

Some of you played sports when you were back in high school... and have strong memories of your coach. Maybe it was tennis... or football... wrestling... baseball... track and field... or basketball. ... But even if you didn't play an intermural sport... maybe you had a P.E. coach that you can remember – or maybe you watched some games from the stands... which has given you an impression of athletic coaches.

I have spoken of this before – but for me... the image of a typical high school coach that comes to my mind... is that of an old fashioned screamer. Yes... that's right... a clipboard-throwing... arm-waving... pacing back and forth... eye bulging... vein-popping... red-faced - SCREAMER. Have you ever seen one of those...? Have you ever been the target of one...? It isn't pleasant... .. OR so I've been told.)

Here is the reason why I have tried to place this (rather unpleasant) image in your mind. ... Many people have a similar view of God. ... They believe he's like a grumpy old high school coach... who has to get his way... and that when he doesn't... he will shame... guilt... and scare people to get them in line.

Although most wouldn't say it out loud... deep down many believers think of God as "*the God who is out to get me.*" ... That God is waiting for us to mess up so he can meet his divine quota for punishing sin. ... Perhaps this comes from a particular misunderstood teaching... or from a bad experience with a church... or a Christian... but with any case... this is how many (*functionally*) view God.

And then... once we have this mistaken notion about God in our heads... we take on the attitude that we can help God out... by treating anyone who

we see breaking His rules – with our disapproving **contempt**. ... “WOAH! You are out of line! So I have to heap a whole lot of shame on you...!”

Today... with our passage in Luke... and the message that I have titled “The Priority of Mercy”... I am going to try to reverse this wrong view of God and what He wants from us. When we open today’s passage... we encounter a very different God. **Mercy** was at the heart of Jesus’ ministry. In fact... before we get to our passage... I want to show you that this passage’s view of God ... is all over the Bible. It is not unique to our verses that we come to... in Luke 6.

Hosea 6:6 is an easy one to come to mind. In its entirety it reads, “*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*” ... Hosea’s message to the northern kingdom was that sacrifices and burnt offerings (in themselves) - held no weight with God. ... What pleased God... was a heart devoted to Him - **and** a life characterized by mercy. ... Mercy is **inseparable** from real faith.

Amos (another eighth-century B.C. prophet to the northern kingdom)... was even more explicit.

Amos 5:12 21-24

¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. ²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Religious observance that does not look out for the plight of the needy (in other words - religion without mercy)... is **unacceptable**.

Micah (a contemporary of Hosea and Amos who prophesied to the **southern** kingdom)... gave this truth its most famous expression: “*And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6:8).

(Finally) on the eve of the southern kingdom’s Babylonian captivity... Jeremiah urged Shallum (the son of the Godly King Josiah)... to recall the example of his righteous father:

Jeremiah 22:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. ¹⁶ He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD.

(So... FOLKS!) It is indisputable that **mercy is a sure sign of knowing God... and living a life that pleases Him.** ... [P A U S E] ...

Authentic believers care about the welfare of others. ... One of the great New Testament expressions of this comes from the Apostle John’s first epistle: “*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*” (1 John 3:17). Some Christians... uneasy with this material test of spiritual reality... ignore it. But it is NEVER a good idea to ignore Scripture’s clear teaching.

It was precisely here that Jesus’ detractors showed their true colors. We will see it - in today’s passage. The pharisees did not care about others’ needs... (physical... or spiritual). ... (You see) in Luke 6... the pharisees

attempt to guard the Sabbath... as we pick right up... where we left off last week. ... Jesus has just described how the fermenting wine of the **New** Covenant... cannot be held in the inflexible wineskin of the Rabbinical interpretation of the **Old** Covenant. Their interpretation of the Old Covenant left no room for MERCY.

But anyone who has been filled with this NEW wine... and shows mercy to others... NEED **NOT** to expect a lot of kudos. Appreciation may (in fact) **NOT** BE SHOWN – as we see demonstrated in today’s passage. Don’t expect praise from others for doing the right thing.

If you have not found out already... you will have times in your life when you will face opposition for doing what is right and good. That’s pretty sad (isn’t it?)... but it is reality. ... Your *assistance*... patience... or help that is given to someone... may spark the outrage of others. ... The gift you offer may irritate those who are selfish and greedy. ... Doing what is right... or treating people right – is not always popular. This is what we see happening to Jesus in our portion of Luke.

Luke 6:1-2

Suddenly some Pharisees arrive. Where they came from is not indicated. One moment they are absent; the next, there they are! Or had they been nearby all the while, spying “from around the corner” perhaps? The fact that this question is not answered makes the story the more dramatic. “Why are you doing what is not permitted on the sabbath?” they ask.

Now... it is important to note that Jesus and His disciples were not stealing food from some farmer’s field. That is not the issue (here) with the pharisees. Deuteronomy 23:25 says that farmers need to allow the poor to

enter their fields and eat whatever they want. They just can't bring containers and carry food away. But they can feed themselves while in the farmers field. (Jesus and His disciples... who had left everything... would be considered poor.)

