

# Upside Down Kingdom: Life Under the Rule of Jesus

## Week 1 — Lord of the Sabbath

**Text:** Luke 6:1–11

### Introduction

Most of us don't think much about the Sabbath anymore.

For many of us, it's just the weekend. A break in the schedule.

Or maybe a day we fill with everything we didn't get to do during the week.

But in Jesus' day, the Sabbath was not casual. It was sacred. It was central.

And that's why Luke places **two Sabbath stories back-to-back** here.

Not to give us a lesson on scheduling—but to show us something far more important:

**Who gets to define what faithfulness looks like in the kingdom of God?**

**Big Idea:** The kingdom of God is not about rule-keeping, but about restoring life.

### I. When Rules Replace Relationship (Luke 6:1–5)

Jesus and His disciples are walking through grainfields on the Sabbath.

The disciples pluck heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat. They are not stealing. They are not rebelling. They are simply hungry.

But the Pharisees are watching—not to learn, but to accuse.

In their system, the disciples have already committed multiple violations:

- Harvesting
- Threshing
- Winnowing

All on a holy day.

Now imagine applying that same logic today. Let's say someone decides to play golf on Saturday.

Suddenly:

- **Walking the course** is labor
- **Riding in a cart** is operating machinery
- **Carrying clubs** is exertion
- **Writing down your score** is record-keeping
- **Digging up turf** → disturbing soil (a prohibited category of work)
- **Replacing a divot** → planting or tending vegetation
- **Smoothing the ground** → preparing soil
- **Using a divot tool** → employing an instrument for productive labor

By that standard, a conscientious golfer trying to *do the right thing* by the course would actually be sinning more than the one who leaves the divot unrepaired. The golfer who replaces their divot is gardening, and the golfer who doesn't replace it is failing to love their neighbor. At that point, everyone loses—except the rulebook.

And if you stop at the clubhouse afterward, now commerce has entered the picture. And that's the point. With this simple round of golf, you have broken about a dozen or so Sabbath laws. And we did not even consider the mess that mulligans get us into. Or swearing.

Once you start counting violations, **faith becomes absurdly anxious:**

- You can't enjoy the day
- You can't love well
- You can't rest
- You're constantly self-policing

That's exactly the world Jesus steps into in Luke 6.

**When rules become the focus, rest disappears.**

And that's why Jesus says something so direct, so unsettling:

*"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*

In other words, the Sabbath does not exist to protect our systems.

It exists to restore people.

Carolyn Z. tells a story about someone once complaining to her about scuff marks on the tile floor in a church basement. The marks weren't vandalism. They weren't neglect. They were left by the shoes of teenagers and children—kids running, gathering, laughing, belonging.

But the concern wasn't about the kids. It was about the floor.

And that's when something becomes clear:

When we are more focused on "doing things right" than on loving people well, we stop offering the kind of soul-rest that children, teenagers, and families are actually longing for in the gospel.

There are, sadly, a lot of pristine churches in the world—churches without scuffed floors, without noise, without mess, and often without children, teenagers, or people at all.

Because somewhere along the way, appearance mattered more than presence. Order mattered more than love. Rules mattered more than rest.

And if we're honest, most of us have felt this tension personally.

Maybe you've felt judged in a church setting over something small or non-essential. Maybe you've had a moment when you realized you were more focused on "doing it right" than loving people well. Maybe faith, at some point, stopped feeling life-giving and started feeling heavy.

And eventually, if we're paying attention, we come to this realization:

*I was trying to earn something God was already offering as a gift.*

That's when Jesus' words land with new clarity: *"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."* Not rules. Not appearances. Not control. Jesus.

## **Jesus' Response**

Jesus doesn't argue technicalities. Instead, He points to David—Israel's greatest king—who once ate the consecrated bread because hunger mattered more than ritual.

Then Jesus says: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." That is a claim of authority. The Sabbath doesn't define Him. He defines the Sabbath.

## **Kingdom Truth**

Rules were meant to serve life. But when they become the goal, life gets crushed. In the upside-down kingdom, faithfulness is not measured by rule-keeping—but by **love, mercy, and trust in the King**.

## **II. Mercy Is the True Measure of God's Kingdom (Luke 6:6–10)**

Luke moves us to another Sabbath—this time in a synagogue.

A man with a withered hand is there. And again, the religious leaders are watching. Jesus calls the man forward. Right into the spotlight.

Then He asks a question that leaves no neutral ground:

"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?"

Silence. Then Jesus speaks healing. The Sabbath was never about inactivity. It was about restoration. In God's kingdom, rest is not the absence of work—it is the **presence of healing**.

## **III. Authority That Restores, Not Controls (Luke 6:11)**

Luke tells us the leaders are filled with fury. Not joy. Not wonder.

Because mercy threatens systems built on control. Rules give power. Jesus gives life. And that's the kind of authority He exercises.

## **THE GOSPEL SPRINT — FROM SABBATH TO THE CROSS**

Now this is where everything comes together. Jesus heals on the Sabbath. And it sets Him on a collision course with the accusations of religious people.

## **The Cross Explained Clearly**

Eventually, these same kinds of accusations will rise again.

Jesus will be arrested. Tried under religious law. Condemned as a lawbreaker. And on the day before the Sabbath, He will be executed.

Then something strange happens. He rests in death. His body lies in a tomb. And on the first day of the week, He rises from that death. To bring us rest. Peace. Hope. Life.

Here's what that means—plain and simple:

- We broke God's law.
- Jesus kept it perfectly.
- We deserved judgment.
- Jesus took it.
- We were weary and broken.
- Jesus gives us rest.

The cross is where rule-keeping ends and grace begins.

## **Gospel Appeal**

If you are here today and faith feels heavy...

If you've tried to be good enough...

If you've wondered whether God is mostly disappointed in you...

Hear this:

Jesus did not come to give you more rules. He came to give you life.

You don't clean yourself up first. You don't earn your way in.

You come hungry. You come broken. You come as you are.

And Jesus says, "*Stretch out your hand.*"

Trust Me. Receive grace. Enter rest.

## **Closing**

If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath,  
then He is Lord of how we live.

And life under His rule is not oppressive.

It is healing. It is freeing. It is good.

## **Reflective Response**

If faith has ever felt heavy...

If you've tried to be good enough...

If you've wondered whether God is mostly disappointed in you...

Hear this clearly: Jesus did not come to give you more rules.

He came to give you life. You don't earn grace. You receive it.

Right where you are, you can say:

"Jesus, I trust You. I receive Your rest. I place my life under Your rule."

And that is enough.

Friends, if you are weary...

If your faith feels more like pressure than peace...

If you have never trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord...

This is your moment.

Jesus stands before you as Lord of the Sabbath and says,

"Come to Me."

Come for forgiveness. Come for healing. Come for rest.

If you want prayer, if you want to begin a relationship with Christ,  
or if you simply need to lay down the weight you've been carrying—  
the altar is open.

Come and receive life.