

Works of Mercy and Necessity on the Sabbath

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[0 : 01] Let us turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Luke chapter 6. And I want us to look at this section that we read, verses 1 to 11.

On the Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields or the corn fields, his disciples plucked and ate some ears of corn, rubbing them with their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? Now the Lord's Day is one of the most wonderful blessings that God has given to us.

There are some people who say that this day has really no place or part in our modern day because this is something that's got to do with the law.

And the law is way back in the time of Moses. And if we're going to observe this, we might as well be still observing sacrifices and alters and looking at the lavers and the incense and all these things.

[1 : 12] And people say all that has been done away with. But what we've got to remember about this particular day is that God's word shows us that this day has been set from the very beginning, from the very beginning of time, tied into the very fabric of the creation of this world.

And into the setting up of the order and the whole process of the human race, God set one day in seven aside.

We're told very clearly that this creation principle of rest, we read about it in Genesis chapter 2, that the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done and rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

And when God set that day apart and blessed it and sanctified it, it wasn't just with regard to himself, although it was as well with regard to himself, but also with regard to the whole of creation, and particularly to the highest point of the creation, and that, of course, is ourselves.

[2 : 35] It is the human race. It is a day that is set apart. It's a day that is set apart for refreshing. Again, the Bible tells us that. We read about that in Exodus.

And it's really quite an amazing statement is made there regarding this day and the refreshing. We read in Exodus, Exodus, In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

Isn't that amazing? This is what it says of God, that he rested and was refreshed. And the Lord who has set out this day, for it was set as part of the whole process, where he had finished all that he had done, and where he set apart this day as a holy day, a separate day, a day where he himself was refreshed.

And again, I find that an amazing statement, and it's one of these statements we just have to accept. But that's what the Word of God says. And now Jesus, of course, who has come, he says that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

So, since all authority had been given to the Son by the Father, it is clear that Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath.

[4 : 05] He is Lord over all, and he is Lord of the Sabbath. And as sovereign Lord, he possesses within himself the authority to lay down principles regarding this particular day.

And the Lord's Day, as we know, it is all tied up in this authority, and particularly with regard to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, because this is the day in which Jesus rose from the dead.

And the Lord's Day is wonderfully tied into this rising. Now, when we look at Scripture, although it doesn't actually state to us and say, now, the seventh day will no longer be remembered, there isn't a particular verse that tells us that.

But it's very obvious, when we look at Scripture, that the early church, the very early church, the disciples or the apostles, and when you read the early church, that they moved from the rest and the worship of the seventh day to the rest and the worship of the first day, all tied into the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is, of course, the day that we follow and that we uphold. It is the Lord's Day. Somebody said that the Lord's Day is centered in the dynamic of the Lord's resurrection and how true that is.

[5 : 34] Now, one of the wonderful benefits of the Lord's Day is it's a day of rest and a day of refreshing. And we need it. Our bodies need it. Our minds need it.

And God, in his wisdom, has given it to us. Isn't it wonderful? And society is discovering, although there was a push for a long time of trying to work and make it a seven-day week, people are beginning to discover that it doesn't work.

They discovered that, actually, in the continent long ago. And many of the areas of the continent, if you go, you will find that they are reverting back. Maybe not from religious reasons or biblical principles, but they're reverting back because they're finding that it's madness trying to work seven days flat out.

It doesn't happen. You can't do it. And this, again, we're discovering where man tries to make himself wiser than God. He's always going to face problems. So God has given us this one day, a day, as we say, focus for the rest of our bodies and our minds, but also a day of focus upon the worship of the Lord.

Because this is a day that the Lord has set aside. And again, we see that from, in the time of Jesus, that on the seventh day, he always went to the synagogue.

[7 : 01] The disciples went to the synagogue. After the resurrection, it was on the first day of the week we find that the early church were meeting together. We read about that quite often. On the first day of the week, and they're assembling together.

This was the day when they gathered together to worship the Lord. However, when we come and we look at this and look at the Pharisees here, while this is a day that we have to guard, a day that we appreciate, we've also got to be careful that we don't fall into the trap that the Pharisees fell into.

And that was the trap of becoming very legalistic regarding the Lord's Day. And the problem with the Pharisees was that they had made so many laws about the Lord's Day that they were more careful to observe their own laws that they had made rather than what the Word of God said.

And we've always got to be careful against becoming legalistic because there is a tendency within us towards this legalistic outlook where we're trying by our own efforts and we're trying maybe to go that extra bit.

It's sometimes very hard to depend entirely upon God's grace. But that's what we must do. It's so hard to get away from this works.

