

Lord of the Sabbath

Lord of our Rest

Luke 6:1 On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.
2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?"
3 And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:
4 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?"
5 And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."
6 On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.
7 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.
8 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.
9 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?"
10 And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored.
11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.
12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.
13 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:
14 Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew,
15 and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot,
16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.
17 And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,

¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

(Luke 6:1-19)

Closed On Sunday

A lot of people in our culture completely **resonate** with the old song by Loverboy, “**Everybody’s workin’ for the weekend.**”¹ George Jones put it bluntly, “**It’s finally Friday, I’m free again. I got my motor running for a wild weekend. It’s finally Friday, I’m outta control. Forget the workin’ blues, and let the good times roll.**”² Of Sunday in particular, the Bangles lament on their song “Manic Monday,” “**I wish it was Sunday – ‘Cause that’s my *fun day* - My I don’t have to run day?**”³

In a slightly different way, when I was in college at a Christian liberal arts school and a friend missed church that week, he usually said he went to **Bedside Baptist** or the **Church of the Holy Comforter** where he listened to the sermon of **Pastor Pillow** or **Reverend Sheets**. Sunday was, after all, the day of “rest.”

¹ **Loverboy**, “Working for the Weekend,” *Get Lucky*, Columbia (1981).

² **George Jones**, “It’s finally Friday,” *Walls Can Fall*, MCA Nashville (1992).

³ **The Bangles**, “Manic Monday,” *Different Light*, Columbia (1986).

Back when I was in school and all those songs were written, people still retained some idea that at least you **weren't supposed to work** on Sunday. Many stores were still closed. These days, not so much. Nearly all Blue Laws have been repealed and virtually every store is open except Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A. As for church? More and more Christians think it isn't a joke to see Pastor Pillow, but the direct mandate of heaven itself. If they go to church at all, because let's get real, God doesn't care about church right (that's sarcasm by the way), any other night of the week will work fine. By the 2020s, we've lost the biblical sense of sabbath, of corporate worship, of the fear of God who is its Lord and towards whom it is directed.

“Sabbath” has been a controversial doctrine in recent decades. In some ways, this dates back to the earliest church which saw a move of corporate worship from Saturday to Sunday, as Christians celebrated weekly the resurrection of Christ **“according to the eighth”** as the Psalms put it—the eighth day.

These days, there are many Christians who **do not like the term “sabbath”** applied to anything that Christians do, feeling that this was a purely ceremonial law of the old covenant nation of Israel only. On the other end, there are some

groups that act very much like the Rabbis of old, creating more rules attending the sabbath than are found in the entire Bible concerning all other things. And just about any conceivable position in between is held by someone too.

During the Reformation, these disagreements can be exemplified by a story where John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, visited Calvin in Geneva. Sproul puts it this way, “Imagine the consternation of John Knox, who was expelled from England during the reign of Bloody Mary, and first sought refuge in Germany and finally went to Geneva, Switzerland, under the auspices of John Calvin. Knox was shocked when he arrived in Geneva and found Calvin, with his family, lawn bowling on the Sabbath day.² You can probably discern which side of the debate he fell on.

Luke 6:1-19 Structure and Context

Luke 6 begins with two stories that deal with the Sabbath. In them, we continue with the antagonists, those devils, the Pharisees who were introduced in the second half of Luke 5. This is no coincidence. The Pharisees had come to

² R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Volume 2—Salvation and The Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2007), 342. In Daniel R. Hyde, “Regulae de Observatione Sabbathi: The Synod of Dort's (1618–19) Deliverance on the Sabbath,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4.1 (January 2012): 161.

investigate this man Jesus, but after he told them that he had the power to forgive sins, their religious dander was raised and they began looking for ways to trap this dangerous blasphemous teacher.

Luke shows us this through a series of miracle stories and teachings that end ch. 5 and continue through chapter 6. Four stories in a row see the Pharisees seeking to find some kind of dirt on Jesus. Two of the stories are miracles. Last time we saw the paralytic; today we will see the man with the withered hand. In both of these stories Jesus “knew their thoughts,” demonstrating an uncanny Spidey-sense that knew when danger is around, a sense that was grounded in the omniscience of God. Two stories in between focus on eating. First, Jesus is eating and drinking “with sinners,” something unthinkable that would make him and everyone else ritually unclean. In the second, the one today, Jesus is eating grain on the Sabbath. In the middle we have the two parables of the unshrunk cloth and new wine.