The underlying issue of the Pharisees was as follows: Work was forbidden on the sabbath day. Scripture (Exod. 20:8–11; 34:21; Deut. 5:12–15) forbids work on the Sabbath. ... But the rabbis felt the need to add to what God said – by strictly defining what constituted “work.” The Pharisees could no longer distinguish between their man-made interpretations and traditions - and the actual God-given Law. They had drawn up a catalogue of thirty-nine principal works... and then broke them down and meticulously subdivided those into a lot of rules and regulations... all defining exactly what was forbidden on the sabbath. The real law of God was buried under a mountain of their man-made... foolish traditions.

The rabbis defined a “burden” as “the weight of a dried fig.” To pick up anything heavier than that was work. If a person were in one place and his hand, filled with fruit, was stretched in another, he must drop the fruit if overtaken in that position by the Sabbath! The rabbis forbade a woman to look in a mirror on the Sabbath because she might notice a gray hair and pluck it out... and that would be work! ... And so on... (page after page) endless... mindboggling pettiness... burden heaped upon burden.

In accordance with this list... plucking the heads of grain (they said) was *reaping* and therefore “work.” ... Rubbing them with the hands (according to their man-made regulations) was *threshing*. ... So here were these

disciples of Jesus engaged in the religious leaders forbidden activity... and Jesus was doing nothing about it! These rule-watchers were ticked!

By their strict and oppressive rules... the Pharisees and scribes had turned the Sabbath Day into a burden - instead of the blessing God meant it to be... and Jesus challenged both their doctrine and their authority.

Jesus responds to the complaints of the Pharisees by taking them straight to the Word of God. And I love how He does this – without even mentioning their man-made additions. ... Jesus reminded the Pharisees of **David's** actions when he and his men were hungry. ... The most beloved King of Israel (David!) believed in the needs of people over religious rituals. This was a bigger issue than the Pharisees ridiculous additions to the Law.

Not only were Jesus' critics missing all the Old Testament verses I have already cited – which show that Mercy is more important than the Law – but they were also missing how King David and Israel's High Priest (back then - at that time) got those passages (in Amos... Jeremiah... and Hosea)

RIGHT!

Mercy (shown by meeting the needs of David and his men) comes **above** the Law. Jesus shows this by citing what is recorded in 1 Samuel 21.

Luke 6:3-4

The high priest gave this special bread to David and his men to eat as they were fleeing from Saul. ... The priest understood that their need was more important than ceremonial regulations. ... The loaves given to David were the old loaves that had just been replaced with fresh ones. ... Although the priests were the only ones allowed to eat this bread... God did not punish

David - because his need for food was more important than the priestly regulations. Mercy trumps cold legalism.

This is the same message that Jesus was trying to get across to these Pharisees. ... By comparing Himself... and His disciples to David and his men... Jesus was saying (in effect): "*If you condemn me... you must also condemn our most beloved King David.*" Both he and the High Priest understood that God desires mercy – not sacrifice.

Another Gospel writer – **Matthew** – wrote of this same incident in Matthew 12:6-7... and I find it very interesting that Matthew actually **quotes** Hosea 6:6 in his telling of this story.

Matthew 12:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

You pharisees ... (you experts of the Law and Prophets) ... (You who think of yourselves as teachers) ... you have **lost** what King David and the High Priest (back then) understood. ... Mercy is PRIMARY! God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules.

Then the Lord exploded a bombshell. "*The Son of man,*" He said, "*is Lord also of the sabbath.*" Who did this carpenter from Nazareth think He was? ... Is He really claiming to be God - able to do with Sabbath anything He pleased!

Luke 6:5

No one dared to challenge the Pharisees' exclusive jurisdiction as police, judge, and jury over all matters related to the Sabbath. That is... until Jesus. His bold claim: "*The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath*" challenged the authority of the Pharisees... who had stolen the Sabbath from God. ... "*The Sabbath is not yours to control; it is Mine, because I am God. Therefore, I am taking it back from you.*"

He was claiming to be greater than the law and above the law. Jesus meant that he had the authority to overrule the Pharisees' traditions and regulations... because He had created the Sabbath — and the Creator is always greater than the creation.

Luke has made his point (here in our passage) that God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules... and Jesus has authority over the Sabbath. But Luke gives us another report about a different clash with the Pharisees over the Sabbath – to make his point even more convincingly. Mercy is **PRIMARY** ... and Jesus has authority over the Sabbath (He is God.)

Luke 6:6-7

There is outrageous irony here as "determined religious men" sinisterly watch Jesus' every move... to see if He will show kindness and heal the man... *so they can charge Jesus with sin.*

These Pharisees were utterly unmerciful and utterly lost. Jesus gave this truth sobering expression when He said, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*" (Matthew 5:7). ... Put another way... "*a merciful spirit is a sign of having received mercy - while an unmerciful spirit is a sign of not having experienced mercy...*" ... (LISTEN!)... No matter how active you

are in a church... if you do not care about the welfare of others... (if you have little to no concern about the salvation of the lost)... **YOU** are lost! ... Let's not soften this... because Jesus never did. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... to grasp the tension in this final event of our passage... we need to appreciate how the Pharisees would have seen the issue of Sabbath healing. ... In general... healing or medical work was not to be done on the Sabbath - **unless** ...a life was in danger ...a baby was being born ...or a circumcision needed to be performed.

