

The Gospel According to Luke
September 30, 2018
Reading: Mark 2:23-3:6

Sermon #19
Luke 6:1-11
(Mt. 12:1-14 & Mk. 2:23-3:6)

Jesus – Lord of the Sabbath

Sabbath Defined

Choosing a sermon title for today's text was not difficult; it comes from Luke chapter 6, verse 5. However, there seems to be a great deal of confusion surrounding the subject of the Sabbath. Not only was there confusion about the Sabbath, in Jesus' day as we will see in Luke 6, but there is also considerable confusion about the Sabbath in our own day. The New Testament has 56 verses that speak of the Sabbath and the Old Testament 61, so it would seem there should not be a lot of confusion. So, what is the problem?

Let me ask, how often do you hear people talk about "keeping the Sabbath"? Not too often, I suspect. In the Old Testament, breaking the Sabbath was a capital offense. When Moses came down Mount Sinai he instructed the people **"These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. ² Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. **Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.**"** (Exodus 35:1-2) Some today would surely respond, that is the old covenant and we are people of the new covenant. That statement is partly correct – we no longer put people to death for breaking the Sabbath. Neither do we put to death thieves, adulterers and those who dishonor their parents. But, just because the law is enforced or not enforced does not mean the principles behind the laws has changed. Laws can correct behavior because of the threat of punishment, but laws cannot change the heart.

In Luke's gospel account by the time we get to chapter 6 the positive response of people to Jesus' teachings has begun to turn. Just a little earlier in Luke, please turn to chapter 4, beginning in verse 14 we read, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all." (Luke 4:14-15) How many of the people were glorifying Jesus? All. Of course, Luke was referring to the people following and listening to Jesus, not to the religious leaders, the Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees. Jesus came to call people to repentance and be saved and as he taught in the countryside and the synagogues many were coming to faith for the truth of God he preached not only touched people's hearts but they knew it was the truth of God. But the religious leaders did not listen because their hearts were hard and they were concerned about their power and position and how to protect their authority over the people and maintain their status. For the religious leaders the Sabbath had become about rules and regulations because this gives control. They wanted people to believe God would be pleased with their outward behavior and promoting one's self as righteous. They taught lies about the importance of being self-righteous, following their legalism and keeping man-made rituals in order to earn God's love. Luke records Jesus' mission statement; turn to chapter 5, verse 32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32) God's truth and not man's truth is what Jesus taught. In proverbs Solomon wrote, "Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding." (Proverbs 23:23) Solomon did not mean God's truth is for sell per say and one cannot go to the market and buy it, but it should be sought above all else even if there is a price. God gives us his truth as a gift and wisdom and understanding are the fruit of God's truth.

Jesus taught God's truth to those who had ears to hear and he warned "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:15-16) Jesus taught that the Pharisees had lost their way saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. ... ⁶ they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces." (Matthew 23:2-7) For these men Judaism had become about the acts of religiousosity and no longer about a relationship with the living God.

Jesus' bold teaching of the gospel was incompatible with the Jewish man-made religion of works. We just finished studying at the end of chapter 5 of Luke where it is made clear that the Jewish religion forced people to choose between the gospel of grace taught by Jesus and the truth from God – or - the works based religion system of Judaism.

Salvation has always been and will always be a heart condition; it is about being in love with Jesus and desiring a relationship with God through Jesus above all else. So the heart of the problem between Jesus and the Jewish leadership was the Sabbath. For Judaism the Sabbath was about keeping a multitude of rules, but for the followers of Jesus the Sabbath was about resting in God, it was about God's love and mercy and grace. The boundaries and behavior one sets for their life is for the joy and for the purpose of bringing glory to God.

There are 39 categories of prohibited activities or work on the Sabbath found in the Talmud and rabbinic writings and each of these 39 categories could have dozens to hundreds of things that one must do or not do. The Talmud has 24 chapters devoted to Sabbath regulations.

Let me share just a few of the do nots and how to manipulate the rules. It was against the Sabbath man-made law to walk more than 3000 feet from your home on the Sabbath. If this rule was left at that it might be OK. But, before the Sabbath day if someone placed food at the 3000-foot mark, well, where the food had been placed is now considered the boundary of their home and they could travel another 3000 feet. If you place a stick or rope across a street that makes it a doorway and extends the home's boundary and someone could travel another 3000 feet.

