

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"What Was Lawful on the Sabbath?"*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at chapter 14, verses 1-6.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word. We will start at verse 22 for context...

Luke 14:1 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. 2 And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. 5 And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they could not reply to these things.

You may be seated. Let's pray.

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Just like many people look for fellowship after the worship service on Sunday, in Jesus's day many people looked for fellowship after the synagogue service on the Sabbath.

Look what happened on this particular Sabbath...

Luke 14:1 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

The Pharisees were the ultra-orthodox sect of Judaism who lived by a very strict code. With the exception of a few of them, such as Nicodemus or the one in the previous chapter who warned Jesus that his life was in danger, they were the worst opposition Jesus faced during his earthly ministry.

But even though Jesus had some of His greatest disputes with the Pharisees, He still associated with them, not to be one of them, but to love them and show them a godly example.

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You're tempted to say, "How kind of this Pharisee to invite Jesus for dinner!"

Nope!

This ruler of the Pharisees invited Jesus, but it wasn't for fellowship. Notice it says **they were watching him.**ⁱ Multiple Pharisees are present and they were watching him to see him do something so they can condemn him.

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The Pharisees had good reason to watch Jesus on the Sabbath, because it seemed to be his most popular day to heal people. Listen to how busy Jesus has been on the Sabbath up to this point:

- In Luke 4:31-37 he cast out a demon on the Sabbath
- In Luke 4:38-39 he healed Peter's mother-in-law's high fever on the Sabbath
- In Luke 6:1-5 he allowed his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath
- In Luke 6:6-10 he healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath
- In John 5:1-9 he healed the lame man on the Sabbath
- In Luke 13:10-17 he healed the woman who was bent over on the Sabbath
- In John 9 he healed the blind man on the Sabbath

And they are expecting him to heal someone else on the Sabbath. Look at verse two...

Luke 14:2 And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy.

Luke wrote this gospel as well as Acts. He was a doctor and traveling companion of the apostle Paul.

He gives us his professional opinion that this man has **dropsy**, which is an abnormal accumulation of body fluids because of kidney trouble, a heart ailment, or liver disease. It was painful and would leave parts of the body swollen, such as a leg, arm, or hand.

The word for **dropsy** comes from the Greek words for “water” and “face” or “countenance” because the disease often made a person look bloated in the face. Today we call it edema.

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So you look at this and say, *“Well, it sure was nice of the Pharisee to invite him over. Maybe they felt sorry for him and wanted to bless him.”*

No.

If you walked into this luncheon you would say, *“The Pharisees are here, and it makes sense that Jesus is here, because they would invite prominent people, which Jesus was...but why in the world is this man with dropsy here?”*

He would never be invited to something like this, because the thinking of the day was if someone had a deformity, disability, or sickness, they must have been a terrible sinner and they were being punished by God. There was no way the religious leaders would invite a man like this to their dinner.

If you write in your Bible you can circle the words **him who had dropsy** and write, “Bait.”

More than likely, the man with dropsy was invited to provoke Jesus into healing him, which they would see as a violation of the Sabbath.

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Consider the Pharisees’ heartlessness and hypocrisy...

Their heartlessness is shown in that they used this man as part of their wicked plan to catch Jesus. They know Jesus. They know His character. They know He’s healed countless people...probably on the Sabbath more than any other day. So, they’re expecting Him to heal this man. They knew that if they put a hurting man like this in Jesus’s presence, He would heal him.

Their hypocrisy can be seen when we try to answer this question...

Did the Pharisees want Jesus to heal this man?

We want to say, “No they didn’t, because that would violate the Sabbath.” But they did want him to, because that would violate the Sabbath and then they would have a reason to condemn him.

So look what Jesus says...

Luke 14:3 And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”

Jesus didn’t immediately heal him. First, He asked this question.

It sounds odd to say **Jesus responded to [them]**, because there’s no record of them saying anything.

So, what did he respond to?