To put this all another way, the climactic point of last week that showed us the change of covenant becomes the central point of the entire passage between 5:1 and 6:19, which is really all one giant interwoven thought. To demonstrate this even more, we saw how the center of ch. 5 was Jesus withdrawing to the wilderness to pray. So also, the

center of **6:1-18** is Jesus **withdrawing to a mountain to pray**. Before Jesus goes to pray in the wilderness, he **calls a handful of disciples** and before this, **multitudes** from Galilee come to hear him teach. After going on top of the mountain to pray, Jesus **calls all twelve disciples** and then begins to teach with **multitudes** from literally all of Israel and even the Gentiles lands of Tyre and Sidon coming to hear him and be healed. It looks something like this:

- A. **the multitudes** come to hear Jesus near a lake of fish (5:1-3)
- B. **The call of some disciples** (Peter, John, James) (5:4-11)
- C. **Miraculous healing: The Leper** (5:12-15)
- D. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed (5:16)**
- C'. **Miraculous healing: The Paralytic** and accusations of the Pharisees **“he knew their thoughts”** (5:17-26)
- B'. **More disciples (Levi) called** (5:27-28)
- A'. **Multitudes having a feast: Accusatory question of the Pharisees (eating/drinking with sinners)** (5:36-39)
- O. The parables of the unshrunk cloth and new wine**
- A''. **Accusatory question of the Pharisees (eating on the Sabbath)** (6:1-5)
- A'''. **Another Sabbath** arose (6:6)
- C'''. **Miraculous healing: Withered hand** and Pharisees seek to kill him **“He knew their thoughts”** (6:7-11)
- D''. He withdrew to a mountain to pray (6:12)**
- B'''. **Jesus calls disciples: the twelve (6:13-16)**
- A'''. **A multitude** from everywhere comes to hear and be healed (6:17-19)⁴

⁴ I'm combining Smith's analysis last time with what is for her one large chiasm between 5:1 and 6:19. While hers is neater, mine is able to show a couple of parallels that hers can't, namely knowing the "thoughts" and withdrawing to isolated places to pray. See **Christine Smith**, "[Luke 5:1-39 Chiasm](#)," *A Little Perspective* (March 8, 2016 on website version) and **Christine Smith**, "[Luke 5:1-6:19 Chiastic Structure](#)," *A Little Perspective* (Mar 9, 2016).

Today our focus will be on the **Sabbath stories and the mountain**. Next time we will look at **the twelve disciples**. These verses all parallel Mark's Gospel rather nicely. After that we will look at **6:17ff**, which Luke takes from the beginning of Matthew's **Sermon on the Mount**, which he shortens quite a bit to take us to the end of ch. 6.

Luke 6:1-5—Eating Grain on the Sabbath

Luke's focus on the Sabbath is made clear at the very beginning. **“On a Sabbath...”** Some people think the word sabbath means **“seven,”** which is why the Jews were to sabbath on the seventh day. In Hebrew, the two words share two of the three letters, but seven or *sheba* (שבע) is clearly a different word than *shabbath* (שבת). The word sabbath means “rest.” Thus, they sometimes *sabbathed* on **first** days (**Lev 23:24, 23-33, 39; 25:10-11**; etc.), **just like Christians**.

Therefore, **on a day of rest**, **“while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands”** (**Luke 6:1**). Of importance beginning here will be **several passages from the Torah** which the Gospel's presuppose that you know, along with Rabbinic tradition surrounding those passages. The

first we should see is probably **Deut 23:25**. “If you go into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may *pluck the ears with your hand*, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor’s standing grain.” This is to the letter exactly what Luke says the Disciples were doing. Therefore, they were not violating the law of harvesting someone else’s field.

Furthermore, **another law**, this time pertaining to the land-owner is relevant. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.... you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God” (**Lev 19:9-10**; cf. **Lev 23:22**; **Deut 24:21**; **Ruth 2:1–23**). The disciples, having left everything, are certainly now considered “**the poor**.” Therefore, they are again doing exactly what Moses permitted.