Carrying objects was a problem. Although I suspect some parents would have liked it that carrying food heavier than a fig was a violation. When their children ate on the Sabbath they had to take small bites and thus have better table manners. On the other hand children liked that they did not have to clean up the dishes after a Sabbath meal. A tailor could not carry a needle or a student a pen and one could carry only enough ink to write 2 letters of the alphabet. Fires had to be made ready before the Sabbath for during the Sabbath a fire could not be lit or be put out and adding wood to the fire was a problem if the wood weighted more than a fig. There was to be no cooking of food. Nothing could be brought or sold. There was no bathing for if the water dripped and touched the floor that would be the work of washing the floor. If one had a dirt floor in their home they could not move a chair for if it left a mark on the floor that would be plowing. Women were not allowed to look in a mirror because they might be tempted to fuss with their hair and take their focus off of God or they might want pull a gray hair. This list

goes on and on. These man-made laws were a crushing burden for the people to follow the hundreds of rules on the Sabbath or to even know all the rules. This is where the Pharisees erred - they saw the Sabbath observance as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Proper Sabbath observance always points to God, who he is and who we are in him.

One thing we would do well to avoid when planning our Sabbath observance is meticulously legislating what we can and cannot do on the Sabbath. This is what the Pharisees did and this is a trap that even churches today fall victim to. Some of you remember a time when churches imposed numbers of restrictions on the Sabbath; a time when you could not play cards on the Sabbath; a time when you could not watch TV or go to the movies on the Sabbath, you were to avoid certain foods and etc. There was a day when many of our churches treated the Sabbath the way the Pharisees did and sadly some still do.

Sabbath Truth

It will now be helpful for us to examine what Jesus had to say, and also what He did not say, about observing the Sabbath. Reading from the beginning of Luke chapter 6, “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.’ ”

The Pharisees were known for their meticulous observance of the Mosaic Law and the rules found in the Talmud, and here they witnessed Jesus and his disciples breaking the Sabbath law. Luke makes this point clear when he mentions that the disciples had “**plucked and ate some heads of grain**”, which was considered “reaping”, a Sabbath violation. Luke also adds that the disciples were “**rubbing them (heads of grain) in their hands**” which was considered “threshing”. Luke’s point is that the disciples were, in fact, technically breaking Jewish Sabbath law.

This point is further manifest by the fact that, when accused by the Pharisees, Jesus does not deny that His disciples broke the Sabbath man-made laws. Jesus does not respond by telling the Pharisees that they were incorrect in their accusation, rather, he simply makes reference to when King David and his companions ate consecrated bread on a Sabbath. Using David as an example, Jesus even concedes that they engaged in an action that was “**not lawful**”. At first glance, this response may seem surprising and to some Jesus’ logic appears to be like that of a child who, once corrected, exclaims “But I saw him do it first!”. However this is not Jesus’ point. Jesus is concerned with God’s purpose for the Sabbath, not man’s purpose.

Another thing I noticed in this passage is that those so ready to accuse others often do not look at their own violations. Their self-righteousness is blind to their own sins. Jesus taught on this problem saying, “**Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.**”

(Matthew 7:3-5) We just learned that to walk more than 3000 feet or under 6/10^{ths}

of a mile was a violation of the Sabbath law. I think it would be safe to assume that if Jesus and the disciples were walking through fields as they traveled, they may have exceeded this rule. So, I was thinking, who was following them? Why it was the Pharisees and they would have likewise violated this rule in their effort to catch Jesus and his disciples violating the Sabbath. Certainly reminds me with what is going on in Washington DC hearings. Who has the log and who has the speck in their eye?

So, what is the point Jesus is trying to make here? Is it that Sabbath observance no longer applies? No, Jesus does not say this. Jesus does not respond to the Pharisees by telling them that the Sabbath is now abolished. Jesus does not say that the Sabbath is now relaxed either. Instead, what Jesus is doing is He is attempting to return Sabbath observance to its original and proper understanding. God gave the Sabbath for the benefit of people and the Sabbath is a heart attitude of worship.

Jesus points to one of the original intentions of the Sabbath in Mark's account that was read earlier when He says, **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."** (Mark 2:27) That is to say that the Sabbath was instituted by God to benefit us and not to burden us. The Pharisees had shackled themselves and others with a strict system of Sabbath observances that completely blurred the original intentions of God for the day of rest and it had become a heavy burden. The day was no longer a day of rest and a day to focus on and enjoy God.

