

September 16, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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LORD OF THE SABBATH Luke 6:1-11

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell the good news that God has come to sinful humanity, lived as a human, shed His blood to pay for our sins, rose from the grave to prove victory over death, sin, and Satan, and ascended back to heaven from where He came. Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow similar formats and chronological timelines as they describe this ministry of God the Son.

We are most familiar with Luke's account at this point because of our study in this book over the past several weeks. Immediately after Jesus defeated Satan's temptations, we found Him in a synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. He read the Scripture, applied it to Himself, and the people were furious at what He said. Then it appears to be a short time later that He was in the synagogue in Capernaum when a demon-possessed man showed up. Jesus rebuked the demon, cast it out, and everyone was astonished. It might be significant that there is no mention in that story that the people were convinced that this amazing Teacher was the Messiah. Both Matthew and Mark recorded the same story with no mention of the people's faith.

Now in our text, we find Jesus in a synagogue again—the third time in as many chapters. It is obvious that Jesus was doing what Matthew and Mark both recorded: *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people (Matthew 4:23).*

When Jesus was in the synagogues, it was a Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week. The people went to the synagogues on the Sabbath as religiously as we show up in this church building on

Sundays. It is where the people who either loved God or were seeking God would go to learn from the Scriptures, sing the psalms, and pray. Sounds a lot like our situation, doesn't it?

Showing up at the synagogue on the Sabbath was important to the religious leaders. They no doubt encouraged everyone to attend so that they could learn all the important laws and rules that were necessary for obeying God. God had given His law to Moses so that His chosen people, the Israelites, would know about God's character and, therefore, know how to order their lives in a way that would be pleasing to their God.

In order to help the people please God, the lawyers and Pharisees invented hundreds of other rules that explained what God really meant by His law. Some of the most important of those rules were the restrictions for the Sabbath. God plainly stated in His law that His people were supposed to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. What did that require? The scribes and Pharisees did not leave any room for doubt on that matter. Out of their superior wisdom and close fellowship with God, they established rule after rule about Sabbath keeping that they expected the people to obey.

Jesus and His followers always seemed to get crossed up with these rules. The reason was because Jesus, being God in the flesh, had invented the Sabbath to begin with. He was the Lord of the Sabbath. So whether He was in a grain field or a synagogue on a Sabbath, He often had opportunity to help the people see that the scribes and Pharisees were not the authority, and worse, that they were hypocrites who should not be trusted.

What does it mean that Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath? Luke's record of a couple of events in Jesus's life will help us understand.

Christ is Lord of the Sabbath (vv.1-5).

We pick up the "Good News" story with Jesus and the disciples walking through the grain fields eating grain. The imposing question for the Pharisees was, "Why did the disciples eat grain on the Sabbath?" (vv.1-2).

Let's take a closer look at the situation. *On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands (v.1).* At first sight it

might appear that the disciples were swiping some farmer's produce and not paying for it. Actually that is not what they were doing. The disciples were engaged in an activity that really was not a problem at all even for the self-righteous Pharisees. Even they were familiar with and accepted God's law on this matter: *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 (Deuteronomy 23:25).*

As long as the disciples were not harvesting the farmer's grain they were okay. It seems likely that this was a pretty natural activity as they were walking along a "right of way" through a grainfield. The problem, as far as the religious police were concerned, is that the disciples were doing this on the Sabbath. That supposed problem led to the expression of the question. *But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" (v.2).*

The "thought police" appeared to always be on hand watching, waiting, looking for Jesus and His disciples to break the law. God's law about the Sabbath was clear. He told Moses to, *"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 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" (Exodus 20:8-10).*

Okay, that is abundantly clear. But what constituted work? How did the people know if they were keeping the Sabbath holy? In the minds of the humble Pharisees, the people were blessed to have them at hand to instruct them and help them know when they were heading out of bounds. The religious rulers developed many rules that described work that was forbidden for the Sabbath. Overall the Rabbis developed 39 ways NOT to WORK on the Sabbath. They came up with rules like, "You cannot carry a burden on the Sabbath." Okay fine. But what's a burden? A burden was defined as anything that weighed as much as two dried figs.

Even fasting on the Sabbath was considered work according to those rules. Barclay pointed out that "Medical attention could be given only if a life was in danger. For example – a woman in childbirth might be helped on the Sabbath; an infection of the tooth might be treated; if a wall fell on anyone, enough might be cleared

away to see whether he was dead or alive; if he was alive he might be helped, if he was dead the body must be left until the next day. A fracture could not be attended to. Cold water might not be poured on a sprained hand or foot. A cut finger might be bandaged with a plain bandage but not with ointment." (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, "Matthew," Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975, p.67.)

