

Luke 6:1-11 - An Invitation to Better Rest

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Date: 22 January 2017

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We are back in our study of Luke. So if you have Bibles with you, you can put them to Luke 6, beginning of verse 1. If you don't, you can follow along on the screen up here behind me. But I'm going to read Luke 6, verses 1 down through verse 11. So here now, God's inspired word of truth.

On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry?

[1 : 15] He and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any, but the priest who eats, and also gave it to those who were with him?

Let's pray together. Father, I thank you for Christian, who knows how to work all this stuff, that enables your word to be heard, and for us to engage with you.

And that's what we want now in this time. We want to engage with you. We want you to be speaking to us. And so we thank you for the opportunity, but we really need your spirit to come and be the one who speaks.

So would you send your spirit to speak to our hearts? And Father, use my words, which are at best weak.

Use them that we might know you more. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay.

[2 : 27] It's been a while since we've been in Luke, so let's kind of step back a little bit and get caught up where we are. But also, we need to see that context, to see this growing conflict that is coming about.

You know, and Jesus begins his ministry there in Luke 4, and everything seems to be going well, well, except they wanted to kill him after his first sermon, but that beside.

Things are going well, but one of the things that Luke says down there is that word began to spread. Jesus, you know, after this point, he goes and heals a man, or he casts a demon out of this man, and people marveled, and they were amazed.

But he did it on a Sabbath. And so, when word begins to spread all over about this Jesus, yes, they were amazed. He was casting out demons.

But he did it on a Sabbath. And so, as we go on, these reports continue to spread. He is doing remarkable things. He's healing and doing all of these things.

[3 : 45] And down in Luke 5, you see that the word about him is spreading even broader. It's going farther and farther. And what you begin to see there in Luke 5 is that as the crowds build, this other group of people starts showing up pretty regularly.

So, when he's now confined in this house, he's got a whole crowd of people. When they bring the paralytic in and lower him down through the roof, sitting there in the midst of this crowd are now the Pharisees.

the Jewish authorities. Because they have heard all of these things about Jesus. And so, they're listening and they're watching.

And they're getting disturbed. Their blood pressure is going up. And so, as we continue to trace through Luke 5, you begin to see that they're not just listening anymore.

They're actually asking questions. And so, when Jesus goes to this party that Levi has, because he's so excited when he comes to Jesus, he throws a party for all his non-Christian friends, all these

tax collectors and sinners.

[4 : 54] The Pharisees are there. They're not actually in there. But they see what's happening. They ask the disciples, Hey, what is your master doing here?

Eating with tax collectors and sinners. And so, at the end of this confrontation, Jesus basically tells them that a new system has come.

You can't sew an old piece of material, a new piece of material, onto what's old. Because if you do, it'll basically destroy both.

And he's telling them that there's a new system coming. There's a new kingdom that's coming. And the old has to go.

It can't be tinkered with. It can't be modified. It can't be improved. It needs to be tossed. To make room, make way for the new kingdom.

[5 : 52] So now we get to Luke 6. And when we come to Luke 6, we see Luke gives us two different scenarios here, two different situations.

But there are events that take place on two different Sabbaths. And that's the key thing. And this is the first of three big conflicts that Jesus is going to have with these Jewish authorities over the Sabbath.

And the others will show up in Luke 13. Another one then in Luke 14. And it's the Sabbath becomes one of these primary issues, or it's kind of a symbolic issue of the old system.

The Jews, the Sabbath observance for the Jews was so important that it was actually a huge statement of their identity as good Jews.

These Pharisees, I mean, you have to understand, the Pharisees in that day, these were the religious conservatives. These were the evangelicals of Jerusalem standing in the forefront, in the cultural war to keep away the infection of Hellenistic thought into their religion.

[7 : 26] They didn't want it to be corrupted. So the Pharisees developed all of these systems of regulations and laws to keep their religion pure.

And they did it, one of the biggest places they did it was in Sabbath observance. There were about five volumes of rabbinic teaching known as the Talmud.

And there was one whole volume devoted to how do you keep the Sabbath. Because, I mean, how do you keep the Sabbath? You go back to the Ten Commandments, it's just one little, one verse that says, don't work on the Sabbath, not you or your animals or whatever, you know, and rest on the Sabbath.

Okay, what does that mean? Can I travel anywhere on the Sabbath? How far can I travel? Well, you know, can I eat?

Can I prepare food? What can I do? What can I not do? And so there's a lot of uncertainty if that's all that you have as to whether you're keeping the Sabbath the way it's supposed to.

[8 : 34] So they built up all these definitions of what it meant to keep the Sabbath. But these definitions ended up becoming a litmus test as to whether you were an Orthodox, a good Jew.