Nevertheless, even though they have two positive commands that keeps them in the right, we read, “**But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?’**” (**Luke 6:2**). **They didn’t care** about the two things they were doing right, but the one they were doing wrong. Why? This is what people who already have something against you do. These men did not care about right and wrong, but about stopping this blasphemous

teacher from spreading his theological cancer at all costs. So, they go after his disciples in an indirect assault on him as their master.

Here's the thing. There is no law in Moses that forbids plucking grain on the Sabbath. There is a law about sabbath that seems like it might be related. It says, "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. *In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest*" (Exod 34:21). But this is precisely where the sickle comes in. Plucking heads of grain with your hand is not harvesting, but simply *eating*. Eating is hardly forbidden on the Sabbath. Of course, plowing someone else's field is wrong. But that isn't what they are doing. In fact, God actually makes explicit provision in the law for what they are doing precisely so that no one would accuse them of what they are now being accused of.

But something else is going on here. That is, the religious traditions of the scribes which were created to "fence" the law. That is, the Pharisees had taken the disobedience of their fathers who were brought into exile for their violations of sabbath and other laws so seriously, that they developed an elaborate system of rules that would keep one from even coming close to breaking the actual law of God. In its best form, the idea seems like it has in mind helping people obey

God. But as Paul says, they have no ability at stopping the indulgence of the flesh (**Col 2:22**). In this case such sabbath rules included forbidding activities such as **reaping, threshing, and winnowing**, but even such minutia as **tying a knot or sewing two stitches**.⁵ It is unclear if there was agreement about plucking grain, but you get the point. Some of the Pharisees believed this was a violation of the Sabbath, justifying it with something like **Ex 34:21**, even though the reality was, it was their own legalistic addition and tradition that was at best being violated, not God's law.

It is curious the way Jesus answers. **Rather than attack** them for their legalistic hypocrisy, which he will do in other places, or **rather than** try to get his disciples off on some kind of legal technicality, which he easily could have done had he so wished, he tells them a story about **David**. This is his own counter-assault. Jesus answered them, **“Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him...”** (**Luke 6:3**). Jesus will focus **not on the work, but on the need**. His disciples who had left everything, were hungry. To point out the obvious, hunger that leads to eating is a basic need of humanity. All of us have both the need and the right to eat.

⁵ Cf. *y. šabb.* 7.9b; Str-B 1.617; *m. šabb.* 7:2.

It is interesting that he would choose a story *about David*, who is called the messiah of Israel and was soon to be its king. In fact, this is more than interesting. It is deliberate and ends up being his main point. Jesus reminds them of “**how [David] 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?**” (4).

Saul is very much still the king of Israel. Nevertheless, David has been anointed (*mashiach*, the verbal form of **messiah**) by Samuel (**1Sam 16:13**). David was fleeing from Saul when he came to the place where the tabernacle had apparently been set up, a town called Nob, identified as most likely about a mile north(east) of Jerusalem. His men were hungry and they had gone days without food.

The story unfolds very strangely. David, seemingly all **alone**, appears out of nowhere and the priest, Ahimelech, the grandson of Eli, is startled and trembling (**1Sam 21:1**). To calm his fears, **David straight-up lies** to him that king Saul had sent him on an errand (2).⁶ But David’s men were hiding somewhere nearby and so he asks the priest **if there be any food on hand**, even five loaves of bread (3). He didn’t, but as

⁶ I completely agree with Phillips on this point. See Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and **Richard D. Phillips**, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 363-64.

the law required, he did have the holy showbread (4) which was to be a memorial in the Holy Place until the week was over and it was to be eaten by the priests (Lev 24:8-9). But the priest says there was a requirement, not found anywhere in Moses, that it could be eaten by others, so long as they were ritually pure. In this case, they had not been with a woman while on their “sacred” duty. David insisted that they were (5), and so the priest gives him the showbread (6), which strictly speaking, was not permitted in the Law. And Jesus even makes this point when he says it “was not lawful.”

What’s very interesting to me is that Luke leaves out three important further words of Jesus found in Mark and Matthew. Mark tells us Jesus told them, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Luke is not at this point concerned that you worry about how Jesus justified the actions of his disciples. Matthew adds two more (and curiously does not have Mark’s point). The first is, “One greater than the temple is here” (Matt 12:6). Luke is not focusing on the temple at this point, I believe because he has already made his point about the temple when he was focusing on the old covenant in the story of the leper. Matthew also says, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not

have condemned the guiltless’” (7). Again, Luke is not concerned with Jesus’ justifications for his disciples actions, I believe because he will deal with this in the very next story.

