

LIII. HAVE YOU NOT READ? 1 Samuel 21:1-6

INTRODUCTION. Beloved brothers and sisters, friends and visitors, this scene with David eating the holy bread from the Tabernacle in 1 Samuel chapter twenty one happened around 1057 B.C. About one thousand and eighty seven years after this scene in 1 Samuel 21, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Son of God, had become man and he was at the beginning of his earthly ministry.

Matthew 12:1-8 "1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Q. What should we learn from what Jesus does here?

Failure to understand and apply all of God's Word, even what we should glean from the Old Testament narratives, can easily result in a misunderstanding and misapplication of what to believe and how to behave.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees' for being wrong about how to understand and apply the Sabbath, saying "Have you not read 1 Samuel 21?"

Because of the Pharisees extra-biblical laws that turned the Sabbath into a burden, Christ rebukes them by pointing to David eating the showbread in 1 Samuel 21.

Because of modern Christians' ignorance of Biblical laws whereby they rob the the Lord's Day of its blessing, I think today Christ would rebuke many believers by pointing to Nehemiah threatening to lay hands on people for breaking the Sabbath in Nehemiah 13:21. [but that is beside the point]

1 Corinthians 10:11 "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction,"

Romans 15:4 "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 "16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the

man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

BOYS AND GIRLS, [recap introduction argument]

With these truths in mind, therefore, turn your attention with me to 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and labor with to understand and apply what God reveals here, so that Christ may never say to us, "Have you not read?"

I. UNDERSTAND 1 SAMUEL 21:1-6.

CON(TEXT). David, the Lord's anointed and future king of Israel, is on the run from the current king, Saul, who desires to kill him.

1 Samuel 21:1-6

"1 Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one with you?'

- **At this time the Tabernacle of the Lord was at Nob**, and that is where David went after leaving Jonathan in the field.
- **David came to the High Priest Ahimelech**, called *Abiathar* in Mark 2.
- **The High Priest was afraid**, much like the elders at Bethlehem were afraid when Samuel came there to anoint David in 1 Samuel 16. Why? We are not certain, but Abiathar may have feared David fled from king Saul as a condemned man. Or he may have feared Saul sent David to assassinate him.

2 And David said to Ahimelech the priest, 'The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, "Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you." I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place.

- **MATTHEW POOLE:** "This seems to be a plain lie, extorted from him by fear and necessity. But as it was officious for himself, so it was pernicious to all the priests there. Whence David afterwards declares his repentance for this sin of lying (Ps. 119:29)." — **Poole, Matthew. English Annotations on the Holy Bible . E4 Group. Kindle Edition.**
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3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.'

- **David seems to have sought out the Lord's High Priest** when he was in need of provision.
- **Though David is alone when talking with Ahimelech**, it seems clear he has men with him. Additionally, Jesus says he has other men with him when he references this scene in Mark 2.

4 And the priest answered David, 'I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women.'

- This was the showbread that would be put in the tabernacle and set before the presence of the Lord, which was only to be eaten by the Priests.

5 And David answered the priest, 'Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?'

- **In Exodus 19:15 before giving them the written Law at Sinai, the Lord told the men, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."** Apparently Ahimelech thought that same reasoning should be applied to David and his men here, though it might actually have been more akin to superstition than to appropriate application.

6 So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away."

- Bread for the Lord's Supper.
 - Water for the Baptismal.

DOCTRINE(S). There are at least four doctrinal truths to learn from this passage.

II. APPLY 1 SAMUEL 21:1-6.

Doctrine 1.

I) The Lord Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice.

- Look at Ahimelech giving the showbread to David and his men because of their need.
 - **Hosea 6:6** "I desire mercy [*Hesed*], not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."
 - **Matthew 12:7** And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Religious duties, no matter how noble, no matter how edifying, must never block you from doing acts of mercy to someone in need.

- **The showbread was only lawful for the Priests to consume**, yet because of David's hunger the Priest gave it.
 - **We are not allowed to reap, sow, plant, or pick on the Sabbath**, yet Christ's disciples can pluck handfuls of grain because of their need and Christ does not condemn them.
 - **You and I are supposed to rest from our ordinary vocations**

on the Lord's Day as we set it aside for worship, rest, and Christian fellowship, yet if you see someone in need of help fixing their car, or rescuing an animal, or any other spontaneous act of mercy, you should render that help with a clear conscience for the good of your neighbor and the glory of God.

- **BOYS AND GIRLS**, it is good to help those in need anytime a need arises. If you are in the middle of Family Worship and a car crash happens outside your house, should you go help the people or sit still until you finish? YOU SHOULD GO HELP THE PEOPLE!

TURN WITH ME

Luke 10:25-27 (The Parable of the Good Samaritan)

"25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise.""

USE FOR EXAMINATION

Q1. Are you like the Lawyer talking to Jesus, trying to justify yourself?

**YOU CAN ONLY BE JUSTIFIED THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST!*

Q2. Are you like the Priest who chooses to remain clean rather than helping someone in need?

Q3. Are you like the Levite who chooses private worship over helping someone in need?

