do, through people who aren't like you, people who go to a different church to you, with a different style, people who have different theology, people who look different, speak different, maybe people who are young, maybe people who are old, maybe people who have tattoos, or blue hair, or just go to that, you know, that Pentecostal church down the road, stop doubting that God can do great things, through them, that's our tendency, we get in our team, in our denomination, behind our fence, and we think that God can't work anywhere else, we don't want to be like that, God can work through different kinds of people to us, and finally, don't doubt, and this is really from last week, but I want to say it this week as well, don't doubt, that God can save sinful people, most of us here, probably grown up going to church, we're good church boys and girls, and never really did anything that wrong, and so we look down on

the sinners, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the drug addicts, and we doubt whether God can save them, we doubt really whether we want God to save them, don't doubt that, if you've got a brother or a sister, son or daughter, who's really rebellious, and you think that God could never save someone like them, don't doubt that, we've seen that really the people that Jesus wants to hang out with, are those kind of people, so that's a pretty heavy message, and it comes straight from Jesus lives,

I reckon that's the message that's on Jesus heart, in their day it was scribes, it was Pharisees, it was tax collectors, in our days it's well educated, western, Bible appreciating, sermon loving, evangelical Christians like most of us, we're the ones who are prone, to behave like they did, I want to say don't do it, let's take some time to repent of that now, if you don't need to repent of that, that's fine, you've probably got some other stuff, you need to talk to God about, but I want to pray on behalf of us, so if you are feeling convicted by that message, and by Jesus words, I'd like you to in faith, add your prayers to mine, as I pray for us, let's pray, that Him, and Hé Zouca, for all thekap Projekt, to manifest reasons you guys áreações,

[30 : 31] I want to pray for the message that God is a blessing, and Sina days to offer you, that God is unfortunately made known for the suffering of them, so if you're gonna thrive in your Jiang,