Instead, Luke picks out **the one saying that they all have in common** as he concludes this story. “**The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath**” (Luke 6:5; cf. Mark 2:28; Matt 12:8). **A lot of people think** that this saying means that Jesus, as Lord, has the right to overthrow the law and make totally new rules, simply because he is God. The problem is, **he isn’t overthrowing anything**. This is not what the saying means at all. But before I show you what it means, let’s go to the second of the two Sabbath stories.

Luke 6:6-11—Healing on the Sabbath

The two stories are obviously parallel from the way this one also opens. “**On another Sabbath**” (Luke 6:6). At least a week has passed, perhaps many weeks. It continues, “**he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.**” We’ve recently seen a **leper**, a **paralytic**, and now a man with a **withered hand**. This seems to refer to a hand that has gnarly knuckles, twisted fingers that won’t straighten, perhaps terrible arthritis. It is

now dead and completely useless. It was also quite visible to everyone around and no one could do a thing about it.

Next, “the scribes and the Pharisees watched him...” (7). They’re still around. They haven’t gone back to Jerusalem. They clearly believe that their most sacred duty on earth is *not* to be studying and teaching Torah to others or to help those near Jerusalem, but to find a way to take down Jesus of Nazareth. It is their sole purpose in life now. They exist for no other reason. They are consumed with hatred and disdain and will do anything to tarnish his reputation, to make others believe he is something that he is not, or, if they have to, much much worse.

What were they watching him so closely for on this day? “To see whether he would heal *on the Sabbath*, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.” (7b). But just as before, Jesus “knew their thoughts” (8a). While this certainly shows Jesus’ ability to perceive danger, it much more helps us identify his deity. Cyril of Alexandria rightly says, “Who can know hearts, and see the thoughts hidden in the depth of the understanding, but God only? For he himself says somewhere by the voice of the prophets, ‘I, the Lord, search the minds and try the heart’” (*Commentary on Luke, Homily 12*).⁷

⁷ In Arthur A. Just, *Luke*, vol. 3, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 3. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 93.

Jesus knows all our thoughts. No one else does, for this is a mark of God. Jesus is God and nothing catches him by surprise. He knows everything about you.

Because he knew what they were planning, he took the fight to them. “He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come and stand here.’ And he rose and stood there” (Luke 6:8). The Pharisees at this point do not know that Jesus knows what they are thinking. So they most certainly were excited, because they thought that he was about to trap himself. They knew he would heal the man. This was their chance.

“*But*⁸ 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?’” (9). It was a rhetorical question. No one said a word. They were not expecting this. Jesus had trapped *them*. I believe this may be a reason Luke did not feel the need to add Matthew and Mark’s additions to his narrative. It has a greater rhetorical impact to not repeat the same thing, but to catch the reader unawares the second time around, even though Jesus essentially made the same point weeks ago on that first Sabbath day when the disciples were caught eating, according to the other Gospels.

⁸ All English translations seem to have “And” or “Then” for *de* here. I rather like “But” because it shows the contrast to what they were expecting and what they received.

How did Matthew put it? “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,” quoting from **Hosea 6:6**, an interesting choice, since that book is all about the **spiritual adultery** the people of Israel were committing against the Lord in their hypocritical picking and choosing to keep certain laws, while violating the much more basic ones.

Now Luke essentially says the same thing. *Is it better to do harm or to do good?* His point would not have been missed on them, though others in synagogue surely would have been oblivious to counter move, like two people having a stare down in a room filled with others, and only they know it. The teachers were in fact at that very moment **seeking to harm Jesus** even as he is about to do good to someone else. This is the evil of men’s hearts, totally unmindful to its own hypocrisy and deceit, able to justify a million different sins in the name of what it arbitrarily decides is “good.” Even when it is objectively true and easily identifiable that it is exactly the opposite. Many times even Christians deceive themselves like this in the way they treat others, how much more men who do not have the Holy Spirit of God?