[8 : 28] Right at the, remember at the very beginning, and I believe this is all part of the legacy, when God made man, in the first instance, God said to man, do this and you'll live, but do that and you will die.

Man had the capacity to obey God and to fulfill the law. And I believe even despite the fall, there is still this tendency within us towards our own righteousness where we try and think that we gain favor with God by being this or being that.

And we have this terrible tendency within us to judge ourselves against others and think, well, I'm a little better than him. I'm doing this. I'm doing that.

He's not doing that. She's not doing that. And beginning to work before God and quietly, we don't dare say it, but there's something of the Pharisee, like the Pharisee in the temple who's saying about the publican over there, oh, look at that publican.

I thank the Lord. I'm not like him. I'm the kind of person. I'm so good. I fast twice in the week. I give loads of money to the poor. I am a really first-class person, and I'm glad I'm not like that person over there.

[9 : 52] We might not be as bold as to actually say that to the Lord, but we think it. Have you ever found yourself thinking like that? Well, the Lord sees that.

And whenever we have that spirit where we begin to elevate ourselves above others and look down on others, for whatever reason, the spirit of the Pharisee has come in, and we've got to guard against it because there were few people in his ministry in this world that Jesus pronounced more woes against than against the Pharisees.

Now, we find here that on the Sabbath, as Jesus is making his way through the cornfields, I just want to stop for one moment here. And some people use this incident as justifying why they don't go to church.

And they say, well, look, for me, I'm quite happy wandering about in the fields. In fact, I like to climb the hills on a Sunday.

I don't need to go to church. And when I'm up in the hills and I watch sit by a river and watch it flowing by and I look out at the beach and I look out at the sun and I look at the sea pounding against the shore, I see nature in all its power and all its majesty and glory.

[11 : 23] I feel so close to God. And in fact, there's a spirit of worship within me. And in fact, I find it much more beneficial than going to church. I've heard people use that argument. Well, let us, and they sometimes, they base this argument upon the fact that Jesus was there and his disciples walking through the cornfields on the Sabbath.

So they say, well, if Jesus can do that. But the point is, Jesus always went to the place of worship on the Sabbath. He may have been going there at this time.

He may have been coming back from it. I don't know. But the fact is that Jesus always went. And we are also commanded to go. And we're told not to forsake the assembling together.

And we are told that for two or three gathered together, that the Lord is there to bless. God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

Let's remember that. That's what the Word of God tells us. So to absent ourselves from the house of God is so absurd.

[12 : 34] God wants us to meet together. God expects us to meet together. And God has promised to be there to bless. This is an essential part of our daily, of our weekly living and our life.

And you know, the amazing thing, what I find, is that I see sometimes elderly people and they no longer have the health or the strength to go to God's house.

And they are so, if you could see some of these people, they would say, I would give anything to be able to get back just even one more time to sit with God's people in God's house to worship God.

And yet there are many people in full health and strength who have the opportunity, who have the privilege, and they choose not to go.

And so it's a wonderful thing to be able to go when we have the opportunity. Well, anyway, here is Jesus with his disciples and they're going through the cornfields on this particular Sabbath.

[13 : 52] And we find that the disciples, they were obviously hungry. Elsewhere it tells us that they were hungry. And they were taking some of the ears of corn and they were rubbing them in their hands.

Now, the Lord, that's why we read in Deuteronomy, the Lord had made provision. Some people reading that would say, hey, they had no business doing that. They were walking through somebody's cornfield and they were taking the ears of corn, they were rubbing them together and eating them.

That was stealing. But when you go back into Deuteronomy, what we read there, the Lord made that provision. And what he's saying is, when you're walking through the cornfield, you are able to take as you're walking and you're able to rub the corn and you're able to eat it.

God made that provision. But you weren't to go with a sickle and start cutting the corn and take it home. I suppose if you were to put it in modern day, in an equivalent, a modern day setting, if you were going through your friend's garden or your neighbor's garden and there were a few, supposing there was a gooseberry bush or raspberry canes or something like that, that you could pluck off as you're walking by a gooseberry or a raspberry and eat it.

But you weren't to go back home and come with a bag or a plastic tub or something and start collecting it and then going off.

[15 : 17] To do that would be stealing. But in walking by, that provision was made where you could take something and eat it as you went along. So God had made this particular provision.

So what the disciples had done was absolutely within the letter of the law. But the problem with the Pharisees was that they had done this on the Lord's day.

They had done this on the Sabbath. And the thing was this, that the Pharisees had added laws to the law that God had already given. And their law forbade anybody to do that because they said, if you pluck an ear of corn, this was the Pharisees' law, if you pluck an ear of corn, you're guilty of reaping on the Lord's day.

