

Luke 6:1-11

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Date: 26 February 2017

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[0 : 00] In your Bibles to Luke chapter 6, verses 1 to 11. If you are looking in a pew Bible, it starts on page 861.

We're continuing in our series through this early part of the Gospel of Luke, and so let's read together Luke 6, verses 1 to 11.

On a Sabbath, while he, that is Jesus, 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?

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 priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him.

[1 : 06] And he said to them, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.

But he knew their thoughts. And he said to the man with the withered hand, come and stand here. And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?

And after looking around at them all, he said to him, stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Now, for many of us, when we hear these stories, I wonder if your initial reaction is something like, what's the big deal? Why are the Pharisees being so uptight and unreasonable about the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest?

Of course, Jesus' disciples should be able to grab a snack on the way to the synagogue. Of course, we should celebrate when the man with the withered hand is healed. The Pharisees' response is just ridiculous and irrational.

[2 : 28] And if that's how we understand the story, the practical implication is something like this. A Sabbath day, a weekly day of rest and worship is a good thing, but let's not get too crazy about the details.

If other people observe it slightly differently, live and let live. It's a secondary issue after all. Now, if that's the main point of this passage, I think most of us will pat ourselves on the back and we'll think, surely I'm not like those legalistic Pharisees and their obsession with man-made religious laws. And we'll go on our merry way thinking that this passage simply confirms what we already know. We don't need to worry about the finer points of observing the Sabbath. That's part of what Jesus came to liberate us from.

Now, there's a kernel of truth in there, but there's a lot more than that going on in this passage. You notice in verse 2, when the Pharisees first challenged Jesus and his disciples, Jesus doesn't say, oh, come on, stop being so uptight, lighten up a bit.

No, he takes their concern very seriously. He refers to a relatively obscure passage in the Old Testament. And then in verse 5, he says, the Son of Man, referring to himself, is Lord of the Sabbath.

[3 : 53] Now, think about that statement. Jesus had no political authority. He was not an officially recognized religious authority either. He wasn't part of the party of the Pharisees.

He wasn't connected with the temple. He wasn't sort of officially recognized by the official religious leaders. But he's making definitive, authoritative pronouncements about one of the core practices

and teachings of the Jewish faith.

And that's what's most striking about Jesus' words and actions here. The story's not just a controversy about how precisely the Sabbath should be observed. The controversy is about who's in charge, Jesus or the Pharisees?

Now, throughout chapter 5, the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees has been gradually building. Chapter 5, verse 21, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven.

And the Pharisees began to question, who can forgive sins except God alone? Then when Jesus was eating and drinking with tax collectors and others, the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled.

[5 : 07] Why does this man eat with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus went on. He said, I've come to bring something new, something that won't fit in the old containers, like new wine that won't fit in old wineskins, or a new patch of clothing that you can't just sew onto an old shirt.

Now we come to today's passage, and the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees comes to a head. What we'll see in the passage today is Jesus claims two things. First, he claims to have authority over the Sabbath.

We'll look at that in verses 1 through 5. And second, he claims to embody everything that the Sabbath represented. And then we'll consider our response to Jesus' two claims.

So Jesus' two claims and our response. That's what we'll be looking at this morning. Now, to understand what's going on here with the Sabbath, we need to have a little background on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was one of the defining markers of Judaism.

In some sense, it was the defining ritual that marked out the Jewish community from others, along with circumcision. But circumcision was a one-time thing.

[6 : 22] The Sabbath was something that people did every week. From sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, the people would rest. And Orthodox Jews still do.

I remember the one time in my life that I was in the city of Jerusalem, and it happened to be over a weekend. And the whole city stopped. From Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.

And it was striking, more than any other place I've been in, how the whole city stopped. Now, why was the Sabbath so important to the people in Jesus' time?

Well, first, it was built into God's creation order. The Sabbath first appears in Genesis 2, where it says, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation.

It was also one of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20 says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath, a day of rest to the Lord your God.

[7 : 29] On it you shall not do any work. The Sabbath was a gift from God to His people, and it was also a sign of the covenant, the promises, the agreement between God and His people.

So it was a sign that acknowledged God as the Creator. Acknowledged that God set the patterns and boundaries in the world, and we live within those patterns and boundaries. It was a sign that acknowledged God as the Redeemer, the Savior.

Deuteronomy 5 says, Keep the Sabbath, because you used to be a slave in Egypt, and God redeemed you from there. Now, why did it say that? Well, in Egypt, when the people were slaves, they were under the rule of cruel masters, who, among other things, would never let them rest, would never give them any days off.

And so observing one day of rest each week was a reminder that God has set us free, that we're no longer under the oppressive rule of the Egyptians, who would never give us any rest, and were always demanding.

And it was a sign that God is not like that kind of master. God is not the kind of Lord who never lets you rest, and is always demanding more.