Jesus paused; it seems for a rather long time. It says that **he looked around at them all (10)**. One by one. Dead in the eye. **Their hearts melted away** in the face of the gaze of the

King of Glory. They know the answer. Even if it is on a Sabbath. As he will say later in Luke, citing other OT laws, “Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it” (Luke 13:15)? “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” (Luke 14:5; cf. Deut 22:4)?

But Luke has us start off not with an ox, but with a man—someone made in the image of God. How much more important are you than an ox (cf. Luke 12:28)? Once he felt his stare-down had done its work, he told the man, “‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he did so, and his hand was restored” (Luke 6:10). Right in front of them all. Not hidden. Not secret. It would be as if right here as we sit in church, he walked in and healed the man’s hand and you saw it with your own eyes.

“But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (11). Why? Because he had identified their true nature. Pure evil. Relentless hatred of good. He had exposed their true purpose for being there. He had mocked them in front of others. He had exposed the plans of their evil hearts. Darkness hates light precisely because it is light and not darkness. Light dissipates darkness

and darkness does not want to disperse. It seeks to protect itself at all costs. They hated Jesus now more than ever. They didn't care that he did good. They didn't care about this man's new-found life. They cared only about their own self-preservation, their way of life, their power over the people, their status as the elites: teachers and scribes, the cream of the crop of God's chosen people, those God loved more than any others.

Luke 6:12—To the Mountain to Pray

I want to conclude our look at the text today by going to **vs. 12**, a **transitional verse**, in my mind the end of our two stories now but the beginning of the story to come. “**In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God**” (**Luke 6:12**). This short verse holds the same kind of central position as its parallel in **5:16**, “**But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.**”

Previously, Jesus did this in the context of healing others, *prior to* the conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees. Now it seems that he does it with precisely them in view. He retreats to his Father after the attack of the devils. **Desolate places is the wilderness**, the wild-lands, the place of the demons and the site of the temptation from the devil himself.

Mountains, on the other hand, convey a different kind of imagery, though it is also related supernaturally. Mountains are considered *axes mundis*, connecting places between heaven and earth. It is on mountains, all over the world, that the gods of the nations meet together in their divine councils to deliberate over the affairs of men. In **China** it is mount *Kun-Lun*. In **Egypt**, it is *Ta-tenen*. In **India**, Mount *Meru*. In **Scandinavia**, *Himinbjörg* (“Sky Mountain”). In **North America** you find *Nunne Chaha*. In **Greece**, Mt. Olympus. For the **Canaanites**, Mt. Saphon. For the **Babylonians**, Mt. Hermon (yes, really). **In the Bible**, it is any mountain that God chooses for his abode—and there are many: Ararat, Sinai, the Mt. of the Beatitudes, Mt. Calvary, Mt. Megiddo (Har Mageddon). And Eden. Jesus, on the mountain, is now interceding as the God-man in a place between heaven and earth. He is going to the council to carry out the duty of Adam—intercessor, guardian. He knows what’s coming. But let’s think more about Adam and Eden.

Most people think of **Eden as a garden**. And this is true. However, Ezekiel also calls it “**the mountain of God**” (**Ezek 28:14**). The whole Garden-Mountain motif was stylized in (at least) one of the seven great wonders of the world: the

Hanging Gardens of Babylon, which was a garden-like zigurat created by Nebuchadnezzar (originally, possibly also the Pyramids of Egypt).



Eden, of course, is all about creation. It was perhaps here that the very first land jutted up out of the primordial waters (**Gen 1:9**). It is here that we find **God and Satan** both present with our first parents. For Eden was in fact **a cosmic mountain**.

In Genesis 1 we learn that **God created in six days**. On that sixth day, he made man and gave him the dominion mandate to be his prophet, priest, and king on earth. His

spokesman. His guardian. His vice-regent. On the seventh day, God rested. That is, he *sabbathed*. Notice, this is *not after* the Fall, but *before*. Sabbath is not just about redemption, but about something prior to sin. It is about reflection and worship in light of who God is and what he has made us to be, as we will see.

God did **not** rest **because he was tired**. It was because God had undertaken a most incredible yet often **unnoticed building project**. For the way the story reads, it is not merely that God is making all the physical stuff of our world—which of course he is. But that **God is creating for himself a temple** (this is why, I believe, Matthew has this in the first story). How can we understand this? Here are a couple of ways.