In Matthew's account, we are told that the disciples were **"hungry"** (v. 12:1) The disciples genuinely needed food to sustain them while they traveled. Appropriately then, Jesus refers us back to David and his companions and when they were genuinely hungry on the Sabbath. These 2 exceptions provide us with a

clear principle that genuine human need takes precedence over legalistic Sabbath observances. When Joyce and I were serving in Papua New Guinea there was a branch of the Seventh Day Adventist Church that taught that God would bless the killing a “Sunday”, meaning those who worshipped on Sunday, because they violated God’s Sabbath being Saturday. They felt that was consistent with the Old Testament as we read from Exodus earlier, “Whoever does any work on the Sabbath shall be put to death.” (Exodus 35:1-2) They had forgotten what Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” In my opinion I do not believe God is concerned with what day people use to have their Sabbath in him. He is concerned that we take a weekly Sabbath focused on him and rest. He is concerned that we take time to separate ourselves from the world and focus on him.

Jesus’ final statement in verse 5 puts the Sabbath in the right perspective, Jesus had every right to say that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” because Jesus as “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” Jesus brings balance, it is true God designed the Sabbath for the benefit of mankind but that does not mean the Sabbath is primarily about us. The focus of the Sabbath is God and Sabbath is about the “lord of the Sabbath” or Jesus. It is about appreciating the Creator and the author of our salvation and focusing on being in the presence of Jesus. This is why Paul wrote to the Colossians, the Sabbath is “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:17) If we spend the Sabbath worshipping Jesus our Lord and growing closer to him, resting in his love, grace and mercy it is still “a shadow of the things to come” compared to when we will be in heaven enjoying an eternal Sabbath in the presence of the triune God.

But now, what has happened? What often is the case is that when the pendulum swings too far in one direction, it eventually comes back to swing too far in the other direction. We do not observe the Sabbath like Pharisees, do we? No, most of people treat the Sabbath the way pagans do. They treat it like any other day, except for attending church. Oh, many put in their hour at church, but then they run to WalMart and buy things for dinner. Others go home and what is it they do with the rest of the day? Do they run around trying to get done those things they have put off all week or watch hours of football?

The pulpit should be used for personal confession. However, I think you should know that I am not always good at keeping the Sabbath. My reasoning used to be that Monday was my Sabbath. Then I realized that this affected my wife and family in the way they see the Sabbath. Surely, if one member of a household stumbles on the Sabbath, the entire household is affected. I refuse to shrug my shoulders and excuse myself by saying that as a pastor my schedule is different. I may be bi-vocational and time is strained but God does not change. So, I, and so you, need to resist society's changes, the demands on our time and hold fast to Jesus – for Jesus did not abolish the Sabbath. He did not even say that the Sabbath was now relaxed. Jesus simply warned against legalistically observing the Sabbath, which often led to neglecting to do what God established, what is good for us and what brings glory to God, and that is rest, separate from the world and worship God.

The account of Jesus' disciples picking and eating the heads of grain brought the purpose of the Sabbath to the surface. This second account, found in verses 6 through 11 demonstrates that doing good must not be neglected on the Sabbath.

Sabbath Worship

Reading Luke chapter 6 beginning at verse 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.”

The principle taught in this account should be clear; it is appropriate to do good on the Sabbath. The man with the withered hand was not in any imminent danger. Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal the man. However, by healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus demonstrates that it is always appropriate to do good in helping those in need. Healing and deeds of mercy are appropriate everyday, including the Sabbath.

Besides duties of necessity and deeds of mercy, there is one other Sabbath day activity mentioned in this passage – worship. Jesus “entered the synagogue and was teaching”. The Scriptures have always been central to the Sabbath day. They were central in Moses’ day, they were central in Jesus’ day and they should be central in our own day.

It should be clear by now that we do not simply break the Sabbath by engaging in activities that we should avoid but we break the Sabbath when we

neglect activities that are good and right before God. Worship, duties of necessity and deeds of mercy must not be neglected on the Sabbath.

Even though the Talmud has 24 chapters concern behavior on the Sabbath, the Bible does not provide an elaborate list of prohibited activities for the Sabbath, I will not presume to offer you a prohibited activity list now. This does not, however, excuse us from keeping the Sabbath.

There is no need to be confused about the Sabbath any longer. The principles for Sabbath observance are clear and straightforward. Observing the Sabbath means engaging in worship of God alone, engaging in duties of necessity, and engaging in deeds of mercy.

I think we would all admit that resting, even worshiping, is not easy when there is so much to get done. Some might say that they cannot afford to rest for a day, yet the Bible says that you cannot afford not to rest for a day. You have started your Sabbath well by coming to Canyon Bible Church this morning. For God's glory and for your own benefit, continue to keep the Sabbath this day and every Sunday. Amen.