

Lord of the Sabbath—and Everything Else

Luke 6:1-11

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for May 9, 2021

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Summary: What happened when Jesus' life-transformational ministry came head-to-head with the Pharisee's religious technicalities? How could Jesus claim to live a perfect life if the religious leaders could accuse him of not following the Sabbath? Come explore with Stephen Davey the truth that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, not the other way around.

One commentator on the text before us today told the story of a group of middle school boys who were being given a tour of the church sanctuary by the senior pastor. He was regaling them with the meaning behind the stained-glass windows, the pews, and the different decorative elements they could see; he just sort of droned on and on. Finally, they were in the lobby and one boy noticed a plaque—some sort of memorial plaque—hanging on the wall. It was a long list of names. And he asked the pastor who they were, and the pastor said that they were members of the church who had died in the service, and the boy asked, “Which service—the 9:30 or 11:00?”

Bruce Larson, *The Communicator's Commentary: Luke* (Word Books, 1983), p. 114

I didn't think that was funny either!

It reminded me of the truth that people can be *spiritually* dead—spiritually cold, spiritually comatose—while at the same time never miss a service with the congregation.

You see, there can be a vast difference between religious *experience* and spiritual *substance*; between the *religious traditions* of man and the *revealed truth* of God.

If you take your copy of the New Testament and turn to the Gospel by Luke, we're now at chapter 6.

While you're turning, let me inform you that this will be the moment in the Lord's public ministry when the gloves finally come off. The conflict between the religious leaders and Jesus is about to boil over here in chapter 6.

Notice verse 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. But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

Luke 6:1-2

Now, let me set this up: the two events we will cover today—verse 1 through verse 11—both events take place on the Sabbath, and that’s why there will be so much heartburn over what Jesus does.

The Pharisees—the religious leaders of the day—believed Israel had landed in her current state of forced subjection to the Roman empire because Israel wasn’t serious enough about keeping the Sabbath.

Adapted from David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 262

Rabbis were teaching the nation that the Messiah could not—and would not—arrive to rescue Israel until Israel was perfectly keeping the Sabbath.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1988), p. 59

So, this is not a trivial matter; this is a matter of national security.

And Jesus isn’t helping.

Notice again the crux of the matter in verse 2:

“Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

Luke 6:2a

Why are you doing what you’re not supposed to be doing?

And what were they doing? They were walking through a wheat field picking some heads of grain and popping the kernels into their mouths and into their growling stomachs. Evidently nobody had packed a lunch!

And the Pharisees, who never seem to be very far away, immediately pounced: “You guys are breaking the law.”

Well not really. Old Testament law allowed hungry people to pull an apple off a branch or pluck some wheat to make a quick meal on their journey; they just couldn’t bring a bushel basket and fill it up (***Deuteronomy 23***).

But according to the technicalities of rabbinical and religious law—which had turned the law into thousands of extra-biblical regulations and ordinances—when the disciples plucked some heads of grain, they were technically reaping; when they rubbed them in their hands to separate the kernels and blow off the chaff, they were technically winnowing; and when they put the kernels into their mouths, they were technically eating prepared meals.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 200

And the Pharisees cried, “You’re breaking the law.”

No, they're not!

Don't miss this here: the Pharisees can no longer tell the difference between their tradition and God's truth.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 142

Jesus will later tell them that they are teaching their own traditions as doctrine (Matthew 15:9).

They can't tell the difference.

In fact, they were so caught up with the sound of their own voice, they just assumed that whenever they spoke, God must be speaking.



How would you define legalism? What are some examples of legalism in Christianity in the 21st century? Does legalism still get in the way of sound doctrine today?

And I love what Jesus does here. He doesn't get into a debate about the nuances of rabbinical law; He basically says, "Hey, you mentioned that what we're doing is unlawful. Well, that recalls a passage of Scripture from 1 Samuel 21 that takes us back into biblical history, I'm sure you've read it before."

Notice what He says here in Luke 6 and verse 3:

"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?"

Luke 6:3b-4

Only the priests could eat this bread after it was replaced with fresh bread on the table of shewbread inside the holy place. Every Sabbath, the priests would take the old loaves and eat them for dinner.

But David was God's anointed, in the service of God, and the rules of the tabernacle were suspended.

J. Dwight Pentecost, [The Words and Works of Jesus Christ](#) (Zondervan, 1981), p. 165

His need was a bigger issue than the regulation of the law.

This passage in 1 Samuel also suggests that since the loaves of bread had just been changed, this event also occurred on the Sabbath.