First, the **sevens** point this out. It is not just that there are seven days, but also **seven** divine speeches, **seven** “let there bes” **seven** fulfillments (and it was so), **seven** “God makes,” **seven** “God saw that it was goods,” **seven** blessings, **seven** mornings, **seven** evenings. The first verse contains **seven** words, the second, **fourteen**. God (elohim) appears **35** times (7x5). There are **seven** paragraphs. The seventh contains **35** words, and so on.

But **seven is the number of the temple**. There are seven lamps on the lampstand. Priests are ordained for seven days. In the instructions God gave to Moses for building the tabernacle, the LORD spoke to Moses seven times. The tabernacle itself is a replica of heaven and earth. Moses obeyed seven times. The work was completed in seven stages. Moses gives seven blessings. Even the order of the seven things he puts into the tabernacle follow the order of the seven days of creation. Solomon likewise took seven years to build the temple. He dedicated on the Feast of Tabernacles, a seven day festival on the seventh month of the year. His prayer has seven petitions. And Solomon was said, unlike his father of war, to be “**a man of rest.**”⁹

A second way to see this is by comparing what God does to what Baal is said to do when he builds his temple in the old myth.

Lo,
A day and a second,
Fire burned in the house,
Flames in the palace.
A third and a fourth day,

⁹ All of this is in my sermon: **Douglas Van Dorn**, “Temple Building: Genesis 1:3-2:3,” RBCNC (Sept 29, 2013), <https://uploads.documents.cimpress.io/v1/uploads/1160f2b9-23e5-4a2d-96a1-277b3077f554~110/original?tenant=vbu-digital>.

Fire burned in the house, flames in the palace.

A fifth and a sixth day,

Fire burned in the house,

Flames in the midst of the palace.

Look!

On the seventh day

The fire was removed from the house,

The flames from the palace.

The silver had turned into ingots;

The gold had been changed into bricks!

Valiant Baal rejoiced:

‘My house I have built of silver,

My palace out of gold!’

(KTU 1.4 vi 17-38)

This is precisely why Isaiah says, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” (Isa 66:1). The place of God’s rest then, is not the place where he takes a nap, but the place where he is enthroned as king, or to use Jesus’ word, as Lord. This is why in the Most Holy Place, the ark-throne and the mercy seat are present with someone sitting on it: God himself.

What does any of this have to do with our stories today? In light of Genesis 1, when Jesus says, “The Son of Man is

lord of the Sabbath,” he is not telling the Pharisees that he has the right to change the law, but rather, that he is the Lord who is enthroned on the Sabbath. To put that another way, he is telling them that he is the God who rested on the seventh day. If that isn’t true, he is a blasphemer. Even more, by going to the mountain to pray, as Lord of the Sabbath he is now going to the axis mundi, the place where heaven and earth meet, to make intercession for the people, to be their prophet, priest, and king as Adam was supposed to do on Mt. Eden.

What is this Son of Man doing on the Sabbath? He is “saving” life. That’s his own words. “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” Jesus is the Savior and his saving work is being done in the synagogue for a man with a withered hand.

It is curious that the word “withered” (*xēros*) means “dry.” This is precisely the same word that the LXX uses to translate “the dry land” appearing (Gen 1:9). It is the dry ground the people of Israel cross at the Red Sea when God saves them from Egypt (Ex 14:16). The dry ground appears again when Israel crosses the Jordan (Josh 3:17).

There is more creation imagery in Ezekiel, this time with trees. “And all the trees of the field shall know that I

am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it” (Ezek 17:24). And again later on with the valley of dry bones that become a living army (Ezek 37:4). Isaiah attaches it to the temple, “Let not the *foreigner* who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people’; and let not the *eunuch* say, ‘Behold, I am a *dry tree*.’ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the eunuchs who keep *my Sabbaths*, who choose the things that please me and hold fast *my covenant*, I will give in *my house* and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. ‘And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, *to minister* to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps *the Sabbath* and does not profane it, and holds fast *my covenant*-- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in *my house of prayer*’” (Isa 56:3-7). Note the verbal connections to all we have been talking about here. Dryness. Sabbaths. House of Prayer. Covenant.