And if you rub the corn in your hand in order to eat it, you are guilty of threshing on the Lord's day. They had gone that far. And so as far as they were concerned, Jesus and his disciples, or Jesus' disciples, were guilty of reaping the corn and threshing the corn on the Lord's day.

And that's why they were so angry. They were so incensed. But as we see, they went completely, this is what we're saying about the legalism, gone way beyond what the Lord has said or commanded in his word.

[16 : 43] But you notice how straight away Jesus comes to their defense. And Jesus doesn't leave them on their own. He comes straight in to help. And you know, my friends, it's still the same today.

Jesus is still there defending us. He's there today defending us against the accusations of the evil one. He is there today as the great intercessor, pleading his own merit, his own worth, his own work on our behalf.

You see, as we are by nature, we are under condemnation. Our life, our sin, demands a verdict of God's justice and condemnation to fall on us.

But Jesus is before the Father presenting his finished work. And he's saying to the Father, look at what I've done. Jesus doesn't intercede on our behalf by saying to the Father, Father, excuse them because they can't help it.

Excuse them, they're actually very nice people, but they have weaknesses. Jesus never says to the Father, just overlook it.

[18 : 06] Because he can't, God cannot overlook it. God's nature is such that he has to deal with sin. But this is what Jesus is doing.

He can, he ever lives to make intercession. He is pleading his own worth, his own merit, who he is before the Father. And he's saying to the Father, look at me, look at my work, look at what I did for them.

And as the Father looks at the perfect work of his Son, he sees that work as having cleansed the sin.

And he sees Christ's own perfect righteousness as being placed over his people. And again, you know, there is another accuser coming.

And I don't know how it works, but when we read the Bible, there is sufficient to understand that Satan, in some way, although Satan is not in heaven, he has been cast from heaven, he still accuses us before God.

[19 : 18] We find a very interesting incident in Job, where Satan is making accusation against Job before God. And he accuses us, the Bible shows that, he accuses us before God.

He's making accusation against us. And he's saying to God, I'll tell you what kind of people they are. And the thing is, it's true.

Sometimes what Satan will say is lies, but often what he says is true. But you know the wonderful thing, do you know what it says in God's Word? Who shall lay any charge to God's elect?

Why? Because it's God who justifies in Jesus Christ. Isn't that a wonderful truth? That today we've been set free. Today we've been pardoned, we've been liberated because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done.

He is a great advocate, the great intercessor. And so Jesus comes to the defense of his disciples and he says to the Pharisees, do you not remember what David did?

[20 : 28] How David ate the showbread? How David gave, not only himself ate the showbread, but he gave it to those who were with him when he was hungry and he had no right to do that.

Because that bread belonged to the priests only and David wasn't a priest. But God allowed that, permitted that to happen because David was starving.

And Jesus is showing how works of necessity are essential on the Lord's day. If we had read another part here it would have shown that the disciples were hungry.

and the Lord is saying to us and he's saying to the Pharisees saying, we've got to be realistic. We've got to preserve life.

We've got to sustain life. We've got to do that which is right for life. We are not to enter into this legalistic way. And so what Jesus is saying is that whatever is necessary for the well-being, for the betterment, for the sustenance of life, that that is all right to, that is permissible on the Sabbath.

[21 : 42] And then the next incident, and just look at this very briefly, shows that any work of mercy is also permissible on the Lord's day. And here we see the maliciousness of these Pharisees because they'd come, it's another Sabbath, and they'd come to the synagogue to worship.

But there was a man there, we read, whose right hand was withered. And notice verse 7, and the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether it would heal on the Sabbath.

And you know, they were there and they were secretly hoping that Jesus would work this miracle. They were hoping that Jesus, because they wanted to get him, and they were hoping, isn't that perverse?

they were hoping that Jesus would do something good, and yet in their eyes it would be something wrong. Hoping? You know, it's quite an extraordinary thing.

I hope nobody in here, as a Christian, has ever hoped that any other might stumble. Not that Jesus was going to stumble, but that somebody would do something that wasn't right.

[22 : 54] that's a fearful spirit. Well, that's what these disciples had. Although Jesus wasn't going to do something that wasn't right, in fact it was the very reverse, it was something that was positively good, but in their eyes his good was evil.

That shows how distorted, how absolutely perverse the disciples' thinking was. And you know, it's an awful thing to be sitting in the place of worship with a heart and a spirit that was all wrong.

And that's what these disciples had. Their attitude, their spirit was all wrong. They were sitting there. They were sitting there in condemnation. They were sitting in judgment.