He responded to their thoughts. He knew they were watching him and wanted to see if he'd heal, so he asked them this question.

And it really should not have been difficult for them to answer. Look at the words, **“Is it lawful?”**

Verse 3 says he was asking lawyers. Don't think of lawyers in courtrooms. The lawyers in Jesus's day were the experts in the law. This is their language! They're always deciding what is and isn't lawful. He's asking them to share their expertise. If anyone should've been able to answer this question it's them!

But they couldn't answer because if they said it is unlawful to heal on the Sabbath, they would look unmerciful and cruel. It was one thing to sit around and interpret God's Law during a theological discussion or debate, but it was something else entirely to apply those conclusions when they would have a detrimental effect on a hurting person.

But they also couldn't say it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath because that would make them look bad for two reasons:

1. First, they would be permitting him to break one of their rules.
2. Second, if they said it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath it's going to cause people to wonder why they never healed on the Sabbath. Jesus was the One doing all the miraculous healing, not them.

Basically, they must either make Jesus look good or make themselves look bad, so look what happened...

Luke 14:4 But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away.

No fanfare; nothing fancy. No ceremony or hocus-pocus in Jesus's healing ministry. He simply did it, and the man was completely well.

Because the man's **dropsy** affected his appearance, he would have immediately looked better. There was no question whether Jesus truly healed him. It wasn't a hurting knee or back. It was a remarkable miracle.

And notice Jesus didn't just heal him and let him remain at the Pharisee's house, or even leave on his own. Jesus sent him away. It was like, *“You've already suffered enough being here with these cruel people who have been using you. Go ahead and see your family and friends and enjoy your new health.”*

Now let's answer the question Jesus asked: is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

They thought it wasn't, because they'd added so much to God's commands...and this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: It is easy to add rules to God's commands.

Listen to these verses explaining the fourth commandment...

Exodus 20:8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

No working on the seventh day, but the question the Jews faced is, “What qualifies as ‘work’?”

Let me tell you why this question became so confusing...

God's Law was originally in written form only. It was given to Moses on stone tablets, and then it was copied by scribes for centuries. After the Babylonian exile the religious leaders began developing rules that were in oral form

only; in other words, they weren't written. The rules were passed down from one generation to the next verbally or orally.

The rules were intended to stop people from breaking God's law. So, God would have a command, and then they would create five commands to stop people from breaking God's command.

About 200AD these oral commands that had been added to the Law were compiled and written down in what became known as the Mishnah. The Mishnah was a commentary on the Torah or the Law.

To give you an idea what the Mishnah was like, there were 30 chapters just on the washing of cups, pitchers and copper vessels. Let me say that one more time: the Mishnah contained 30 chapters just on washing dishes.ⁱⁱ

When you have as much information as the Mishnah contained, it could be very confusing. In an effort to clarify the Mishnah, the Gemara was developed. So really the Gemara was a commentary on a commentary on God's Law!

To put the Mishnah and the Gemara together the Talmud was created. I know we aren't familiar with these works, so let me make this clear...

Lesson Two: The Mishnah was a commentary on God's law, the Gemara was a commentary on the Mishnah, and the Talmud combined the Mishnah and Gemara.

When you think of the Talmud, think of it as a collection of collections. It combined all the material up to that point. I can't say it was all the material put into one volume, because it was over 500 books separated into 22 volumes. It would take a lifetime just to read all of it!

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Now let me ask this...

What was the Sabbath SUPPOSED to be for man?

It was supposed to be a blessing!

In **Mark 2:27** Jesus said...

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

The words **Sabbath was made for man** mean God gave the Sabbath to man to be a blessing. The words **not man for the Sabbath** mean the Sabbath wasn't supposed to make people slaves, but because of all the rules added to the Sabbath that's exactly what happened. The Sabbath became the most dreaded day of the week.

And this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Three: The rules added to the Sabbath made it a burden.

The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest, but it became exhausting because people were consumed with trying to keep all the rules that had been added to it.