Darrel L. Bock, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke 1-11](#) (Baker, 1994), p. 524

And here's the point: who among these Pharisees would condemn King David?

The truth is—and this is the heart of legalism—the Pharisees would use Scripture in whatever manner they could to justify those they wanted to justify and condemn those they want to condemn.

But Jesus doesn't let them.

He puts them in a hermeneutical headlock here and effectively says:

“Look, if you don’t condemn David for eating consecrated bread, you cannot condemn me for eating raw grain.”

And by the way, in this little history lesson, Jesus makes just the slightest implication of a connection between David, who was God’s anointed, and Himself, as God’s anointed.

And the Pharisees are just sort of standing their realizing Jesus had just checkmated them again, and they’re sort of mulling over the implication of this analogy between David and Jesus, and Jesus now moves them from history to current theology.

Verse 5:

And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Luke 6:5

“The Son of Man,” which is a favorite title He uses for Himself, just so happens to be sovereign over the Sabbath.

Wait a second, who created the Sabbath? God did, at the end of creation week (Genesis 2). Jehovah God established the Sabbath rest.

Jesus is essentially saying, “Well I happen to be Jehovah, the Lord. I am the Sovereign Creator God, who created the Sabbath, and the Creator is always greater than that which He created.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 139

Therefore, since I created the Sabbath, I can do on the Sabbath and I can do with

the Sabbath whatever I want to do on it and with it.”

Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 61

We can’t imagine the shock of this statement, but Jesus isn’t pulling any punches.

“The Sabbath is not yours to control; it is Mine, because I am Lord/Jehovah.”

Swindoll, p. 143

You’ve taken the Sabbath and you’ve twisted it all up with your traditions and your laws and your ordinances. Well, I’m taking it back—it belongs to Me!

Now we’re not given their reaction here, Luke evidently wants to save it for the next event.

Now verse 6:

On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.

Luke 6:6-7

Mark’s Gospel account uses language that informs us that this man wasn’t born handicapped; but something had happened that had caused him to lose the use of his right hand.

Only Luke, the doctor, tells us which hand it was, the right hand, which made this condition incredibly challenging.

Dr. Luke writes that it was withered—literally, dried up.

Fritz Reinecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 153

In other words, his muscles had atrophied; he couldn't extend his fingers; he couldn't grasp a plow or hold the tools of a carpenter.

G. Campbell Morgan, The Great Physician (Fleming H. Revell, 1937), p. 123

A manuscript written in the 2nd century refers to this event and adds the information that this man had been a stone mason but had lost his livelihood in an accident and was now too ashamed to become a beggar.

Quoted by William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 67

He would have been confused and desperate, and make sure you notice that he's in the synagogue. He isn't running away from God even though his livelihood and career are over.

Now again, according to the expanded man-made rules of the Sabbath, it was technically unlawful to practice medicine on the Sabbath or offer any kind of medical help.

For instance:

- cold water could not be poured on a sprained hand or foot.
- a cut finger might be bandaged but not with ointment.

- a midwife could help deliver a baby on the Sabbath, but any treatment of either mother or baby would have to wait.
- medical attention could be given only if a life was in danger.

Ibid

And this man's life here was not in danger. To heal him would have provided medical relief and that was against the rules of the Sabbath—so said the Pharisees.



Have theological or doctrinal issues ever gotten in the way of your ministry? Why was it so important that Jesus didn't stop ministering to people because of religious tradition?

And did you catch here in **verse 7** that the Pharisees are **watching** Jesus.

In other words, they knew this disabled man was attending the worship service, and they knew Jesus loved to do some rather miraculous things with disabled people.

This word for watching is a word that means "to spy on; to watch out of the corner of one's eye."

Darrel L. Bock, ed; The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels (Victor, 2002), p. 205

They're not really singing; they're not really listening. They're watching Jesus

out of the corner of their eye. What will Jesus do now?

But don't miss this: they didn't come to the synagogue this Sabbath day to worship God, but to spy on Jesus.

Barton, p. 141

Why are you here today? Are you spying on someone? Are you here to make up for the way you lived over the weekend, or to feel a little more religious than you know you are? Are you here to watch other people or have you come to worship God?

We can all play the role of Pharisee with incredible skill and precision.

One author provoked my thinking by writing here that it's easy to watch Jesus without having any desire to imitate Jesus.

Well, Jesus knew what was going on—
Luke writes here in verse 8:

But he knew their thoughts.

Luke 6:8a

I love this! The original construction can be translated: "But He knew their thoughts all along."

John Phillips, [Exploring The Gospel of Luke](#) (Kregel, 2005), p. 109

He knew what they were thinking before He even showed up in this synagogue.