Q4. Are you like the Samaritan, by God's grace, who chooses to help even his

worst enemy because he is bloodied and beaten on the side of the road?

Q5. Do you realize that you are supposed to see yourself as the bloodied and battered man whose only hope of salvation is if his greatest enemy shows him gracious love?

USE FOR EXHORTATION

The Lord desires mercy, not sacrifice. Look what the High Priest did for David in 1 Samuel 21. Look at Christ healing on the sabbath. Look at the Good Samaritan showing loving kindness even to his enemy. Go and do likewise.

Doctrine 2.

II) For the Christian, the Law of God is a Liberating Blessing, not an Enslaving Burden.

- Look at David having his needs met despite the ordinary circumstance of the Law of God forbidding him to eat the showbread. This is a picture of the liberating blessedness of the Law, and that it is in no way an enslaving burden for those who belong to Christ.
- **Psalms 119:105** "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
 - **BOYS AND GIRLS**, is a flashlight a burden or a blessing when you are trying to find your way in the dark? A BLESSING.
 - On the other hand, if you use the flashlight wrongly it will be a burden. If you need clothing to cover yourself and you try to use a flashlight to do it, it will go very badly for you.

THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY TRY TO JUSTIFY THEMSELVES BEFORE GOD BY OBEYING THE LAW. *The Law is a flashlight and it can never cover the nakedness of your sin! Only through faith in Christ can you be clothed with righteousness.*

- **James 1:22-25** "22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."
 - **BOYS AND GIRLS**, is a glass mirror a burden or a blessing when you are trying to see your face to clean off the dirt? A BLESSING.
 - On the other hand, if you use the glass mirror wrongly it will be a burden. Try to break of a glass mirror and use the pieces to clean your skin you will not get clean, you will only get bloody.

THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY TRY TO GET THEIR SINS FORGIVEN BY GOD THROUGH OBEYING THE LAW. *The Law is a mirror and it can never clean off the filth of your sin—in fact, it will only leave you more dirty as you are covered in blood! Only through faith in Christ can you be forgiven of your sin.*

You have to use the Law rightly. Not to justify yourself before God, but to love God and neighbor because God has freely and fully accepted you in Jesus Christ.

- **1 John 5:3** "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."
- **SPURGEON:** "There is nothing in the law of God that will rob you of happiness; it only denies you that which would cost you sorrow." — **Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 41: Sermons 2394-2445," Delmarva Publications, Inc.**

Psalms 19:7-11

"7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward."

USE FOR EXHORTATION

1. *Go to the Law of God, all of you and use it like a mirror to expose your sinfulness and drive you to Christ for forgiveness, and never use the Law of God as if it were soap to wash away your guiltiness.*

2. *Go to the Law of God, Christians, and use it like a flashlight to illumine the path you should walk, and never like clothing to cover your unrighteousness.*

Doctrine 3.

III) Fearing Man instead of God will cause you to commit stupid sins.

- Look at David lying to Ahimelech the High Priest. Why? It seems his faith is shaken for at least a moment, and he is fearing man rather than trusting the Lord.
 - **Proverbs 29:25** "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."

Doctrine 4.

IV) The LORD God provides for His people even when they do not deserve it.

- Look at David running to the High Priest for provision, and even when he gets there he shows his moral unworthiness (at least to us) by lying to Ahimelech.

Like David you and I must go to God's High Priest for provision! But we have no ordinary High Priest. Our High Priest is the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, once-crucified now-resurrected and ascended in heaven.

Study and Discussion Questions for Understanding and Applying 1 Samuel 21:1-6

- **Contextual Understanding:**

- Describe the historical and situational context of 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Who is David, and why is he on the run?
- What is the significance of the Tabernacle being at Nob, and who is Ahimelech? Why might Ahimelech have been trembling when he met David?

- **Textual Analysis:**

- What does David tell Ahimelech about his mission (v. 2)? According to Matthew Poole's commentary, how should we view David's statement?
- What is the "holy bread" or "bread of the Presence" mentioned in verse 4, and what were the biblical rules about who could eat it (see Leviticus 24:5-9)?

- Why does Ahimelech ask if David's men have kept themselves from women (v. 4)? How does David's response (v. 5) address this concern?
- **Connection to Jesus' Teaching:**
 - How does Jesus reference 1 Samuel 21:1-6 in Matthew 12:1-8 to address the Pharisees' accusations about the Sabbath?
 - What does Jesus mean when He says, "Have you not read?" in Matthew 12:3? How does this challenge the Pharisees' understanding of Scripture?
- **Scriptural Support:**
 - How do 1 Corinthians 10:11, Romans 15:4, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 emphasize the importance of Old Testament narratives for New Testament believers?
 - Why is it critical to understand and apply all of God's Word, according to the sermon's introduction?

For Children:

- Who was David, and why was he running away from King Saul?
- What special bread did David ask for, and why was it special? Why did the priest give it to him even though it was only for priests?