The rule was that only in such cases in which a person's life was actually in danger... would it be permissible to heal on the sabbath. ... Would Jesus **dare** to oppose this (well-established) rule? The Pharisees thought that surely it must not be violated! So they watched Jesus closely.

The graphic term παρατηροῦντο **{par-a-tay-reh-un'-to}** is emotive; it means to spy on... or to watch out of the corner of one's eye (which adds a sinister note.) If Jesus acts... the Pharisees are ready to charge Him with working on the Sabbath. Menacingly... they **want** Him to heal on the Sabbath... so that they can level a charge and destroy Him. (Jesus' destruction was their intent. Remember this... as we come to Jesus' response in verse 9. Their intent was to destroy the life of Jesus.)

Luke 6:8-9

Jesus knows that they want to get Him - but He does not back away. ... The opponents may be secretive... but Jesus is open. ... He turns to the man and tells him to come forward. He could have dealt with him in private. He could have gestured silently or healed the man with a mere

thought. But Jesus deliberately and boldly brought him to the front of the synagogue.

Jesus then challenged the scribes and Pharisees with a question... which the Greek construction presents as two sets of alternatives. The New Living Translation appropriately captures the essence of the Lord's challenge:

"Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath... or is it a day for doing evil? ... Is this a day to save life or to destroy a life?"

Jesus' question is: *"Is this a day for restoring this man's life"* – in terms of enabling him to make a living once more... *"or is this a day for destroying someone's life – (namely) MINE?"*

How ironic! ... The hearts and minds of these self-righteous scribes and Pharisees (who were finding fault with Jesus for wanting to deliver this man from his handicap)... were engaged in killing the Messiah! ... (Is the Sabbath for good... or for evil...?) ... *"Is it right on the sabbath to do good and to save life, as I am doing; or to do harm and to destroy, as you right now are doing?"* ... The confrontation was as sharp... dramatic... and bold as imaginable.

Luke 6:10

Jesus "looked around" at the men... staring them down... defying their absurd rules... condemning their lack of compassion (is what Mark 3:5 tells us)... daring them to interfere. ... (Please) take note of Jesus' authoritative approach... and Luke's emphasis on obedience. ... Jesus had earlier commanded the man: *"Get up and come forward!"* ... The man *"got up and came forward"* (verse 8). ... Then Jesus commanded: *"Stretch out your hand!"* The man *"did so"* (verse 10). ... And the very act of obedience—

extending his twisted... useless hand — demonstrated the Lord’s power to heal diseases.

Everyone saw the man’s hand “*restored*”... yet Jesus **had not done work** in the manner of a traditional physician. ... He was clearly responsible for the healing... though He hadn’t moved a muscle! Jesus healed the man and did not violate the Pharisees ridiculous rules. ... This left His accusers without any condemning testimony. ... What is more... Jesus demonstrated to them beyond any shadow of doubt that He is Lord of the Sabbath.

Luke 6:11

Before the public... these Pharisees had been “shown up” for what they really were: leaders who set a higher value on their harsh... hairsplitting rules than on God’s law of love... and were more concerned about their “traditions”... than about the health and happiness of a tragically handicapped fellow man. ... And if their self-inflicted silence had already made them angry... the actual miracle Jesus performed made matters even worse for them.

We might expect that (now) they would have repented and confessed their wickedness! ... But no... they discuss back and forth... among themselves... what they might do to Jesus!

This marked a turning point — or rather... the breaking point — in Jesus’ relationship with the Pharisees. The Pharisee (up to this point) had probably hoped to recruit Jesus to join their ranks. But Jesus had firmly established His authority over everything they held dear. ... And He disagreed on virtually every point.

Luke describes the strong reaction of Jesus' enemies as their being filled with "**rage**"... which literally means "**unreason**." It describes a kind of foolishness or folly that is expressed by a hothead who allows impulsive hostility to overpower logic. ... In their senseless wrath... the Pharisees were determined to find some expedient way to harm Jesus.

Jesus didn't look for a fight... but neither did He back down when the Pharisees took the fight to Him. He didn't allow their opposition to deter Him from doing what was right. ... And neither should we!

Once we understand the underlying lesson of today's passage – that mercy is primary ... and that **mercy is a sure sign of knowing God... and living a life that pleases Him**... we ***will*** find opposition to our showing mercy. But will we persevere? Or will we back down when we get challenged?

Does the New Wine in you really make a difference? Is there a definite sense of mercy that expresses itself to a culture that desperately needs it?

Dynamic mercy in all its dimensions is nothing less than the life of Christ in us. Such a life is costly. It is inconvenient. It raises tension. It brings conflict. It is humbling. It is countercultural. But it is our calling... for God says: "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings*" (Hosea 6:6).