

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

Luke 6:1-11

Key Verse: 6:5

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’”

In the last passage Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to his guests at the wedding celebration. The life of Jesus’ disciples is characterized by joy. Where Jesus is, there is the joy of heaven. When Jesus is in our hearts we are joyful. The joy of Christian life does not depend on our situation or human condition. It depends on our relationship with Jesus. If we have no joy in our hearts, we need to repent and ask Jesus into our hearts. Then we can have real joy. We also learned that Jesus’ disciples must be like new wineskins to contain the new wine of Jesus’ word. We must shed our fixed ideas and ways of thinking and simply obey the word of Jesus. When we study the Bible, our basic attitude should be to repent and obey and make a new decision. If we do this, God can use us to make a new history in America and establish a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In today’s passage Jesus encounters the Pharisees on two different occasions, both times on the Sabbath. The Pharisees try to trap and accuse Jesus. But he turns these events around into opportunities to teach that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

First, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (1-5)

Look at verse 1. “One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels.” Jesus’ ministry was in its initial stage. Jesus was full of vision. He foresaw the rapid and dynamic spread of the gospel to give new life to all who believed. Perhaps, as he went through the grainfields, he thought about the harvest of souls at the end of the age. His love for sinners and his vision for world salvation compelled him to work hard, even on the Sabbath. For his young disciples, it was not easy to keep up with Jesus. Jesus worked so hard to heal the sick and preach the good news of the kingdom of God that they scarcely had time to eat. As they followed Jesus through the grainfields, a growling noise began to erupt here and there until it formed a kind of chorus. It was the disciples’ hungry stomachs. Inadvertently, they began to stretch out their hands to the heads of grain in the field around them and pick them. Then they rubbed them in their hands to remove the husks and ate the kernels. They might have looked like young men walking down the street, cracking open peanut shells and tossing the peanuts in their mouths.

Suddenly, out of the cover of stalks of grain, Pharisees popped up, like soldiers in wartime from secret caves and tunnels. Pointing spindle-like fingers at the disciples, they said, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” It seemed that the Pharisees had caught the disciples in a very serious crime. What was it? At first glance, we might think it was for eating grain from another’s field. But that was not the charge. There was a provision in Jewish law that allowed travelers to eat what they could as they passed through another’s field. Of course, they could not carry out bushel baskets of the crop to store in their pantries at home. But they were allowed to eat freely while passing through. In those days, there was no McDonalds every two miles. Travelers could not stop for a Big Mac and fries whenever they were hungry. So the law allowed them to eat others’ crops as they passed through the fields. The Pharisees knew this very well. Then what was their charge against the disciples? In essence, it was working on the Sabbath day. By picking heads of grain, they were harvesting; by rubbing them in their hands, they were threshing; by removing the husks, they were winnowing.

How did the Pharisees come up with this charge? To them, it was based on the Bible, specifically the fourth commandment, which says, “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...” (Ex 20:9-10a). But in fact, it was their interpretation of this command taken to an extreme degree. It hinged on their definition of the word “work.” To define what constituted work they developed 39 articles and many sub-categories to specify, in as much detail as possible, what was work. It is interesting that they did not enforce the part of the law that man must work hard for six days with the same fervor. They could have made hundreds of categories that defined laziness on the other six days. But they strictly enforced the law of resting on the seventh day.