[8 : 48] He's a God who graciously gives, who graciously gives us rest. So the Sabbath acknowledged God as the Creator, as the Redeemer. It was God's gift to guard against the oppression of vulnerable people and society.

The fourth commandment specified, You shall not do any work. You, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your livestock, the sojourner, that is the foreigner who's within your gates. That meant everyone in Israel, including slaves and foreigners, the workers with the fewest legal protections, and most likely to be exploited, got one full day of rest with their families every week.

Fourth, the Sabbath was a foretaste of God's kingdom to come. It was a day of renewal and restoration, a day of feasting and delight, a day of worship and fellowship, anticipating the age of the Messiah when toils and cares would one day end.

So the Sabbath was not a minor thing. Observing the Sabbath was at the heart of what it meant to trust in God and follow His commandments.

And so that's why it was such a big deal when Jesus claimed authority over the Sabbath, as we see in verses 1 through 5. Let's look at these verses. Jesus and His disciples, perhaps they're on their way to the synagogue, they're walking through the grain fields.

[10:07] Some of His disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. And then some of the Pharisees objected. Now, why would the Pharisees have objected? Well, plucking could have been seen as a form of harvesting, and harvesting was strictly forbidden on the Sabbath.

Rubbing the heads of grain could be understood as a form of threshing, which was also forbidden on the Sabbath. Now, of course, there were different debates between different schools of rabbis as to what exactly qualified as work.

But the basic principle that most everyone agreed on was, don't do any work on the Sabbath that isn't absolutely necessary to preserve life.

So some rabbis had come up with 39 types of work that were forbidden. Everything from sowing and reaping, grinding and sifting, writing and erasing, tying and loosening knots, kindling and extinguishing a fire.

Some of these things were explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament laws. Other restrictions had developed over time in an effort to guard the Sabbath from being gradually eroded.

[11:14] But notice Jesus' response to the Pharisees. Jesus doesn't quote a more liberal rabbi who would have been okay with these things.

He doesn't say, oh, come on, Pharisees, you're just being too strict. Jesus goes back to the Scriptures. And he goes back to an incident from 1 Samuel chapter 21 when David and his men were running away from King Saul.

Now, David had already been anointed king at this time in his life. The prophet Samuel had anointed him and said, you are going to become the king of Israel. God has chosen you.

He has appointed you. But his kingship was not widely recognized. And so David had this ragtag band of men following him around, trying to survive in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty.

And in order to feed his hungry men, David went into, went to the tabernacle, went to the house of God, went to the priest, and he said, I need some food. We're starving. And the priest said, the only thing I have is the holy bread, the bread of the presence.

[12:22] And according to the ceremonial law, only the priests were supposed to eat that holy bread. And David said, we need some food. And he said, okay, I'll give it to you.

So David did something that was technically illegal, contrary to the ceremonial law. Now, what's Jesus' point in citing the story?

Well, his argument is, if David can do that, then I can do this. If it was proper for David to feed his starving men with holy bread, contrary to the ceremonial law of God, then it's proper for me to feed my hungry disciples with grain, contrary to your human tradition.

Now, do you notice here that Jesus is drawing a parallel between himself and David? He's saying, if David had the authority to do that, David was the anointed king.

People didn't recognize him yet. He only had a small band of followers. But he was trying to feed them when they were hungry. If he could do that, then surely I can do this.

[13:32] Now, notice, Jesus has already been declared king when Jesus was baptized. God the Father said, you are my son, with you I'm well pleased.

But like David, he only has this small band of followers at this point. And he's facing opposition, just like David was at that point in his life. You see, what Jesus is saying here is, I'm the king in the line of David.

And you don't recognize it yet. But this is what God's called me to be. This is who God's appointed me to be. The king in the line of David, the promised Messiah.

Now, do you see why that got under the Pharisee's skin? Jesus wasn't just saying, oh, come on, lighten up. He's saying, I have an authority even greater than King David.

That's not what any old person goes around saying. And then he says, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Think about that.

[14 : 42] Who instituted the Sabbath? God did. Over and over in the Old Testament, God says to his people, keep my Sabbaths. That is, the Sabbath is my day.

And here comes Jesus saying, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Now, when Jesus uses the term Son of Man to refer to himself, he's not just affirming that he's fully human, just like the rest of us.

Although he was, and is, he was claiming to be the representative human being. Notice he says, the Son of Man. Not a Son of Man, a human being.

The Son of Man. He's claiming to be the Messiah, the head of a new humanity. The promised Messiah whose kingdom would never be destroyed.

The one that Daniel saw in his vision. It's referred to as the Son of Man in Daniel chapter 7. Coming with the clouds of heaven, reigning with glory and honor. So, what Jesus is saying here is he's saying, you know, I'm not just passing a message down the ranks.

[15 : 59] I'm not just sort of an intermediate officer in the military who's just passing down orders from above. I'm the commander-in-chief. And I have, I'm here. I'm not just one in a line of many interpreters of the Scriptures.