The Talmud contained 24 chapters of Sabbath restrictions. The religious leaders took those few verses in **Exodus 20** and came up with 24 chapters!

John MacArthur said, *“One rabbi says he spent 2.5 years in the study of one of those chapters trying to figure out all of its ramifications.”*

Imagine that: 2.5 years studying one chapter on the Sabbath.

There were 39 categories of activities that were forbidden because they were considered “work.” That’s not 39 activities that were forbidden, but 39 CATEGORIES of activities that were forbidden, and each category had numerous subdivisions, making for thousands of meticulous rules.

I want to tell you some of the rules they added:

- You couldn’t carry anything that weighed more than a dried fig because that would constitute work. But you could carry half a fig two times.
- Cold water could be poured on warm water, but warm water couldn’t be poured on cold water.
- You couldn’t travel more than 3,000 feet from your home, unless it was on a Friday before the Sabbath and you had placed food at the 3,000 foot mark. Then you could go 3,000 feet beyond where you placed your food because the place where you had your food could be considered a home. Then you could go another 3,000 feet beyond that.
- Women couldn’t look in a mirror on the Sabbath, because they might see a white hair and be tempted to pull it out and that would constitute work.
- You couldn’t examine your clothes before you put them on, because during the brushing or shaking of them you might kill an insect and that would constitute work.
- You couldn’t tie a rope to your bucket at the well on the Sabbath, but you could tie a knot in your wife’s girdle on the Sabbath. So if you need water on the Sabbath, tie the rope to your wife’s girdle, and then tie your wife’s girdle to the bucket.

Now this morning’s situation is sinful for Jesus because healing people was practicing medicine, which was a profession, and you can’t engage in a profession on the Sabbath. That would be work. The only exception was if someone’s life was in danger you could do whatever was necessary to keep them alive, but no more than that. For example:

- If people experienced a deep cut and they were in danger of bleeding to death, you could stop the bleeding by applying a tourniquet or compress, but as soon as the bleeding stopped you couldn’t do any more:
 - You couldn’t stitch them up.
 - When you applied the bandage to the wound, you couldn’t apply any ointment
 - Stitches or ointment would have to wait until the following day.
- If a man broke a bone, you couldn’t reset the bone because the man’s life wasn’t in danger. If the bone was sticking out you couldn’t do anything about it until the next day. They’d have to deal with the pain.
- Ladies, you’ll be relieved to know if you went into labor, you could be assisted, but that’s because the woman or the baby could possibly die if you tried to delay the labor to the following day.

Because dropsy wasn’t life-threatening the man with dropsy should have been ignored until sundown Saturday.

John MacArthur said, *“It was a ridiculously complex system by which you could earn your salvation maintaining all these rules. Your salvation depended on it. This is how the people thought.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

If you think about how the Jews added all of these rules to God’s law you will see they actually did the opposite of what the New Testament does...

God gave the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It consisted of 613 crisp, clear commands, and those 613 commands could be summarized in the Ten Commandments. Jesus took the Ten Commandments and narrowed them down to two commandments in **Matthew 22:35-39**:

1. First, **love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**’ This is the greatest commandment.
2. Second, **love your neighbor as yourself.**’ This is the second greatest commandment.

And these two commandments can be narrowed down even more to the word “love.”

- **Romans 13:8 He who loves another has fulfilled the law...10 therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

- **Galatians 5:14 All the law is fulfilled in one word...“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

So you’ve got 613, to 10, to 2, down to one word: love.

But the religious leaders did the opposite in two ways...

First, they took God’s Law and turned it into over 500 books in 22 volumes. Instead of simplifying the Law they complicated it to an unimaginable extreme.

Second, the rules the religious leaders added to the law stopped the law from being loving and caused it to be unloving:^{iv}

- Think of the man with dropsy
- Think of the situations I mentioned earlier when people needed help, but they couldn’t be helped

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This is so bad, because it caused the Sabbath to be the opposite of what God intended...and this brings us to lesson four...