Discussion Questions for Reflection and Application

Doctrine 1: The Lord Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice

- **Reflection:**
 - How does Ahimelech's decision to give David the showbread illustrate the principle of "mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 12:7)?
 - In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), how does the Samaritan demonstrate mercy? Why do the priest and Levite fail to show mercy?
- **Application:**
 - Can you think of a time when you prioritized a religious duty (e.g., attending church, personal devotion) over helping someone in need? How can you balance these responsibilities?
 - The sermon suggests that if a car crash happens during family worship, you should help. What are other examples of situations where showing mercy should take precedence over religious routines?
- **Examination (based on sermon questions):**
 - Are you ever like the lawyer in Luke 10, trying to justify yourself instead of trusting in Christ's righteousness? How can you grow in faith-based humility?
 - Do you sometimes act like the priest or Levite, avoiding opportunities

to help others because it's inconvenient or "unclean"? How can you overcome this?

- How can you be like the Good Samaritan, showing mercy even to those who might be considered your "enemies"?

For Children:

- If you see someone who needs help, like a friend who is hurt or hungry, what should you do? Why does God want us to help others?
- Tell a story about a time you helped someone or someone helped you. How did it make you feel?

Doctrine 2: The Law of God is a Liberating Blessing, Not an Enslaving Burden

● **Reflection:**

- How does David's eating of the showbread demonstrate that God's Law can be a blessing rather than a burden in times of need?
- According to Psalm 119:105 and James 1:22-25, how is God's Law described as a "lamp," "light," or "mirror"? Why are these metaphors significant?

● **Application:**

- The sermon warns against using the Law to justify oneself before God (like using a flashlight to cover nakedness). How do people today misuse God's Law in this way?
- How can you use God's Law rightly—as a guide for living and loving God and neighbor—rather than as a means to earn salvation?
- What practical steps can you take to view and apply God's commandments as a "liberating blessing" (1 John 5:3) rather than a burden?

For Children:

- Why is God's Word like a flashlight or a mirror? How does it help you know what to do?
- Can you think of a rule from the Bible (like "love your neighbor") that helps you live better? How?

Doctrine 3: Fearing Man Instead of God Will Cause You to Commit Stupid Sins

● **Reflection:**

- Why does the sermon suggest David lied to Ahimelech? How does Proverbs 29:25 explain the consequences of fearing man over God?
- Can you recall a time when fear of what others thought led you to make a poor decision? What was the outcome?

● **Application:**

- How can you cultivate a greater fear of God over the fear of man in your daily life (e.g., at school, work, or with friends)?
- What are some "stupid sins" people might commit when they prioritize human approval over God's truth? How can you avoid these traps?

For Children:

- Have you ever done something wrong because you were afraid of what your friends might think? What happened?
- Why is it better to obey God than to worry about what other people say?

Doctrine 4: The LORD God Provides for His People Even When They Do Not Deserve It**• Reflection:**

- Despite David's lie, how does God still provide for him through Ahimelech? What does this reveal about God's grace?
- How does the sermon connect David's reliance on the High Priest to our reliance on Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest?

• Application:

- Share a time when you felt God provided for you, even when you didn't deserve it. How did this experience strengthen your faith?
- How can you regularly turn to Jesus, our High Priest, for provision in times of physical, emotional, or spiritual need?
- What does this doctrine teach us about trusting God's grace rather than relying on our own worthiness?

For Children:

- How did God help David when he was hungry, even though he told a lie?
- When you need help, who can you pray to? Why does Jesus always want to help you?

Group Discussion Prompts for Deeper Engagement**• Sabbath Application:**

- The sermon critiques both the Pharisees' burdensome Sabbath rules and modern Christians' neglect of the Lord's Day. How can we honor the Sabbath (or Lord's Day) in a way that balances rest, worship, and acts of mercy?
- What are some practical ways to make the Lord's Day a "liberating blessing" for you and your family?

• Old Testament Relevance:

- Why is it important for Christians to study Old Testament narratives like 1 Samuel 21? How can we avoid the rebuke of "Have you not read?" in our own lives?
- Discuss how 1 Samuel 21:1-6 points forward to Jesus' ministry and teachings. How does this passage deepen your appreciation for Christ as "something greater than the temple" (Matthew 12:6)?

• Mercy in Action:

- As a group, brainstorm ways your church or community can show mercy to those in need, even when it disrupts normal routines or expectations.

- How can we encourage one another to prioritize mercy over rigid adherence to rules, while still honoring God's commands?
- **Grace and Provision:**
 - How does the truth that God provides for His people, even when they are unworthy, give you hope in your current circumstances?
 - Share testimonies of God's provision in your life and discuss how these experiences can inspire trust in Jesus as our High Priest.

Personal Reflection Questions for Journaling or Prayer

- How has studying 1 Samuel 21:1-6 and its connection to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12:1-8 challenged your understanding of God's Law or the Sabbath?
- Which of the four doctrines from the sermon resonates most with you right now? Why, and how will you apply it this week?
- Are there areas in your life where you are fearing man instead of God? Confess these to God and ask for strength to trust Him more.
- Write a prayer thanking Jesus, our High Priest, for His provision and grace, and ask for opportunities to show mercy to others.