

**Text:** Luke 6:1-11

**Title:** Sabbath Controversies

**Truth:** Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and encourages doing good, not being enslaved by human traditions.

**Date/Location:** December 17, 2023 at FBC

## **Introduction**

One of my goals in this message is to make sure that our understanding of the Sabbath is Biblical, not based on the traditions of people or religious denominations. By extension, we need to evaluate our thinking on religious matters as a whole and make sure we are not living merely by tradition, but in fact we are honoring the word of God by obeying it.

### **I. The Supposed Offense**

- A. It was another Sabbath day. Perhaps the Lord often ministered on Saturdays because people were more available, not so busy with their daily work Sunday through Friday. It seems that He Himself had been a working-class type of man because He was the son of Joseph, a carpenter (Matt. 13:55), and as was often the case in those days, He had the same trade as His father Joseph.
- B. Luke has already mentioned the Sabbath twice—4:16 and 4:31. Jesus ministered in the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath, and likewise in Capernaum He regularly taught on the Sabbath each week. I am unsure if the “second” Sabbath is significant, but at least we know it is yet another Saturday upon which this controversy occurs.
- C. The situation: as the disciples were walking along with the Lord, they were grabbing grain along the way and eating it. As they did this, they were rubbing the heads of grain in their hand to extract the grain portion and remove the chaff. This behavior was in agreement with the law of Deuteronomy 23:25. The disciples were not working in violation of the Sabbath law; they were not doing business to earn money; rather, they were subsisting, eating to keep living and to enjoy the fruit of God’s bounty.

- D. Some Pharisees saw them doing this and complained. The first problem is that the Pharisees were shadowing the Lord; they were following Him; tailing Him; stalking Him. They were meddling. To *meddle* is “interfere in something that is not one’s concern.”<sup>1</sup>
1. An interesting historical fact: God told the people of Israel not to meddle with Edom or Ammon. God had not given them any of the land of those nations. Israel was not to concern themselves with those nations (Deut. 2:5, 19).
  2. Joash proudly meddled with the northern kingdom of Israel against the advice of Israel’s king (2 Kings 14:10).
  3. Josiah made the same kind of mistake with Pharaoh Necho (2 Chron. 35:21).
  4. It is foolish to meddle in a quarrel not your own (Prov. 26:17).
  5. Christians are commanded not to walk disorderly, not to be lazy about working, and not to be busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11, 1 Tim. 5:13, 1 Peter 4:15).
  6. Some people today spend a lot of time concerning themselves with the matters of others. There is social media, and old-fashioned gossip. There is hunting around for heresy in others. That is spending time keeping up with all the latest news about other churches, schools, Christians, neighbors, etc.
  7. Mind your own business (1 Thess. 4:11)! There is plenty of your own business to keep you busy. God will take care of His business, but not before the time.
- E. The second problem is that the Pharisees were wrong about the law. The disciples were not “harvesting” and “threshing” the grain. It is frequently the case with busy-bodies that they are misinformed. Outsiders cannot pass judgment if they do not know the situation thoroughly (1 Cor. 4:5). The Pharisees’ particular misinformation is that they thought what the disciples are doing was unlawful, but it was simply un-traditional. They had elevated

---

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., [\*Concise Oxford English Dictionary\*](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

their tradition to the place of law, and then harshly judged others who did not follow the same tradition as if they were terrible criminals. (In their minds, they excused themselves to get away with literal murder, but attacked Jesus for a non-violation.)

Note: "The doctors of the law laid down literally thousands of subtle provisions of what was commanded and especially of what was forbidden on the Sabbath."<sup>2</sup>

## II. Jesus Answered with a Rebuke

A. Jesus answers using a rather obscure section of the Hebrew Bible (1 Samuel 21:1-6). When a situation arose where David and His men needed food, they went to the tabernacle and "borrowed" the showbread. It was lawful only for the priests to eat this bread after it had finished its service in the temple after a week, but God did not charge David with sin to eat to nourish his life and those of his men in an exigent (pressing) situation. Mercy and need overrode blind obedience to ceremonial law. In effect, the bread was out of service, and the priests could share it with David.

Note: the bread of presence or "show bread" was not an offering to God to satisfy His need of human support like with the pagan deities of the ancient near east. Rather, it pictures the reverse: God's provision to the people of Israel.

Jesus expected that the Pharisees would have read that portion of Scripture, and from it would have a better understanding of such matters as Sabbath. Blind obedience to a law, without regard for mercy or kindness or preservation of life, is not God's way. Disobedience is not God's way either, of course. But God is not concerned about "disobedience" to a complicated man-made system of traditions. But also, it was not acceptable to discard the worship of God on the Sabbath in favor of deeds of mercy.