So according to the Pharisees, an Israelite could travel only 3,000 feet from his home without committing work. However, if he placed food 3,000 feet from his home on Friday, he could travel to that food and it became an extension of his home. With that provision he could travel another 3,000 feet. Or if you placed a rope from your home at 3,000 feet, as soon as you crossed the rope, it was equivalent to crossing the threshold of your home, and you could go another 3,000 feet. But God's law never addressed the matter of walking away from home on the Sabbath. That was a manmade thing.

There were four laws in particular that were about not working on the Sabbath of interest in this case. There was to be no reaping, no threshing, no winnowing, and no preparation of food. Technically the disciples broke all four. By plucking the heads of grain they were reaping. By rubbing the grains in their hands to remove husks they were threshing. By blowing the husks away they were winnowing. And the whole process was considered preparation of food. Guilty, guilty, guilty in the minds of the ever-present religious authorities.

Listen to the Lord's explanation of what they disciples were doing (vv.3-5). Jesus answered the hypocrites by giving an illustration. *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?" (vv.3-4).*

Let's consider a couple of principles here. Notice first that the religious leaders addressed the disciples who appeared to be breaking the law. They asked them, *Why are you doing what is illegal?* They used the plural pronoun *you* to address the disciples. In fact, it appears Jesus was not involved in the activity.

Notice second then, that Jesus answered for the disciples. This is a wonderful reminder that He is our advocate. When the great

accuser of the brothers, Satan, tempts us to sin and then goes to rat us out to God, Jesus answers for us.

Notice third that Jesus never argued on the level of the religious hypocrites. He did not respond, “My disciples are not breaking the law.” Nor did He respond, “Mind your own business.” Rather, Jesus always drove straight to the truth that was at stake.

In this case, Jesus highlighted the truth by giving an illustration. The Pharisees certainly knew this story from David’s life (1 Samuel 21:1-9). It was during a new moon celebration, which may well have been a series of Sabbath days, that Saul became so angry with David that he proposed to kill him. God had already rejected Saul as king and had sent Samuel the prophet to anoint David to replace him as king. Saul was insanely jealous. David escaped, stopped at Nob, which was about 1 mile east of Jerusalem, and 5 miles from Gibeah where Saul was. David asked Ahimelech the priest who was in charge of the tabernacle for some food. Ahimelech said that the only food was the Presence bread which had been replaced recently (on a Sabbath). That bread was only for the priests to eat. It was from the table that sat right in front of the Holy of Holies where God’s presence was represented at the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

David requested the priest to give him and his men the bread. *So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away (1 Samuel 21:6).*

That left the Pharisees to answer a very important question. Why was it okay for their favorite king in Israel’s history to eat bread that God’s law prescribed only for the priests’ use? The common conclusion would be that this was an emergency. Furthermore, David, the anointed king, God’s choice servant, had a legitimate need. But the important principle is that Ahimelech, God’s chosen priest, acted out of mercy and kindness toward a fellow human and met the need. A greater king than David and a greater priest than Ahimelech was present and the Pharisees didn’t know it.

The greater King bluntly laid down the real law. *And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” (v.5).* The root problem was that the Pharisees did not understand the purpose of

God’s true law. The full purpose of God’s law is to lead us to love God and love others. Jesus revealed this in response to a lawyer’s question. *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).* So again, the Pharisees’ problem was that, like a lot of religious people, they just didn’t love God or others.

Therefore, Jesus established the underlying rule about the Sabbath. Only the one who invented and established the Sabbath could be the Lord or Master of it. That was God. And Jesus pointed out to the critics that He “the Son of Man” is God. Everyone knew that the title “Son of Man” came from Daniel 7:9-14 and referred to the Messiah. That means that in this simple statement of the law, Jesus affirmed that Messiah is co-equal with God. If Jesus of Nazareth is co-equal with God, He is the Creator, the Law giver, the founder of the Sabbath.

He was not on earth to abolish the law of God. In this case about the Sabbath, Jesus did not abolish or do away with the Sabbath. He promised, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).*

So obviously the Sabbath is not the one command of the Ten that Jesus abolished. The “one in seven” day is His Day. We call it the Lord’s Day. It is still a great day to break from the routine of the week, to lay aside the responsibilities, cares, work, and pressures of life to focus on the Giver of life. It is a wonderfully, glorious, joyful day to fulfill the law: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor. We demonstrate our supreme love for God by our worship. We demonstrate our love for each other by corporate worship.

The disciples walking through the grainfield picking up lunch and eating demonstrated that they worshiped the Lord of the Sabbath not the Sabbath itself. They understood the principle: *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).* Of all the people present in this scene, Jesus alone, the Lord of the Sabbath, had

the right to decide what can or cannot be done on that day. It is still right to do necessities, to do good toward others, and to worship God on the Sabbath.