Lesson Four: The Sabbath was about doing good.

When I say the word Sabbath, what’s the first word that comes to mind?

Rest!

We associate the Sabbath with rest. Because of that, this lesson probably sounds odd. Doing good seems like the opposite of resting. But the Sabbath was about doing good...

Matthew 12:12 Jesus said, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

John MacArthur said, *“Good works were especially appropriate on the Sabbath – particularly deeds of charity, mercy, and worship.”*

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When Jesus asked what was lawful on the Sabbath, He exposed the religious leaders’ wrong understanding:

- They were more concerned with the negatives than the positives: they were more concerned with what you shouldn’t do on the Sabbath than what you should do.
- Jesus was more concerned with the positives: He focused on what you should do on the Sabbath: help people and do good.

The Sabbath was about resting, so you could say it was about not working, but it was NOT about NOT doing good.

That’s a lot of negatives so I just say: the Sabbath was about doing good.

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Think about this...

Even though God rested from working after the 6th day of creation, did he rest from doing good?

If God rested from doing good none of us would know the grace and blessings we experience daily...

Psalm 121:3 He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

After the 6th day God rested from creating, but He didn’t rest from doing good.

When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda...

John 5:16 The Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, “MY FATHER HAS BEEN WORKING UNTIL NOW, and I have been working.”

Jesus said he worked on the Sabbath, because his Father continued working after the sixth day of creation.

And to make it even clearer that people should do good on the Sabbath, look at the next question Jesus asked...

Luke 14:5 And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” 6 And they could not reply to these things.

Jesus' logic was simple and impossible to dispute. If it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath by helping animals, how much more lawful was it to do good on the Sabbath by healing people who are made in God's image?

Speaking of doing good, Jesus said something really interesting with his question: he appealed to the good in his listeners. Look at the words: **“Which of you, having a son or an ox...”**

One reason they could not answer was that in using this analogy Jesus appealed to something good in His accusers. It is as though he said...

“You aren't brutal and cruel men. You will help your children or even animals in need. Now extend that same commonsense kindness to needy people.”

G. Campbell Morgan said...

“Thus, while our Lord rebuked the wrong attitude and temper of these men, He did so by appealing to the best within them and calling them to be true to it. His purpose is not that of shaming men, but that of saving them.”

I think one thing we learn from this is when we are speaking to people, we can follow Jesus's example by appealing to the good we see in them.

If we understand the Sabbath was about doing good, and not not doing good, then who obeyed the Sabbath and who violated it?

And this brings us to Lesson 5...

Lesson Five: Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath and the Pharisees violated it.

Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath, not in the sense of resting and doing nothing. He fulfilled it in the true and greatest sense of doing good like people were supposed to do!

Jesus was the busiest man in history, and because of all the good He engaged in on the Sabbath, the Sabbath seemed like his busiest day of the week.

If you did fulfill the Sabbath by doing nothing, then Jesus would've been incredibly disobedient!

The irony is the religious leaders criticized Jesus for violating the Sabbath, but they were the worst violators for two reasons:

- First, they wouldn't do any good, which is what the Sabbath was about.
- Second, they did evil. They did the opposite of what they were supposed to do. They used the man with dropsy for their wicked plan, and in many other accounts they spent the Sabbath plotting how to kill Jesus.

So here's another way to look at Jesus' question...

“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath like I'm trying to do, or is it lawful to do evil on the Sabbath like you're trying to do? Who's really keeping the Sabbath and who's really violating it?”

Let me conclude with this...

While we might not have dropsy, we all have spiritually ruined parts of our bodies.

This man had no idea Jesus wanted to heal his dropsy, but I can tell you Jesus wants just as much to heal the spiritually sick parts of our lives:

- Maybe it's a critical spirit
- Maybe it's a mouth given to gossip
- Maybe it's a covetous heart
- Maybe it's eyes given to lust
- Maybe it's a root of bitterness
- Maybe it's a lying tongue

We all have spiritually sick parts of our lives and these are areas the Lord wants to heal.