They were sitting with perverse minds. And my dear friends, when we come to God's house, ask the Lord to empty you of all the things, all the baggage that is so much part and partial of our lives and that so often we drag with us because the Lord sees our spirit.

Got to remember that. I mentioned this before, it's a powerful version in Malachi where God is condemning the priests for devotion.

[24 : 16] But they weren't actually devoting except in their heart and their mind. They were, they had, they were, had a bad mind, a bad attitude to their wives.

And God was reading that bad attitude and that bad mind. And he was condemning the priests because of it. And you see, God sees your spirit and particularly when we come to his house.

It is wrong to have a bad attitude towards anybody or about someone. When we come to God's house, we need, remember if we come, Jesus talks about that, and we ask God for forgiveness and yet we can't forgive our brother.

He says, don't expect God to forgive you. Remember in the Lord's prayer we say, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Do we really know what we're saying?

We're saying to the Lord, Lord, you forgive us our sins in the same way that we forgive those who sin against us. Well, how do we forgive those who sin against us?

[25 : 27] Are we there holding a grudge? Are we there with an unforgiving spirit? Because if so, that's what we're saying to the Lord. We're really asking the Lord to do something that we're not ready to do ourselves.

So it's very important. God places a great emphasis upon our spirit and our attitude as we come in worship. So ask the Lord, and I must ask the Lord as we come, Lord, cleanse my heart, create in me a clean heart.

Lord, give me the right spirit of worship as I approach you this day. So Jesus, who knew their thoughts, and he said, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy?

So Jesus asks that very, very powerful question. You see, the Sabbath, which was made for man, is also a day surely in which the good, the restoration, the well-being of somebody ought to be helped and taken on.

And so Jesus addresses a man with the withered hand. And he says to him, stretch out your hand.

[26 : 49] And he did so, and his hand was restored. And see what it says, but they were filled with fury. You know that spirit of where you, sometimes you meet people who are completely irrational.

You can't reason with them. And it's awful. And people, you know, when people are prejudiced, it's very, very hard to reason with people who have prejudice in their heart.

And I would say to you as well, guard against that spirit. It is so easy to become prejudiced against whatever. Guard against that spirit. Because we become totally irrational and unreasonable.

That's how it was with the Pharisees. But I want to say one thing in conclusion here. And it's about this man. See the command that Jesus gave to that man. He said to the man, come and stand here.

Well, the man could do that. But then, after looking round at them all, and I love that, the way Jesus is addressing the man, but first of all, he looks at all the Pharisees.

[27 : 54] He looks at them all. He's taking note of them. Eyes that pushed him to their very heart. And then he said to the man, stretch out your hand. Jesus was there asking this man to do something that, humanly speaking, he couldn't do.

He couldn't stretch out his hand. That hand had been paralyzed. I don't know whether it was always paralyzed, or whether it had been in an accident, but it was completely limp. It was useless.

It was the one thing he knew that he could not do, was to lift up and stretch out his hand. Utterly impossible. And Jesus was asking him to do something he knew he couldn't do.

But I love the faith of that man. Because what did he do? He stretched out his hand. In other words, that man, if that man, for instance, had said, there is no point in me trying to do that because I know I can't.

If he had begun to think about it and say, right, hold on, I'll have to work out this process, he would be still there. Well, obviously not, but he would have been there and his hand would not have been healed. That man's hand was healed as he took that step of doing what he himself couldn't do.

[29 : 16] But in obedience to the Lord, he began to, in what the attempt would be. And the moment he, in his mind, went to act on his body, which wouldn't work, he did it, and his faith, as Jesus often said, your faith hath made you whole.

That's what happened. And my dear friends, that's what the Lord is saying to us as well. That's what faith is. Believe in God's word. Stepping out into it.

And when the gospel invitation today to you is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, come to me. You may be saying, I don't know how to come.

What happens? How do I go about? Just come. The Lord will save you. But you, in your own mind, in your heart, say, well, Lord, I don't know what all, but here I am.

I'm coming as if you were physically going to him. Go in your heart. And he will save you. You can't save yourself, but you're the one who are to go to him.

[30 : 28] And he will save you. And that's what he's saying. Come. Come to me. Well, will you? And he'll do the rest. You do. You come to him and throw yourself on him and ask him to save you.

And he will. Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray that we might heed what God's word is saying to us, that we might be helped by it.

Give us a faith to lay hold upon Jesus Christ as Savior. Forgive us, Lord, our sin and help us to believe with all our heart. Lord, bless everybody here today.

Bless our homes, our families. Bless all our loved ones, near and far. We commit them to thee. Take away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Amen.