I'm the author. And I've come to show you what they mean. And I've come to fulfill what they're talking about. And so, the proper response to Jesus is to bow before him and swear allegiance to him and to follow him alone.

Now, what does this mean for us? If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, then he is Lord over all our spiritual practices and all our traditions. Now, every church has traditions, whether we call them traditions or not.

Trinity, if there's an order to our worship service, if you, you can see it laid out in the bulletin, it's pretty similar every week. We have Sunday school beforehand and coffee hour afterwards. We have small groups during the week.

Maybe you have family traditions, cultural traditions, personal habits. But we should never hold onto any of our traditions more tightly than we hold onto Jesus.

[17 : 16] We should always be willing to test our traditions against what Scripture says and change them if necessary. And when there isn't an explicit biblical command one way or the other, we should be generous toward other Christians who are seeking to live out the same biblical principles in a slightly different way.

Let me give an example of this. Last summer, my family and I were driving through the Midwest. And through a series of circumstances, we spent a night in the home of an Amish family. This was a traditional Amish family.

They lived pretty much off the grid with limited electricity. They wore plain clothing, traditional clothing. They drove a horse and buggy or sometimes got rides with other people, but they would not drive cars.

They all worked together in a family business. They were committed to what seemed like a very unusual, traditional, conservative way of life because they were convinced that it was healthiest. And honestly, coming to their house, we had never met these people. It was a friend of a friend. We had spent 10 hours in the car. I was a little nervous. I was like, I don't know how this is going to go. You know, we're not quite at our best.

[18 : 30] We've just been in a car for 10 hours today. But these people were nothing like the Pharisees in this story. We arrived at our house at 9 o'clock in the evening. They served us ice cream on their back porch.

They talked with us for two hours about church and family and theology and culture, their life in rural Ohio, ours in the urban Northeast. They asked genuine questions. They acknowledged ways that they had fallen short as parents.

They showed not a hint of disdain or defensiveness. Once I remember the husband saying, he said, you know, we have our standards. That is our sort of distinctive traditions and way of life as Amish people.

We're committed to maintaining them, but our standards don't save us. We're only saved by the grace of Jesus Christ. He said, that's very important. And because they were rooted in the grace of Jesus Christ, they recognized us as brothers and sisters in Christ, even though our traditions and

habits and way of life was very different than theirs.

not only did they stay up with us until 11, they were out of the house the next morning by 6 before we even woke up to go to work. We planned to meet some mutual friends at a local, or we planned to meet the friends we actually knew for breakfast at a restaurant.

[19 : 47] The husband stopped by to say hello and then paid our bill without us knowing it before, without us even knowing that he did it. Now, these people had never met us beforehand and had no guarantee they would ever see us again.

But I think they recognized Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. And that's why they both maintained a very countercultural way of life, and at the same time they were some of the most gracious and hospitable people we had ever met.

And it struck me that this is what every follower of Jesus is called to be and to do. However we dress, wherever we work and live, is to be unflinchingly countercultural in the way that we live as we seek to live out biblical principles and utterly hospitable to all those who God sends our way.

That's when we recognize Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. That's Lord over all of our spiritual practices and traditions. I think that's the attitude that results.

So first, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. But second, we see that Jesus embodied everything that the Sabbath represented. We see this in verses 6 to 10. While Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, He sees a man whose hand was withered.

[21 : 07] His right hand, Luke points out, was withered. In the ancient world, as for most people today, the right hand was the dominant hand. That was the hand you would use to perform most work, to convey blessings, to swear oaths, raise your right hand, to give alms, to make deals.

So a man with a withered right hand would have been disgraced and disempowered. The word withered means shriveled or dry or lifeless. Perhaps it was atrophied or paralyzed.

Jesus sees this man and He wants to heal him. He wants to restore him to a place of honor and health and proper function because that's what the Sabbath was meant to do in the first place.

It was meant to be a day of restoration, a day of healing, a day of refreshing, a day of delight in God's good creation, a gift from God to humanity.

And Jesus came to embody and fulfill all that the Sabbath was meant to be. When Jesus spoke in His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, what did He say?

[22 : 22] He said, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus says, I've come to do all that the Sabbath was pointing towards. I've come to give you rest. I've come to renew your relationship with God. I've come to bring peace between God and humanity.

Jesus came to begin the process of restoring and healing His people physically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. And yet, Jesus healing the man in the synagogue provoked the Pharisees even more than the disciples eating grain in the cornfields.

By now, the Pharisees were watching Him. They were looking for a reason to accuse Him. Verse 7. And Jesus didn't back down. He wasn't intimidated by them. In fact, He questioned them. Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or destroy it?

You see, sometimes, Jesus says, doing nothing to help someone is as good as doing them harm. In other words, being godly is not just about avoiding sin.

[23 : 51] Apathy and indifference can be a form of hatred. And the Sabbath is no excuse. of **■■■■■** as All right.

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