If you've never repented and put your faith in Jesus you're still spiritually sick. You're filled with unforgiven sin and unrighteousness.

But if you repent and put your faith in Christ, He'll remove your sins and give you His righteousness. He'll make you as spiritually healthy as this man was after Jesus healed him.

I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Jesus was under constant observation. People wanted to know what He would do in different situations, and they formed their opinions about Jesus (and His God) based on what they saw.

There's a sense in which our situation is like Jesus's situation. In **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**...

2 Corinthians 3:2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. **3** And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Paul explained that we are letters from Jesus, that all men read; and that the letters are not written with ink, but with the Holy Spirit, and not on paper, but on our own hearts. We are the only kind of Bible many will ever read.

ⁱⁱ At the wedding at Cana Jesus turned water into wine, and He used the large waterpots that were filled with water for this type of ceremonial washing...

John 2:6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

These pots were for the fences described in the Mishnah.

In **Matthew 23:25** Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.” Jesus was referring to their fierce desire to

clean the outsides of their dishes and how absurd it would be to leave the inside filthy...but that's exactly what they were like as people: they looked great outwardly, but they were filthy inwardly.

Hopefully your Bibles are still open to Mark 7. Please look at verse 2...

² Now when they (this is the religious leaders) **saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.** **³ For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.**

The **tradition of the elders** is all the commands or fences that were added to God's Law. The **elders** are not church elders, they are the rabbis or teachers that came up with these traditions.

⁴ When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, *like* (now notice this...) **the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches** (and the Mishnah would've had 30 chapters on this).

You need to know this has nothing to do with hygiene; the religious leaders were not concerned with people getting sick, but they were concerned with the extra commands they established.

ⁱⁱⁱ Now because people thought their salvation depended on this, there are some unbelievable stories about how hard Jews worked to avoid working on the Sabbath...

- Adam Clarke said, *"The Jews were so superstitious concerning the Sabbath they thought it a crime even to attempt to defend themselves. When their enemies observed this, they deterred their operations to the Sabbath. It was through this that Pompey was able to conquer Jerusalem."*
- This type of thinking still hangs around today:
 - Jews eat leftover food and they drink day-old coffee because it would be considered work to prepare anything.
 - Some apartment buildings in New York, housing Jews, have a Sabbath elevator that has no buttons on it. It just goes up, hitting every floor, and it goes down hitting every floor so you don't have to push a button.
 - They can't start fires or put out fires on the Sabbath, so they have Sabbath timers in the houses that turn lights on and off, because to turn a light on would be starting a fire through the electrical current that's created and turning lights off would be putting the fire out.
- David Guzik shared a story in his commentary: *"In early 1992, tenants let three apartments in an Orthodox neighborhood in Israel burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath would violate Jewish law. Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath, because doing so would break an electrical current, which is considered a form of work. In the half-hour it took the rabbi to decide 'yes,' the fire spread to two neighboring apartments."*

^{iv} Listen to this example Jesus shared...

Mark 7:9 And he said to them, **"You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! 10a For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother';**

This is part of God's Law, Exodus 20:12, the 5th commandment.

Mark 7:10b and, **'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'**

This is Exo 21:17: it's the consequence of disobeying the 5th Commandment.

Mark 7:11 But you say, **'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"'** (that is, given to God)— **12 then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother.**

The Law was clear people were supposed to care for their parents, but they added rules that allowed people to mistreat their parents.

“**Corban**” is one of the rules. People could tell their parents...

“Whatever I would give you is Corban, which means I’ve promised to give it to God instead; therefore, I can’t give it to you.”

But guess who got to hold on to it? The children!

They added to God’s law and it prevented people from doing good.

Because God gave the Law to honor father and mother, the only way this could be nullified was in acting like they were doing something greater than honoring father and mother, and that’s honoring God. They acted like they were doing something spiritual, so they could do something selfish! They were being hypocrites!