He knew they thought this was the perfect setup to catch Him—**once again**—breaking the rules, but Jesus will set them up to reveal—**once again**—who He is.

Verse 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.

Luke 6:8

This is going to be a public demonstration; Jesus is not going to whisper a little word of healing after the service as people are kind of filing out and this man looks down, "Whoa my hand's healed."

Oh, no, this is going to happen right in the middle of the service—right in the middle of the congregation.

As I was initially reading this passage, I was thinking, "Man, this is great; this is right in their face; there's going to be egg all over the faces of these Pharisees. How great is this? Go get 'em, Lord!"

But wait a second. Let's not forget that Jesus loved the Pharisees as much as He loved this disabled man.

He'd come to die for them too.

This man had a crippled body, but the Pharisees had a crippled theology;

"This man had a withered hand; the Pharisees had withered hearts. And Jesus will reach out to them all."

Adapted from Phillips, p. 109

Praise God for the mercy and grace of our Lord! This is indeed one more

opportunity for them to believe that Jesus is indeed Lord of the Sabbath.

Now verse 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?”

Luke 6:9

Matthew’s account adds the words that Jesus reminded them that if one of their sheep fell into a pit, wouldn’t they bring it out, rather than wait as it suffered in misery? Jesus then says: **“Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!”**

Get this—especially in our generation—from the very lips of our Creator: “A human being’s life is of greater value than an animal’s life.”

So why would you relieve the suffering of an animal and not relieve the suffering of another human being?”

No one is breathing in the synagogue. You could have heard a pin drop.

Verse 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.

Luke 6:10

The word for **restored** means, “it became like it had been before.”

Suddenly—not slowly; immediately—not eventually.

Right here in the middle of the synagogue—in front of everyone—blood flow, muscle mass, tendons, nerves, and joints immediately restored. As if someone suddenly blew air into a shriveled-up balloon—like a flat tire that’s suddenly filled with air—his hand suddenly fills out, takes shape, and is restored.

The place erupted with fury—**verse 11** tells us—and these Pharisees now discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Matthew adds—how they are going to kill Jesus.

Imagine the irony: “Oh, you are breaking the law in helping a man in pain; oh, you’re breaking the law in eating raw grain on the Sabbath; oh, horror of horrors!” Never mind the fact that they are now planning to murder Jesus. Never mind, “Thou shalt not kill!”

It’s possible to appear religiously right and hide a heart of rebellion against God, and resentment and rage.

I can imagine this place is also erupting with joy and tears and hugs, this man’s family among them. An anxious wife perhaps wondering how they would ever survive this injury—he couldn’t hold his stone mason’s tools; he refused to beg—what were they going to do?



Are there any truths in God's Word that you are having trouble seeing and applying to your life? How can you remove the blinders and see God's truth more clearly today?

And suddenly, their lives are turned right-side up. It was the authority and the power in the word of this Man who was indeed able to do on the Sabbath and with the Sabbath whatever He wanted.

He was indeed Jehovah, Lord of the Sabbath, over all His creation.

And you cannot miss the power of His word, the authority of His command. Jesus said to this man, "stretch out your hand," and he believed, and applied the word of Christ to his life, and it no doubt changed the rest of his life.

What about you?

Jesus said to these Pharisees: "Have you never read?" I've spoken to you too, you've read it; when are you going to believe it and apply it to your life?

It's possible to read the Scriptures without applying the Scriptures.

It's possible to analyze the text and miss the truth.

What is it about God's Word that you have difficulty applying to your own heart?

Are you doubting the faithfulness of God? **God's word says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you!" (Hebrews 13:5). Have you never read? That's for you!**

Are you doubting your salvation? Jesus said, "Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out" (John 6:37). Did you come to Him?

Well, I'm not sure if I came to Him in the right way or if I came with the right words or if I came with the right motive or if I came with the right spirit or if I was repentant when I came or if I really understood exactly why I came or if I understood the full impact of what would happen if I came.

Did you come to Him? **Have you never read!** "He will never cast you out."

Jesus said to this man, "Reach out your hand." He can't reach out his hand! His hand doesn't work; his muscles are gone; he probably can't feel his hand, much less move it.

Jesus tells him to do something impossible—to go against everything he feels, everything he knows, everything he's become, everything he can't do—**"Reach out your hand."**

And the word of Christ is believed, and in that moment of obedience and dependence, he experienced a miraculous occurrence and everyone in that synagogue, and to this day, got the point.

Jesus is sovereign Lord of the Sabbath—and everything else.

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