The only real change in Sabbath observation between Old Testament and New Testament is that in the Old Testament the Sabbath was the last day of the week. When Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, rose from the dead on the first day of the week, He demonstrated a shift that moved the Sabbath to the beginning of the week. And every time we set aside this day for worshiping the Lord of the Sabbath, we are fixing our minds on the eternal Sabbath rest that is yet to come. *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his (Hebrews 4:9-10)*. Because Jesus is still the Lord of the Sabbath, we meet on the first day of the week, make it a Sabbath, and honor Him.

Is it Right to do Good on the Sabbath (vv.6-11)?

The fact that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath leads to a second question. Would Jesus heal on the Sabbath (vv.6-8)? Consider the situation. *On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered (v.6)*. This was still in the context of Jesus preaching and teaching in their synagogues throughout Galilee.

There just happened to be a man present in the synagogue whose hand was atrophied. Dr. Luke pointed out that it was his right hand, as we might expect from a doctor. The all-seeing eyes of the Pharisees were also present to put Jesus to the test. *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 (v.7)*.

The ever present “thought police” were present to see if Jesus would break their rules again. By this time, the religious authorities were not curious, nor were they deciding if they should approve Jesus. They were spies. They were continually looking for a reason to accuse Jesus and thus discredit His ministry. These people who claimed to love God had become the adversaries of God the Son. Which means they had become allies with Satan, the quintessential adversary of God.

In response to the hypocrites’ spying, Jesus offered an invitation. *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 (v.8)*. Jesus knew their thoughts because Jesus exercised divine omniscience in this case. He knew their laws. He knew well that according to their laws it was okay to attempt to save a person’s life on the Sabbath if death would result from non-action. However, any medical procedure that could wait until the next day had to be foregone.

Jesus desired to heal the man’s atrophied hand. Ah, but it was not a life-threatening situation. True. But to heal the hand would be an act of kindness. The unkind, unmerciful, legalistic Pharisees **thought** it was right and acceptable to wait until the next day to heal.

Jesus demonstrated the truth of God’s Sabbath law (vv.9-11). The question. *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?” (v.9)*. Again, Jesus drove to the essence of God’s law: “Love God supremely, and love your neighbor.” That idea lies on the surface of the expanded explanation according to Matthew. He wrote that Jesus said to them, *“Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11-12)*.

Jesus’s question was penetrating. Everyone in the place knew that the only acceptable answer was to do good to the animal. So was it acceptable to love your livestock but not your neighbor? Jesus’s question should have helped the hypocrites to see that they were not keeping even the most basic element of God’s law—love your neighbor. The Lord of the Sabbath showed us what it means to love our neighbor on the Sabbath.

Jesus demonstrated a unique blend of anger and compassion. *And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored (v.10)*. We get the idea here that Jesus looked with fearful penetration at everyone. Probably the focus was on the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, according to Mark’s record, Jesus looked at them with anger. *And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart,*

and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored (Mark 3:5).

Jesus was angry with the stubborn rebellion against God. Jesus was angry because the hypocrites who claimed to love God actually loved themselves so much that they could not love God or their neighbor. And these hypocritical teachers of their own laws were laying heavy burdens on the people that they could not bear. As a result, the religious leaders robbed the people of their joy so that they could not even rejoice in corporate worship at the synagogue.

Perfect God was angry with the religious people but showed compassion to the needy. He gave the needy man a command and he obeyed (unlike the self-righteous people). And Jesus, God the Son, did a miracle that only the Author of life can do. And the self-righteous hypocrites were not impressed, were not happy for the needy man, were not thankful to God.

How would we expect the apparently most religious people in the culture to respond to such a display of compassion? Probably not with fury. *But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.* The words *filled with **fury*** (a translation of the Greek *anoia*) means to be angry out of your mind, so filled with wrath as to be unthinking. The Pharisees were so angry they even became allies with their most despised religious/political enemies, the Herodians whose goal was to make Israel more like Roman culture. Mark wrote, *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him (Mark 3:6).*

So who do you identify with best in this story? Are the scribes and Pharisees, the rule makers (but secret rule breakers), the people who pretended to hold fast to the standard of godliness, your kind of folks? Or do you prefer to identify with the disciples who were going through the grain fields breaking the Pharisees’ laws but not concerned about it? I think I identify most with the guy who had the atrophied hand. He is the picture of spiritual need.

We are all born atrophied in our spirit. We need the life-giving miracle of the Lord’s salvation. We need to have someone who loves us enough to point out that our spirits are lifeless but that Jesus can give us eternal life if we will simply trust Him. And even after we are born again and given newness of life, we still are needy. I regularly

need someone to love me enough to help me grow to be like Christ. I always need to love others enough to help them draw close to Christ and follow after Him. To attempt to help a person become like me is not only foolish, it’s dangerous. To truly love others is to pour your life into them to help them love God supremely. That is what the Lord of the Sabbath does for us, and what we will do for others when we are following Him.