B. At the end of the interaction according to Matthew's account (Matthew 12:7), Jesus told the Pharisees to "go and learn" what this means...what a rebuke! They were to learn what it means when God says in Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy and not sacrifice; the

---

<sup>2</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 199.

knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” If they had understood that they would not have been so quick to condemn people who are without guilt.

I will take Jesus’s interpretation of the Law over the Pharisees’ ideas any day of the week!

- C. The bottom line is that Jesus, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath. He is over the man-made traditions; He is over the Sabbath itself. But there is more than “authority structure” here. This is a bold claim to deity because it is clear from the Old Testament that **God** gave the Sabbath law. It arose from His example of finishing the creation in six days, and then he codified it in Exodus 20:8-11 as a sign of the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 31:13, 20:12; Ezekiel 20:20). Jesus is *that* Lord who gave the sign of Sabbath observance. He is the ultimate “interpreter” of that Law, not the Pharisees!

### III. Another Sabbath Controversy

- A. The next event was that the Lord encountered a disabled man—on another Sabbath, and in another synagogue. Here I cannot fault the Pharisees from being present since that is where they would certainly be on a Saturday. But I *do* fault them for “watching.” The word is a “surveillance” activity carried out by spies. The scribes and Pharisees were still on the lookout, still on their stakeout trying to pin a violation on Jesus.

The man had a *withered* right hand. The word-picture is fitting, for his hand looked something like a dried, curled-up leaf. A probable cause of such an affliction is a stroke, but whatever the cause, the man was unable to be healed by the state of the medical art at the time and was probably beyond human help at all.

- B. Jesus knew their thoughts. He had “extra sensory perception,” but not in the weird human way of thinking, because His omniscience is far beyond the ability of human senses. With this knowledge, He specifically put a test to the Pharisees to show them how far they would go in a ridiculous quest to find a violation, a quest in which they cared nothing for a suffering man who was one of their flock. They were consumed with hatred instead of grace, mercy, and

worship. They viewed helping a disabled man on the Sabbath as worse than their intentions of murdering an innocent man.

Mark 3:5 shows us how we should regard these sinful Pharisees—as Jesus did, with anger, but also grieved by their hard hearts. There is a mixture of anger and sorrow in such a situation. These people are lost as can be and need help.

- C. Jesus asked a preparatory question: is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath? Or evil? To save life, or destroy it? No one answered his question, but the answer is obvious: to do good and to save life are definitely lawful on the Sabbath. If someone is sick and needs a ministry of mercy, you give it whether it is midnight on Wednesday or 11am on Saturday. The religious “leaders” were constrained by what they had been blindly taught and blindly accepted. They were ensnared by their political alliances and could not “break rank.”
- D. The Lord simply asked the man to reach out his hand and stretch it. He probably opened it as he did this, and the miracle was done. Jesus healed his hand and now it operated just like his left hand.
- E. This obviously took Jesus no outward work, no labor, but simply the word of His power. It was divine work, but hardly work on a human level. And remember, the Father is working, and Jesus was also working (John 5:17).
- F. The scribes and Pharisees were enraged at Jesus. Think of that—wrath at a man who just helped one in their community, in the synagogue. Supposedly, it would have been better if Jesus had done the miracle the next day on Sunday (Luke 13:14)! They did not just have a little beef with Him. They were so invested in their tradition that they were willing to kill Him for those traditions. This is not offering God a service. It is serving self.
- G. Jesus is still Lord of the Sabbath, and He can heal someone on that day regardless of what tradition you believe. The Jewish person can pull an ox out of a pit on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). He can even participate in circumcision of a child on his eighth day and not be guilty of breaking the Sabbath (John 7:22-23). “Works” of mercy were not forbidden on the Sabbath!

## Conclusion

We conclude with important notes:

1. Sabbath observance (Saturday) is not required and never has been required of Christians (Col. 2:16).
2. Sunday is not the new “Christian Sabbath” because the Sabbath is always *Saturday*. It cannot “move” to another day of the week. This does not excuse the Christian from taking some rest each week, nor from regular corporate worship during the week. Sunday does not demand rest and cessation of all activity in blind adherence to past tradition. Sunday can be a day for doing good to all men, especially the household of faith. Some elevate Sunday above the other days of the week, and others do not. Either is fine as long as you maintain the principles of godliness. For example, you must be fully convinced in your own mind on the matter of the importance of days (Romans 14:5); you cannot cease from worship; you need rest; you are a Christian *every day*, not just some days.
3. Traditions, even ancient ones, may be good, or may not. They may make practitioners seem religious, but adherence to them instead of or over the words of God incurs God’s deep displeasure. In Mark 7:7-8, Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13: “IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men...All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition.”
4. Jesus reminds us of the need for sustaining life and doing good, even on days of worship. Worship cannot become so self-centered that we ignore others!

MAP