It is as if Jesus’ miracle is bringing about the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is mighty interesting to me that the last verses of the larger unit (Luke 5:1-6:19)

tell us that a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon were coming to Jesus to have their diseases healed. And in fact the calling of his disciples appears right between these things, which is surely no accident, even more when we consider that in Acts, the disciples are not only from Galilee, but to the ends of the earth, starting with an Ethiopian Eunuch who absolutely fulfills this prophecy in Isaiah. Luke and Acts parallel one another at just the right point.

Jesus: Lord of the Sabbath

So what does all of this mean for us? It means the same as it meant for them. The Pharisees had in their midst a man claiming in multiple ways to be God in human flesh, the Messiah they had long awaited. He was performing miracles to prove it. But here, he is doing them on the Sabbath. Why?

Again, not because he is overthrowing the law, but because he is the Sabbath's Lord. It is popular to read people say things like, "Jesus wanted to make a point here to the Pharisees—he is the Lord of the sabbath, able to break those rules when necessary to do the right thing."¹⁰ I don't understand this. What rules exactly did Jesus break? A Pharisees'?

¹⁰ Beth Kreitzer et al., eds., *Luke: New Testament*, vol. III, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 128.

Maybe. God's? Not that I can see. Yes, he does say that *David* did something unlawful, and he uses this in the other Gospels to show the teachers that **God desires mercy and love** over pure obedience. In fact, we can argue that this is the point of the law and that Ahimelech actually understood this, and in so doing was not actually violating the law, but fulfilling its heart all along. **Pure obedience necessitates obedience to higher moral principles**—mercy and healing. But even in giving this story to them, Jesus isn't justifying his own *disobedience*, but pointing out that the Lord of the Sabbath is right in front of them. Standing before their eyes. What will they do? What will you do?

Jesus is the very reason why people are supposed to Sabbath. Sabbath is not about resting *per se* (that is a by-product), but about resting *in Christ*. It is about worship. It is about reflection. Reflecting on who he is and what he has done for us. And Reflection upon our own lives in him. Meredith Kline has said, "**Sabbath-keeping expresses man's commitment to the service of his Lord.**"¹¹ **We reflect on what we have done in the past week in service** to God in carrying out dominion through our work. Richard Gaffin says, "**Weekly Sabbath was a continual reminder to Adam that history is**

¹¹ **Meredith G. Kline**, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 39.

not a ceaseless repetition of days.”¹² It is about reflecting on the fact that God is taking us somewhere, because he has been enthroned. God set this up as a pattern so that one day in seven you might recognize his Lordship and worship him, because in Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, we enter our eternal sabbath rest. And this is why we should look forward to Sunday, not because we get to sleep in or finally not have to go to our places of work which are a drudgery. This can actually help you see that your work actually has meaning, no matter what it is, in Christ.

There is a byproduct of this. As Hendriksen says, “It was given to man to keep him healthy, to make him happy, and to render him holy.”¹³ If the Lord of the Sabbath appears and you leave everything for him, as the disciples had done, then you are free to worship him as you obey the law and pick grain in another’s fields to satisfy your hunger, to enjoy your time with the King, and to be changed through union with Christ.

The disciples are following Jesus and their action demonstrates that he is their Lord, the one they follow. We come together on the Lord’s Day—the Christian Sabbath—

¹² Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 155.

¹³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 9, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 514.

for the same purpose. We come to acknowledge his Lordship over all of life. We come to be with him, together. We come worshiping him for making us clean when we were impure, forgiving our sins when we were guilty, making us alive when they were dry trees and withered bones.

Those with a beef against Jesus have an agenda. That agenda is wholly selfish. They do not like being confronted with their sin; they'd rather keep it than have the forgiveness that he brings and the release and redemption that comes through his sacrifice. They would rather remain dry and withered than bow their knee to the one who can heal them. They would rather be restless wanderers like Cain than come to eternal rest in Christ.

But why? Cannot people see that Jesus is love? Can't they see that he brings healing in his wings? Can't they see that the Lord of the Sabbath is omnipotent to save? Can't they see that he is the Creator, enthroned above all his creation? This is what Luke wants you to see in his Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I pray all who hear this story would see the stubbornness of the human heart and its unwillingness to repent until touched by the Word of God. I pray he would touch you with spiritual and physical healing in all the places you so

need, so that you might leave here knowing that truly, Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath, and that having worshiped him, you have carried out the very purpose for which you were made: To glorify God and enjoy him forever, resting in his unchanging grace.

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