However, we must not trivialize the Pharisees’ efforts. To them, it was a very important matter to enforce the Sabbath law. During the time of the Maccabean revolt, many sincere Jews were willing to sacrifice their lives to

keep the Sabbath holy. When their enemies attacked them on the Sabbath, they would not fight back. They were like some gunfighters in America's old west who refused to fight each other on Sunday. Instead they went to church. After worship service they would have their gunfight. Many respect Eric Little, a sincere Christian athlete from Scotland in the early 20th century. He reached the finals in the Olympic Games and was favored to win a gold medal. But when he found out the event was scheduled for Sunday, he refused to run in the race. It was to keep the Lord's day holy. Among our UBF members there are many who try to keep Sunday holy in various ways. One person does not carry his cell phone on Sunday. One woman missionary does not go shopping on Sunday. In America, the Puritans gave such an influence in keeping Sunday holy that for a time, there were state and local laws forbidding businesses to open on Sunday. The great Bible teacher John Calvin once had a man executed for not keeping the Lord's day holy. Keeping the Sabbath holy or honoring God on Sunday has been a most important element in both the Jewish and Christian faith. And the effort to practice this truth in each generation and national situation requires careful study of the Bible.

The Pharisees' problem was not their zeal to enforce the Sabbath law. It was their motive to discredit Jesus and his ministry by attacking Jesus' disciples. They wanted to use their knowledge of the Sabbath law to condemn Jesus' disciples. They were self-righteous and critical. Here we must think about what kind of people we are. How easy it is to be critically minded, like the Pharisees, especially after we have accumulated some Bible knowledge. St. Paul said, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1Co 8:1). May God help us to repent our critical minds which make us like Pharisees. Then God can give us the love of God and a right motive to use our Bible knowledge.

What the Pharisees did was really offensive. But Jesus did not punish them or argue with them. Instead, he appealed to them on the basis of God's word to learn the heart of God in applying the law.

Look at verses 3-4. "Jesus answered them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.'" King David was a most important person in Israel. In Matthew's estimation, David, Abraham and Jesus are the three pillars of Israel's history (Mt 1:1). But before he became King David, he was a shepherd boy who received a lot of spiritual training. In this event, David was running for his life from King Saul, who wanted to kill him out of his jealousy. Perhaps Jesus identified with David in terms of his increasingly intense confrontations with the jealous Jewish religious leaders. In that desperate situation, David went into the house of God. David believed that God was his Shepherd (Ps 23:1). He came to God in times of trouble and distress. Taking the consecrated bread was literally a violation of ceremonial law. But David did so believing that God is a God of mercy and that true justice cannot be contained in the letter of the law alone.

David is known as a man after God's own heart (Ac 13:22). This is said of no one else in the Bible. To really know someone we must know their heart. If we only hear the words they say and do not discern the intentions of their hearts we cannot say that we really know them. The Pharisees claimed to be experts in the law based on their Bible knowledge. But they did not know God personally and they did not discern the intentions of God's heart. This is why Jesus told them that although they studied the Scriptures diligently, they missed the point: they did not come to Jesus through Bible study (Jn 5:39-40). On the other hand, David knew God personally. To David, God was his Shepherd. David believed that God loves his people one by one and wants to lead them and guide them and protect them until they finally reach his heavenly kingdom. Of course, included in this divine love is God's spiritual discipline, with which David was quite familiar. David deeply recognized God's sovereignty in his life. He knew that God held his life in the palm of his hand. And God had a purpose for his life. It was to unite Israel into a single kingdom and to use her as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. When David believed God's absolute sovereignty and lived for God's holy purpose every day, he was free from legalism. He also became a shepherd for men's souls, after God's own heart. He is known as the shadow of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." When we practice the law of God, we must know the shepherd heart of Jesus; we must know the heart of God.

After teaching the Pharisees to practice the law with the heart of God, Jesus now deals with another problem: they did not know who Jesus was. Look at verse 5. "Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" When Jesus said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath," he revealed to them his true identity. Jesus is the "Son of Man." This means that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfills all of God's promises made to his servants down through the generations. He is the Son promised to Adam and Eve who would crush Satan's head (Ge 3:15). He is the Son

promised to Abraham and David who would bless all nations and reign eternally on David's throne (Gen 12:3; 2 Sa 7:12). He is the Son prophesied by Isaiah who would come as a baby boy but who is also the Mighty God (Isa 9:6).

This Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. In other words, Jesus has mastery and authority to use the Sabbath because he is God. Jesus is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth and all things, including each person's life. John 1:3 says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Jesus cannot be bound by Sabbath legalism because he is God. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for the glory of Jesus. Therefore, on the Sabbath, men must honor and worship Jesus, the Creator God. Jesus himself honored his Father God on the Sabbath. He worked hard to heal the sick for the glory of God. Because of that he was persecuted, but he did not mind. He only wanted to please his Father in heaven. He said in John 5:17, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." Here we learn that to obey God's will is the most proper way to use the Sabbath. And we learn that Jesus is the focal point of the Sabbath. We must worship Jesus on the Sabbath.

Jesus came to fulfill the true meaning of the Sabbath, which is to help men worship God and to find true rest for their souls. To do this, Jesus became the Lamb of God who shed his blood on the cross. Men are restless because of their sins. But Jesus' holy blood shed for sinners can cleanse our souls and take away restlessness. Jesus' holy blood gives us true peace and true rest for our souls. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

Second, Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath (6-11)

Look at verse 6. "On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled." This man had a serious life problem because his right hand was shriveled. He could not play baseball or basketball, only soccer. As a child, he must have been ridiculed by his classmates to the point that he did not want to attend school. So he probably formed the habit of keeping his shriveled hand hidden behind his back or in his pocket. Because his right hand was shriveled, his heart must have been shriveled, also.

This unimportant man, who was in deep sorrow due to his life problem, was sitting quietly in a corner of the synagogue. Certainly, he also heard the good news that Jesus heals the sick and preaches the kingdom of God. He heard that Jesus welcomes anybody and everybody. When he heard that Jesus came to the synagogue in his town, a beam of hope smeared into his heart. But there was a really devilish group of people. As soon as the Pharisees saw the man with the shriveled hand, they picked him as bait in trapping Jesus instead of trying to help the helpless. And they watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath (7). Their hearts were evil. They were devils under the cloaks of priests.

What could Jesus do in this situation? "Jesus knew what they were thinking..." (8a). To Jesus, this was a critical moment. To Jesus, to help the helpless was right. But to heal a man whose right hand was shriveled was not easy because of the Pharisees' plot to kill him. Even if the atmosphere was murderous, Jesus wanted to restore his shriveled hand. As soon as Jesus saw the man, he said, "Get up and stand in front of everyone" (8).

Humanly speaking, restoring the man's shriveled hand meant intentionally ignoring the authority of the Pharisees and offending their pride. But Jesus did not mind. Jesus said, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." Praise Jesus for his courageous faith! How did this man respond? Proud human beings are reluctant and unwilling. When they have to obey him, proud human beings usually refuse to obey Almighty God. As a sinful human being, Jesus' command to him was an impossible obedience test. He was a sensitive man because of his shriveled hand. It was scary for him to stand in front of everyone, while all of them were staring at him; it was especially hard to stand in front of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, he overcame his self-consciousness, got up and stood there in the middle of the room. This was an act of faith and obedience. How was it possible for him? After hearing Jesus' word, "Get up and stand in front of everyone," he felt the love of Jesus in his heart; he felt the power of God circulating in his soul. After hearing the voice of Jesus, he had enough faith to stand up in front of everyone. Therefore, it is important for us to hear the word of Jesus.

Look at verse 9. "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" In this verse, Jesus was asking what the concept of good and evil was to them. But they were silent, partly because they

did not know the concept of good and evil, and partly because they were angry. But mainly they were silent because Jesus pierced their consciences.

What did Jesus do next? Look at verse 10. "He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was completely restored." Jesus restored his hand at the cost of Jesus' own life. As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus used his power and authority to save one damaged man and make him whole. Praise Jesus!

In this passage, Jesus reveals that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. We must worship Jesus on the Sabbath. We must listen to Jesus on the Sabbath. We must also serve the needy on the Sabbath. May God help us to honor and glorify Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.