And so this was so much part of the old system. And so when Jesus comes to town and starts preaching and acting the part of this new prophet, the Pharisees are wondering, he says, wait a minute.

He's not keeping the Sabbath rules. How can he be such a prophet? But this is where we see this growing conflict.

But it's important for us. Not so much about for us as to what we're supposed to do or not supposed to do on Sunday. What it is, is a primary, maybe an extreme, but it's a great example of something that is innately true of every one of us.

And that is our tendency towards and our commitment to self-justification. because we are all, every one of us, in search of something that gives us identity, that gives us value, that gives us, that just says that we are right.

[10 : 19] And deep down, we know that we're not. But we are trying to. We are looking for something to give us that sense that we're okay.

And that's what we see in this. And so, I think what I want us to do is we study down through this.

There are four things I want us to see. We're going to look at the whole methodology of self-justification, what that means.

We're going to look at the tragedy of self-justification. We're going to look at the insanity of self-justification. And then finally, we're going to look at the remedy for self-justification.

Let's look at the methodology. You know, again, the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, there's just not much there. You're supposed to rest from your labor. You're not supposed to travel. Or you're not, we don't know exactly what is rest.

Because even for us, we wrestle with it. For some of us, rest is going out and working in the yard. For me, I like to rest from working in the yard. So what does it mean to rest?

[11 : 35] Well, well, but that command that was given to us in the Ten Commandments was not just a piece of, one article of a legal code, but it described more of a posture of our hearts.

It was a posture that, it was a day where we were to set, step back from all that our duties, all the things that we were involved with, and it was supposed to be a day of celebration for all that God had done and that we were to rest in that and even trust Him that we don't have to work this one day of the week.

But instead of it becoming, just being a heart posture, it became a whole list so often of specific duties. And so, you know, how to keep the Sabbath and so forth.

And what the Pharisees came and accused the disciples of here were three violations of the Sabbath. The disciples were allowed to walk through someone else's field and just with their hands pluck grain and eat.

They weren't allowed to take a sickle to someone else's fields, but the Bible did provide four hungry travelers that you could go through a field, pluck grain with your hands, and then eat.

[13 : 09] But what the Pharisees had decided, though, on the Sabbath was you could not reap, you could not winnow, which is separating the grain from the chaff, and you could not prepare food.

Well, the disciples did all those things. They plucked grain with their hands, which was reaping, they rubbed it in their hands to separate it from the chaff, which was winnowing, and preparing a meal.

So the Pharisees were accusing the disciples here of breaking the Sabbath rule, but this is the problem with the Sabbath. What can you do?

What can you not do? What is right? And so, in effect, the Jewish leaders erected a system, a whole system of laws that defined everything.

There were no questions. There were no gray areas. Those laws defined how far you could go from your residence on the Sabbath.

[14 : 15] They even defined what your residence was. It defined everything down to the minutiae. So that when the Pharisees looked at their lives, when they wanted to obey God, they could see, I did it.

I kept all of those rules. Of course, the other advantage, too, is that when you kept it, everybody else would see you keeping it as well.

I mean, what good is it to be good if nobody sees you being good? It also kept them from the riffraff of society.

Because when others would see them keeping the Sabbath, that separated them in a whole better class of people. They were better. They were good.

They were not the ordinary sinners. And so, this is what it does.

[15 : 19] But also notice, what the disciples were accused of were not breaking necessarily biblical commandments. The Pharisees were upset because they broke their rules about the commandments.

These were man-made. These were things that they had concocted. And so, even in this, Jesus never throws out the concept of Sabbath. He actually promotes it in a whole new way.

but what he was throwing out were the man-made rules. And so, I know this, in some ways, it all sounds kind of silly, but this is what we do.

We all do this. I mean, what is it that makes you a good Christian? What do you do that makes you feel good about yourself as a Christian?

I mean, sometimes, you know, it's not, it's enough, well, excuse me, let me step back a second.

You know, sometimes maybe we don't just have to be good, or we just have to be better.

[16 : 36] I feel good about myself as long as I'm just better than somebody else. But, what makes me better? What have I erected? What kind of man-made rule have I created that now gives me a sense of superiority or betterness or just feeling good about myself?

Am I a good Christian because I'm against abortion? Well, I hope you are. This is Right to Life Sunday if you didn't remember. You know, I think it's good to be opposed to be against abortion, but does that make me better than you if you're not?

Am I a good Christian because I'm a Republican or because I'm not? We won't say anything else about that. Am I a good Christian because of my stance on same-sex marriage?

Am I better because I am reformed theologically? Am I better because I'm a grace man? Am I superior?

Do I have a great sense of value because I graduated from Marshall University? I'm really glad not many of you have to deal with that kind of temptation. It's brutal.

[18:07] What makes you significant? What makes you good? What gives you a good sense about yourself? We narrow the law of God down to something just like the Pharisees, something that we can now do, we can achieve, and we build our identity on that.

To the neglect, unfortunately, of everything else. self-justification. So that's the method. We create a whole set of laws that not only we have to keep ourselves, we will also enforce on other people.

So what's the tragedy of self-justification? Well, really, I think there's two things. The first thing is that it's a joyless religion.

religion. There is no fun here. I want you to find one place in Scripture where these Pharisees are at a party. Oh, they're at parties, but they're trying to break them up.

This approach, this kind of religion is an approach to God that requires strict ritual. I have to do right or else.

[19:35] I am nothing. If I don't do right, I am an outcast. If I don't do right, then I'm not right. And God then becomes somebody not to love, but to appease.

I've got to do something to make him smile, to make him happy, or maybe not that far. Maybe I'm not trying to make him smile.

I'm just trying to keep him from getting ticked off and getting angry and whacking me around somehow. all. And what it says here is that their God that they worship is not fun.

He's not fun to be with. He's not a joy to deal with. He is a God that is hard to please. And typically, he's angry.

You know, how do you enjoy a God that you have to constantly placate? How do you live with someone who's always looking over your shoulder and he's got a scorecard?

[20:57] How do you rest? How do you enjoy life? Are you excited about this person with a scorecard?

Don't you wish that he would just leave? so you could rest? Well, that's the tragedy.

That's the way a lot of us live our religion. God is not somebody that's fun. He's a necessary evil who's constantly displeased.

He's disappointed because his scorecards are not favorable for us. you know, I lived for years and years with this one very haunting question.

Am I good enough? You know, not am I good, am I good enough? Have I kept enough?

[22:00] Have I been doing enough? And I never could answer that question. And the answer to that question would determine what this God was like that I had to deal with.

If I have devotional times every day for 10 years, is that going to make God happy? Would he require me 30 minutes a day or maybe 45?

Is that enough? How do we ever do enough? See, that's the problem with the scorecard.

And that's the problem with a God who keeps score. the other part of this, the other tragedy in this, is that if that is the way I live with God, it's also the way I live with people around me.

You know, it's I become God. When I set up the rules, that's something that only God can do. And then when I use the rules to judge other people as to whether they are meeting the standard, that puts me in the judgment seat, which is only a place for God.

[23:28] And in so doing, with people around me, I'm the one that ends up carrying the scorecard. And I become the lawgiver, the judge, and the jury, and the executioner.

God because if you don't meet up to my standards, you'll become an outcast. From my circle, from my favor, you'll become an outcast.

And see, these Pharisees, that's exactly what they did. They created this law, and it's funny, well, it's not really funny, it's tragic. There's a man there with a withered hand.

It was a right hand. And if you know anything about Middle Eastern culture, the right hand is everything, and you never do anything with the left hand because of certain things you do with the left hand.

And this guy had a withered right hand. He was helpless. The Pharisees did not care. And they started judging Jesus because he didn't follow their specific rules.

[24 : 40] They got angry at him. You know, you can find a place where you get angry or where you're self-justifying by simply looking at those places where you get angry the quickest.

You know, we've talked about anger before, but it's such a great window into our soul. Who is it that makes you angry? Is it homosexuals? Is it liberals?

Is it Yankees? Who makes you angry? People that don't use their signal lights?

Or people that constantly drive on the left lane and not the right lane? when I feel the right to condemn somebody because they're doing something that I think is stupid or wrong, that's a window into something that I'm using to justify myself.

the Pharisees majored on outward religion but it was a religion that was very cold, it was very harsh and in many ways they missed everything about their religion because they would have known that way back in the Old Testament one of the minor prophets had already spoken of this whole thing, his name was Micah.

[26 : 18] In Micah chapter 6 verses 6 through 8 Micah came to them and said, look, your outward religion means nothing to me but this is what God requires of you.

He says to do justice and that is to treat people with the dignity and the value and the respect that they deserve as being created in the image of God.

Did they do that with that man with their hand? No. Do I do that with these crazy drivers out here on the road? No.

Then it says to love kindness or to love mercy and that is to desire to come to the aid of those who are helpless and needy and needy help basically to love.

And when I've got my rule book out and scorecard out, that's not what comes out of me. And it says to walk humbly with their God because see what they were doing in all of this was they were becoming God in and of themselves.

[27 : 41] They were the law giver. They were the judge. They were the jury. They were the executioner. That's not humility. That's the opposite of humility. That's exactly what Satan was doing when he was thrown out. But this is a picture of us when we are self justifying according to a set of standards we create and then apply to everybody else around us.

And it's tragic. But it's also insanity. I mean there's a word here that I've got to point out to you that really is unfortunate the way it was translated in our text.

In verse 11 down there it says, and they were filled with fury. Well that word is not just a word for strong anger. It's actually a word that can be translated as dementia or insanity.

So when the Pharisees heard what Jesus said and watched him do what he did and they had no answer literally I wish the writers of this of the ESV had said they went nuts.

They were out of their minds. They were out of control. They were so enraged. But it was an insane they were mad.

[29 : 15] Literally they were mad. when the foolishness was brought to the lights and it was foolishness they couldn't see it and they didn't give it up but they dug their heels in even farther and in their rage in their insane rage they tried to recapture this foundation upon which they were standing that Jesus had just knocked out from under their feet.

It's insane. Self-justification is insane. I mean how many of us do enough? How many of us are good enough?

I mean so what what is it that makes me good? What am I doing that gives me more value? How is it that I can think that I have a right to condemn another people simply because they throw a switch in their car or they don't throw it?

Why would I think that I have a greater value and I can feel better about myself than you because of my low carb diet? And that I'm better than those who would eat donuts every day and I will not mention any names.

Though the brownie I had last weekend didn't count or the biscuits I had yesterday morning. You got any donuts left?

[31 : 07] You got what makes me think that these trivial little things gives me a basis to separate myself from the riffraff and it puts me in a superior place that somehow my scorecard looks better because of that.

Insanity. It is also. And it's so contrary and this is interesting why did Jesus pick the Sabbath? Because a life like this has no rest.

None. Because how can you rest with a scorecard? how can you ever rest that you've done enough?

How can you ever rest in your value? You can't. do you think of God instead of bringing a smile to your face it probably strikes terror in your heart.

Do you ever think of what the judgment day is going to be? You get to stand before God and the records opened. Are you looking forward to it? Because he's going to pull out your scorecard.

[32 : 38] how are you going to be? How are you going to do? Well there is a remedy and we see it here in two places.

First in verse 5 and I love this. When Jesus goes through and he's answering the Pharisees and gives them this tale of look you make exception for David who was the king and he broke the rules of the tabernacle by eating bread.

See you've got a greater king here. Because I'm not David. I'm Lord of David. I'm Lord of the Sabbath itself.

And little did these Pharisees realize that they were standing before the face of the one who declared the Sabbath to come into being. And why did he create the Sabbath?

To celebrate. To celebrate all that God had done. To celebrate his creation. To celebrate the goodness of it.

[33 : 55] You know where he pronounced it at the end of that sixth day and it was very good. And then he had this day to again to rest from his labor. But then to celebrate all of this great work.

And the one now that stood in front of them was not only the creator who called it into being but he was also the one who was making all things new.

It was his work that was going to become the scorecard. he was going to go and it was going to be on the cross where he would say it is finished.

It is done. He was going to go and he was going to live and fulfill everything that God required.

Fill the scorecard with righteousness and then hand it to us if we believed. and in that we can rest.

[35 : 07] Jesus would do all that was required of us himself. He would do the work and then invite us into his rest.

And it would be a rest that would go on forever. God would do the rest. But secondly there was something else.

In that second episode I loved it because there was there was somebody in that group in that place of the synagogue who was lame who was weak and he was helpless and everybody thinks it was the man with the withered hand.

But it wasn't just him. it was all those Pharisees. And he basically told the guy with the withered hand he says come to me.

Stretch out your hand. And in the same way he was calling to the Pharisees to do the same thing. He said come to me.

[36 : 20] Come stretch out your hand. you're helpless. You can't do enough. Come to me. Just like he says in Matthew 11.

Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Let me ask you a question. How many of y'all are tired? how many of you are tired of the scorecard? How many of you are tired of trying to perform and trying to be good enough?

And not really knowing if you ever get there? Well you do kind of know because you know you never get there. There's a lot of us are tired.

Jesus says come to me. Don't worry about doing all this stuff. I've already done it. You can't do anything with the scorecard that's enough.

[37 : 33] I've already done it. The scorecard is full. It is fulfilled. It is complete. There will nothing else to be done. Come to me.

And in me you'll find what he means by rest and the Sabbath. Because it's the end of labor.

It's the end of performance. It's the celebration now of all that Christ has done for us. Because now we are in Christ.

So if you're tired come to Jesus and know his rest. Let's pray.

Father we there's a lot of us here that are tired. some of us are tired and we don't know it. But some of us know it very acutely.

[38 : 49] Would you give us ears to hear your invitation? And would you give us the strength to get up and go to Jesus and stretch out our hands to him?

and help us to believe that in Jesus we can finally find our rest.

No more self-justifying. No more performing. Just rest. Because Jesus has done it all.

Would you do that for us? Jesus. And Father if there's some here who've never known Jesus at all and are so tired would you speak to their hearts that they might hear his voice his inviting voice that they might come to you.

And we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org